Grey Shapes

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by E. Charles Vivian

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Chapter I A MATTER OF SHEEP

A LITTLE pile of opened letters, with their neatly-slit envelopes pinned to them, lay beside the typewriter on the desk: the girl who sat back from the desk in her comfortable chair, reading a novel, was tall, but not too tall; she had piquantly irregular features, brown hair with reddish shades in it, and deep, blue eyes, long-lashed. Her principal attraction was expressiveness, both of eyes and lips, though she could render her face as wooden as a doorpost if she chose.

She put the novel down on the desk as a tall, youngish man, with exceptionally large feet and hands, came into the doorway of the room and, paused for a moment, reflected as he always did when he first saw her for the day that he had been wise in his choice of a secretary. He looked ungainly, at a first glance, by reason of those feet and hands, but a second glance would convince anyone that he was nothing of the sort. Clean-shaven, pleasantly ugly, he gave the girl a smile as she looked up at him.

“Morning, Miss Brandon,” he said.

“Good morning, Mr. Green,” she answered. “There are—yes, twenty-two inquiries, none of them very interesting.”

“We’d better get an editorial regrets done, I think,” he said.

She looked a question at him, and he explained:

“You know. Not—‘the editor regrets’—in our case, but the same sort of thing. ‘Messrs. Gees have given careful consideration to your case as stated in your letter, and regret they are unable to offer any advice.’ Something like that—get it engraved in copperplate and run on to decent paper. It’ll save you answering each one individually.”

“But I’ve so little to do, as it is,” she pointed out.

“I know,” he assented gravely. “It’s growing into weeks since we wound up the Kestwell case, and I put the balance of that twelve thousand pounds away in the safe. And we’ve spent over two of the twelve thousand already, including my new car.”

“We?” she queried stiffly.

“Well, I saw you putting a new typewriter ribbon on a couple of days ago,” he said, “and I suppose you paid the window cleaner. I didn’t.”

The telephone bell rang before she could reply. She removed the receiver and listened, and then replied:

“Yes, I should think eleven o’clock would be all right. Will you hold on while I ask one of the principals?”

With her hand over the mouthpiece she looked up at Green—or Gees, as his intimate friends always called him:

“A Mr. Tyrrell from Cumberland is in London—his letter is among those on the desk—and wants to see you at eleven o’clock, Mr. Green.”

“Okay by me,” he answered. “Tell him I also yearn.”

“Yes, Mr. Tyrrell”—she spoke into the receiver—“our Mr. Green will be pleased to see you at eleven o’clock.”

She replaced the receiver, and turned over several of the letters, eventually picking out one which she handed to Gees.

“Yes,” he said, “it will be as well to see what he wants before he gets here, and there’s half an hour to go. I hope the poke contains a real pig—we get so many silly inquiries.”

He glanced at the sheet of paper. Pinned at the top left-hand corner was a small clipping, evidently from some agony column. It read—

“Consult GEE’S CONFIDENTIAL AGENCY for everything, from mumps to murder. Initial consultation, two guineas—37, Little Oakfield Street, Haymarket, London, S.W.I.”

“Ah,” Gees observed complacently. “Our old ‘mumps to murder’ is still pulling ‘em in, then, even from the wilds of Cumberland. But—Oh! What the—? Am I a goat? The man’s daft!”

“He enclosed a check for two guineas,” Miss Brandon remarked.

“Yes, I said he was daft, didn’t I? Sheep? Does he think we’re a veterinary establishment, or a dumb friends’ league?”

“I suppose sheep come between mumps and murder,” she said reflectively, “and he is the only one who sent the two guineas in advance.”

“Well, then, I’ll talk to him, wurzel worrier from the wilds though he may be, and unless he stops the check he won’t see his two guineas any more. Now what about the rest of them, Miss Brandon?”

He drew up a chair, and, seated at the end of her desk, went through the other letters. As he put the last one down, he shook his head.

“Editor’s regrets are strongly indicated, Miss Brandon,” he observed, “and in the next advertisement we’ll put a note to the effect that a stamped addressed envelope must accompany all inquiries. We shall be three bob and more down by the time you’ve told all this lot that I don’t feel inclined to take up their cases. And that—” as the doorbell rang “-will be our sheepist, I take it.”

Rising, he went to the next room, which formed his own office, and left her to admit the visitor. Presently she opened his door—

“Mr. Tyrrell to see you, Mr. Green,” she announced.

“Ah! Come in, Mr. Tyrrell. Take that chair—it’s comfortable.”

The visitor lowered six feet of bone and muscle into the leather-upholstered armchair at the end of Gee’s desk—he did not know that he was directly facing a concealed microphone, the wires of which terminated in a pair of earphones which Miss Brandon could fit on in her room if Gees put his foot on a buzzer stud under his desk. The net effect of him, Gees decided was brown: brown tweed suit, well cut, with brown brogue shoes, and he had brown eyes and a sun-browned, pleasant sort of face. An open-air man, and a good sort, with a pleasant, honest smile.

“You got my letter, I hope, Mr. Green?” he asked.

Gees nodded at his desk. “It’s here,” he answered. “All I can gather is that you

want my advice about losing sheep—or rather, about how not to lose sheep. To begin, now—have you advertised?"

Tyrrell shook his head. "Not that sort of loss," he answered.

"You'd better state the case," Gees advised. "The where and the how and the why, and make it as full as you like. Though I must warn you in advance that I know next to nothing about sheep—on the hoof, that is. Saddle of mutton at Simpson's—yes. Otherwise—but tell me all about it, since you've come for a consultation."

His visitor smiled, thought awhile, and then began.

"You know Cumberland, Mr. Green?"

"I have a hope of visiting the lake district some day," Gees answered, "but it hasn't materialized yet. That is—no."

"Not the lake district—I can see Skiddaw from my bedroom window, but if you don't know Cumberland that conveys nothing to you. I own about two thousand acres, Mr. Green—Tyrrells have owned it for centuries and the greater part of it is sheep run, though there is some arable land as well. But, in the main, sheep farming. A far-flung country—my nearest neighbor is well over a mile away—was, rather, until McCoul took Locksborough Castle and decided to rebuild enough of it to live in. Rather wild country, it would seem to you, I think. And, since last March, I have lost over fifty sheep."

"And where do I come in?" Gees inquired.

"Those sheep have been killed—mangled horribly—by some great dog or dogs," Tyrrell proceeded. "I've had the police on it, of course, but with no result, except that they have proved to me that no dog capable of doing the damage is kept within twenty miles of my land—that is, no dog which is not kept under proper control."

"In that case, what do you think I could do?" Gees asked again.

"I don't know. But there's this about it. Sitting here talking to you, the whole thing seems incredible, preposterous. My head shepherd, a man named Cottrill, is a straight, practical, unimaginative man of about forty, but—well, in such a

district as that old legends survive, and there is a vein of superstition in the most practical of the people. He says it's unearthly, and that no dog as we know dogs is responsible for the damage. I've been out nights with him, watching—to no purpose, of course. They were the nights when nothing happened."

"Still, what could I do?" Gees insisted.

"Find what is destroying my sheep," Tyrrell answered promptly.

"When the police who know the district have failed?" Gees pointed out, and shook his head. "I'm afraid, Mr. Tyrrell—"

"But they have merely approached the problem on routine lines," Tyrrell interrupted. "Checked up all the dogs within a reasonable radius of my flocks, and virtually proved them innocent. After that, they own, they are at a standstill. And I know this is no ordinary dog."

"The specter hound of Man, eh?" Gees observed meditatively.

"Something like that, I honestly believe," Tyrrell assented with a hint of nervous earnestness. "Oh, I know it sounds damned silly, sitting here with a telephone handy and cars honking outside—all the twentieth century round us. If you come to undertake this problem for me, you'll step back a couple of centuries, back into a world where people still believe that solid, material things are not all of life."

"As you believe, evidently," Gees suggested.

"I have an open mind," Tyrrell admitted. "Look here, Mr. Green—first of all, though, would this fall to you, or would any other member of your firm undertake it, if it is undertaken?"

"It would fall to me. I am the firm—all of it."

"But—your secretary said one of the principals would see me," Tyrrell pointed out. "So I assumed—and the name of the firm is plural. You mean—you are Gees? All of it?"

"Gregory George Gordon Green," Gees said solemnly. "Therefore."

“Well, look here, then. So far, I’ve lost fifty sheep, and if this goes on for another six months, I shall not only lose fifty more, but Cottrill will go, and so will others of my men. They regard it as a curse on the place, especially those who have seen the carcasses. If you’ll undertake to kill this dog or whatever it is—put an end to the trouble for me, I’ll pay you fifty pounds.”

Gees considered it. “I will undertake a week’s investigation for that sum,” he offered. “That is, on the understanding that the fee is paid whether I lay the ghost or no—even if it’s merely a matter of sitting up a night or two with a gun and shooting a dog.”

“Umm-m!” Tyrrell grunted doubtfully. “And yet—”

“Well?” Gees asked in the pause.

“Well,” Tyrrell echoed, with an air of decision, “I’ll pay that, and another fifty to hold you a second week if the first is not enough to solve the mystery. I’ll go that far, for I read all that Kestwell case and know what you did in it, and now I see you—well!”

“For these bouquets, much thanks, Mr. Tyrrell,” Gees said gravely. “Shall we say—if I arrive the day after tomorrow?”

“That will suit me,” Tyrrell assented. “I’ll meet you at the station—it’s an eight mile drive to my place—Dowlandsbar.”

“Oh, but I shall drive all the way,” Gees said. “I run a Rolls-Bentley, and can do it in the day comfortably. Stay—where?”

“You’d better let me put you up,” Tyrrell answered. “The only inn, the *Royal George*, is the better part of two miles from me, and the accommodation there is—well, rather primitive. Yes, I’ll put you up.”

“Very good of you, I’m sure,” Gees told him, and rose to his feet to indicate that the interview was at an end. “Expect me in time for dinner, the day after tomorrow, at—yes, Dowlandsbar.” He glanced at the address at the top of Tyrrell’s letter to get the name right.

Tyrrell, risen too, held out his hand. “I’ll do my best to make you comfortable in the wilds,” he promised. “Since seeing you, I’ve got faith in you, Mr. Green. I

believe you may be able to solve my problem."

"We'll see. I make no promises. But I'll do my best."

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"A likeable chap," Gees observed to Miss Brandon after his caller had gone. "Public school type, but not too much so. And I've always had it in mind to have a look at the lake district, though he's rather out of it, by what he says. Still, I can move on, after killing the dog, or dogs. It's a dog killing his sheep, that's all."

"And you say he's going to pay you fifty pounds to go and kill it?" she asked, with patent incredulity.

"Ah, but he's got a bee about it being a ghost dog," Gees pointed out. "The local police have exonerated all the dogs in a twenty mile radius, he says—but I know from the time I spent on my father's Shropshire estates that if a dog gets the sheep-worrying habit, he'll travel far more than twenty miles in a night to gratify his tastes."

"Then—" she began, and stopped, thinking it over.

"It's got him down," Gees explained. "There was a point in our talk when I could see belief in the supernatural in his eyes. I don't wonder. He lives eight miles from a station, and his local is the best part of two miles from where he lives—Dowlandsbar, heaven save us!"

"His local?" she asked curiously.

"Short for pub—the nearest bar to lean against," he explained. "And his next door neighbor is half a mile away and named McCoul, so what have you? I start early in the morning the day after tomorrow."

"And—and I remain in charge here?"

"Obviously. Go over the inquiries as they come in each morning—open all the letters whether they're marked 'Personal' or no. I've no low intrigues on, just now, so you won't get shocked. Send editor's regrets in every case where you feel it's possible, and if you come across anything interesting write and say the matter is receiving consideration, and on receipt of our initial fee of two guineas

we shall be happy to communicate further. Then send that particular inquiry on to me, and I'll see what I think of it. Of course, if Tyrrell's right—"

He broke off, and stood thoughtful by her desk for awhile.

"You mean, about the supernatural?" she inquired eventually.

"It would be sub-natural, if anything, in a case of this sort," he answered. "I'm going to spend the rest of the day in the British Museum library, Miss Brandon, and when you've finished discouraging the rest of our inquirers you can get on with your novel. One of these days, there may be some work for you again, and till then I like the decorative effect of having you here. If I'm not back at your usual time for closing down, just put the cover on your typewriter and go."

"Very good, Mr. Green. Do you—do you think this is super—no, sub-natural, as you called it?"

"I'll tell you when I come back from Dowlandsbar." he answered, "and since I don't start till the day after tomorrow, that's some while ahead. But a nice holiday in the lake district—or somewhere near it—before the end of September, and a check for fifty pounds for taking it—well, what have you? I'd be sub-natural myself if I didn't. See you tomorrow morning, if not this evening, Miss Brandon."

"Very good, Mr. Green."

Chapter II BEYOND ODDER

THERE was a one-armed, crankily-sagging signpost beside the road, and, glancing up at it as he slowed, Gees read on its decrepit arm

ODDER 3 DOWLANDSBAR 6

and, having got too far past it by the time that he read his destination thereon, braked to a stop, reversed, and then swung the long bonnet of the Rolls-Bentley into the narrow, uneven way indicated by the sign.

“The shades of night were falling fast,” he quoted to himself, “and if that lad had had to drive along a lane like this, it’s not ‘Excelsior’ he’d have been shouting to the landscape, but Gordelpus.”

The nose of the car went burrowing down and down, and the narrow lane wound snakily until there appeared a hump-backed bridge of grey stone, just wide enough to admit the car between its weathered parapets. But, short of the bridge, Gees braked suddenly to a standstill, for, looking down the bonnet into the gathering gloom of evening, he saw the vanguard of a flock of sheep on the hump of the bridge, and beyond them, as far as the next bend of the lane, was a greyish mass of their fellows. They went scuttering past the car, enveloping it in a woolly flood, and darkness had advanced perceptibly when the shepherd, a tall, gaunt, black being with a patient dog walking beside him, came abreast.

“Good evening,” Gees saluted him. “Am I right for Dowlandsbar?”

“Aye, ye’re right,” said the shepherd, “an’ can’t go wrong. Through Odder, an’ ‘tis but a step. Ye’ll see the slats of the roof above the trees. A long hoose—Squire Tyrrell’s place. Gude night to ye.”

“Good night, and thank you,” Gees answered, and went on.

As it had burrowed down to the bridge, so the nose of the long car now sought heaven for awhile. The hard-pumped tires—Gees always traveled with tires ten pounds above the recommended pressure—bumped and scraped in the ruts of the lane, and even with the perfect springing and steering of this car ten miles an hour was the limit for safety. The crest of the climb gave place to descent with

such abruptness that Gees feared lest his exhaust pipe should scrape on the summit of the ridge: again he dipped down and down and down, until he saw four cottages of grey stone, two on each side of the way, and beyond them an inn which declared itself as the *Royal George,* with, almost facing it, a slightly larger cottage with a brightly lighted window in which were displayed bottles of old-fashioned sweets, packages of much-advertised soaps, and cigarette placards, together with a festoon of sausages.

“Odder,” said Gees to himself, noting the white-lettered, blue enamel plate which declared this emporium as a post office and gave the name, “but it should be Much Odder”.

By this time, he had switched on his headlights, and the village slid into darkness behind him as the car wheels splashed through a tiny rivulet that crossed his way without the formality of a bridge.

He traveled another tortuous mile or so, dipping and lifting, and then into the long ray of his headlights came a man who kept to the middle of the lane and, as the car approached him, raised his right hand above his head. Recognizing Tyrrell, Gees braked to a standstill.

“It is you, of course,” Tyrrell observed as he came abreast the car. “I thought I’d come along and act as guide.”

“Kind of you,” Gees answered, and opened the near side door. “I know now why you talk about fells in this part of the world.”

“Yes?” Tyrrell seated himself in the car as he spoke. “Why, then?”

“Because when my radiator wasn’t pointing horizontally upward along this trail, it fell, and I wondered if I were going to fall too—out over the windscreen. Yes, fells by all means, here.”

“That’s an old one,” Tyrrell told him. “I suppose you know nearly everyone in the district has one leg longer than the other?”

“I’ll buy it,” Gees offered. “Hereditary disability?”

“Not exactly. Walking along the slopes of the hills does it.”

“They never come back, then,” Gees reflected. “Well, I don’t wonder at it. What do I do—just go ahead?”

“Yes—keep straight,” Tyrrell bade.

“Since this lane would break a snake’s back, I’ll forgive you for that advice,” Gees promised. “But why guide me, if I can’t go wrong?”

“Because Locksborough Castle gateway is half a mile this side of mine, and you’d probably have turned in at it if I hadn’t come along.”

“If there’s a borough round here, it’s a rotten one,” Gees declared solemnly. “A sound one would have gone off to level ground long ago.”

“It never was a borough,” Tyrrell told him. “Amber—he’s our vicar and a bit of an archaeologist—he explains it as a corruption of barrow, Danish or more ancient, and the Norman occupation didn’t destroy the name, though they built a castle on the site. Here—this is the gateway. No—bear to the right, don’t go in. That’s why I met you.”

Two rugged monoliths reared up almost directly in front of the car, and Gees swerved sharply to the right to pass them and keep to the uneven, narrow main way. Beyond them, as he passed, he caught a glimpse of rugged, jagged-topped walls rising against the clear night sky.

“Ruins,” he observed. “I thought you said somebody lived there?”

“It was possible to restore the keep—three floors of it—to a habitable state, and McCoul bought the place and did the restoring,” Tyrrell explained. “The rest of it is still ruinous. If he hadn’t taken it, I think the ancient monuments people would have taken it over. You know—the National Trust. But McCoul is a bit of an antiquarian.”

“And your nearest neighbor,” Gees remembered, and felt that his London flat and office, in which he had talked with this man only two days before, was already several worlds and centuries away.

“Yes. I—er—I hope you don’t mind, but he and his daughter Gyda are dining with us tonight. It was arranged before I went to London, and I forgot about it when we arranged for you to come today.”

“Well, I packed a tuxedo, thank God,” Gees reflected piously.

“Well, really!” Tyrrell protested. “Did you think I wanted you to bring your own provisions when I asked you to stay with me?”

“A tuxedo,” Gees explained, “is an apology for not dressing for dinner—respectability without tails. You’d call it a dinner jacket.”

“Oh, sorry,” Tyrrell apologized. “Here—turn in here. Left.”

Gees swung the wheel in time, and found himself on a graveled drive which, after the bumpy, rutted lane, made driving a pleasure.

“The term is American, I believe,” he explained. “My father wants to brain me every time he hears it, being a soldier of the old school.”

“Yes?” Tyrrell queried interestedly. “What regiment?”

“Oh, some obscure crowd of footsloggers for a start—Coldstreams, as a matter of fact. But being a general with a K.C.B., he doesn’t brag about his regimental service. I went for distinction when I joined up—the Metropolitan police was my mark. But their discipline was so strict that I chucked it after two years, and wished I’d gone for the army instead, as the old man did. Still, it was useful for my present business. What I don’t know about police methods—well!”

He swung the car alongside a long frontage of grey stone, a two-storied mansion with deeply set windows—most of it showed plainly in the ray of the headlights before he swerved to halt beside the deeply-receded, wide main entrance. A pendent electric bulb in a quaint old lantern revealed a great oaken door with vast hinges of scroll worked iron—it was an antique in itself, that door, as Gees realized.

“Well, constable,” Tyrrell observed, “you’ll have good time for a bath and change before dinner, if you feel like it. We’ll get your traps out, and then I’ll show you where to stable this beauty.”

Gees followed him out from the car, and went to the back to open it up and haul out his big suitcase. Then he turned to Tyrrell.

“You’re a good scout, and I like you,” he said.

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The floor boards of the room were old as time, with wide cracks between them, and the floor sloped as, in a past age, the foundations of the house had settled. The furniture was plainly Jacobean, all but the full-length mirror, which, Gees decided, was more probably Tudor, re-silvered. There was a press in which he dared not hang his clothes lest he should never find them again, so vast it was. And, like the floor, the ceiling beams were black with age.

He made a final adjustment of his tie before the mirror: the electric light by which he had dressed was incongruous in such an apartment, and he could hear the engine, by which in all probability the light was provided, pulsing somewhere. Beat, beat—miss—beat—miss—beat beat beat. Suction gas plant, he decided, and, opening his door, switched off the light and passed along the corridor until he came to the head of the staircase. There, for a moment or two, he paused.

The staircase itself was magnificent. Wide stairs curved down to the big entrance hall of Dowlandsbar, and there was a balustrade which was pure renaissance, black, like the floor and ceiling beams in his room, with age, and so delicately carved as to appear the work of a Cellini or Da Vinci. The hall into which he gazed as he stood, for the moment unnoticed by the people occupying it, had an oaken floor black and old as the rest of the house's woodwork that he had seen so far, and there were rugs, and little tables, and a great fireplace inside which Tyrrell stood warming himself at a log fire, while, nearly facing him, stood a man and a woman who for the period of this little pause absorbed all Gees' attention.

The man, he decided, was somewhere in the fifties, and stood well over six feet in height. His hair was iron grey, as was the half of moustache that Gees could see—both the man and woman were in profile to him. Of greyhound leanness, and with an almost regal pose, the man accentuated his own height. Tyrrell was tall, as was Gees himself, but this man appeared to stand over him, look down on him—such was the impression Gees gathered in this first view—and the profile was hawk-like, finely, even beautifully molded. An arresting type, this man, and, if his mentality were equal to his appearance, one worth knowing.

And the woman, at a first glance, would be about the same age, for her hair was snow-white, a crown of little ripples that shone softly, like old satin in the

lighting of the big hall. Gees saw her more nearly three-quarter face than in profile, and saw that, like the man, she had classically fine features—gazing down from his height, he could not see their eyes—with richly red lips almost too full for such a face, and daintily molded chin over a neck that Praxiteles might have rejoiced to model. She too was of unusual height, almost as tall as Gees himself, and very slenderly-fashioned, with beautiful, ringless hands. "Give her a bow and arrow," said Gees to himself as he began to descend the stairs, "and there's Artemis—in grey crepe-de-chine or something of the sort. But what a pair!"

But, as he faced her and was introduced to Gyda McCoul, he found his estimate of her age was wrong—the white hair had misled him as he had looked down, for she was obviously still in her twenties. Her eyes were amber and green—he could never determine their real color, or whether they were green-flecked amber or amber-flecked green. Either way, they completed as bizarre an attractiveness as he had ever seen, though, as for a moment he took her hand, he felt a sense of —was it fear? Or was it that faint thrill that comes with the sight and realization of something utterly new, an unhoped experience to be faced? He could not tell, and he turned for his introduction to the man and met the gaze of a pair of eyes as nearly black as any he had seen. Here again was new experience: McCoul's eyes held all the fire and light of youth, while his faintly-lined face was that of one who has known all things—the face of a disillusioned cynic and old, past belief.

These were first impressions, and then Tyrrell spoke:

"Mr. Green has driven all the way from London, so he ought to be the hungriest of us all, if he isn't. But it's poured ready for you, Green." And, with the final statement, he indicated a cocktail glass on the occasional table by the corner of the fireplace—the others, as Gees noted, already had their glasses in their hands.

"I don't know that I'm superlatively hungry," he said as he took up the glass and turned again to face the woman—or girl, perhaps. "At present, I'm rather lost in amazement over this miracle of a house. The little I've seen of it so far, that is. What do you think of it, Miss McCoul? Don't you envy him his collection of antiques?"

"She need not," Tyrrell put in, before she could reply.

“But I do,” she said, after a brief pause in which Gees took in Tyrrell’s remark and prayed that he himself was not destined to act alone in the matter of the sheep while his host went love-making. And she smiled, revealing perfectly-even, shining white teeth.

“From London in a day,” McCoul remarked, and Gees glanced at him to meet the gaze of his uncannily dark eyes—so dark that there was no distinguishing between iris and pupil. “I wonder what the legionaries marching north to the wall would have thought of it?”

“We are not far from the old Roman wall, I suppose?” Gees inquired.

“It’s a goodish step,” Tyrrell told him. “Mr. Green has come here to help me with my sheep mystery,” he explained to the other two. “To put an end to the trouble, I hope. Two more killed last night, Green—”

A voice from the side of the hall announcing that dinner was served interrupted him, and the four of them passed through a doorway under the staircase to a dining-room lighted only by the candles on the table, and, like all the rest that Gees had seen of the house, furnished in a way that would have made an antique-collector choke with jealousy. As they seated themselves, Tyrrell looked at Gees.

“Very plain feeding, you’ll find,” he observed. “My cook is no Brillat-Savarin. You’re in the wilds, here—all primitive.”

It was difficult of belief, Gees felt as he glanced at Gyda McCoul’s grey dinner frock, and then at her father’s perfectly-tailored jacket. A dumpily-built maid waited on them, and evinced good training as she did it. But for the absence of a waiter in tails, they might have been in one of the better class London restaurants, and both soup and fish were as good as the service and table appointments. A remark by Gees set them all talking of place names—Oswaldstwhistle, Odder, Much Hadham, Nether Wallop, Wig-Wig, and other curiosities of naming, provided light chatter through which Gees observed that neither McCoul nor his daughter appeared to appreciate the really good plain cooking of the first two courses. Then the maid placed a dish before Tyrrell, and, removing the cover, revealed a large joint of beef.

“Plain fare, Green, as I warned you,” Tyrrell observed. “Also as a warning, it’s underdone—very, because—well!” He gave Gyda McCoul a glance which said

she would understand and appreciate what he meant.

“Specially for me and my father,” she said, with pleasure in her voice. “Oh, but you shouldn’t, Mr. Tyrrell! Quite possibly Mr. Green doesn’t like it as underdone as we do—do you, Mr. Green?”

“You can save a spot of the outside when it comes my turn, Tyrrell,” Gees counseled. In actuality, he hated underdone meat.

Then he watched, and saw red slices—half-raw, they looked to him—laid on the plates of the other two, while Tyrrell reserved a portion of more fully cooked meat for himself and Gees. And there was a hard glitter in McCoul’s black eyes as he looked down at the plate set before him: he may not have been hungry at the beginning of the meal, but, if his expression went for anything, he was avid for that red flesh, and the girl, too, seemed to rouse to greater appreciation of her meal. Tyrrell, himself, like Gees, took an outside cut.

“I did remark that I lost two more last night, didn’t I?” he asked as he helped himself to vegetables.

“You did,” Gees assented. “I suppose you fold them at night since this trouble started? Or do you leave them out and take the risk?”

“Oh, they’re folded, of course,” Tyrrell answered, as if surprised at the question, “and Cottrill—that’s my shepherd—he’s kept watch night after night, but nothing happens the nights he’s on watch. Then, immediately he relaxes—the very first night he thinks the trouble is over—two more are killed. Always two—it’s not the promiscuous harrying and mangling you usually get when a dog takes to sheep-worrying, but just two carcasses, and no trace of what did it. More beef, Mr. McCoul?”

“I will have another slice, thanks,” McCoul assented, and Gees took his plate to pass it while Tyrrell carved red, dripping stuff, nauseating to Gees’ sight. It was not merely underdone, but almost raw.

“And you, Miss McCoul?” Tyrrell asked, poising his carving knife.

“Yes, thank you, even at the risk of being thought greedy.”

Again Tyrrell carved, and Gees got a glimpse of the girl’s teeth—beautiful, even

teeth, between full, red lips that needed no artificial coloring. She was innocent of make-up of any kind, Gees decided, except for the powder that all women use.

“Always two, eh?” Gees observed, and shook his head as Tyrrell gestured the invitation of a second helping at him. He emptied his glass, and the maid refilled it with a burgundy that bespoke a fine taste in vintages and careful ageing. “Clockwork regularity.”

“A fiendish sort of instinct,” Tyrrell amended, “as if there were more than instinct in it—some human knowledge behind the mad things that do this. I’ve sat up all night with a gun, and Mr. McCoul has kept watch with me several times this summer, but—nothing. No sign of trouble, as long as there’s anyone about, and Cottrill is getting tired of constantly folding the sheep in fine weather. It’s no joke, rounding up the flock on these hills night after night—and to no purpose.”

“Except that you might have lost more, if you didn’t,” Gees said.

“There is that, of course,” Tyrrell assented moodily.

“Are you an expert at this sort of thing, Mr. Green?” the girl asked.

“Well, my father has a little place in Shropshire—runs one of the few surviving herds of aurochs on it, and some sheep,” Gees explained, though he hated the sight of the general’s Shropshire estate. “I would hardly call myself an expert—just cognizant, say.”

“General Sir George Green, that is?” McCoul asked interestedly.

“Why, yes—he is ex-service,” Gees answered, “though most men of his age are, nowadays. Why, do you know him, sir?”

McCoul shook his head. “The aurochs,” he explained. “I had the pleasure of seeing the herd, once. No, I have not met your father.”

“Oh, Mr. Green!” Gyda McCoul laughed, and something in the laugh reminded Gees of the sound he had made as a child by tapping pendent glass lusters with a long nail. “A little place, you call it. I was there with my father to see the aurochs, and it’s a wonderful estate!”

“That’s exactly what the income-tax people think,” he conceded without enthusiasm, “which makes my father’s life one long strain on two ends that refuse to meet. An estate is the very deuce, and when my turn comes to inherit—heaven keep it away and the old chap alive for years yet—I shall sell it and give the aurochs to the Zoo, or something.”

“Then you must be the Mr. Green who calls himself Gees—the one who became famous over the Kestwell case?” McCoul suggested.

Gees gave him a steady stare, and not a friendly one—it was not McCoul he hated at that moment, but himself, for betraying his identity, and Tyrrell for revealing his purpose in being here to these people.

“Quite accidentally,” he said. “I didn’t do anything, really.”

“Enough to make me feel you’d be the man to save the rest of my sheep,” Tyrrell put in. “Though there’s no similarity in the cases, of course—Anarchists, or whatever you like to call that gang you ran to earth, are not exactly like mad dogs with extra intelligence.”

“I fail to see any difference,” Gees dissented.

He saw McCoul nod appreciation of his remark. The talk flowed on, and all the while Gees watched and studied this amazing pair. For they were amazing: there was a vitality about McCoul which belonged to a world-beating athlete in his early twenties rather than to a grey-headed man with a grownup daughter, and the girl herself, equally vital and alive, betrayed ever and again a range of knowledge and worldly-wisdom more characteristic of a middle-aged woman than one of her age. And in the mellow light of the candles, that white hair of hers was like ripples of purest sea-foam on wave crests, and her eyes deepened to a darkness that was more amethyst and emerald than mere amber and green—Gees saw or imagined a wistful tenderness in them, once, as she gazed across at Tyrrell, and felt anew that he must go dog-hunting alone.

“Gyda?” he echoed the name after McCoul had spoken it in addressing her. “What an unusual name—unusually attractive, I mean.”

“A corruption of Bridget,” McCoul explained as she smiled at Gees. “Or rather, of Brigid, which is the form I prefer.”

“And I suppose you trace descent from Finn McCoul?” Gees half-asked, with the very faintest hint of amusement in the query.

“There is no reason why Finn should have been given more prominence than many others,” McCoul said with a frown. “We were kings in Ireland before the O’Neills had won to chieftainship.”

“Was Eochaid one of the family?” Gees inquired thoughtfully.

“Eochaid?” Gyda fired out the name sharply, almost fearfully.

He gave her a steady look. “Married Etain of the fairy folk,” he said, “and had his year. Dalua warned him at the start, I believe—the whole story has been told by Fiona McLeod, which is how I know.”

“I see.” She relaxed, patently relieved by the explanation, and McCoul gave an audible sigh, as might a man after passing a dangerous moment. Tyrrell offered liqueurs, and a discussion of the relative merits of Cointreau and old liqueur brandy swept away a brief but not less real tension. For a moment, Gees knew, Gyda McCoul had been definitely afraid. Of what, he questioned inwardly?

*

Another brief moment of tension arose later, just before father and daughter set out for home, when Tyrrell observed that the neighborhood was rich in antiquities, and Gees, remembering a previous remark of his in connection with archeology, questioned:

“You said the vicar was strong on it, I believed? Amber, isn’t it?”

“It is,” Tyrrell answered, after an awkward silence.

“There is a feud, Mr. Green,” Gyda explained, coming to the rescue. “My father and Mr. Amber hate each other—you didn’t know, of course.”

“I see,” he said. “It was evident that I’d dropped a brick of some sort, but naturally I didn’t know anything about it.”

Being by this time very much alive to impressions, he sensed more in the momentary tension than the mere quarrel between the two men. An expression

in Tyrrell's eyes indefinable beyond that it was a decidedly unhappy look, went to show that he was involved, in some way. Then McCoul decided on going, and Tyrrell offered to walk as far as his gateway with him and his daughter.

"In that case," Gees remarked, "I'd like to act escort too."

"Oh, but you must be tired, after driving from London today," Gyda protested. "And we don't need an escort at all, really."

But Gees saw Tyrrell's gaze at her, and knew he would be doing the man a good turn if he could manage to pair with her father. "I insist," he said, "if only as exercise after sitting still all day."

Eventually they set out, and Gees' maneuvering placed him ahead beside McCoul, with the other two following. The September night was mild and fine, and they went coatless and hatless into the light of the moon a day or two past its full, along the graveled drive and out to the rutted lane. At first, Tyrrell's and Gyda McCoul's voice sounded to Gees and her father as they walked, but McCoul took long strides, and the voices in rear faded out—as Gees knew they would.

"Not your first visit to Cumberland, surely, Mr. Green?" McCoul asked in consequence of a remark Gees had made on the quality of the lane.

"Not the first—no," he answered, "for I went through Carlisle in a sleeping berth on my way to Aberdeen and that's Cumberland, of course. Came back east coast, so I didn't see much of the district."

"No, you wouldn't," McCoul observed, and his tone suggested that he resented having his leg pulled.

"It would be an interesting county, if it were ironed out," Gees said.

"I don't quite understand," McCoul admitted stiffly.

"Well, there'd be so much more of it if it were flattened," Gees pointed out brightly. "So much is up-ended. A hill or two here and there—yes, but when it's all in roof sections—well, where are you?"

"In Cumberland, apparently," McCoul said coldly.

“That’s how it struck me,” Gees assented. “And eerie, too, especially in moonlight like this. As if one might see the Daoine Shih peering from behind a crag like that.” He pointed, as he spoke, to a hump of grey rock showing a score yards beyond the low stone wall that bounded the lane. “And a crock of gold under the rock,” he ended.

“What do you know of the Daoine Shih?” McCoul demanded sharply.

“Oh, one picks up things, here and there,” Gees evaded with surface carelessness. “Legends, you know, and all that sort of thing. I’ve always felt sorry for Eochaid—any human would, I think.”

“You seem to have that legend on your mind,” McCoul accused.

“Not more than a good many others. I’m merely interested, and Tyrrell told me you had antiquarian tastes. Lived here long?”

“We arrived in March,” McCoul answered. “I bought the castle last year, but it took some time to make any of it habitable. There was nothing but the bare walls when I bought it.”

“And the servant problem?” Gees asked. “How does Miss McCoul manage about that? It’s difficult to get servants in a place like this, surely—that is, I don’t really know if it is, of course.”

“I brought a kern from the wilds of Gallway, and he does nearly everything for us,” McCoul explained. “One of my own clan.”

“Galway, eh?” Gees reflected aloud. “I must go to Ireland, some day. The wild and woolly part of it, I mean—get impressions.”

“Then you don’t know Ireland either?” McCoul inquired sarcastically.

“Well, nothing to speak of,” Gees confessed. “I’ve done the ritual tour of Killarney and drunk Guinness in Dublin, and I own to having been in a faction fight near Cork, long ago, but the real Ireland, the land of the Daoine Shih—no. I must look it up.”

By that time, they had come in sight of the two stone pillars beyond which the rugged walls of Locksborough Castle reared upon a hillock, distinct and ruinous

in the moonlight. McCoul halted and looked back: Tyrrell and Gyda were just in sight, and her silver-white head was very close to her companion's, Gees saw as he too looked back.

"Now what do you know of the fairy folk?" McCoul demanded—there was a trace of menace in the query, as Gees realized.

"Legend only, as I told you before," he said cheerfully. "But—these pillars." He nodded at the two gigantic stones which marked the entrance to the castle grounds. "Never used as posts, surely?"

"I really couldn't say," McCoul answered stiffly.

"Stonehenge would be far more perfect if the people of a century or two ago hadn't broken up some of the stones for road making," Gees pursued meditatively, ignoring his companion's resentment. "And Avebury—Avebury is a tragedy, from the point of view of anyone with a respect for the old beliefs. These pillars remind me of Avebury—they belonged to something much bigger, once. In the days when the Daoine Shih were not afraid to show themselves—but men feared instead."

"You're a strange man, Mr. Green," McCoul said with odd abruptness.

"What man isn't?" Gees retorted, gazing straight into the black eyes—in that light they were quite black—that searched for hidden meanings in his words. "We're all strangers to each other."

McCoul gave him no answer. The other two came up with them, and Gyda McCoul smiled at Gees—she looked unearthly, a slender, perfect figure with her uncovered white hair shining in the moonlight.

"What a wonderful night, Mr. Green," she said softly.

So very softly, almost as if the words embodied a temptation, and yet, to him, her voice was like metal striking on glass lustres, a glassy tinkling—or the touch on a knife blade on a plate on which half-raw beef dripped redly. He could not forget that beef.

"Marvelous," he assented. "I'd like to roam about these hills—except that I should probably get lost and caught by the fairy folk."

“Mr. Green has the fairy folk on his brain,” McCoul put in coldly. “For tonight, he appears able to talk of nothing else.”

“But it is none too warm,” the girl said with an abrupt change of manner—to Gees it seemed that she shrank from him suddenly. “So many thanks to you for a delightful evening, Mr. Tyrrell. Good-night, Mr. Green—we shall meet again, I expect. Father, we must go.”

It was dismissal, and Tyrrell, realizing it, took her hand and kissed it before bidding good night to McCoul—Gees contented himself with a more formal parting. Then the two stood and watched while father and daughter walked between the monoliths and on toward the old castle. Not till they were within the shadow of its wall did either speak. Then—

“Pretty far gone, aren’t you?” Gees queried acidly.

“It was not for that I agreed to your coming here, was it?” Tyrrell retorted, with a trace of real anger.

“Possibly not,” Gees said equably, “but I managed you a *tete-a-tete* with the lady, and I’m so dog-tired I wouldn’t care if you carried me back. I haven’t had such an interesting evening since I ditched an airplane in the sea off Worthing. Let’s go home, shall we?”

“By all means,” Tyrrell assented coldly.

“No good, like that,” Gees said, and did not move. “You fetched me here—at fifty pounds a week, to get at the bottom of a mystery for you, and I’ve started on the job already. If you’re going all icy, I’ll forego my wage and start back tomorrow. Do we carry on, or do we carry on? You’re the finance of the business.”

“You mean—?” Tyrrell asked, evidently mystified.

“That I am the hired man,” Gees told him. “Do I carry on?”

“Oh, don’t be a blasted fool, man!” Tyrrell adjured with sudden heartiness. “Of course you carry on. I’m sorry—I ought to have known you took this walk because of me, and you must be nearly falling asleep as you talk, after that drive today. What have you-?”

“Nothing,” Gees interrupted ruthlessly. “Give me a few hours to arrange my impressions. I believe I’ve jumped into something big, big and old. And I haven’t been here ten minutes, yet. Let’s go home.”

But, before turning to go, he gazed up at the reared stones that marked the gateway, and at the part-ruined castle on its mound beyond.

Chapter III COTTRILL

TWEED-JACKETED, and wearing a pair of jodhpurs he had thought at the last moment to thrust into his suitcase before leaving London, Gees mounted a stubby little pony and urged it to catch up with Tyrrell, who in breeches and leggings was already riding a similar pony away from the long frontage of Dowlandsbar. They rode down the graveled drive and out to the rutted lane, where Tyrrell turned east, away from Locksborough Castle and Odder. It was a still morning with some of the warmth of summer about it, and a bluish haze veiling the rugged ridges among which they rode. Glancing back before they began their descent into the first deep hollow, Gees saw the two monoliths which marked the entry to McCoul's habitation, and the castle itself, ruinous except for the square, massive grey keep, a rambling jumble of broken-down walls set on its little height, and surrounded by grassgrown earthworks which reminded him of Maiden Castle in Dorset, though they were of not such tremendous proportions as that old stronghold.

"And this lane leads where?" he asked, noting the grass that grew between the ruts, and evidence of little care and less use.

"It will bring you out on to the main Carlisle road," Tyrrell answered, "about eight miles away. You can give your pony his head—he won't let you down. But with that car of yours, I'd advise you to go back the way you came. This lane is no joke for a car, in this direction. There are only two farms, and it gets worse as it goes on."

"I'd call it one big joke all the way," Gees comment sourly. "Why don't you do something about it—make a road of it, say?"

Tyrrell shook his head. "I want it kept like this," he explained. "Otherwise, tourists and char-a-bancs, and all the rest of it."

"Something in that, of course," Gees remarked. "Look here, I did some thinking over the early tea your maid brought me. Has anyone beside you been losing sheep or are you the only one?"

"As far as I know, I'm the only sufferer," Tyrrel answered.

“Umm-m! And how does your land run—who are neighbors?

“Toward Odder, McCoul is next me,” Tyrrell explained. “About two hundred acres go with the castle, most it useless ground, heather and stones. On this side, a man named Bandon is tenant of the farm that joins on to land, and he doesn’t run sheep—he has a dairy farm of sorts, and you can’t graze cattle on land that sheep have been over, as probably you know. And both north a south is waste land—as is a good deal of mine, for that matter. We turn off, here.”

He swung his pony to the right and passed through an opening in the low stone wall, and Gees, following noted the rough three-barred gate that guarded the opening—it was no more than a rude hurdle—laid against the farther side of the wall. They faced a declivity of—for one unused to the country, appalling steepness, and Gees drew rein.

“Give him his head,” Tyrrell advised. “I’ll show the way.”

And they rode down, while Gees queried inward whether he would slide along his pony’s neck and over its head, but, with Tyrrell leading, came safely to comparative level, a sheltered area of three or four acres of rich grass land, cropped close inside a large sheep fold that was empty, now, except for a small, dark man and a patient dog, and two woolly things lying beside one of the hurdles that formed the fold.

“That’s Cottrill,” Tyrrell stated as he dismounted at the entrance to the fold, and Gees followed suit. They tied their reins to one of the hurdles. “I told him to leave those carcasses—wanted you to see them and get some idea—we’ll have a word with him, first.”

He led on, and Gees, following, found himself facing a sturdy, honest-looking little man of nearly middle age, with doglike brown eyes and close-clipped black beard and moustache, who touched his hat at Tyrrell and gave this stranger an inquiring glance.

“Cottrill—my shepherd, Green,” Tyrrell stated. “Cottrill, this is Mr. Green, who is going to put an end to our troubles. I brought him to have a look at these two carcasses before you burn them.”

Gees offered his hand, and the man gripped it firmly, while Tyrrell let his eyebrows go up at this acknowledgment of the introduction.

“Glad to see you, sir,” Cottrill said, in a pleasant voice with hardly any trace of dialect in it, “and I hope the master’s right about you.”

“He’s a bit optimistic, perhaps,” Gees remarked. “You have had six months of this trouble, I understand, and all the killings in pairs.”

“That’s so, sir. A sort of what you might call method about it. I’ve come across sheep-worrying dogs in my time, but never anything like this. It’s got on my nerves, to tell the truth. I’m—well, scared.”

“Ah!” Gees observed. “Any special reason for being scared?”

“Yes, sir.” Cottrill glanced at his master, and caught a nod which invited him to be as frank as he liked. “The devilish calculation of it—not like ordinary sheep-worrying. I’ve sat up night after night, and the master’s sat up, and even Mr. McCoul from the castle has watched with him this summer, and as long as we watch—nothing! But as soon as we don’t watch—well, there’s another two done in. As if them things had knowledge, not like animals, but more like humans. And it’s gettin’ me down. Because, you see, the sheep are my people, as you might say.”

“I know,” Gees said. “You take it as against yourself.”

“I’d trust Cottrill to do his damndest,” Tyrrell put in.

“I’ve done it, sir,” the man said. “But—they’re too much for me.”

“They?” Gees asked. “More than one, then?”

“Two, sir,” Cottrill answered. “I sighted ‘em, back in May.”

“You never told me this.” Gees turned to Tyrrell, accusingly.

“I thought it better for him to tell you,” Tyrrell answered. “He’s the one who saw them. Tell that tale, Cottrill.”

“It’d be about the middle of May,” the shepherd said. “I’d begun this folding, of course, and we’d had a fortnight clear of these things, with me watching every night—that was after we’d put the police on to it, and much use *they* are, too! Mr. Tyrrell said I needn’t watch, that night, so I was on my way home—there

was a bit of mist come in off the sea, and it was gettin' dark, and dimmish like as I went off to my home. About a couple of miles away from where I was folding 'em, then—another bit of grass rather like this, only away over there"—he pointed up to the summit of a ridge away from the lane—"and I hadn't a gun with me, that night. And I saw 'em, two of 'em—grey shapes away in the mist—just glimpsed 'em for a moment. Great things like donkeys."

"Long-eared, eh?" Gees surmised thoughtfully.

"No, I couldn't say I saw any ears. The size of donkeys, I mean. They showed up against the sky, and I went after 'em, but, of course, I couldn't find anything. Then I went off back to the fold as quick as I could, and got there in time to find two carcasses all mangled like the two over there"—he nodded at where the two carcasses lay—"and no sign of pad-marks nor nothing to tell me where them things come from or where they went—and there's never been any sign to guide us, either. That sight of 'em I got—just the grey shapes, and no more."

"And you went back," Gees observed, marveling at the courage of the man who had thought nothing of going back to his sheep when two ravening beasts, "the size of donkeys," had been abroad.

"As I'm tellin' you, sir," Cottrill said. "But Jimmy here"—he gestured at his dog, which looked up at mention of his name—"I've never known him act as he did then. Turned reg'lar coward, he did—stuck his tail between his legs and whined and cringed—didn't you, Jimmy?"

The dog stood up to wag his tail at being addressed, and then again sat down and gazed at his master. He was of nondescript breed, Gees saw, more collie than anything, sturdily built and shaggy.

"Something he didn't like facing, eh?" Gees suggested.

"Something he would not face, sir," the man amended. "Stuck behind me, and when I touched him he was all quivering with fright. I tell you, sir, just as I've told the master, them grey things are more than dogs. They're devils, and know as much as devils know. Lord, if only I'd had my gun, that night! If only to make a blood trail to follow."

"Put that more plainly, Cottrill," Gees invited. "Devils, you say—what do you mean by devils?"

“Well, sir, I’ve had Jimmy here from a pup, and trained him up to his job. The sweetest tempered dog in a hundred mile, and as brave as a lion, against anything he can understand—things that live like him and me and you, sir, if you don’t mind my puttin’ it that way. And if he puts his tail between his legs and goes all trembly, it’s because of something he can’t understand, if you get me, sir. Unearthly, I’d say.”

“Things that live like him and me and you.” Gees picked out the words and echoed them thoughtfully as he gazed at the dog.

“There you are!” Tyrrell exclaimed, with a note of exasperation. “Cottrill’s got it—even Moore, the policeman, looks at it like that, I believe! They’re all set on believing there’s something unearthly about this—but ghosts don’t go in for material killings like those.” He nodded at the two carcasses lying beyond them, inside the fold.

“And you’re bitten by the same bug yourself,” Gees accused.

“I don’t know what to think,” Tyrrell owned.

“You’re not a native of this district, are you?” Gees turned to the shepherd and addressed the question to him.

“Why, yes, sir,” the man answered with a smile. “Born an’ bred here, an’ my father was shepherd at Dowlandsbar before me.”

“But you don’t talk like a native,” Gees persisted. “What have you done with your Cumberland dialect, if you were born here?”

Again Cottrill smiled. “Well, you see, sir, there was the war—I was just a bit of a boy when I joined up in time to do a bit—”

“Military Cross,” Tyrrell put in, “and recommended for a commission.”

“Which I didn’t want,” Cottrill went on, “and after I got demobbed I thought I’d see a bit of the world. So I went out to the States and did a bit of roving there, got off to Peru down the west coast an’ went across the Andes to Buenos Aires—fooled about, as you might say, sir, on this job an’ that job. But all the time I could see these fells—they pulled me back at the finish, an’ here I am an’ here I’ll stop.”

“Believing that some things don’t live like him and me and you.” Gees stooped and patted the dog as he spoke.

“Not exactly, sir, but keepin’ an open mind. These fells—

He did not end it, but looked up at the heights about them. They were in a basin-like depression, pierced at its northern end by a narrow cut, along which flowed the tiny rivulet which had its source in a spring on the eastern hillside. And, as Cottrill ceased speaking, Gees felt the utter silence as a thing almost tangible: there was no breath of wind, no token of life of any kind on the hills that shut them in-until a solitary carrion crow sailed over them, a black and ominous thing against the hazed and cloudless sky.

“You were saying—?” Gees asked, after a long pause.

“An open mind, sir,” the man answered. “Here we’ve got sunshine—full day—and it’s difficult to believe anything but what you see. But after nightfall it’s different—the fells have their own secrets. Before Mr. McCoul took the castle an’ had it repaired to live in, I doubt if you’d get anyone in Odder to come past that gateway in the dark. It’s old, a graveyard of the very old dead, the people who were here in the very beginning of things, an’ they say they can feel—”

“Rank superstition, Cottrill!” Tyrrell broke in impatiently. “As a man who has seen the world, you ought to know better than to give heed to those old women’s tales. And we came here for Mr. Green to see these carcasses—the way they were killed is real and material enough, with no ghastliness about it. You can’t accuse a ghost of—”

“Wait, though,” Gees interrupted in turn. “What tales do they tell of the castle, Cottrill? What was it—did anyone see a ghost there?”

Cottrill shook his head. “No, sir—I never heard of anyone seeing anything. But the feel of it—even in daylight.”

“That is, until Mr. and Miss McCoul came to live there, and humanised it again?” Gees suggested, ignoring Tyrrell’s evident impatience.

“I suppose so, sir. I haven’t heard so much about it since they came to live in it. Not that that would have anything to do with our losin’ sheep like this, though. I just told you because you asked.”

“Yes—thank you very much, Cottrill. Now we’ll look at these sheep, since that was the idea in coming here—eh, Tyrrell?”

“It was,” Tyrrell answered shortly, and moved toward the carcasses.

The other two followed him, and the dog got up and padded sedately beside his master until they had walked nearly halfway across the fold. But then, abruptly, Jimmy stopped, whined, and sat down, looking up at Cottrill with eyes as nearly human as a dog’s can be, and in them an expression half-fearful, half-pleading. Gees stopped to observe him.

“That’s curious,” he remarked.

“He’s been the same every time, sir,” Cottrill said.

“I’d have to carry him to get him near them corpses, and even then he’d fight to break away from me an’ darned near bite me to do it. An’ him that’d tackle anything on four legs or two, if I set him at it. Jimmy!”

With the last word he called to the dog, and both Gees and Tyrrell stopped to watch. But Jimmy crouched down fearfully and whined, evidently more fearful of obeying the call than of what might happen to him for refusing. Cottrill went back and patted him, and he thumped the ground with his tail once or twice, as if glad of this absolution.

“Now, Jimmy—come on, old chap!” Cottrill adjured him.

But again the dog crouched and whined, in abject fear.

“All right, then,” Cottrill said reassuringly, and turned to go on. “He’s never disobeyed me about anything else,” he explained, “an’ I’d trust him with anything, anywhere. But this is—well, too much for him to stand, by the look of it. He won’t go near ‘em.”

Following him and Tyrrell, Gees looked down at the two horribly mangled carcasses. “I don’t wonder,” he said rather grimly. “But”—he bent over one of them—“ripped and torn like that, and no blood?”

“There never is, sir,” Cottrill said.

Bending down, Gees took hold of a foreleg and turned the stiff carcass over so that it lay on its back. There was a great, ugly tear beginning at the throat of the animal, and running back to its shoulder, and the flap of fleece and skin hung loosely back, showing the bloodless flesh torn and gnawed—where the meat should have been thickest, bone gleamed whitely. And the mangling of the rest of it was sickening to see.

“They always drink all the blood like that, sir,” Cottrill said in a matter-of-fact way, “an’ then have a feed off the meat.”

Gees straightened himself. “Two killed like this, every time?” he asked, gazing at the other, equally mangled carcass.

“No more, an’ no less,” the shepherd confirmed him.

Gees looked back at the dog, down with his head on his forepaws, now, faced toward them and watchful. Again the silence wrapped round him like a fourth presence here. Then Tyrrell moved, impatiently.

“Well, what do you make of it?” he demanded.

“Nothing, yet,” Gees answered imperturbably. “Give me time.”

He snuffed at the air as might a hound seeking a scent.

Then he took a petrol lighter from his pocket, flicked it, and held it up. The tiny flame stood straight—there was no breeze to deflect it.

“Do you smell anything?” he asked of Cottrill.

“Ah, I wondered if you’d get it too, sir,” the man said.

“What do you get?” Gees asked, putting his lighter away.

“It’s like—an’ yet not like—the wires in front of Passchendaele, sir,” Cottrill said slowly. “I was there, an’ the corpses hung an’ rotted on the wire, an’ the smell, when the wind drove it—like what I get after one of these killin’s, and yet not like it. This is fouler.”

“Very faint, but foul, as you say,” Gees confirmed him. “But it doesn’t come

from those.” He nodded at the carcasses before him.

“No, sir, not from them,” Cottrill said gravely.

“What the devil are you two talking about?” Tyrrell demanded. “I can’t smell anything unusual.” And he too sniffed, and shook his head.

Gees disregarded him. “Cottrill,” he said, “when the police took it up—at least, I suppose they took it up—what did they do?”

“Had a search for dogs all round,” the shepherd answered, “an’ couldn’t find one they could blame, anywhere, let alone two. Then Inspector Feather—he’s the big noise around here—he asked me to let him know instantly the next killing happened, an’ he brought a bloodhound to see if he could track the things that did it.”

“And the bloodhound?” Gees asked—though he felt he knew the answer.

“Just like Jimmy there.” Cottrill nodded at his waiting dog. “They couldn’t get it near the killings, an’ when they made a cast round with it, it just shivered an’ crouched an’ wouldn’t work—wouldn’t even try for a scent. An’ I remember that scent you picked up—just now was much stronger, then—it was fair hellish. But the hound wouldn’t take it.”

“I must see this Inspector Feather,” Gees half-mused. “What are his views now—I suppose you still report the killings.”

“I do,” Tyrrell put in, “and I’ve raved at him. Also he’s had six men on watch for a week on end, all with shotguns, and never a trigger was pulled. While they watched, nothing happened—as always.”

“Well, what does he do now?” Gees persisted.

“Comes up and sees me, and regrets. To hell with his regrets! Offers to keep men on watch as long as I like and what’s the use? He could keep men on for six months, if he would, and the night after they go off it would happen again. It always does, when Cottrill gets a night’s sleep. I feel like rounding up every sheep I own and putting them into a sale yard, except that I hate being beaten.”

“You’re not beaten, yet,” Gees said thoughtfully. “Neither am I.”

“Do you mean you’re going to put an end to it, then?” Tyrrell asked.

Gees gave him a whimsical sort of smile. “As I asked before—give me time,” he answered. “I want to see several people, including this Inspector Feather and some of his men, and”—he turned to Cottrill—“for awhile I’m going to leave you alone, as far as looking after the sheep is concerned. You may have one or two more killings before I come in to stop them, but I may want to talk to you at times.”

Cottrill shook his head. “The sheep are my people,” he said.

“I know,” Gees assented, “but—without being irreverent—it is expedient that two should die—or four should die—for the rest. For the present, I am not watching sheep, but going straight for the things that play hell with them, and—as you’ve noted already—drink blood.”

“Vampires?” Cottrill only half-questioned.

“No. You’re a thinking being, Cottrill, so it’s safe to tell you I’m not sure what they are. I’ve got to find out, first.”

“Good luck to you, sir,” Cottrill said earnestly. “I wouldn’t wonder if you did get to the bottom of it. I’ll do just as you say.”

“Then carry on, you and Mr. Tyrrell, as if I were not here—until I feel like getting busy at the sheep end. I’m on the other end, first.”

“Not dogs?” Again it was only half a question.

Gees smiled. “Perhaps dogs,” he said. “Except—that smell.”

“I get you, sir,” and Cottrill smiled. “Half-dogs, say.”

“And what the hell all this means—” Tyrrell began, and broke off.

“There’s a good deal of hell about it, as Cottrill has found out,” Gees told him. “Or rather, a state between earth and hell—this is about the most interesting business I’ve run up against since I ditched an airplane in the sea off Worthing—and made money out of it.”

With a last glance at the two carcasses, he turned away.

“I’ve seen enough, and heard more,” he remarked. “I’ve got a hunger I wouldn’t sell, and I suppose you do have lunch, at Dowlandsbar—what a glorious name for any place! Do we go back, or do we go back?”

Tyrrell, making no reply, walked beside him. As they neared the dog it stood up, gazing anxiously up at its master.

“Good old Jimmy!” Cottrill said encouragingly, and the dog wagged his tail vigorously. “We’re both scared, an’ you’re honest about it.”

“By the way”—Gees stopped abruptly—“what do you do with those?” He turned his head to nod at the two carcasses they had left.

“Burn ‘em,” Tyrrell answered. “They’ll be carted to a heap of brushwood and stuff at Dowlandsbar, and a few cans of paraffin make sure of their being altogether destroyed. Nobody would touch that meat.”

“Which goes to show that the bug has bitten you too,” Gees observed. “Well, Cottrill, we shall meet again. I don’t blame you for being scared. It’s natural, considering everything.”

“Glad to’ve met you, sir,” the man said, with a hint of earnestness.

“And I you,” Gees answered sincerely.

He untied his pony and mounted to return, his feet looking bigger than ever as they hung down below the turn-ups of the jodhpurs. Tyrrell led the way up to the lane.

“Think you’ve got to the bottom of it, do you?” he asked as Gees came abreast of him beyond the stone wall. There was a trace of derision in the query.

“As far down as the neck,” Gees answered imperturbably, “and I’ve got to get all the way down to the feet and the ground under them. Don’t be so damned impatient—I’ve not been here a day, yet.”

Chapter IV INSPECTOR FEATHER

EXTERIORLY, as Gees decided when he came out from the house after a huge and satisfying lunch with his host, Dowlandsbar was utterly devoid of architectural pretensions: it was no more than a big, oblong stone box, divided into compartments by the interior partitioning walls and dumped on a ledge of a hillside so that it faced south-west—if the ledge had been artificially terraced in the side of the hill, the work had been done so long ago that no trace of it remained. The thickness of the grey stone walls was that of a fortress, and, as Gees had already noted, the interior walls were of little less solidity. Slate-roofed above its two stories, it was a grim-looking habitation—but inside was a treasure house of the handicraft of past ages. There was a huddle of outbuildings tucked away at the inner end of the house, viewing it from the lane, and before it, over the ridge that it faced, showed the ragged tops of Locksborough Castle's ruined walls, with the boxlike keep rising apparently undamaged in their midst, its arrow-slit windows and even the machicolations that crowned it intact. No other dwelling-house or building was in sight.

"I want to ask you some things," Gees stated, as Tyrrell came to stand beside him. "To begin with, how many men do you employ?"

"Six—eight, altogether, and three maids in the house—which is including the cook," Tyrrell answered. "You're an odd sort of inquiry agent, Green," he added, with amusement evident in his tone.

"Not an agent at all—a principal," Gees dissented. "I like the way you've taken me in as a brother, too, instead of putting me out to board or leaving me to fend for myself. But where do your men live?"

"You'll find their cottages quite near by—two of them in the glen just outside the gate, but on the other side of the lane."

"M'yah! Houses have a way of hiding themselves in country like this, of course. How old is this house of yours, by the way?"

"Does it matter to your inquiry?" Tyrrell countered dryly.

"I don't know what does matter, yet," Gees said. "Never mind, if it pains you.

Magnificent weather for September, isn’t it?”

“The newest part of the house—that is, the end nearest to the outbuildings, which you can see is an addition if you look closely at this front wall—is not less than three hundred years old,” Tyrrell explained rather morosely. “This main doorway is much older.”

“Much,” Gees agreed, turning to look at the house and taking out his cigarette case. “Have one—no? I will, then. It looks to me as if the original builder made it a one-story fabric, and then a later occupant lifted the roof and put another floor under it—and a still later one put that new end on, three hundred years ago, you say. Bless me, how time flies! And yours is an old family, I gather?”

“I don’t know how you gather it,” Tyrrell said, “but you happen to be right. A relative of my ancestors achieved some distinction in the New Forest with a bow and arrow, not many years after the Conquest.”

“Saxon, eh?” Gees conjectured thoughtfully.

“Mainly Danish, my branch of the family,” Tyrrell dissented.

“And settled here? But the Danes stuck to the East coast, surely?”

“Oh, no! They allied with the Irish, in the early days, and came across the Irish Sea to see what they could find on this West coast, quite a few of them. Vikings used to winter at Dublin, and hire themselves and their men for the wars between Irish chiefs, and some of them came over here and settled. Also, this was part of Northumbria in those days, and that was nearly all Danish.”

“Quite so,” Gees agreed. “There was a chap named Siward, earl or something of the sort. I must look it all up, some time.”

“And what has all this to do with my sheep?” Tyrrell inquired acidly.

“I don’t know, yet,” Gees answered with unruffled placidity. “I’m getting the feel of the place. Do you know who built that castle?” He nodded at the ruined walls beyond the ridge that they faced.

“Yes, it was William de—Guillaume, he called himself, Guillaume de Boisgeant.” He spelt out the surname after speaking it. “Why?”

“Umm-m!” Gees took no heed of the final query. “I’d hate to be called wooden giant, myself. Would that be—when did he build?”

“In Stephen’s time, and the name is supposed to imply that he came from somewhere near Ghent, or his ancestors did. Spelling was a mere wild amusement in those days. But he built on the site of something much older—that hillock where the castle stands is peppered with Roman brick, and even the Romans built on older earthworks. And now have you had enough of archaeology, or shall I go inside and fetch out a few volumes of the *Britannica*? You’ve only to say the word.”

“Put that differently, and I ought to be thinking sheep, dreaming sheep, and talking sheep,” Gees observed thoughtfully. “Slaughtered sheep, that is, bled white by what killed them. Well, perhaps. Tyrrell, if you don’t let me tackle this in my own way, it won’t get done. If you do—well, I’ll amend the terms we made in London—in my office. I’ll accept fifty pounds for putting an end to your trouble, whether it takes a week or seven months, and nothing at all if I don’t end it.”

“Then you’re sure of success?” Tyrrell asked eagerly.

“No. I don’t know yet what is killing your sheep, but I’ve seen for myself that these are no normal killings, which simplifies it, enormously. The abnormal is bound to declare itself, if you look for it long enough and in the right way. And I haven’t asked you a single question that does not bear on the problem, though you may find that hard to believe. But—who’s that coming through the gateway?”

“Inspector Feather—the one in civilian clothes,” Tyrrell answered after only a glance at the small touring car advancing along the drive, “and that copper with him is Constable Moore, our local muddler. I telephoned Feather about this last killing as soon as Cottrill reported it to me—I’ve telephoned him each time it happened, and he’s come out each time to show me how useless he is about it.”

“I didn’t suspect the existence of a telephone,” Gees observed. “What is it, a Marconi contraption? You’ve got no wire visible.”

“Since the wire came down with the snow every winter, and put me out of communication, I had it laid underground,” Tyrrell explained. “It comes up to join the ordinary wires at the end of the lane.”

“You’re not a poor man, are you?” Gees remarked abruptly.

“Well?” Tyrrell asked, and smiled amusedly.

“And yet you live in a place like this?”

“You heard Cottrill say how the fells pulled him back,” Tyrrell said. “So with all of us who belong here—and my people have lived in this house for centuries. It’s in the blood of us to stay.”

“There is no escape,” Gees reflected aloud. “And you mean to marry Gyda McCoul and rear up successors to feel like that—and stay here.”

“I’ve not asked her to marry me, yet,” Tyrrell admitted, “but—yes, I do mean that. Does it also bear on the problem of the sheep?”

“Call it a mere statement of what I saw as obvious last night,” Gees countered. “And now—the inspector. Let us be practical.”

The final observation was a fruit of his survey of the man who got out of the car after pulling on his handbrake at the corner of the house, instead of driving up to stop abreast the main entrance. A very large man, though still active in all his movements, clad in a suit of grey tweed that fitted him none too well, he looked more military than police with his squared shoulders, brownish-red face in which his grey eyes were deeply set under bushy brows, and big, cavalry moustache hiding his mouth. Following him came Constable Moore, equally large, but of a slow, lumbering type—Hercules with sciatica, Gees mentally dubbed him. The inspector, approaching Tyrrell and Gees as they stood on the graveled frontage, saluted by touching his soft felt hat.

“Afternoon, sir,” he said to Tyrrell. “I thought I’d just look you up over this last outrage, to see if there’s anything different about it.”

“In fact,” Tyrrell interrupted savagely, “to show your damned incompetence once more. I’m utterly fed-up with you, Inspector Feather.”

For some seconds, the inspector appeared as if about to choke, and his reddish face took on a purplish tinge. Then he achieved control over himself, and spoke in a way that Gees admired.

“Very good, sir. I’m sorry to have intruded on you. I hope you have no objection to my seeing your shepherd, Cottrill, about it?”

“See him by all means,” Tyrrell snapped back. “And after that, what are you going to do about it? Go home and dream again?”

“Mr. Tyrrell,” Feather asked coolly, “if a man of yours has bungled some piece of work, do you castigate him in front of others?”

“I’m sorry, Inspector,” Tyrrell said frankly, realizing his own lack of decency, “and I take it all back. Green, this is Inspector Feather, who has tried to get to the bottom of this trouble—though with no success, so far. Inspector, Mr. Green, from London, who—”

“Is just looking round your wonderful country and admiring it, and enjoying my friend’s hospitality,” Gees put in. “Though I’ve not seen much of it yet, having only arrived last night. I expect your duties take you over a fairly extensive territory, Inspector?”

“Some few miles to cover, sir,” Feather answered, far more placably than he had spoken to Tyrrell, so far. “It’s a sparsely populated area, this, and I do a good bit of driving about in the course of a week.”

“And in all your driving, I suppose, you’ve never come across a case like this,” Gees suggested. “One so difficult, I mean.”

“That is the case, sir. It’s—well, baffling, say, I find it.”

“Yes, very, I should think,” Gees assented encouragingly. “Mr. Tyrrell has been telling me all about it, and we went to see the carcasses of these last two sheep this morning. I suppose you’ve tried everything? I know a little about police work, by the way.”

“Is that so, sir?” The inspector accorded him a slight increase of respect, and Tyrrell frowned heavily, but did not interrupt them. “Yes, I think I’ve done everything possible. Drummed up six men this summer—though it’s difficult for me to spare as many—and put them on watch over the sheep—and the very night after they were taken off it happened again. Moore, here, has watched with Cottrill, too. I’ve had a census of dogs taken all over my district, and exonerated every one of ‘em, and last June we had that drive, you’ll remember, Mr. Tyrrell.”

“Drive?” Gees echoed. “How do you mean that, Inspector?”

“Got every man we could, and two troops of boy scouts, and started early in the morning to beat all the countryside for miles—I had an idea it might be an animal or animals escaped from some menagerie or something—they’re big beasts that do this, as you can see from the carcasses, and I had an idea there might be something hiding in the fells and coming out to play this devil’s game with Mr. Tyrrell’s sheep. But we found nothing—except for one wild cat that one of my men shot.”

“Which was not big enough to do damage of that sort,” Gees observed.

“Not by a long chalk, sir. Mr. Tyrrell”—he turned from Gees as he spoke—“I propose to organize another drive. We may find something if we do, and I can get more men into it, this time.”

Tyrrell made a slight grimace. “Do what you like,” he said, “but if you stop to reflect, you’ll remember that these killings have all been exactly alike, pointing the fact that the same beasts have done them all the time. Add to that, there has been as much as a fortnight interval between two killings—and if those things are hidden in the fells, what do they live on? Do they starve for a fortnight?”

“Well, there are rabbits, sir,” Feather ventured.

“Do you think, in six months, we should not have come across some sign if they had been killing rabbits?” Tyrrell demanded. “Do you think Cottrill or somebody would have gone all this time without finding some sign of the things themselves? He, for one, tramps every bit of the fells with that dog of his—and he’s seen nothing at all.”

“Yes, sir, but I’m suggesting they may lie up outside the bounds of your land, and come in to kill. I propose a twenty-mile drive from north to south, and adding in the boy scouts we can get, there’ll be between one and two hundred people beating the country, this time.”

“With intervals of fifty yards, and the size of these things that do the killings, they ought to find them if they’re there,” Gees put in.

“At least, it seems to me worth trying,” Feather said hopefully, “and it’s got to be done while this weather lasts, if at all. Once the autumn rain and fogs begin, it

would be a mere waste of time."

"When do you propose to undertake it, then?" Tyrrell asked.

"Well, today's Tuesday—Friday, I'd say. I can get my crowd together and out here by about eleven on Friday morning, if you agree."

"And do I feed them, or pay them?" Tyrrell asked acidly.

"No more than you did before, sir," Feather answered, and Gees sensed the resentment that his quiet tone concealed—he was a genius at keeping his temper, evidently. "The boys will bring their own food and treat it all as a lark, and I shall look after the rest of them—that is, the county will have to stand the expense. But"—he turned to address Gees—"it'll be more than fifty yards intervals, sir. With that, you'd only cover a front of five thousand yards, not the full width of Mr. Tyrrell's own land. From one to two hundred yards apart, I want them—and those things are big enough to see at that distance."

"You're going by Cottrill's glimpse of them and his description," Gees suggested, after a moment's pause for thought.

"To some extent, sir. But if you see things like these by night, with probably a bit of haze about, they're bound to look bigger than reality. Cottrill said they were as big as donkeys, but anything the size of a Great Dane would be big enough to do what they're doing."

"Still doing," Tyrrell amended for him, sourly.

"Mr. Tyrrell," he said gravely, "if you can suggest anything I have not done in connection with this case, I shall be most happy to do it."

There followed an awkward minute or so, and Gees feared lest Tyrrell should break out into open rage. But, instead, he laughed.

"You win, Inspector," he said. "No—I'm sore over it, as you'd be if they were your sheep, but I haven't an idea in my head beyond what you've done and propose to do. You want to see Cottrill, I suppose?"

"I'd like to see him, and inspect the carcasses, sir."

“Well, he’ll be over in Anker’s Glen—and you’ll find four of my men carting the hurdles to make him a new fold. That is, unless he’s gone out on the fells to see to his sheep, and in that case the men making the new fold will tell you where to find him. If this keeps on much longer, there will be nowhere to put fresh folds for him.”

“You mean that you move the sheep each time?” Gees asked.

“Necessarily,” Tyrell answered. “Sheep are the worst fools of all animals, but you won’t get them down on to that ground where the killing took place for another two months, at least. Cottrill knows he can’t, now, and so he folds in a fresh place after a killing.”

“You get that, Inspector?” Gees asked.

“The smell of blood, I expect,” Feather said. “In the same way, I’ve seen sheep go nearly mad over being driven into a slaughter house. All animals are the same when there’s blood about.”

But, Gees thought and did not say, there had been no blood at the scene of this last killing. Instead, there had been a faint reek that had a sickening, loathsome quality, a scent he could no more forget than define. He nodded a grave assent to the inspector’s statement.

“That is so,” he said. “Well, I shall be here to take part in your drive—and good luck to it. This is a ghastly affair.”

“It’s against my professional pride, sir,” Feather said, “and I’d do anything to put an end to it, as Mr. Tyrrell knows.”

He took his leave, and the stout constable, who had stood in the background and said nothing throughout the interview, though he had heard it all, followed his superior and climbed unhandily into the car. Gees watched meditatively as the inspector started his engine, reversed and turned, and eventually went off down the drive toward the gateway.

“His professional pride,” he observed thoughtfully.

“What do you make of him, Gees?” Tyrrell inquired.

“Ah! That’s real friendliness, calling me that,” Gees answered, and smiled. “I make less of him than I do of you, over it.”

“Explicate?” Tyrrell asked, after a thoughtfully frowning pause.

“Well, he lived up to the best traditions of the force, took all your insults as if they had been compliments,” Gees explained, “and you didn’t show up as the world’s most perfect little gentleman against him, either. I’m being frank, and you can kick me out, if you like.”

“No, I won’t. Feather’s a sound officer, really, but I’m so sore over this that I say more than I mean, probably,” Tyrrell admitted.

“Well, say a little less about me, from henceforth,” Gees urged gently. “You were about to tell him I’d come here to investigate this business when I broke in and stopped you at it. I don’t want a board put up at the gateway to say Gees is investigating something between mumps and murder on this spot. I don’t want you to shout my purpose in being here at any more of your friends or retainers, but just to play the simple innocent with a vast interest in Cumberland, which I’m now seeing for the first time. And if you tell the police I’m conducting a private investigation for you, you put the police’s backs up—see?”

“With consequent loss of interest on their part,” Tyrrell suggested.

“Possibly,” Gees admitted. “Wow, but that was a whale of a lunch! Do you know what I feel like doing, at this moment?”

“Haven’t the faintest idea,” Tyrrell answered.

“Going to my room, pulling down the bed cover, and settling down for an hour or so before tea. It must be this air, I think.”

“Just as you like.” He sounded as if the idea did not appeal to him.

“Permission granted, obviously,” Gees remarked. “You’re thinking I ought to be up and about, of course, doing my damndest. But, as I told you, the terms of the contract are now fifty all in if I succeed, and nothing if I fail—and I do it in my own way.”

“I’ll see that you’re wakened for tea,” Tyrrell promised, far less stiffly. “And—

you think well of Inspector Feather, apparently?”

“As a police officer—yes,” Gees answered. “Trained to routine work and employing all the best police methods—more than he told you or me, almost certainly. Feather is no fool, within his limitations.”

“Meaning—?” Tyrrell queried interestedly.

“I told you, the abnormal is bound to declare itself if you look for it long enough and in the right way—but you mustn’t look for it in normal ways. Which is why I’m going to climb on to my little bed and either think or not—I think I want some more material to think over, before I really begin thinking. We’ll see.”

He turned toward the house and made for the entrance.

Tyrrell, unmoving, watched him go, and smiled.

“You can’t help liking the chap,” he told himself.

Chapter V BAR TALK

THERE had been five scones in the dish, all hot and buttery, when Tyrrell had called Gees down from his room for tea. One remained, now. Gees, who had had three, looked at the lonely survivor, wistfully.

“Take it,” Tyrrell urged. “I’m turning on to cake.”

“Then it would be a pity to waste this,” Gees said, seizing the scone. “It must be this air that’s getting me down.”

“Getting the scones down, too,” Tyrrell gibed.

“I want to borrow a suit of clothes,” Gees announced abruptly.

“Well”—Tyrrell surveyed his figure—“apart from hands and feet, you and I are much of a size, I should say. Anything of mine—”

“No,” Gees interrupted. “Good of you and all that, but have you a man working for you of about my size? I want a working suit.”

“There’s Weelum,” Tyrrell said, after a moment’s thought. “He’d be about your build if somebody hit him on the nose and pushed his head back. You know—stoops. But I think a suit of his would fit you.”

“A dirty suit,” Gees explained. “Everyday, corduroy, reach-me-down uglies. The uglier the better. Can you borrow one without his knowing it’s for me? And a cap or hat—I’ll muddy a pair of my own shoes.”

“Is this disguise?” Tyrrell asked. “I mean, if it is, you’ve got to wear boots, not shoes. Farm hands don’t, you’ll find.”

“Quite right,” Gees assented. “I packed a pair of heavy boots, fortunately. Experience of Shropshire mud made me do it. Well, suit, and hat, to make a farm laborer of me. Can you do it, unbeknown?”

“I think so,” Tyrrell assented rather dubiously. “For when?”

“This evening—to walk to Odder and mingle with the gay throng in the *Royal*

George on terms of fraternity and equality."

"And is *that* how you expect to discover what's killing my sheep?" Tyrrell demanded with heavy sarcasm.

"Part of it," Gees answered placidly. "I wish you'd be a little less anxious to keep my nose hard down on the sheepstone, but as a matter of fact this is relevant to my idea of pursuing the abnormal by abnormal paths. How do you approach this Weelum, as you called him?"

"I don't," Tyrrell answered. "I approach my cook. Weelum is her son, and illegitimate at that. He lives on the premises with her, and I expect I could persuade her to let me have a suit of his and say nothing about it for the evening —say nothing to him, that is."

"Tomorrow, of course, she'll tell the world," Gees suggested, "but it will be too late to damage me, then. All right, Weelum let it be. Oh, one other thing, though. I want Cottrill with me."

"Cottrill?" Tyrrell echoed, in blank stupefaction. "But he'll be watching by the sheep tonight, man. Always, after a killing—"

"There will be no killing tonight," Gees interrupted. "I want him to come pubcrawling with me, as far as Odder and the *Royal George*."

"You'll never get him away from his sheep," Tyrrell prophesied.

"Well, will you get him to come here and see me after he's finished his folding?" Gees asked. "Will he be near enough for that?"

"Yes, I can send and get him to come over before dark. But I assure you it will be impossible to get him away from the flock."

"I'll take the assurance—and Cottrill too, after I've had a word with him. Now will you go and see about a suit of Weelum's workaday fustian? I may have to make alterations in it to fit it, or anything."

"It shall be done," Tyrrell promised, and, having finished his tea, went off to that part of the house over which his cook ruled.

It came to pass some two hours later that Cottrill, arriving at the house in answer to a summons, faced his master just as there emerged from the house a being at whom he frowned in a puzzled way, since, as nearly as he could tell, it was a stranger to these parts. Soiled corduroy trousers over enormous feet, an old grey gabardine coat of which the sleeves were too short by an inch or two, and which was soiled as if its owner had gone ditching in it for years; a blue striped shirt, a muffler of dark wool round the neck, and a dirty old cap pulled well down over the eyes, completed the outfit.

“How do I look, Tyrrell?” Gees asked, and Cottrill first smiled and then chuckled as he recognized the voice.

“Villainous,” Tyrrell answered unhesitatingly.

“Splendid!” Gees remarked with deep satisfaction. “Now, Cottrill, I suppose you blow along to the *Royal George* at Odder occasionally, if things are quiet enough to give you an evening off?”

“Well, sir, I have been known to do such a thing,” the shepherd admitted, with a twinkle in his eye.

“Well, we’ll go along together tonight, and I’ll be—”

“Not tonight, sir,” Cottrill interrupted gravely. “I shall be keeping an eye on the fold, after what happened night before last.”

“Whether you do or no, there will be no more killings tonight,” Gees told him with utter certainty in his tone, “and I assure you it will be far more useful if you come and give me the freedom of the bar.”

“I’d be uneasy, sir. It’s not as if—well, you see, the sheep are my people. And to leave them alone in the fresh fold, tonight—”

His gesture implied refusal to think of such a thing. Then Tyrrell spoke—his look at Gees’ face determined him.

“They close at ten, Cottrill,” he said. “I’ll take a shot gun and go down to Anker’s Glen, and you can come and relieve me after knock-out. Mr. Green is set on making this expedition tonight.”

“Because, after today, too many people will know me—I should be recognized by someone in spite of these clothes,” Gees explained.

“Well, if you’re sure, Mr. Tyrrell—” Cottrill began, and again did not end it. Evidently he was reluctant to leave his sheep to the care of any other. “And I don’t see what use—” he began again.

“As I remarked to Mr. Tyrrell,” Gees told him, “this is an abnormal case, and you’ve got to use abnormal methods to get at the cause of the trouble. It may be quite useless, this little jaunt, but I want to try it—and if I go alone, the men in that bar will shut up like oysters.”

“An’ I’m to be the oyster-knife,” Cottrill suggested. “All right, sir, since Mr. Tyrrell is goin’ to keep watch. I’ll come.”

“Good! I’ll be George—just George, for the evening. Friend of a cousin of yours, shall we say? From down south—Sussex, for choice.”

“I think I can back that amount of fiction, sir.”

“Not sir—George.” He looked at his watch. “If I meet you outside the gate in about an hour’s time, that will give you a chance to get something to eat, and it will be very nearly dark by then, too.”

“Right you are, sir. I’ll be there,” Cottrill promised.

“No—George!” Gees insisted. “Start practicing it now.”

“All right, George. I’ll be there in an hour from now.”

He went down the drive, Jimmy following him. The dog was plodding wearily, Gees noted, and Cottrill himself seemed none too fresh.

“I wonder how many miles they’ve done today already?” Gees mused. He thought of how he had seen the sheep scattered to graze on the hillsides, and what it meant to collect them all and fold them for the night. “And Odder’s nearly three miles away,” he added.

“He’ll be all right after a rest and some food,” Tyrrell said, “but I doubt whether this idea of yours will lead to anything.”

“We’ll see,” Gees said. “No other idea has led to anything, so far, so at the worst I shall merely come out even. But—dinner, eh?”

Tyrrell led the way inside, and then gestured Gees to precede him.

“You’re sure that maid of yours can keep quiet—till tomorrow?” Gees asked. “It would be a pity if a word from her got ahead of me.”

“It won’t,” Tyrrell promised. “I’ve seen to that already.”

*

Night had fully fallen when Cottrill and Gees went off toward Odder: Tyrrell, with a double-barreled breechloader in the crook of his arm and about a dozen cartridges loaded with number three shot, had set out for Anker’s Glen half an hour earlier. Since the moon would not rise till after ten o’clock, and the haze was thicker than on the preceding night, the darkness in the hollow to which the two descended after leaving Dowlandsbar gateway was of such a quality that Gees stumbled more than once in the ruts of the unkempt lane.

“This reek’s comin’ off Solway, I reckon,” Cottrill remarked. He halted, wetted his forefinger by sticking it in his mouth, and held it up to test the air. “Yes,” he added as they went on. “West, with a bit of north in it—there’ll be a fog by mornin’, George.”

“Ah! You oughter see what a Lunnon fog’s like,” Gees responded.

“Bad enough here, in winter,” Cottrill said.

They passed over a stone bridge that Gees remembered from the night before, since it had given him little more than a foot of clearance on each side of his car, and bent to the steep ascent beyond. The tall stones of the entrance to Locksborough Castle reared ghostly in the haze, and Gees saw that Cottrill signed the cross on himself as he passed the twin pillars. He was about to comment on it when with a little thrill down the spine he realized that a specter-like grey figure was showing above the low stone wall between them and the castle lands, and advancing toward them. Then it resolved itself into the form of a woman, and Cottrill uttered a cheery “Good night” as they came abreast.

“Why, Mr. Cottrill, isn’t it?” Gees recognized Gyda Mccoul’s voice.

“That same, miss,” Cottrill said, and paused. “It’s a foggy sort of night—I’m afraid our good weather’s breakin’ up at last.”

“Oh, I hope not!” As she spoke, she took a step forward, seemed to stumble, and recovered herself within a yard of Gees—he could see her snow-white hair, uncovered, and see, too, a half-luminous quality in her eyes, before she backed away from him. “This awful lane!” she exclaimed. “It makes an evening walk almost impossible. But surely you should be watching the sheep tonight, Mr. Cottrill?”

“No, miss, I’m takin’ a night off wi’ George here—he’s come all the way from Sussex to have a look at us up here. There won’t be nothing happen to the sheep again as soon after the last killin’ as this.”

“Well, you know best, of course,” she said. “Good night, Mr. Cottrill. And good night, George, too.” And she went on toward the monolith-guarded entry to the castle, while Cottrill and Gees resumed their way. And, Gees realized, there had been a spice of mockery in her voice when she had bidden him good night: she had recognized him, he knew.

“They say she walks about a lot o’ nights,” Cottrill observed, when be felt sure the subject of the remark was beyond hearing. “Restless, like. Ever see a white head like hers before, George?”

“Not quite so striking,” Gees admitted. “It’s very attractive.”

“Mighty pretty,” Cottrill agreed, “but a bit uncanny. I saw one like it in Valparaiso, but she had a face you could camp out on—got some Arauco blood in her, and her hair was straight, not curly like Miss McCoul’s.”

“There’s a prospect that she won’t be Miss McCoul much longer, I understand,” Gees observed after they had tramped some way in silence.

“Aye,” Cottrill assented, and Gees divined from his tone that this was a subject he was not inclined to discuss.

Again they went on in silence, topped the rise beyond the castle, and went winding down into Odder. The village emporium was closed, Gees noted: he saw, too, the squat steeple of a little church that he had not observed from his car—it was set back from the lane and tucked into a slope that rendered it

inconspicuous. Then they turned toward the *Royal George*, from the frontage of which a band of light lay out across the lane, and in it the thickening reek of the night swirled smokily. Cottrill opened a door, and the two entered a big, low ceilinged room, paneled shoulder-high with painted and grained deal planking. There were settles round three sides, a plain deal table with two scrubbed, backless forms as seats for it in the middle of the room, a dart board hung in the corner by the window, and a bar at which a red-faced man in shirt-sleeves presided. A dozen or so of men dressed much as was Gees himself sat round on the settles, in twos and threes, and against the bar lounged a well-dressed youngster who screwed up his eyes to gaze at the new-comers in a way that suggested he had been drinking freely. The sag of the pint tankard he held suggested it, too.

“Why, it’s Co-Cottrill!” he hiccupped. “Good old Cottrill! How-how’s sheep-killing going on, Cottrill? All-all dead yet?”

“Not all, Master Harold,” Cottrill answered stiffly, as he approached the bar. “Two pints, tankards, Mr. Querrett. I’ve got a friend from Sussex come to see us. George, this is Mr. Querrett, an’ if you can find better beer between here an’ Sussex—well, you’re clever. Why, hullo, Harry! How goes it, Ben? Taters all clamped yet?”

“Aye, an’ a rare crop, too,” Ben, a grey-headed ancient, responded.

“They hain’t begun clampin’ of ‘em yet, down in Sussex,” Gees put in, addressing himself to both Cottrill and the ancient.

“You jest coom from theer, then?” Ben inquired friendlily.

“Aye,” he answered. “Come up through the sheers.”

“Through what, mister?” The ancient put a hand to his ear for the reply, and the rest of the men in the room listened too.

“The sheers,” Gees repeated. “Lemme see, now. There was Birksheer, an’ Oxfordsheer, an’ Shropsheer, an’ Lancasheer—”

“Geography lesson, gentlemen all!” the youngster by the bar broke in. “Counties of England in their or-order, by the man from Sussex. Dirty county, Sussex, by the look of him. Refill, please, Querrett.” He slid his tankard across the bar and

released it with the order.

“No, Master Harold, you get no more to drink here tonight,” Querrett answered firmly, and put the empty tankard away after handing two to Cottrill. Gees took one of the two and silently toasted the shepherd with it before he drank, and discovered it was very good beer indeed.

“No more t’-night?” the youth demanded harshly. “Why, ‘ts’not nine, yet! Not half-pas’ eight. Don’ be silly, man!”

“It’s nearer nine than half-past eight,” Querrett told him firmly, “and if it were only seven you wouldn’t get another drop across this bar. It’s time you went home. Good night, Master Harold.”

Gazing round the room blinkingly, as if inclined to appeal against the decision, the youth sensed that the landlord’s suggestion was approved. He stuck his hands in his pockets and walked unsteadily to the door, pausing there to look back into the room as he held on to the handle. He grinned, foolishly, and opened the door.

“Good nigh’, ev’ybody,” he said, and went out, slamming the door.

“If I’d had a boy like that, I’d ha’ leathered him black an’ blue,” Ben said solemnly. “Reckon he’ll break Mr. Amber’s heart, this way.”

“An’ his sister’s as well,” said another. “She’s fair worritted over his ways. ‘T’ain’t as if he could carry his drink.”

“The vicar’s son, eh?” Gees asked of Cottrill.

“Aye. He’s at college at Oxford—they give ‘em far too long holidays, an’ don’t discipline ‘em when they’re there,” Cottrill answered. “What d’ye think of our Cumberland beer, George?”

“Fine stuff,” Gees said reverently. “You were right about it.”

“That young feller oughter be leathered,” Ben insisted to the company in general. “If I had a son like him, I’d leather him, I would.”

“An’ how are things down yure way, mister?” A brawny individual in a shabby velveteen jacket put the question to Gees as he set a pint glass on the bar and

gestured Querrett to refill it.

“Oh, slow,” Gees answered. “But I come into a bit o’ money, so I reckoned I’d travel a bit an’ see me old friend here.” He indicated Cottrill by a nod. “An’ havin’ come into that bit o’ money,” he added, “I reckon it’s up to me to stand me footin’, like. What’ll everyone have, now?” He looked round the room to see how the invitation would be received, trusting to Cottrill’s sponsorship to justify it.

“Well, that’s very kind o’ your friend, Mr. Cottrill,” Ben said, and finished his drink hastily. “I’ll drink his health in another pint, wi’ pleasure, an’ I reckon the rest of us’ll do the same.”

“Drink up, chaps,” Cottrill admonished heartily.

“George is a warm member, an’ he can afford it. Half for me this time, Mr. Querrett—I don’t want to make the pace too hot, an’ we’ve just had pints.”

The landlord bustled between the bar and his taps—he had the beer in casks at the back—and eventually every member of the party had a fresh drink at Gees’ expense. They toasted him, and old Ben smacked his lips loudly as he lowered his tankard after a long draught.

“An’ how d’ye like our part o’ the world, mister?” he inquired.

“You’ve got too many hills, an’ not enough trees,” Gees answered.

“You don’t want to be all smothered up in woods, do you?” Ben demanded. “As f’r the hills, I reckon the Almighty put ‘em there.”

“An’ trees,” another observed, “there’s a fine clump round Mr. Tyrrell’s place—reg’lar little wood, it is. Don’t want trees everywhere you go. It’d make it stiflin’ like, besides the mess o’ leaves.”

“All round that old ruin we passed on the way here, there’s no more trees’n hair on a baby’s chin,” Gees declared gravely.

“Ah, that’ll be Locksborough,” Ben remarked. “Well, there was some fine rowans, but Mr. McCoul had ‘em all cut down an’ the roots pizened. It beat us, that did—unless maybe he reckoned to use ‘em as firewood.”

“That way, he wouldn’t ha’ had the roots pizened,” another suggested.

“Happen he wouldn’t,” Ben said, and dismissed the subject. “Well, Mr. Cottrill, what’s yure news? Yu’re a bit of a stranger, these days.”

“Why, yes,” Cottrill agreed. “It’s some while since I called in for a pint, ain’t it? News? Nothing good, I can assure you, Ben.”

“You hain’t found out what’s a-doin’ of it yet, then?”

Cottrill shook his head. “Neither hide nor hoof,” he answered.

“I was talkin’ to Moore tonight,” the velveteen-jacketed man put in, “and he told me there’s to be another drive, come Friday mornin’.”

“Aye, an’ if any o’ them boys go tromplin’ round my tater clamp, I’ll leather ‘em,” Ben promised.

“The things that kill them sheep ain’t likely to hide in your tater clamp, Ben,” velveteen-jacket said slily, and won a general laugh.

“Happen they don’t,” Ben snapped when the laugh subsided. “D’you know where they do hide, since you talk so sure about it?”

“Happen you know as much as I do about ‘em,” velveteen retorted.

“What d’you chaps make o’ these things, then?” Gees ventured, opening the subject for which he had made this excursion. “I’m a stranger about heer,” he added apologetically, “an’ know no more’n what Mr. Cottrill told me, about losin’ his sheep by dogs o’ some sort.”

“Well, mister, that’s what it is,” Ben said, and suggested by his tone that he intended to say no more on the subject.

“But you been callin’ of ‘em things, not dogs,” Gees pointed out.

“It’d be back about the middle o’ July, mister,” the velveteen man said slowly, after a pause in which nobody moved or spoke, “an’ Jack Baldwin—he ain’t here tonight—Jack was comin’ along from Dowlandsbar way, same as it might be you an’ Mr. Cottrill tonight. Top o’ the rise this side the old castle, he sighted two

things t’other side the wall alongside the road—things, he called ‘em, not dogs. They was goin’ like all possessed across country, Jack said—it was nigh on dark, but not quite. Jack said they loped over the wall a score paces in front o’ him, an’ then took the other wall an’ went outer sight in a dip t’ords the castle. An’ Jack said he’d take his oath they warn’t dogs nor yet nuthin’ a dog’d come near, though they was four-legged.”

“More like big cats?” Gees suggested.

“No. Like dogs, Jack said, but not dogs. Because, he said, there was a smell went with ‘em that made him nigh sick, a smell no dog could live with—they was to wind’ard of him, an’ he got the smell as they went across his front. Ye know, sometimes a dog’ll roll on a dead rat or anything an’ get a powerful stink on him, but Jack said it was not a bit like that. More—more like bad chemicals, he reckoned…”

“I were here when he come in that night,” another interrupted, “an’ he were white as a sheet, an’ what he said about the smell were that if any of us ever got to hell, it’d be what we’d find. The reek o’ the pit where the damned frizzle, he said, not bein’ careful o’ his words at anytime, ain’t Jack. An’ if you went by the look o’ him, he’d seen the davvle hisself, that night. All to pieces, he were.”

“An’ they’re what’s killin’ Mr. Tyrrell’s sheep,” the velveteen man added. “An’ ‘tis my belief no mortal man can tackle ‘em, even if he could find ‘em, any more’n ye could tackle the old dead risen.”

“The old dead risen?” Gees echoed questioningly.

“The man’s a stranger,” Ben cut in, “or he’d know there’s things round these fells we don’t talk about, lest we get their ill-will.” He tilted his tankard, and ceremoniously spilled a gout of its contents on the sanded floor, and with amazement Gees saw that half a dozen others, Cottrill among them, did the same. It was a sort of libation, as if the men who made it feared lest the “old dead” should hear themselves discussed, and so must be propitiated.

An odd quiet followed, and the occupants of the bar looked at each other uneasily: there was fear in the atmosphere of the place, Gees sensed, and a lad by the window let out a little yelp as the door went clattering open and a wild-eyed, bare-headed man, his grizzled hair all tousled, almost ran in and, steadying, approached the bar.

“Fr the love av the Virgin, Misther Querrett, gimme a double whisky, an’ make it big!” he pleaded rather than ordered.

“Shaun Ammon, Mr. McCoul’s man at the castle,” Cottrill whispered explanatorily to Gees. “Why, Shaun, what’s wrong?” he asked, as the landlord took down a bottle and a man by the door shut it hastily.

“Ah, sure, I’ve seen an’ smelt ‘em,” Shaun answered half-sobbingly. “Beyant the church, waitin’ be the wall o’ the graveyard. Eyes like fires glowin’ at ye—great grey things crouchin’, an’ one growled as I wint by. An’ hell itself’ll smell no worse than thim.”

“There!” the velveteen man exclaimed. “Wasn’t that what Jack said? The reek o’ the pit where the damned frizzle was his words.”

“But how come you to be out this way so late, Shaun?” Querrett asked. “You’ve never been here after dark before, I know.”

The man finished his neat whisky and put the glass down. “I’ll be throublin’ ye f’r the same again, Misther Querrett,” he said, “F’r I nade it, if iver a man did. How’m I here so late, ye’re askin’? It was the masther, Misther McCoul—Miss Gyda went f’r one o’ her walks, an’ since she was out a long while, he sez to me —‘Shaun,’ he sez, ‘I mislike Miss Gyda bein’ out alone so late, with all the happenin’s that happen these days—go find her, she wint t’ords Odder, an’ ye’ll find her forninst the village, sure.’ An’ I kem out lookin’ f’r her, but divil a sight of her could I see. An’ bein’ so near, a dhrink sthruck me as a frind in nade, an’ I kem on past the churchyard—but not f’r ten barrels av the craythur would I have kem if I’d known what I’d see!”

Cottrill emptied his tankard and put it down. Then he turned to Gees and gripped the stick—it was almost a cudgel—he had brought.

“I dunno how you feel about this,” he said, “but if the grey things are still there —but I wish I had my gun with me.” And he moved toward the door, while Gees, comprehending his intent, followed.

“Nay, come back!” Ben called to them. “Can ye face devils from the pit wi’ no more than a stick, man? Come back! Death’s out there!”

“Aye, the old dead, mayhap,” and Cottrill lifted his stick aloft, “but I cut this

from a mountain ash myself. And I'm going."

He went out to the night. Gees, following him, looked back and saw a huddle of frightened faces as the occupants of the bar crowded round the doorway. Cottrill, hurrying, glanced back too for a moment.

"If they had the guts of a louse among 'em, they'd come too," he said. "Hullo! Tom Cotton's a man, at least. Comin' with us, Tom?"

The velveteen-jacketed man, running to catch up with them, eased his pace to fall in beside Cottrill. "Aye," he said. "If so be as we might track 'em down an' put an end to this devil's business."

They hurried on, and came to the low wall bounding the churchyard. Again Gees caught the vile reek he had smelt that morning by the sheep fold, but of whatever had caused it there was no sign, though they searched all four sides of the quadrangle. Then, standing in the misty, utter stillness to listen for a moment, vainly, Cottrill shook his head.

"Might be anywhere, by this time," he said. "In the churchyard itself, mayhap. There's hiding enough among the tombs."

"The old dead wouldn't go in consecrated ground," Tom Cotton said.

"Are they, then?" Cottrill turned on him and put the question sharply, almost fiercely.

"This smell," Tom said. "That, or—" He did not end it.

"Ssh!" Cottrill cautioned him. "Don't speak of *them*."

"You goin' back home, or stoppin' the night here?" Tom asked after another long silence in which they looked over the wall.

"Back home, of course," Cottrill answered. "Why?"

"It's more'n I'd do, tonight," Tom said. "But there's that poor chap Ammon—he'll never dare go back to the castle alone. If—"

"Yes," Cottrill said, "he can come with us. Now, though. I'm not stopping in

there any longer, nor goin' in again. Tell him, will you."

Tom went off toward the inn, and Cottrill and Gees went a little way back toward it. Presently Shaun Ammon came hurrying toward them.

"May the saints in glory look down an' reward yez, gentlemen," he accosted them. "'Tis meself that'd niver dare go back alone, an' no breakfast there'd have been for the masther in the mornin' av I'd sthayed, an' Miss Gyda's hot wather to make tonight, too."

"You'll be rather late with it," Gees suggested.

"An' maybe I will, but Miss Gyda's a forgivin' sort. Ah, me head's all rattlin' wi' the fright, an' I can't think. Av you two gentlemen would come as far as the dureway, I'll remimber it in me prayers. The divil is out tonight, sure, an' all his angels too."

"We'll see you home, Shaun," Gees promised.

"May the blessin' av Mary rest on ye, gentlemen," Shaun prayed fervently. "'Tis no night to go alone, be the powers!"

As they climbed to the ridge between them and the old castle, Gees could hear the Irishman drawing long, shuddering breaths, as if the terror of what he had seen were still on him. And, until they had seen him open a postern door at one corner of the old keep, and enter, no more words were spoken except for the "Good nights" of all three. Then, as the two turned to go back to the lane, Cottrill spoke.

"It looks as if they were coming out into the open at last," he said. "God send it, before I go mad."

"Soon, now," Gees said soothingly.

"You mean that?"

Cottrill stopped to face his man while he put the question. But, before Gees could answer, they both faced toward Dowlandsbar to listen. Not from Dowlandsbar itself, but from beyond it, came the faint report of a gun. Then again it sounded to them, and faint echoes of the report volleyed among the fells

and died out.

“The master!” Cottrill whispered. “Nobody else would be shooting at this time of night. They’re there among the sheep!”

He turned and ran, and Gees, following at first, caught him up and kept beside him on the way to Anker’s Glen.

Chapter VI ATTACK

FROM the top of Brownhill Scar, a humped mound or hillock on the ridge over which a path led to Anker's Glen, Tyrrell paused to look back at the last of the sunset afterglow, pink and emerald shading to deepening turquoise between horizon and zenith. A little light remained on such heights as this, but in the valleys the shadows were deepening fast, and the light haze that would later become a misty reek was thickening. Dowlandsbar, a mile and more to the west from the Scar, was hidden by the intervening height; to the east, far off and no more than a glimmering point, Tyrrell could see the coalesced lights of the farmhouse where Bandon, whose land formed the eastern boundary to Tyrrell's own, lived. There was no other sign of human occupancy of the rugged landscape: cottages, what there were of them, were set low down in the glens for the sake of water, and of winter shelter too.

Nearly all Tyrrell's land was, like his homestead, on the north side of the lane which formed his only way to main roads and the urgencies of what claims to be the higher form of civilization, but the glen in which the sheep were folded for this night was part of some two hundred acres on the south side. The lane itself averaged an east and west direction, though its persistent divergences from the average as it followed the conformations of the ground made this hard of belief to one who did not know the countryside.

Heather-clad, rock-scarred, the heights grew obscure and their outlines softened with the coming of darkness: from this height on which he paused Tyrrell could look down into Anker's Glen, a wide valley of rich grass in which the new fold showed as a grayish oval in the dimness, filled as it was with the fleecy backs of his sheep. He broke his gun, slipped in two of the cartridges from his pocket, and snapped the breech closed again before following the narrow sheep track that led down the hillside toward the fold. There might be no need of it—Gees had said there would be no killings—but fear had lain over these fells for six months, now, and was over them tonight. And Gees was a stranger who had been here but a bare twenty-four hours—how could he tell what might happen in the hours of darkness?

There were scrubby clumps of broom on the hillside, any one of which might have hidden a target for the breechloader, but appeared void of any occupancy when Tyrrell passed them. Between him and the fold, and less than a dozen

yards distant from it, rose up a solitary mountain ash, the only tree in sight, its red clusters of berries black in the deepening gloom. As he came into the shadow of its boughs a flapping sounded among them, and a lone carrion crow sailed off to westward, a black blot against the very last of the sky's light. Startled, even chilled by the sight, Tyrrell half raised his gun to aim at the evil thing, but then lowered it again—it was too uncertain a shot. But that lessening speck against the darkening west was ominous, threatful: fear lay heavy over the fells, tonight.

He made the round of the fold, slowly, since it would be two hours and more before Cottrill would relieve him of his watch, and came back to the lone tree. The sheep were quiet, some of them cropping the grass inside the fold, others placidly cud-chewing, but, Tyrrell noted, not one of all the flock was lying down. With a sudden gust of irritation he reflected that they ought to be out, scattered all over the fells, on such a night as this, rather than cooped together to scatter at dawn and be rounded up again in the next dusk. Cottrill had stood the abnormal situation splendidly up to the present, had made no complaint, though he could not have had a score nights in bed all this summer, but he could not go on, Tyrrell knew. The mere physical strain would be too much for him when winter approached, and, in addition to that, the uncanny, almost unearthly nature of these killings would break any man's nerve, even one with such unthinking courage as Cottrill had shown—up to now!

Tyrrell, watchful of his man, was convinced that he would not stand much more of it. He had agreed to Gees' suggestion of taking Cottrill with him to Odder as much for the shepherd's sake as for anything, believing that such an evening off, among the cronies he would meet in the bar of the *Royal George,* would have a tonic effect. That Gees himself would get anything of value out of the expedition, Tyrrell did not believe for a moment. A group of laborers and the like, gossiping over their beer, could contribute nothing in the way of enlightenment as to how the sheep were killed.

Leaned against the tree, his gun in the crook of his arm, he gave himself up to reflection. Gees—what could Gees learn that others had not learned—what could he do that had not been done already? Impulse alone, at first, had led him —Tyrrell—to send that two-guinea check in response to the semi-comic advertisement that had caught his eye, and then the man himself—Tyrrell had wanted to know more of him, and had so far believed in one who might prove an utter charlatan that there, in London, he had agreed to risk fifty pounds for a solution of the mystery.

There, in the heart of civilization, the problem had appeared utterly different from what it did here. The superstition it had wakened had seemed a foolish thing, but here on the scene of the killings Tyrrell was not so sure that it was foolish. In ordinary times, his men were common-sense beings: for years he had heard no more than old tales told half-skeptically, in the way that grownups regard children's fairy tales, stories of interest and no more. But in these last six months all that had altered, and even Cottrill, traveled and common-sense man that he was, seemed to believe in the presence of something un-human, evil, fearsome. Others made vague allusions—Tyrrell had heard the phrase—"the old dead," and noted a sudden change of subject if he came on two men talking. Did they believe the old dead could rise and do evil on earth again? He had seen Jack Baldwin, one of his workmen, seated under a wall and eating his midday snack of bread and bacon, and had seen the man carefully cut off a piece of his meal and throw it over his shoulder—not cutting out something unfit for his own eating, but choosing a morsel of the best to throw away. Propitiating … what? For there was something, not the "old dead," but something else that these men believed existed, and they would never speak of it in Tyrrell's hearing.

And all this superstitious belief had grown up in the past six months, he reflected. Before the killings began, his men and their neighbors had been quite normal in their outlook. Was there a fire behind this smoke, or were they all silly and credulous over something that had a perfectly natural and reasonable explanation? And why the devil should he himself go cold with superstitious fright when a carrion crow flapped out from a tree and flew off into the night? He had seen carrion crows flying over the fells all his life, and had regarded them as part of that life, birds that had their uses, foul though they might be. Was this folly infecting him?

What would Gyda think of him, if she knew he yielded though ever so little to credence of these fantastic beliefs? For as long as he could remember, the inhabitants of the district had shunned Locksborough Castle ruins in all but the brightest of daylight, feared it as a haunt of the "old dead," whoever or whatever they might be, and as a place of ill-omen, but Gyda's father had bought and restored it, and now he and she lived there with no sign of fear of their surroundings. A little thrill of another sort took Tyrrell as he recollected her walking beside him in the darkness toward her home, her shining head so close to his shoulder, her voice soft and caressing—and the pulsing, wonderful vitality of her that stirred him as did the strange, luminous softness of her eyes—such eyes as he had never seen before. Soon, perhaps, he would have her as mistress

of Dowlandsbar, pillow that shining head on his shoulder and feel the warm prisoning of her white arms. Gyda, his wife! From his first sight of her, he had loved her.

The rattle of a displaced stone high up on the hillside startled him from his long reverie. Darkness was heavy about him, now, and the haze of the day had thickened to a misty reek in which the nearest hurdles of the sheepfold, only a dozen yards distant from the tree, had merged into an indistinct grayness. He must have been dreaming here a long time, for that falling stone could only mean that Cottrill was coming down to relieve him. And the sheep, surely, knew that someone beside himself was here, for the grey mass of them was moving, milling round and about—but *away toward the centre of the fold!* They were crowding inward on each other with little "Urr's" and grunts and coughings, and now there was quite a space between the edge of their mass and the hurdles, and still they milled round, crowding in to the centre of their mass. And Tyrrell knew—it was not Cottrill coming down the hillside! A shudder of fear took him—not such fear as men know in facing normal danger, but such unreasoning terror as grips and holds a child that finds itself alone in the dark. He pressed his back hard against the tree, felt for and found the safety catch of his gun and slid it off, and waited through an eternity of stillness, save for the rustle and grunts and coughs of the milling, frightened sheep.

Twenty yards away, or more, beyond the deeper shadow cast by the foliage of the tree, something moved toward the fold, a grey blot on the misty darkness. With his worst paroxysm of fear passed, Tyrrell lifted his gun to his shoulder, but knew the muzzle was wavering—he tried to grip the barrel and steady it, and so held his fire. Another, more whitish shape joined the first, and now he had the gun steady on them both, but a choking, hellish reek came to his nostrils, a sickening smell as that of death itself. He wanted to cough, to cry out, but could make no sound. The two shapes moved on toward the fold, and from within it came a collective, moaning noise, such as he had never heard from sheep or any animals—it was the last extremity of terror expressed in sound. The two things leaped the hurdles, long, gaunt shapes, they seemed, and then Tyrrell pressed the trigger of his right barrel, heard the echoes of the shot go clattering along the fells, and let off the left barrel too. There came to his singing ears a low, angry howl, half-doglike, half-human, and the two things leaped back out of the fold and came at him as he broke the gun and fumbled in his pocket for fresh cartridges when the empty shells dropped at his feet. But he could not get at the cartridges: his pipe and tobacco pouch would get in the way of his fingers.

At just such a distance as the branches of the tree reached over, the two things stopped, and, fumbling feverishly for cartridges, Tyrrell saw four eyes gleaming at him like points of fire. He got out two cartridges, but in his clumsy, fumbling haste dropped them both when he tried to insert them in the breech of the gun. The two things turned their heads so that he could see only two points of light, and at that a sudden rage and fear lest they should escape took him. He snapped the gun breech shut, clubbed it, and charged out at them—here were real things, no ghosts, his brain told him in that moment. The slight downward slope from the tree trunk gave him pace for his rush. Now he saw the things clearly, almost as if it were day instead of darkness-as if, his brain told him, they were luminous. Gaunt grey things with little, pointed ears, and the one that shrank back from him was more nearly white than the other. That other sprang at him as his foot dropped into a hole, and as he fell the impetus of his rush carried him sliding face downward over the short, thick grass. And now it was over him, on him. The poisonous reek of its breath came to his nostrils as he saw white teeth dropping toward his face—a snarling growl, and the whitish beast charged its fellow and knocked him in the ribs with such force that he rolled over and over, and Tyrrell heard the grating tear of his coat and felt a stinging pain in his shoulder. He saw the two beasts rolling over and over close beside him, heard that snarling growl again—and then consciousness left him.

“Master! Master, for God’s sake wake up! Say something! No, he’s not dead, an’ I can’t find any hurt except this scratch. Master!”

Tyrrell sat up, slowly, with Gees kneeling beside him and holding his arm. Then, with Gees still holding him, he began retching, and was violently and horribly sick. As he put up a hand to his forehead at the end of the paroxysm he realized that his hair was sodden with dew: he could not remember losing his hat: it must have fallen off when he made that rush from under the tree, and he had lain here a long while. All that had happened was clear in his mind, intolerably, awfully clear.

“Feel better, now?” Gees asked, while Cottrill peered anxiously.

“Yes. Let me stand up. I’m all right, now. Only, I’ve been in hell—no, hell came here to me. The sheep—another killing?”

“Why, no, master,” Cottrill said. “I’ve been around, an’ the sheep are all right. What—was it *they* again, then?”

“Things—wolf things,” Tyrrell said. “Not wolves, not dogs—not anything that lives as we live. I believe it all, now. Straight from hell, they came—Cottrill, I must sell the flock. It’s—hopeless.”

“No,” Gees said.

“Oh, I’ll pay you your fifty pounds!” Tyrrell retorted harshly.

“You blasted fool! I’ll ram the check down your throat!” Gees fired back with sudden heat. “Did you think I meant that, then?”

“Ram nothing!” Cottrill growled. “Who the hell are you to talk like that to the master, after what he’s been through tonight?”

“What do you mean?” Tyrrell demanded fiercely. “You told me there would be no killings tonight, or I’d never have let Cottrill go with you on your fool pubcrawl. What do you mean?”

“I mean”—Gees took a long breath while he got back his self-control—“that what you have seen tonight, whatever it is, is sub-human, not supernatural, and the human is stronger than the sub-human. I’ve been here one day, and already I know enough to feel sure that if you give me time, I’ll beat the sub-human, and you can leave your flock out on the fells all night and every night, and Cottrill here can sleep in his bed till lambing time. And you may keep your fifty pounds!”

“That is, you can go right away and find these things, and destroy them?” Tyrrell asked, and made a gibe of the question.

“No,” Gees answered.

“Then what’s your certainty? What do you know—what can you do?”

“Find them—put an end to it,” Gees answered coolly.

“I’ve been out with him tonight, Master,” Cottrill said, almost timidly, “an’ I believe he might, if you give him a chance. He’s got the brains, an’ he’s got the guts for it, too. Excuse me, of course.”

“What of your no killings tonight?” Tyrrell demanded. “There would have been

a killing, if I hadn't been here with that gun."

"I was mistaken," Gees said, and the way in which he broke off indicated that he repressed a further explanation. "Well, what about it, Tyrrell? Do I turn the car out and go back tomorrow morning?"

Tyrrell reached up and put his hand to his shoulder. He felt the torn fabric of his coat and underclothing, and a wad of bandage.

"Who tied that up?" he asked, disregarding Gees' final question.

"Mr. Green," Cottrill answered, "by match light. I struck the matches. It's a scratch—whatever did it didn't go deep, sir."

"Fortunately, I had two handkerchiefs on me," Gees added.

They stood silent for awhile. Cottrill picked up the gun, broke it and found it unloaded, and closed the breech again.

"Gees," Tyrrell said at last, "I'm an ill-conditioned swine, and feel like one, but if you'd lived through these last six months with us—with Cottrill and me, that is—well! I apologize to you, and if I break out again, put it down to the strain of this—this beastliness we're enduring. Don't go back—stay and see it through with me, and ask me what you like if you can restore us to normal—end it for us."

"Sound enough," Gees said, "and I've told you what I'll ask, for the week or for as many months as there are days in the week. And if you'll have patience, I will end it, soon, perhaps. I can't say more than that, or put a limit to the time. Only, it shall end."

"You know—what?" Tyrrell asked. "How much—what are they?"

"I'm not telling you a thing," Gees said inflexibly. "Instead, I want you to tell me what you know and saw—all that happened here."

After another pause, Tyrrell told all that he could remember of his vigil and what had happened at its end. By the time he had finished the story, his voice was unsteady and he was trembling at the recollection of the things he had seen and smelt and felt.

“Then I lost consciousness,” he ended, “but somehow, as if the memory of it belonged to someone else rather than to me, I have a sense that one of them, the whitish one, came back and stood over me, and sniffed at me—at my shoulder where that scratch is. It may have licked the scratch, even, though since I was dead unconscious when you two found me, I don’t know how I know this. And it was the horrible stench that sent me off—they didn’t hurt me, except for the scratch.”

“Licked you—yes,” Gees mused. “You don’t know which way they went, do you? That isn’t in your consciousness?”

“No, I have no idea,” Tyrrell answered.

“No. They scared Shaun Ammon by the churchyard wall at Odder, and then came straight here, evidently—came the same way as you did, since you heard that stone roll, up on the path. I think we are a little nearer locating them, but—no. Can you walk home?”

“A damned silly question,” Tyrrell answered, and laughed a little. “Obviously the two of you can’t carry me—I’ve got to walk home.”

“Yes, but do you feel fit for the tramp?” Gees persisted.

“Even if I do, we can’t leave Cottrill here alone,” Tyrrell said. “Unless I stop here till morning, it means leaving the flock unguarded, for I’m not going to take that walk in the dark alone.”“‘Scuse me, sir,” Cottrill broke in, “if I have this gun an’ as many cartridges as you have on you, I’ll be quite happy here alone. Your mistake was in comin’ out from under the tree—you said they didn’t do anything but stand away an’ watch while you stayed under the tree—which is where I’ll stay to watch, when you go.”

“And what the devil has the tree to do with it?” Tyrrell demanded.

“Ygdrasil,” Gees said.

“Who the devil’s he, and what has he to do with the tree and these hell’s fiends that wouldn’t come under it?” Tyrrell asked again.

“You’re right, Mr. Green,” Cottrill said with deep conviction.

“Are you two in conspiracy to talk double Dutch at me?” Tyrrell asked. “What has the tree special in the way of virtue?”

“Ygdrasil—the world ash,” Gees said. “Never mind—it would take half the night to explain my theory fully, and bring in some few things altogether unconnected with trees—and you’ve had enough for one night without a pack of explanations. But Cottrill knows—hand him the cartridges, and I’ll go back with you. It’ll be midnight, soon.”

“If you could look in at my place on the way an’ let Jimmy loose, sir, I’d be glad,” Cottrill asked as Tyrrell took his remaining cartridges from his pocket and handed them over. “He’ll find me, if you just untie him. Thank ye, sir—six—seven—is that all?”

“You’ll find the other two somewhere under the tree,” Tyrrell answered. “I dropped them when I was trying to reload the gun.”

They set off at last to climb the hillside. Cottrill, under the ash Ygdrasil, strained his eyes toward Brownhill Scar in an effort at seeing them as they came against the skyline. But, though he could vaguely distinguish the outline of the height, the mist had thickened too much for human or any other figures to be discernible on it. He turned his coat collar up over his ears and settled to his vigil.

*

Tyrrell kicked at a log in the wide fireplace of the entrance hall of Dowlandsbar, and with a crackle a shower of sparks flew out, proving that there was still plenty of life under the white wood-ashes. Then he took up the whisky decanter the maid had set out with siphon and glasses on the occasional table by the corner of the fireplace, poured himself about half a tumbler of the spirit, and poised the decanter over the second glass while he looked up at Gees.

“One for you?” he asked. “We can do with them, I think.”

“About half that quantity, thanks,” Gees answered. “I’ll tackle it when I come down—won’t be a minute.”

He ran up the staircase, his clumsy boots thudding on the carpet, and disappeared. Presently he came down again, still wearing Weelum’s garments, but he had donned over them a fleecy overcoat and had exchanged the dirty cap

for a tidier one of his own. Tyrrell stared at him.

“Now what the devil next?” he demanded irritably.

“Cottrill,” Gees said. “I’m going back to him. Not that I anticipate any more trouble near the sheep tonight, but I want to talk to him—get his views clearly. He knows more than I thought.”

“You mean you’re going back there alone?” Tyrrell asked incredulously. “After what happened to me—alone over the fells?”

Gees took his right hand from his coat pocket, and, shining darkly in his grasp, there showed the blued steel of a fair-sized automatic pistol barrel. “Webley thirty-eight is going with me,” he said.

“Leave it, man,” Tyrrell urged. “You can see him tomorrow.”

“Let’s get this all square,” Gees said. He dropped the pistol back in his coat pocket and squirted soda water into the glass Tyrrell had set for him with a stiff tot of whisky. “You’re all agreed in your own mind that I’m to stay and see this business through. Is that so?”

“Certainly I want you to see it through,” Tyrrell assented.

“Then I’ll see it through, but on one condition, which is that what I say, goes. There’s precious little that I shall ask of you, or of anyone else, until the finish of it, and then I may ask a good deal—but I want you to trust me absolutely unless you find out I’m a dud, and not question any decision of mine—even this one. Does that go?”

“I think I can promise it,” Tyrrell said thoughtfully. “Yes—I’ll take your advice about it—and your instructions, if you wish it.”

“I shall wish it, later on,” Gees admitted. He gulped down his drink and put the glass back on the table. “I wonder if you realize that you’ve had a miraculous escape from death tonight—and death in as ugly a shape as ever a man faced,” he added gravely.

“I know—why didn’t they make an end of me?” Tyrrell asked.

“I may yet be able to answer even that question,” Gees said. “In the meantime, you’d better go to bed. See you in the morning.”

He went out, closing the big entrance door on himself quietly, but saw before he went that Tyrrell was already pouring himself another half-tumbler of whisky. Well, Gees reflected, probably he needed it, after the experience to which he had been subjected. Although physically intact, he was badly shaken, and the spirit might help him to sleep.

The night mist had thickened still more since they had come in, and visibility was limited to a dozen yards or less, although the moon had risen. Through the grayness Gees could see the narrow line of beech and elm trees which the worthies of Odder designated a wood, an unkempt shrubbery running parallel with the graveled drive to the gateway, with thick undergrowth of brushwood and saplings. His big, heavily-shod feet thudded on the gravel until he was halfway along the drive—and then with a shiver that went all the way down his spine he stopped abruptly, for there, in the undergrowth, at perhaps six yards distance, burned four tiny fires. Points of reddish light, set in pairs, and as he stood gazing at them they began to move, while he heard the low snarling that had chilled Tyrrell’s blood in Anker’s Glen.

His thumb pushed off the safety catch of the Webley as the pistol came out from his pocket, and four shots, hard on each other, crashed on the stillness. There was a howl as the glaring eyes vanished, a crackle and flurry of the undergrowth—Gees chanced two more shots at random, and then the front door of the house opened to reveal light beyond the cloudiness across which two shapes leaped, to vanish again in the hollow towards which Dowlandsbar stood faced.

“Gees?” Tyrrell shouted, agitatedly. “Are you safe?”

“Quite safe,” Gees shouted back.

For a minute or so he stood irresolute, and then, slowly, he went back toward the lighted doorway. Tyrrell faced him, wide-eyed.

“What—what—?” He seemed unable to end the question.

“Waiting for me,” Gees answered. “I didn’t expect that, so soon. But—I don’t think I’ll go to Cottrill tonight, not even with Mr. Webley to keep me company. They won’t go after him, but they might follow me and attack again from

behind. No—I think I'll go to bed."

"What do you mean, so soon?" Tyrrell asked.

"If I were you," Gees said slowly, "I'd tell Feather he needn't organise that drive for Friday. Yes—he'd better cancel it."

"Do you wish me to tell him that?" Tyrrell asked.

"Yes. It would be quite useless, and a waste of his time too."

"Look here! How much do you know?" Tyrrell demanded impatiently.

"All of it, except what, exactly, is doing all this. Something not quite material, though material enough to be felt and seen and smelt. The old dead, perhaps—and perhaps not. Give me time, man."

He went and stood gazing into the fireplace: the log that Tyrrell had stirred was almost enveloped in pale flame, now; down in front of it were embers red as the eyes that had glowed at him from the copse beside the drive—glowed by virtue of the inward fire of the things to which they belonged, for there had been no other light for them to reflect. Glowed, Gees felt, like points of the fires of hell.

"They live, but not as we live," he said, half to himself. "Drinking warm blood, rending raw flesh, like lions and all the cat tribe—and yet—pah! More doglike, wolf-like—I saw them as they went across the light. One—two—three—four people have seen them tonight. No—three, though. Utterly evil—well, some of them would be that, though not all."

"What on earth are you talking about?" Tyrrell questioned.

Gees turned to face him. "Do you know the 'Fairy Song'?" he asked.

"No, I don't. What have fairy songs to do with things like these?"

"'They laugh, and are glad, and are terrible'," Gees quoted. "Good night, Tyrrell—I'm off to bed."

Chapter VII AMBER

TYRRELL removed the cover from the chafing dish, and revealed yet another egg reposing among pinkish scrolls of fried bacon.

“Ought a man to eat three of them at breakfast?” Gees inquired.

“Hand me your plate,” Tyrrell responded, “but you say it’s the air again, I’ll heave the dish at you.”

“It would be a pity to waste that one,” Gees observed, passing his plate, “and you couldn’t warm up the bacon very well, either.”

Later, as he applied himself to toast and marmalade, Tyrrell inquired if he had made any plans for the day.

“Several,” he admitted. “As a beginning, if you don’t mind my using your telephone, I want a word with Eve Madeleine.”

“With who?” Tyrrell asked, obviously startled by the name, Gees conjectured, for he could think of nothing else startling in his reply.

“Shush, man!” he admonished gravely. “You mean with whom, surely. Eve Madeleine, I said. My secretary—I have to call her Miss Brandon to her face, but as soon as she’s out of sight she becomes Eve Madeleine, and it really is her name, too. One of these days I shall get it mixed and either call her Miss Madeleine or Eve Brandon to her face, and then she’ll walk out on me and I’ll have to get another.”

“You are an ass!” Tyrrell observed. “A remarkably charming girl, I thought, when I called to see you the other day.”

“The other day!” Gees echoed thoughtfully. “It’s hardly credible that this is only my second breakfast here. Things are humming.”

“None of what has happened seems credible, in daylight,” Tyrrell said. “And after telephoning? You said you had several plans.”

“Principally, a talk with the archeological parson you told me you keep. The

Reverend Walter Edward Amber, vicar of Odder, M.A., of Balliol, one s., one d. How long has he had the living?"

"A good thirty years," Tyrrell answered. "Where did you get those particulars?" He sounded rather constrained, Gees thought. Gyda McCoul had explained that there was a feud between her father and the vicar, and, of course, Tyrrell sided with the McCouls for her sake.

"Most of them from an ordinary work of reference I found on a shelf in your hall," he answered. "Also, I've met the s., when I was boozing with Cottrill last night. A most objectionable pup, I thought him—the s., not Cottrill. I trust the father is a better type."

"He's—well, rather a hot-tempered man," Tyrrell said slowly. "A Gael from Caithness, though you'd never guess it by his accent. His people are landowners up there, with hardly a sixpence among them."

"Poor and proud, eh?" Gees suggested. "And since he came from wild country like that, he doesn't mind a place like this. But how does a man from Caithness happen to get educated at Balliol?"

"You'd better ask him," Tyrrell said rather irritably. "And if you don't like this country, why breathe on it? What's wrong with it?"

"Oh, nothing," Gees answered. "The air is wonderful—if you so much as lift that dish, I'll throw the marmalade pot! Another point while I think of it. What made the McCouls come and settle in a place like this? A girl like that, you'd think, would hardly."

"Ask McCoul, if you want to know," Tyrrell snapped, interrupting. "The place is good enough for us who live in it—all of us."

Having finished his breakfast, Gees pushed back his chair, lighted himself a cigarette, and looked at his watch. He shook his head.

"Too early, yet, to call Eve Madeleine," he observed. "Tyrrell, if you'll accept the remark in the spirit in which it is spoke, it's not only Gaels from Caithness who are hot tempered. If you came to Piccadilly Circus and asked me why Eros wasn't wearing a chest protector, or remarked that the girls round there looked lonely, I wouldn't get all hot and bothered. I'm merely trying to get the hang of

things here."

"And adding a few comments as you go on," Tyrrell interrupted.

"I won't crab the country any more. After all, if you had factories and cinemas and char-a-bancs, you'd only get smoke and petrol fumes and spoil this marvelous air—leave that dish alone, I tell you!"

Tyrrell laughed as he stubbed out his cigarette end and stood up.

"But you'll have to make this visit to the vicar without any sponsorship from me," he remarked, suddenly grave again. "And I suppose I'd better tell you, though—well!" He made a long pause, as if doubtful about the telling, and then resumed. "You see, my father and Amber were great friends, and young Harold and his sister and I—Harold was no more than a baby, of course, for most of it—well, we sort of grew up together, if you understand. They were as free of this place as I was of the vicarage—I don't know why I'm telling you all this."

"I think I do, though," Gees said thoughtfully. "It's not so much because of Amber himself that I'm to see him on my own—isn't that it? Nor because of Harold, if you want the t's crossed and i's dotted."

"I had an idea you'd understand," Tyrrell assented gratefully. "A thing like that is difficult to put into words, and I feel—"

"Guilty about the girl," Gees thought but did not say. "Well," he said aloud, "all this i's irrelevant to my purpose in seeing Amber, and it merely puts me *au fait* to an extent that prevents me from putting my foot into things—and believe me, it's some foot, mine! Now, I think, I'll go and have a word with Eve Madeleine, and if she hasn't got there I shall get 'no reply' and it won't cost anything. Where do you keep your telephone, though?"

"In the hall. Open the wall cabinet on the left of the fireplace, and you'll see it sitting inside. Microphone instrument—quite modern. That and the electric lighting plant are my concessions to your style of living, but I wouldn't have a wireless set if you paid me."

"Stout feller," Gees observed. "Persevere in that resolve."

He went out to the entrance hall and found the telephone, with a comfortable

chair before it in which to wait after he had called Trunks. And, presently, he heard his secretary's voice announcing her identity, or rather, his own, under the pseudonym he used for his office.

"Yes, Gees at this end, too," he told her. "I won't tell you anything about myself, except that it's marvelous air here. What have you at your end of the table? Any inquiries worth following up?"

"Only one," she answered. "A man in Sussex suspects his wife of being poisoned—she's still alive, but unwell, he writes, and he's afraid of being suspected of poisoning her and thinks you might—"

"Have you got his initial two guineas consultation fee?" Gees interrupted. "If not, get it. If you have, arrange him a consultation for—let me see. Yes, a week from today, at eleven-thirty."

"I haven't got it yet," she said. "I'll write and suggest it and tell him—you expect to be back a week from today, then?"

"My dear Miss Brandon, I'd hate to suggest his coming all the way up here! If I'm not back then, and he sends the two guineas, it will be quite easy to write and put him off till I do get back."

"Yes, I see. Of course," she assented. "But the wife may die."

"He'll be no worse off," Gees responded cheerfully. "That is, if he's suspected of poisoning, attempted murder is nearly as bad as murder, and so he'll only be a little worse off. Anything else?"

"No, except for inquiries I needn't trouble to report to you."

"There's one born every minute, of course," he remarked. "But I want you to do something for me, Miss Brandon, which is my main reason for ringing you. Pack and send me as quickly as you can the most informative work on Norse mythology you can lay hands on—try Bumpus and the Times Book Club, and Hatchard, and anyone else you can think of, and get the best—not the *Golden Bough*, though. I know pretty much all there is in that. Any book specially devoted to the Norse gods and legends, and hurry it."

"Very good, Mr. Green. It shall go off today."

“Add to that, anything you can lay hands on which gives Druidical and pre-Druidical rites and observances in this country, going back to the flint age, if possible. I don’t know where you’ll find that, but look up the bibliography of the subject in the *Britannica*, and get and send me something. What’s that? … I said, Druidical and pre-Druidical—you know, the chaps who used to sacrifice to the mistletoe and wear woad-de-chine—woad! Blue paint. Druids. Oh, Lord!”

“I understand, Mr. Green. Ancient Britons.”

“They’re the ones. But don’t forget the flint age too.”

“Very good, Mr. Green. Both books shall go off today.”

“And in case you want to talk to me, the telephone number here is Odder, six. Odder, short for more peculiar.” He spelt it out. “And that’s all for now. Spare no expense over the books, though.”

“It is more peculiar, too,” he said to himself as he replaced the microphone and closed the cabinet, “and now Ho for Amber—Amber, Ho!”

Tyrrell, entering the hall in time to hear the final apostrophe, shook his head as Gees turned to face him.

“One would think you were enjoying these horrors,” he remarked.

“It’s the—well, the climate is invigorating,” Gees answered. “I’m not enjoying the horrors any more than you are, but, as I assured you last night, they are not going to last much longer. And it’s a conviction of mine that if you try to live on a high note all the time, you break down. High C occasionally, but B natural for everyday use.”

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To use his own expression, Gees turned out the buzzwagon for his visit to Odder vicarage. In ordinary language, he started up the Rolls-Bentley and went down the drive in it, but, after he had got into the lane, he changed his mind and reversed to drive back and run the car into the big shed where the ancient two-seater that contented Tyrrell was also stabled. When he came back to the frontage of the house, Tyrrell hailed him from the doorstep of the main entrance.

“Changed your mind about going, eh?” he inquired.

“Partly,” Gees answered. “One sees so much more, on foot.”

He kept on and, emerging again from the gateway, plodded along the lane, crossed the narrow stone bridge, and so came up abreast the monoliths marking the main entrance to Locksborough Castle. There he halted, and gazed along the short, grassy track that ended before the keep.

“Oomph!” he mused. “Strong enough, till firearms came in.”

There was no sign of life about the place. The massive square of the keep towered high, apparently as sound and strong as the builders had left it: round, it stretched a ruined wall, in some parts not a foot above ground level, in others rising to eight feet or so, and sometimes altogether razed, though the line of it was easy to trace. Altogether, it enclosed four acres or more of ground, including that on which the keep stood, and within the enclosure were ruined fragments of other buildings that had been, all of grey stone or flint work. Like most of the strongholds of its day, the castle and its adjacent buildings had formed a complete community, the retainers and craftsmen of the place being within call of their feudal lord. And round and about, from Odder on the one side to Dowlandsbar on the other, were tracts of fertile land in the valleys that might support cattle and sheep, or, broken up from pasturage, bear corn crops for the people of the castle.

There were, too, as Gees saw, lines and mounds denoting older fortifications: the moat remained, dry, now, and filled in to a grassy, level strip from bank to bank before the entrance to the keep, which showed as an inconspicuous doorway in the mighty stone wall, with, above it, arrow slit windows which, as Gees knew, admitted more light to the interior than one would guess from an outside survey. But, disconnected and altogether apart from the ridge raised by excavating the moat, other raised lines of turf, sunken, perhaps, in the many centuries since they had been heaped up, until they were but little above the normal level, ran maze-like about the edges of the slight eminence. It had evidently appealed to successive races as worthy of being fortified: Romans, as Gees knew already had built on it; those trenches and a long barrow at the far side from the lane pointed to works perhaps even earlier than those of the Roman occupation, and perhaps to Danish or even Saxon work, while the two remaining monoliths by the entrance were obviously pre-Roman. Up into mediaeval times, and perhaps later,

Locksborough had certainly been a place of some importance.

Now, outwardly, it was a ruin, for the sky showed through the top-most arrow-slit of the keep—McCoul must have roofed in the part that he used at a lower level than that slit, which marked what had been the highest story. And of him and his daughter, and of Shaun Ammon, Gees could see nothing, though he stood at gaze by the gateway for some minutes. At last he went on, crossed the ridge beyond, and dropped down into Odder to see a squat, square grey house quite near the church, a dwelling of far too imposing a size and character to rank in with the cottages, though it was of less content, evidently, than Dowlandsbar. By its position and character, Gees decided it was the vicarage, and made his way there to pull at an old-fashioned bell-handle beside the pale, weathered oaken door, at which a clangorous tolling sounded within.

A dumpy little maidservant, strikingly like the one who waited at table at Dowlandsbar, opened to him after a very brief interval, and in answer to his inquiry for Mr. Amber requested him to step inside. He waited in a narrow hallway, and presently found himself facing an elderly man of middle height, red-haired, and with keen, kindly grey eyes. A dog-collar proclaimed his calling: but for his wearing it, Gees would have taken him for a farmer who preferred black attire.

“Mr. Green, I think,” he said by way of opening. “Do come in and sit down.” He gestured at the door by which he had come into the hall.

Gees preceded him into the room and saw, seated by the fireplace at its far side, a woman taller than and little less old than Amber: she had been beautiful in her youth, Gees decided, and was still more than normally attractive of feature as well as of expression.

“My wife, Mr. Green,” Amber said. “My dear, this is the gentleman staying with Mr. Tyrrell. Do sit down, Mr. Green, won’t you?”

Gees acknowledged the introduction, and turned again to Amber. “Yes, but how do you know my name and where I am, before I’ve even spoken?” he inquired with a smile.

Amber smiled too. “Our Jenny and Mr. Tyrrell’s Annie are sisters,” he explained. “All Odder knows about you and your wonderful car.”

“I see,” Gees remarked, and seated himself in the chair the vicar indicated. “Gath and the streets of Astalon aren’t in it with Odder.”

Mrs. Amber laughed, a friendly, cheery little laugh. “We have so little to gossip about,” she half-apologized, “and according to Jenny, you are here to put an end to the sheep-killing at Dowlandsbar.”

“Why, yes, that is so,” Gees admitted, realizing that it would be useless to deny it, and mentally damning Tyrrell for announcing the fact. Probably Tyrrell had spoken of it in advance, for Gees could not recollect his mentioning his—Gees’—purpose in his maid’s hearing. And, with Jenny’s sister in Tyrrell’s household, Gees realized, there could be little going on at Dowlandsbar that was not known here.

“You will be doing us all a great service,” Amber said. “There are all sorts of stories going about the village and round the cottages in the fells for miles—about these killings. A revival of old superstitions, and a general fear of something uncanny.”

“It was concerning that side of it, sir, that I ventured to come and see you,” Gees stated. “I’m afraid—well, it is uncanny.”

Amber glanced at his wife. “Perhaps you would like to come into my study for a little while,” he suggested. “I think—you will understand, my dear. Either of the children might come in while we talk.”

“In other words, Mr. Green, he’s afraid my nerves won’t stand it,” Mrs. Amber said. “Perhaps he’s right, though. But I hope to see you again before you go—can you stay to lunch with us?”

“It’s awfully good of you,” he answered, while the vicar waited by the door of the room. “Some other day—no, though, I will accept. Tyrrell will understand when I don’t come back.”

“You can telephone him—we are civilized enough for that,” she said. “I’m glad you can stay—now go and talk your secrets.”

She spoke with sincere friendliness, Gees felt. Though he had been in the house only a few minutes, he liked its atmosphere, liked these people, and felt himself among friends as he entered the vicar’s untidy study and seated himself at the

latter's invitation. Amber drew up a chair for himself, sat down, and polished a pair of glasses with his handkerchief before fitting them on his nose.

"Now, Mr. Green, how can I help you?" he asked gravely.

"So far, though I've hardly known you five minutes, you've helped me by merely being alive," Gees responded with equal gravity. "But as to this particular matter you're an enthusiastic archeologist, I understand. Conversant with pretty much all there is to know about Odder and its surrounding country—and ruins."

"Well, that would be saying a good deal," Amber hedged. "Say that I am interested in the subject—and have been all my life."

"Concerning Locksborough Castle, now," Gees suggested.

He saw the vicar's mouth tighten, and waited through a long pause.

"Er—you mean its history, I suppose?" The question came at last.

"Certainly. I understand you would not be inclined to talk about its present-day state—or its occupants either."

"On the other hand," Amber said slowly, "I have no objection to saying to anyone that the man McCoul was rude to me, most rude, with no reason or provocation whatever, and that I will have nothing to do with him until he apologizes. Which," he ended, "is not likely to happen."

"Then we'll leave him alone, for the time being," Gees suggested. "The history of the place, and any legends, especially."

"Yes. Well, the castle was built by Guillaume de Boisgeant—"

"Couldn't you begin before that?" Gees interrupted. "A long while before. Those two stones by the gateway for a start, say—or earlier."

"The legendary period, eh?" The vicar smiled, as if not ill-pleased at finding one interested in his own subject. "Understand, there is only legend, nothing really certain before de Boisgeant's time."

"I think the legendary period will interest me most of all," Gees observed

quietly, and offered a cigarette which the vicar accepted. He took one for himself, and lighted them both.

“You have a reason in asking—or no?” Amber inquired.

“A most decided reason—the object of my visit here.”

“I see-e.” He sounded gravely reflective. “Well, Mr. Green, there are some things I should prefer not to state without good reason, because they lie outside the province of the Thirty-nine Articles. I am, as perhaps you do not know, Celtic by birth—Gaelic, in fact, and perhaps, in my study of my hobby, which is old things and old times, I have come to give credence to things which ordinary people would regard as fantastic—non-existent things, from the material view-point. And it is understood between us that whatever I say—” He paused, and gazed at his guest as if he preferred only to imply the rest.

“I came to you for help,” Gees said. “Whatever you tell me, you tell me only. And—very few things are fantastic, I am finding out.”

“So! Well, Locksborough Castle—yes. The name, by the way, is a corruption of Loki’s Barrow—the place never was a borough, though in old time it had a certain importance. And Loki was the god of deceit and illusion in Norse mythology—the deity of evil, in fact.”

“Alternatively, Dalua,” Gees suggested.

“Ah! You’re not altogether a neophyte in these paths, I see. Yes, analogous, say. But if you want all the story, we must go back beyond Loki—or Loge, as he becomes in the Wagnerian legend and in German.”

“I certainly do want all the story,” Gees said decidedly.

“I did a little digging there when I was younger and more energetic, after getting permission from the then owner to disturb the turf,” Amber said. “The north trench and its corresponding—parapet, I suppose you would call it—gave me evidence of very early occupation indeed. I found eleven flint arrow-heads, and two stone hatchets, most beautifully worked, and another implement which I took to be a scraper—used for scraping skins before dressing them. The curator of York Museum, whom I happen to know and who is a final court of appeal on such matters, confirmed my opinion on this. And then I traced and mapped those

early earthworks, defining them, as nearly as I could, apart from the later work. I believe, if the site were fully excavated, it would prove as rich in traces of early man in Britain as Maiden Castle in Dorset, or, say, Avebury. There was certainly a settlement there, and those early men fortified it after their fashion. Cleverly, too."

"And-?" Gees asked. "The type of men they were, I mean?"

"Flint men, one may call them," the vicar said, half-musingly. "I should say they had a religion of sorts in their later stages, they probably erected the monoliths, and almost certainly most of those standing stones were cut and used in the building of the castle, long later. Put the first race as existing between two and three thousand years ago, and perhaps farther back than that. A people who believed in fierce gods, made human sacrifices to them, and were fierce themselves. Evil, from our point of view. They are the race that our people here call the 'old dead,' and undoubtedly they had an extensive settlement on the site. I do not think the Druid cult prevailed here, in spite of the monoliths. I believe this was a fiercer, less cultured and more bloodthirsty race dying out before the Roman occupation, and leaving behind, among the early British inhabitants of the country, a legend of evil—staining the site, as one might say, with cruelties that would cause it to be regarded as haunted. By the victims of the cruelties, possibly, but more probably by the authors of them."

"And that belief persisted," Gees suggested.

"Among such Britons as inhabited here, though they were sparse, being on the edge of the Pict country," the vicar answered. "Still, even in those days there were probably flocks of sheep about these fells—the Britons were a far more civilized race than is generally credited today, and the good grazing would bring their flocks here. Then came the Romans, and they seized on the site as admirable for a stronghold. They had no fears of hauntings, being a practical people, and this, before the wall was built, was in my opinion one of their citadels. It ought to be excavated—nobody knows what treasures of the Roman occupation lie under that turf. But apparently, in these days, there is money for everything but the extension of knowledge. Research, in every direction, limps and starves—the possibility of war takes all the money, and places like this keep their secrets."

"And, after the Roman occupation?" Gees asked.

“Danish realization of the strength of the site,” Amber answered unhesitatingly, “and now we come to something more like certainty, although it must still be regarded as legend. But, well inside the fortifications of the flint men, there is a long barrow. I should say that, inside it and well below the present ground level, there is a long ship buried with the Viking to whom it belonged by the place where the steering oar or rudder came in to the afterdeck, and his arms beside him. I don’t know if you know that that was a custom of theirs?”

Gees shook his head. “I didn’t know it,” he confessed.

“It was so. When some famous man died, they buried him with his ship. And this, I think, was a pirate of the worst sort—Loki’s barrow, remember. The god of deceit, the god of evil. From somewhere, perhaps from service with the Irish kings of that day, this Viking sailed into Solway, perhaps, or perhaps beached his ship somewhere near the coast where Silloth stands today, or came in as far as Whitrigg, and then came ravaging inland with his crew. They may have found Picts here, since the Romans had gone long since—whatever they found, they ousted it and took possession, and when the captain of the long ship died they hauled it here and buried him in it—in that long barrow at Locksborough. And heaven alone knows what atrocities they committed to make their occupation safe. There is a tale—I don’t believe it, myself—that on the eleventh of October every year the old Viking comes out from his barrow and can be seen on it, winged helmet and byrnie and all the rest of his war gear, challenging any who will to come and fight with him. According to the legend, one of the de Boisgeants did sally out from the castle to take up the challenge, and after fighting the specter withered away and died.”

“Interesting,” Gees observed. “I hope to be back in London before the eleventh of October. If not, I shall stay in bed that night.”

“Thorfinn Thorfinnsson, the Viking in question, has not appeared on any of the occasions that I have watched for him,” the vicar said.

“Oh, you took that much trouble?” Gees asked.

“I did. He existed, past question, and I believe he is buried on the site, long ship and all. Now, since you seem interested, a digression. Have you ever heard of the Daione Shih—Duione Sidhe”—he spelt out both forms of the words—“the Shee, as they are best known?”

Gees quoted:

“There was a breeze in the whispering fern.

And a star that danced in the stream.

When the Men of Peace came riding by

Betwixt a dream and a dream.

‘Twixt Beltane fire and Hallow-e’en

Men that have sight may see

The hosts who pass, nor stir the grass—

The riding of the Shee.”

“Ah! The woman who wrote that had genius,” Amber said “‘Men that have sight’—it is not a pleasant gift, that sight, as I know. But by that sight I know you have a purpose in what you have asked me, Mr. Green, or I should not be telling you all this.”

“I’m glad I came to the right man,” Gees observed.

The vicar smiled. “If you did,” he retorted. “But where was I? Yes—you mentioned Dalua, before I began telling all this.”

“I did. Identical with Loki, I make him.”

“Practically. There are differences. Dalua belongs to the Erse legends, and is almost purely Erse. Loki, who is supposed to watch over Thorfinn Thorfinnsson in his barrow—and to watch to this day, too!—belongs in the Norse mythology. That is”—a dreamy look took the keenness from his grey eyes—“if it is no more than mythology.”

“You mean-?” Gees asked.

“I mean that men can create evil by their thoughts,” the vicar answered slowly. “Words, and even thoughts, are vibrations that go on endlessly, and so with beliefs. I think that when the belief in the old Norse gods was strong, they

existed—Valhalla fell because belief died out, and its gods failed for lack of human support, but enough belief may remain in superstition and fear to give them a shadowy life to this day. And if ever superstition and fear centred round a place, it is round Locksborough, and very much alive in these last six months."

"Giving renewed vitality to Loki, you would say?"

"I see you understand—yes. Reanimating the evil of the place—I have not begun on the de Boisgeants, yet, and I'm afraid you find me long-winded on my pet subject. If so—"

"Not in the least," Gees interrupted. "It is all valuable."

"Yes. I believe you are on the right track, Mr. Green, though materialists would laugh at both of us. Yes. Well, let us consider Loki and Dalua as identical, and turn to Erse legend for a moment. Do you know, by any chance, the legend of Eochaid and Etain, originally written by Fiona McLeod, and turned into the opera *The Immortal Hour* by Rutland Boughton? The substance of the legend, mean?"

"Quite well," Gees answered. "Dalua promised Eochaid happiness—Eochaid was a king in Ireland, young and romantic, and Dalua promised him happiness much as Mephistopheles promised Faust. Dalua, as I remember it, brought Eochaid and Etain together, and the king married her, and at the end of a year Etain went off with Midir, prince of the fairy folk, back to her own people, and left Eochaid desolate."

"Near enough," the vicar said. "Add in that Etain was not human at all, but was a daughter of the Shee—the fairy folk. Then add in that when Midir tempted her away from Eochaid, she left behind with him a child—it may have been daughter, or it may have been son. But it was only half-human, and that strain of the Shee persisted in the race to which Eochaid belonged. It may have been that the Shee kept an interest in the child, and brought it in touch with their own kind when it grew up. There may have been other interminglings of the human and the Men of Peace, as I should call them in my own country, and probably there were. So that, to this very day, the strain persists."

For a long time Gees sat silent. Then he looked the vicar straight in the eyes, and met an unwavering, sincere gaze.

“That’s a strange thing for a man of your profession to say, Mr. Amber,” he remarked.

“I know,” the vicar answered quietly. “In this room.”

“Certainly,” Gees assented. “Even if I did so much as mention it outside—which I wouldn’t dream of doing—I should only raise a laugh from my hearers.”

“Not all of them, if they belonged to this district,” Amber dissented. “But now, for a moment or two, the Duoine Sidhe—the Shee.”

“Legend pure and simple,” Gees suggested.

“Simple, say,” the vicar dissented again. “There must be some Celtic blood in you, Mr. Green, judging by your patience with these fantastic theories. Never mind. You must consider the Shee as timeless ones, knowing nothing of human ageing or the passing of time—”

“Immortal, say,” Gees interposed.

“No. Oh, no! Get that out of your head at once. Not subject to human ailments, or changeable by age, as we are, but far from immortal. Etain and her descendants, Midir and his kind, in human shape, could be destroyed. I repeat that—could be destroyed.” He looked at Gees in an intent way, as if he would put all the insistence he could into the statement. “Don’t think for one moment that they are immortal.”

“Subject, say, to the accidents of humanity,” Gees suggested.

“Yes—otherwise, the Shee would people the earth, and possibly subdue humanity, since we neglect all but the material,” the vicar assented. “As it is, they are a failing race, for they have no children among themselves. Only as when Etain came to Eochaid—and because of that, they take human shape and size and try desperately to mate with the human race. Else, they must eventually die out altogether.”

“And that,” Gees said, “is why Tyrrell was not torn to pieces in Anker’s Glen last night.”

“I don’t get that,” the vicar said quickly. “What was it?”

“No, please! I’ve come to get all you can tell me—I’ll tell you about this later, if you like. Back to the Shee—the fairy folk.”

“One thing,” the vicar said earnestly. “You must not regard the Shee as evil—many of them are beneficent beings. As with humanity, there are good and evil among them—some devoted to Dalua, some to better and even noble ideals. But, all the time—and they are out of time—soulless, and therefore heartless, as we conceive those words. Feelingless, say—unable to enter into human emotions, though they may seem just as capable as was Etain of feeling—of love.”

“Seem,” Gees commented. “But, in reality—”

“They counterfeit human emotions to attract human beings,” Amber stated. “If there is reality in it—I do not know. No human being can ever know. But of fixity of purpose—nothing, beyond the one aim. To perpetuate the race, to achieve survival—and it is many a day since they dared to face humanity, to assert that such a race exists.”

“Because they are sub-human,” Gees observed after a pause.

“Quite so! You have them in legend—the rhymes of true Thomas, and others of the kind. Mr. Green, they do exist! You may think I violate the creed by which I live in saying it, but—they do exist.”

“Are we—or are we not—getting rather away from Locksborough Castle in this?” Gees asked. “I believe you—the Shee do exist.”

“And we are not getting away,” the vicar insisted earnestly. “Don’t you see that—there you have a place stained and soaked in evil, and I have more to tell you on that point yet. A place, humanly speaking, abhorrent, haunted by evil, if not by visible ghosts, and a place from which all the people of the district shy away. What more probable than that the more evil of the Shee, the dregs that sub-human race, say, should use it, haunt it, come there to consort with their familiars…”

He broke off and sat thoughtful. There seemed to Gees something that he had been about to say, and had not said.

“And all this time,” Gees said, “I have not mentioned McCoul’s name!”

“Nor I,” Amber said quickly. “If I accused a fellow human being of having traffic with these Men of Peace, without just and full cause, I should be guilty of a sin which will not be forgiven either in this world or the next. I am telling you legend, and no more.”

“The legend of Eochaid and Etain,” Gees said thoughtfully. He remembered how, at dinner with Tyrrell, Gyda McCoul had appeared fearful at the mere mention of that legend. “Yes. And you say they are timeless—that is, out of time as far as age is concerned. Yes. So if, assuming such a thing could be, Etain appeared today, she would be just as young and just as charming as when she persuaded Eochaid to take her as his queen—for the year that ended so badly for him?”

“She would be unchanged,” Amber assented. “If it could happen.”

“Do you know anything to prevent it from happening?” Gees asked.

“I must own, I had not considered such a thing,” the vicar admitted.

“No? Well, think it over. And you said you had more to tell me, about the subsequent reasons for the avoidance of Locksborough by the local inhabitants. Concerning this de Boisgeant, I suppose?”

The vicar had no chance to answer. The door of the room appeared to fall inward, and Gees looked up and started up at the appearance of a girl who, charging into the room, blew away the illusion of yesterdays that the two men had created between them. All Gees could tell in that first sight of her was that she had chestnut-red hair that would have set Roussetti aflame with longing for his palette and brushes and all his genius for reproduction on canvas, and eyes like the vicar’s own, but of a deeper, more sea-like blue-grey. She halted in midcourse, and stared at this unexpected stranger as he stood up.

“Oh, daddy, I’ve just come in,” she said. “I didn’t know you were not alone in here. Where’s—I’m so sorry! I didn’t mean—”

“My dear,” Amber said, “don’t run away. This is Mr. Green, who is staying at Dowlandsbar and lunching with us today. I was just about to tell him the history of the de Boisgeants at Locksborough when you fell—yes, fell, by the way of it—into the room and interrupted us.”

“I didn’t fall at all, Mr. Green,” the girl said, with a shy smile at him. “And, since daddy won’t finish the introduction, I’m Madeleine Amber, though everybody calls me Madge, and—it’s so nice to see anybody new in these wilds. Daddy, what do I do? Is this all quite private, or may I hear about the sins of the de Boisgeants again? Mr. Green, don’t let him throw me out. It’s too fascinating, and he’s so clever about it. I believe he’s ferreted out everything there is to know about that fiendish family.”

The vicar looked at his watch. “Lunch is in half an hour,” he said. “I don’t think we need mind her hearing the history of the de Boisgeants, Mr. Green. She knows it fairly well.”

“Having met Miss Amber,” Gees said, “I should hate to part from her until I’m forced to it.”

“Mr. Green,” she said severely, “You were obviously born a flatterer. Now be honest, and tell me to get out because I’m not wanted.”

“I’ll be perfectly honest,” he answered. “You’ll find this quite a comfortable chair, and it’s so nice to see anybody new in these wilds. If you go away, I shall feel desolate—and the tale of the de Boisgeants won’t suffer, sir?” he added, turning to the vicar. “I hope not, because I’m here to get all the story you can tell me.”

“As far as that part of it goes,” Amber said, “I can assure you that Madge’s presence will make no difference at all—if she chooses to stay, that is. She knows it all so well already.” He looked at the girl, who gave Gees a smile which declared her intention.

“Daddy’s being pontifical,” she remarked, “Those de Boisgeants—Mr. Green, if you call them dirty dogs, you won’t be exceeding the speed limit. A Rolls-Bentley, isn’t it?”

“Precisely,” he agreed, “but the speed would frighten the de Boisgeants. We’re centuries behind them in our talk. Can it possibly interest a lady so obviously modern?”

“Mr. Green,” she said calmly, “I understand that daddy is going to tell you about the sins of the de Boisgeants, and when did you ever meet a member of my sex who was not interested in anyone’s sins, either of yesterday or today? Why, we

live on them!”

“Madge, darling!” the vicar exclaimed feebly.

“Proceed, daddy,” she commanded. “I can almost see Mr. Green’s ears waggling. He wants to know the sins of the de Boisgeants. What I don’t know about them isn’t worth knowing. Daddy, proceed.”

Chapter VIII MADELEINE AMBER

FOR a minute or two Amber disregarded his daughter's injunction and sat silent, while the girl, seating herself on the arm of his chair, smiled in a friendly way at Gees. She had just as fine features as her mother, and a wild-rose complexion slightly tanned by sun and wind; there was about her an utter un-self-consciousness that added to her attractiveness, and Gees, remembering what Tyrrell had implied concerning her, felt that the man was a fool. This child of the open with her very obvious sense of humor was worth ten of an exotic being like Gyda McCoul: the contrast between them, was, to use Gees' own simile, that between high C and B natural. If, eventually, Tyrrell did marry Gyda, as seemed to be his intent, he would be compelled to live in an intensity that might and probably would prove wearing: with this girl, he would have found comradeship and a far saner happiness. But it was his affair: Gyda had fascinated him: she might so far fit into the life he lived as to content him, but it was doubtful if she could adapt herself to that extent, and, from what Gees had seen of Tyrrell, the man was incapable of adapting himself at all. Madeleine Amber, at this first meeting, showed herself as capable of sympathy and understanding and, with no loss of her own individuality, as one who would fit her life to that of the man she chose. So Gees saw her, and on better acquaintance found no cause to modify his judgment.

"Yes," the vicar said at last, "the de Boisgeants. There is in existence a script written by Mancius, a monk of York, and because of what was done by the de Boisgeants of his day, he gives a brief history of the family. The first of them built this castle in Stephen's time, and made it a veritable hell for the inhabitants of the district. Perhaps you recollect a little of the history of that time, Mr. Green, before the coming of the Plantagenets. All England, one might say, was one great torture chamber. The barons and feudal lords ravaged and killed and tortured just as they chose, and castles like Locksborough sprang up all over the country, each one of them a nest of plunderers—law ceased to exist, and in the phrase of the time, no man reaped what he had sown. It was, I think, the most evil time this land has ever known, and among those devils in human shape who made it so Guillaume de Boisgeant was not the least. He was killed, just before Henry Plantagenet came to the throne, by his own son—murdered in his bed."

"Quite an interesting family, evidently," Gees observed.

“Charming people,” Madeleine Amber put in. “Wait, though—daddy hasn’t really begun, yet.” She put her arm round the vicar’s neck and leaned against the back of his chair. He looked up at her and smiled.

“Don’t interrupt, Madge—and stop tickling at once. Yes, Mr. Green, they were an unusually foul nest of brigands, even for those bad days. Mancius tells how Guillaume had his men-at-arms roast one of his prisoners alive in the great hall of the castle while the family were at dinner, apparently as an entertainment. Other stories, too—the floors of the dungeons under the castle must have been soaked with blood, many a time. And the son who killed his father was, as you may guess, no better than that father. King Henry restored the country to order gradually, but this part of it was far from any centre of authority. York, probably, would be the main seat of administration, but York was far away, and Jean, the second de Boisgeant—he murdered his wife, by the way, to please one of his lights o’ love, while he ruled here Jean did what he liked, to a very great extent. That is, he kept the countryside in terror, just as his father had done. He did not live long—one of his own men-at-arms stabbed him, the dispute, according to Mancius, being over the men-at-arms’ daughter. What had happened to her, and what happened to her father after the stabbing, I leave you to imagine, and even if Madge were not here I should not particularize.”

“Don’t mind me, daddy,” the girl said. “We moderns, you know.”

“That’s because I tell her the young people of today seem to have lost all their reticence,” Amber explained. “Now the third de Boisgeant, Hugh, was credited with the study of the black arts in addition to his other villainies—he experimented on children much after the way of the original Bluebeard, Gilles de Laval, who flourished long later in France. Gilles, after he had slaughtered about two hundred children, paid the penalty for his crimes, but that was in a rather more civilized age. Hugh de Boisgeant was carrying on his practices at the time when Richard of the Plantagenets was in Palestine, and when Richard was imprisoned, all England was scoured to pay his ransom. De Boisgeant went to York and handed over some part of the plunder he and his forbears had collected here, paid in a great sum toward the ransom, and so won immunity for himself. He returned here, and one eleventh of October went out to the long barrow to do battle with the spectre viking, Thorfinn Thorfinnison. He came back unwounded, but after that night he gradually wasted away—and not so very gradually, either. By All Soul’s Day he was dead, a fleshless skeleton, almost. This is as Mancius tells the tale in his script.”

“Actually,” Madeleine added, “he caught cold and developed tuberculosis. Daddy’s been looking for the spectre, and there isn’t one.”

“Or pernicious anemia,” Gees suggested, smiling at her. “All the same, I’d hate to go looking for that specter myself. And the next of the family, sir—or was this Hugh the last of them?”

“Oh, no! He left two sons. Geoffrey, the younger of the two, went to his brother’s room one night and stabbed him in his sleep, and then took his brother’s wife—she had been Eleanor de Morville, a relative of that de Morville who helped to assassinate Thomas A. Beckett, but I do not know the degree of relationship. King John came to the throne, and in the state in which England was then, the crime went unpunished, as did most of the crimes of these de Boisgeants. Now—this, as nearly as I can quote it from memory, is the story that Mancius tells. Two years after murdering his brother, Geoffrey went hunting at a distance, which may mean anything, but since Mancius speaks of a great forest I take it to mean Inglewood Forest, which was of far greater extent then than now. In this great forest he met a fair damsel of middle earth—that is, one of the Shee—and constrained her and took her to his castle. But she would not yield herself to him except as his wife, so they were married according to the customs of her people—of her people, mind, not normally with bell and candle—and a week later Eleanor was buried, leaving no children. That is how Mancius tells it, and if Geoffrey killed Eleanor or had her killed, she probably got no more than she deserved, for almost certainly she had been a party to the murder of her husband, the elder of the two brothers.”

“*Anno tertii, johannes regnant,*” Madeleine observed.

“My dear, your Latin lacks finish,” the vicar remarked. “But it was in the third year of John’s reign that the damsel of middle earth comes into the story, as you say. She bore Geoffrey two children, a boy and a girl. Geoffrey himself set to work to restore the family fortunes, get back some equivalent of what his father had paid toward King Richard’s ransom. That is to say, he tortured and murdered after the custom of the family for miles round, and stained Locksborough with blood as heavily and evilly as ever it had been stained in the days of the old dead—the first people of all on the site. The children grew up, and their mother retained her youth—I told you that they are out of time, her people, and do not age as do human beings. Geoffrey died, apparently a natural death, which was strange for that family, and the woman of middle earth took her daughter and

disappeared—both of them disappeared, leaving the son, Colum, to inherit and rule here. Observe the name, Colum. Erse, and by that you may form your own conclusion as to the origin of the damsel of middle earth who became his mother."

"She belonged to the lordly ones in the hollow hills," Madeleine said. "Daddy took mother and me to see *The Immortal Hour* when we were in London, and I'm sure she was one of the Irish fairy folk."

"Or from our own country," the vicar went on. "Mind, Mr. Green, I am telling you this story as I read it in Mancius and other sources, and you may take it as a fairy tale, if you like. To return to the de Boisgeants, though. Colum took his father's place, and was no better than that father—there was no exception among them, but they were all evil and did evil. You must think of Locksborough of that day as a little town, inhabited by fierce men who gathered there because they were driven out from among their kind—criminals, all of them—and stole wives where they would. A place of fear, for the normal inhabitants of the district, peopled by a band that lived by plunder, and ruled, then, by Colum de Boisgeant, who was the lord of the castle when John died and the third Henry came to the throne. Colum had married, but into what family is not told. He had three sons, the eldest of whom was killed in some raid. The other two quarrelled and fought in their father's lifetime, and Hugh, youngest of the family, killed his brother and was forced to flee from his father's vengeance for the deed. Fratricide, you may observe, was a hobby in the family. Colum is supposed to have been poisoned by his wife—whether the accusation were just or no, she was burned to death in the castle yard, and a nephew—it is quite impossible to ascertain how there was a nephew, or where he came from—appeared and claimed the estate. But Hugh, the son, came back with a young wife of surpassing beauty who, he said, was his cousin—and that, you must realize, put them within the prohibited degree according to church law of that time, but there was still no law, either ecclesiastical or civil, to touch Locksborough. Hugh had the nephew toasted over a slow fire, and took possession. The wife of surpassing beauty appears to have followed in the footsteps of the original Hugh, for children disappeared from the district and she was credited with having made away with them and with practicing unholy rites. Also, according to Mancius, she was a daughter of middle earth. If that were so, it would make her son—for she had a son—three-quarter of the race of the Shee, and only one quarter human. Now—and mark this and make what you like of it—she named the son Diarmid."

“I don’t see—” Gees said, and did not end it.

“No? Well, leave it for the present. Diarmid de Boisgeant was still a young man when he brought home a wife, another being of great beauty according to Mancius, and they had a little daughter—Hugh was a grandfather while he was still a middle-aged man. Patience, Mr. Green. He was the last of them, so far as occupation there is concerned.”

“But the son, Diarmid,” Gees pointed out, “and the wife and daughter. You mean —they didn’t inherit after Hugh?”

“We can leave them for a minute or two,” the vicar said, looking at his watch. “Madge, dear, will you go and ask your mother to ring through to Dowlandsbar and tell Mr. Tyrrell that Mr. Green is lunching with us? We ought to have thought of it sooner, really.”

She rose from her perch on the arm of the chair and went out. Gees noted that her color heightened at the request.

“The last of them,” her father said when the door had closed. “Yes, Hugh de Boisgeant. Mr. Green, has Mr. Tyrrell told you of a farm—Bandon is the name of the man occupying it—which adjoins his land?”

“He did mention it—yes,” Gees assented.

“Yes. Well, somewhere on that farm, in the time of the de Boisgeants, was a small priory built round a holy well. You know—there had been miraculous cures, and the monkish settlement grew up on the spot because of pilgrims resorting to it—the well had been discovered, or rather its properties had, by Saint Brenda, and it had been famous before the de Boisgeants built this castle. It is impossible to locate it today, or to find any trace of the priory, either. It was rich with gifts, jewels and gold—all the treasures that the grateful of those days bestowed on it for their cures. One winter’s night Hugh de Boisgeant and his men attacked the place. They slaughtered every monk but one, who escaped and somehow got to York. They burned the priory and every building attached to it to the ground, and came back to Locksborough with the treasure—Hugh feared neither God nor man, though he may have had some respect for his master the devil. He wanted that treasure, and he took it in his own way.”

“I begin to see—but go on,” Gees said.

Engrossed in his story, the vicar took no heed of the comment.

“Hugh should not have let that monk escape,” he said. “The time was still lawless—Edward Longshanks had not yet come to restore order to England—but this terrible sacrilege was too much for what government there was. A de Vere—one of the family which held the earldom of Oxford and lost the battle of Barnet for Earl Warwick—a de Vere was sent here to call de Boisgeant to account for this and other crimes. He besieged the castle for two months before it fell. He hanged de Boisgeant and every other man who came out from the surrender, broke up the stronghold entirely, but for some reason or other did not damage the keep, which stands as it did when de Boisgeant swung from the top. One man, Diarmid, is known to have escaped vengeance. Hugh de Boisgeant’s wife was killed in the sack of the place, and Diarmid’s wife too, but Diarmid and his daughter were never found. What became of them is not known—Mancius’ record ends with the siege and sack of the castle.”

“And the treasure—all that they took from the priory?” Gees asked.

The vicar shook his head. “That was never traced, either,” he said. “Legend has it that Hugh—the Hugh who destroyed the priory to win it—sits over it in full armor somewhere within the bounds of the outer wall, and any who search for it will wither away as his ancestor did after giving battle to the specter of Thorfinn Thorfinnsson. There have been searches for it, but the owner of the place who sold it to McCoul discouraged anything of the sort, and the treasure ranks in the district as fairy gold, better left alone.”

“Yes, better left alone,” Gees echoed thoughtfully.

“I have told you the story of the de Boisgeants at what you may consider unpardonable length,” the vicar remarked, “but there was a purpose in it—to show you that the family followed evil—was altogether bad. Now look back to the beginning of it. Apart from the Roman occupation—there is no record of that, and there have been no excavations—apart from it, every race that has occupied Locksborough has added evil to it—from the fall of the de Boisgeants, it has been shunned and regarded as no place for human habitation—until McCoul bought it and restored just so much of the keep as would make a habitation for him and his daughter. Its reputation, apparently, does not weigh with him. I know he got it for next to nothing—the previous owner was glad to sell at any price, and I understand McCoul drove a hard bargain over it. Also, he

spent as little as possible to make it habitable."

"And Diarmid de Boisgeant and his daughter were untraced," Gees observed, after a long pause in which the vicar sat, apparently doubtful as to his guest's opinion of the story he had told—and of himself for telling such a blend of fact and immaterial, fantastic fancy.

"Diarmid and Lynette de Boisgeant were never traced," Amber said.

"Lynette, eh? That takes us into a different breed of legend—the Arthurian, surely," Gees half-questioned.

"Not necessarily. If you accept the legendary part, probably the women of middle earth who came into this family were conversant with things far outside the Cumberland fells—the name may have originated in a memory of a previous experience, contact with different people."

"I'm very glad I came to you, sir," Gees remarked thoughtfully.

"If I have helped—" the vicar began, but got no further. Again the door burst open, and Madeleine Amber stormed into the room.

"Daddy, it's mutton. Forgive me, Mr. Green, but mother always has fits about mutton getting cold quickly, and—lunch is ready."

"Tell her to keep the cover on the dish for another two minutes while we have a small wash," the vicar bade. "I'll take you along, Mr. Green. Did you ring Dowlandsbar, Madge?"

"Mother did," she answered. "I'll go and tell her you're coming to lunch in time for dinner—he's never in time for meals, Mr. Green."

"A distinct slander," Amber said. "Run along, child."

"So," Green remarked as he followed his host, "if one accepts this as you have just told it, Diarmid de Boisgeant was only one-quarter human, and, assuming that his wife belonged to middle earth, his daughter who escaped with him was only one-eighth human?"

"It would seem so," Amber confirmed him, "but I have not told you all this story

as fact of today—you must make allowance for the superstitions of the age in which Mancius wrote—the beginning of Edward the First's reign. Also, his script is on parchment sheets in blackletter Latin, very carefully written, but the Latin is rather like my daughter's. And one sentence of the script is utterly obscure, as far as relation to the rest goes. After explaining how the fall of the castle was brought about by de Vere and his men, Mancius tells how Hugh de Boisgeant was hanged and search for Diarmid and his daughter proved fruitless. Then he says—'Neither were the "loupi" seen by the beseigers.' There is no other reference anywhere in the script to these 'loupi,' by which I take it he means wolves."

"No other reference, eh?" Gees asked thoughtfully.

"None. I take it that they form a part of the story that he meant to tell, or thought he had told earlier. Kept as pets, possibly. Wolves were exterminated in this country in Edward's reign, remember."

"And they're the sort of pets people like the de Boisgeants would keep," Gees reflected. A not altogether irrelevant thought of the four eyes he had seen like points of fire in the copse at Dowlandsbar drifted into his mind as he dried his hands and followed his host to the dining room, where the rest of the family waited for the vicar.

"My son Harold, Mr. Green," Mrs. Amber introduced. "Walter, do please begin carving at once. Tepid mutton—will you sit here, Mr. Green?—tepid mutton is worse than warm ice-pudding, don't you think?"

The vicar said a brief grace, and Jenny removed the covers. Gees seated himself opposite Madge, and saw the boy staring at him in a puzzled way as he too took his seat.

"Worse," Gees said solemnly, "than white pigs in Birksheer."

"Gosh!" Harold murmured, and turned crimson. "The man from Sussex!"

"Worse," Gees added, "than a geography lesson." Observing the boy's slack mouth and morning-after appearance, he had no mind to spare him.

"You have met Harold before, Mr. Green?" Mrs. Amber asked.

“Once,” he answered, “but I didn’t think he would recognize me. We were both in character parts on a fairly full stage when we met.”

“He’s never told us about joining any dramatic society at Oxford,” Madge remarked. “But did daddy branch off into geography, Mr. Green?”

“Only slightly,” he answered. “Over a priory on Bandon’s farm that is vanished altogether, today. And he merely mentioned it.”

“And the one monk who escaped to York,” she observed. “I know. If mother hadn’t lectured him severely, he’d still be looking for that priory instead of visiting his parishioners.”

“But Bandon is one of my parishioners, my dear,” the vicar protested mildly, “and your gift of exaggeration amounts to misrepresentation.”

“I should never have thought that farm would be in your parish,” Gees remarked. “Then, of course, you count in Dowlandsbar too?”

“That is so,” the vicar answered. “Mine is a widespread charge. Before the black death, there was a populous village between Dowlandsbar and Bandon’s place, but it disappeared utterly in Richard the Second’s time. The plague unpeopled these fells by two-thirds.”

“Has daddy told you about the dungeons at Locksborough, Mr. Green?” Madge asked, after a silence devoted to the destruction of roast mutton.

“Not yet,” he answered. “I hope he will, though.”

“I wish he could—all of it,” she said, “but Ben Latimer prevents him from finding out. Not poor old Ben himself, of course, but what happened to him in connection with these McCouls.”

Gees noted the shade of contempt in her voice as she mentioned the McCouls. “And what did happen—if I may ask?” he inquired.

The vicar took up the story. “Ben,” he explained, “is by way of being a builder. An old man, now—employs labor when he needs it, which is not often, and is a very good stone mason himself.”

“Also, he owns a tater clamp, and threatens to leather people if they appear likely to go near it,” Gees observed.

“And this is your second day here!” the vicar remarked, gazing hard at him. “How much more do you know about him, may I ask?”

“Nothing,” Gees answered. “I happened to meet him—in character.”

Again Harold’s face turned brick red, and he scowled.

“I see,” the vicar said—but he did not see, obviously. “Ben is a good, sound workman, and when McCoul bought the castle and grounds, he got Ben to put two floors in the keep and roof them in—it was a mere shell, with all the floors either destroyed by de Vere and his men at the time of their siege of the place, or else—and more probably—taken as building material later. Practically all the cottages in Odder, and this house too, are built of stone from Locksborough. In addition to putting in the two floors, Ben cleared the ground floor and made it habitable. One slab of stone stood up above the rest in the flooring, and in order to level it with the rest Ben took it up, and discovered a stairway leading to vaults—dungeons and a torture chamber, I judge by what Ben described to me of their fittings. By McCoul’s order he replaced the stone and cemented it in—but, he told me, before he finished his work there McCoul had removed all the cement, and the stone slab was loose from the rest of the flooring.”

“The wine-cellar is under the dining-room,” Gees observed.

“It may be,” the vicar assented seriously. “In any case, McCoul evidently intended to maintain access to the dungeons, which had gone undiscovered until he arrived and Ben cleared that floor—it was feet deep in rubble and debris of all sorts. But when Ben had finished his work—he employed as many as twelve men on it, at one part of the reconstruction—when he had finished, he naturally sent in his account, having paid off his men and incurred a good deal of expense for materials. That account was not paid. Ben’s wife fell ill, and my wife was the angel she always is in these cases—to your face, my dear—and she found Ben literally starving himself to provide invalid necessities for his wife. For one in his position, the repairs to the castle had been a very big contract, and he had put all his savings into it rather than go to McCoul for money in advance. When he was in danger of being sold up I went to McCoul, and it was then that I experienced the worst rudeness I have ever endured from any man. A week after

I had buried old Mrs. Latimer—the second week in August, it would be—I understood from Ben that the account had been paid in full. Had it been paid sooner, I believe she might have lived."

"It was a shameful thing, Mr. Green," Mrs. Amber said. "And when Walter took Madge and me to London for our holiday—we came back only three weeks ago—I saw Miss McCoul in a theatre one night, wearing jewels that would have paid poor old Ben's account ten times over."

"Umm'm! What sort of jewels, Mrs. Amber?" Gees asked.

"I couldn't tell you, except that they struck me as very fine."

"There was a moon of diamonds—you know, a crescent, set in gold," Madge said. "She wore it as a dress ornament, up towards the left shoulder—Oh, what diamonds! Antique, by the look of it. And a ruby pendant—I'm sure it must have been a ruby. I've never seen such a lovely stone. She came into the cloak room while I was there, and looked at me as if I'd been a performing frog. Oh, yes, she had a bracelet, too—diamonds and one big emerald, in platinum. The other two things looked antique, but the bracelet was quite modern, and I should say almost priceless. I wouldn't dare wear such things in a public place like a theatre, even if I had them."

"Which isn't likely," the vicar murmured gently.

"Quite modern, eh?" Gees queried. "The setting—yes. But the cutting of the stones, especially the emerald. The faceting?"

"I don't know anything about that," Madge said dubiously.

"No, it's a silly sort of remark of mine. And you say that the crescent and pendant looked antique?"

"I think so," she answered. "The setting was very heavy."

He smiled. "You're an observant sort of person, evidently."

"Tater clamps, and leatherings," she fired back, and laughed.

"Ah, but they were thrown at me," he said. "In the bar of the *Royal George* last

night, in fact. I went there with a view to getting the sense of the meeting—the feel of Odder, I might call it."

He saw the vicar gaze at his son with a sort of dawning understanding of the character parts Gees and Harold had played, and saw, too, that Harold gave him a resentful look. But he had no pity for the boy.

"*The George*," the vicar said slowly, "takes the place of a club for the men of the village. Querrett, the landlord, is a very good man indeed, and Mrs. Querrett and my wife, I might say, are joint trustees in every case of illness in the parish. A very fine pair, the Querretts."

"So you were Mr. Cottrill's George, Mr. Green?" Madge accused abruptly.

"I had to get there somehow," he admitted, "and if I'd gone as myself I should have been frozen out of learning anything."

"I wish I could see more of Cottrill," the vicar observed. "That man combines knowledge of the legends of this district with a sound practicality acquired in his travels, and everybody likes him."

"Ygdrasil," Gees murmured thoughtfully.

"The world ash! Did he talk to you of that?" Amber demanded.

"We're going to talk about it," Gees said. "That is, I mean him to talk about it. From what I can see, your folklore ranges from Erse to the Germanic, and for a stranger there's almost too much of it. But I have hopes of digesting all I've swallowed—before lunch, that is." He gave Mrs. Amber an anxious glance with the last sentence.

"I do hope our Cumberland cookery hasn't been too primitive for you," she said anxiously.

"Bring it to London, tell me where I can find it, and tell everyone that's my alternative address," he assured her.

"I'm so glad," she said. "We are primitive, you know."

"Then you conceal the fact remarkably well."

“Apology for what doesn’t need it is mother’s long suit,” Madge told him. “Mr. Green, how much do you know about faceting jewels?”

“Just a little,” he answered. “One hears these things.”

“And Ygdrasil, and white pigs in Berkshire—though you pronounced it wrong—and the way you simply lapped up daddy’s tale of the de Boisgeants—Mr. Green, is there anything you don’t know?”

“Quite a good deal,” he answered promptly. “For instance, and to revert to Mancius for a moment, what are ‘loupi,’ in your opinion?”

“Badly spelt for Latin, of course, but I think ‘lupus’ is second declension,” she answered. “And the French—‘loup.’”

“I might have thought of it myself,” he said.

“In other words,” she observed severely, “you knew it already.”

Later, when he had announced his intention of leaving, the vicar came out to find his hat and coat for him.

“I do hope you’ll come and see us again, Mr. Green,” he invited sincerely. “It is so rarely that I meet anyone interested in my subject.”

“My stay here will be short one, I hope,” Gees responded, “but I’ve enjoyed today so much that it won’t be my fault if I don’t fit in another visit. You’ve been a real friend, Mr. Amber.”

He started as a hand grasped his arm, and, looking round saw Madge beside him, tweed-clad and wearing an impudent little hat.

“Say I’ve been a friend too,” she begged. “And say that you’ll endure my walking with you on your way back—Mr. Cottrill’s landlady has had a baby, from which you mustn’t deduce any more than you’re meant—”

“Madge! My dear!” the vicar interposed warningly.

“The younger generation is utterly devoid of reticence daddy,” she said. “Mrs. Nevern has had a baby, Mr. Green, quite recently—a fortnight ago, in fact—and

I want to go and see her, and it. The ‘it’ is to distinguish it from her, because it’s a girl too.”

Gees glanced at the basket hanging from her hand. “Let me carry that for you,” he asked.

“How nice of you! Be careful—eggs. I must see that baby.”

He bade good-bye to Amber, and set out with the girl.

“Errand of mercy, eh?” he suggested, as they passed the churchyard.

“Curiosity,” she answered. “Did you ever meet any girl or woman who wasn’t curious over a baby? And I’m a parson’s daughter.”

“I don’t see the application,” he said, after a moment’s thought.

“No?” she queried, and laughed. “Well, we’re always worse than the average, though my daddy is enough to make a saint of anyone. All the same, I shall scream for help if you dare to regard me as a saint.”

“You’re not,” he said dryly.

“Give me that basket!” she ordered sharply.

“I won’t,” he retorted. “Ah, Ygdrasil again.”

They passed under a mountain ash, its berries shining redly in the afternoon sunlight. Madge looked up at it.

“No, carry the basket,” she adjured. “You’re one of us, obviously. I don’t know when I’ve liked a man so much—not as a man, mind you, or anything sentimental and dam-foolish, but as one of us.”

“Us being whom?” he asked.

“Daddy’s got sight,” she explained, “and he liked you. So did mother. Therefore, you must be one of us. *Quod erat*-”

“*Faciendum,*” Gees concluded for her. “I feel made for life.”

“If you can, slosh Harold one for us,” she asked. “I know he saw you in the *George*, and was heavily boozed. You’re outside, of course, and all tied up with problems outside our little family affairs. But if you get a chance, slosh him heavily.”

“I won’t forget,” he promised.

“You see, mother’s sad about him,” she explained, “and daddy feels the lad is too old to be put over his knee and half-murdered—which is what ought to happen to that ungrateful brother of mine. Daddy could do so much more for his people here if it were not for what he’s spending on putting Harold on his feet by sending him to his own college—Balliol—and it seems such utter waste—am I saying too much, Mr. Green?”

He looked down at her, met her gaze, as she trudged up hill beside him, and saw a nervous anxiety lest she had overstepped the bounds with a stranger.

“When you say too much, I’ll tell you, Miss Amber,” he said.

“I knew you were one of us,” she said contentedly. “Big enough to shoulder other people’s troubles, in spite of your own.”

“But I have none of my own,” he said gravely.

“Then your father was not an impecunious parson,” she declared. “Though, mind you, I wouldn’t change my daddy for Jawn D. Rockefeller, and I wouldn’t do anything to grieve him for ten Jawn D. Rockefellers and all they own. Mind those eggs!”

“The eggs,” he stated gravely, “shall be guarded as—as I’d guard you, if one of the de Boisgeants’ ‘loupi’ appeared.”

“They don’t appear in daylight,” she said solemnly.

They topped the ridge, and came within sight of the two monoliths guarding the entrance to Locksborough Castle.

“No, they don’t appear in daylight,” the girl repeated.

Chapter IX AT DOWLANDSBAR

“YES, Mrs. Amber, that will be quite all right. I shall understand he is lunching with you, and expect him when he gets here.”

Tyrrell put the receiver back on its rest, closed the cabinet, and turned to face Annie, sister of the maid-of-all work at the vicarage.

“Miss McCoul, sir,” she said. “Say’s she’d like to see you, sir.”

Gyda McCoul stood in the open doorway, to his sight a picture of perfection as he turned from the telephone cabinet.

“Unquestionably, the gods are good,” he said, as he hurried toward her with both hands outstretched, and a smile that emphasised the words in his eyes more than on his lips.

“I’m so glad you think so,” she answered, and gave him her two hands to hold momentarily. “My father is busy, and I came to ask how you are after your terrible experience last night. I do hope—but you are quite yourself, I see. It wasn’t so very terrible, then?”

“It was terrible enough,” he answered sombrely. “But—how do you know what happened last night? Who has been telling you?”

“Oh, you know what gossip is,” she said evasively. “Your man Cottrill, and—but I am glad to see you, Mr. Tyrrell! As soon as I heard, I made up my mind to come and see you, because—well, just because!”

“Because?” he echoed, and reached for her hands again—but they evaded his, and she smiled as she stepped back from him.

“Because—well, a neighbor,” she said, with surface lightness.

“No more?” he asked, and, advancing, forced her to a standstill. “Gyda, you know! I’ve loved you from the first time I saw you, and you’ve never given me a chance to tell you all that you mean to me. My dear—Gyda—if only you could care for me.” His arms went round her—they had the hall to themselves, for

Annie had gone about her work, and the girl, knowing herself alone with him, yielded to his clasp and looked up into his eyes, steadily, unwaveringly.

“But I do,” she said, very softly. Her shining white head lay against his shoulder, and the soft velvet of her lips was his. He lifted her arm to place it round his neck, and, little given as he was to any softer emotion, the tender clasp that he won made him fear lest she should divine too soon the strength of his passion for her. With her strange eyes half-closed, she rested in his clasp, to him a fragile being, infinitely dear.

“My dear—Gyda—from the first sight of you—no other thought,” he said, half-incoherently. “And now—incredible! That you care.”

“Oh, I do!” she whispered back. “I know—”

But then she released herself from his hold and stood back: Annie, the maid, entered from the back of the hall, and Tyrrell turned to face her, knowing that Gyda’s new relationship with him would be news in Odder before many hours had passed. He did not care: in the happiness of his new certainty he cared for nothing but the girl beside him.

“Could you tell me, sir—beg pardon, sir,” Annie asked, “but is the lady staying for lunch here?”

“Miss McCoul is staying for lunch,” Tyrrell said, “but you need only lay for two —Mr. Green will not be in for lunch. And—Annie—Miss McCoul and I are going to be married. You may as well know.”

Annie looked from one to the other of them, at a loss for words, for a moment or so. Then she folded her hands before her, primly.

“Very good, sir. I’m sure I hope you’ll be happy, sir.”

“Thank you, Annie. Lay lunch for two, please.”

He made the response quite formal. There had been a lack of enthusiasm in the girl’s reception of his announcement that angered him, momentarily. But then, he reflected, her sister was in service at the vicarage, and all Odder had looked for a match between him and Madge Amber until these McCouls had come to live here. Added to that, Gyda’s unusual appearance, her snow-white hair and green-

flecked, amber eyes, went against her with the simple country folk, while her father's treatment of Ben Latimer and his antagonism to the vicar rendered both McCoul and herself objects of dislike. It was nothing, Tyrrell told himself: as his wife she would soon live down their present opinion.

Gyda smiled at him and shook her head as Annie vanished.

"I didn't say I could stay to lunch with you," she said.

"Darling, I simply won't let you go," he answered "Your father—are you thinking he may wonder what has become of you?"

"I told him I was coming here. But—this Mr. Green?"

"Gone to the vicarage—lunching there, they tell me," Tyrrell said. "Why—what about him, dearest?" Again he passed his arm round her and held her. "You don't dislike him, do you?"

"I know nothing of him," she answered, with a shade of constraint.

"Then—but don't let's talk about him or anything else, today, except you. And I've won you-I can't believe it, yet! Gyda—I love your name! And you, wonderful one—I love you! May I tell you?"

"There are many ways of telling." She hid her face against his shoulder to answer whisperingly. "I—dear, I want them all."

*

In mid-afternoon, Gees handed Madge Amber her basket back, outside the gateway of Dowlandsbar.

"Do come and see us again, Mr. Green," she asked.

"I think I can promise that—yes, I will," he answered. "And if you or any of your people are in London at any time. I hope you'll give me a chance to show how I appreciate the kindness I've experienced at your home today. It was a real experience for me, Miss Amber."

"But daddy liked you, you see," she said, "and he's got sight—I don't mean the

sight of the physical eye. Now I must go and see Mrs. Nevern and her baby—good-bye for the present, Mr. Green."

For a minute or two he watched her on her way. Tyrrell felt uncomfortable over the way he had treated her, evidently, but if she felt his defection as a loss, she gave no sign of it. But then, Gees decided, she had far too much good sense to wear her heart on her sleeve, or pine for a thing that was beyond her reach. Healthy-minded, a little too outspoken, perhaps, but very attractive, lovable.

He put her out of his mind, for there was so much else of moment needing thought, arising out of his visit to the vicarage. Amber's story, the plunder of the old-time priory—and Gyda's jewels! Had McCoul unearthed what Hugh de Boisgeant had buried, centuries before? If the wealth of the priory had been hidden at Locksborough, surely someone must have found it, long ago? And yet it may have been hidden so securely that one who sought it must know where to search.

Amber believed, but would not say, that there was some connection between the hounds that formed Gees' errand here and the old castle—some connection between them and the McCouls, perhaps. But Gees felt now that he knew why such a man as McCoul had bought the place, installed himself and his daughter in it. He had been a poor man when he came there—his failure to pay Latimer for so long proved it—and, suddenly, had been able to pay and produce fine jewels—antique jewels, too!—for his daughter's wear. By keeping his discovery of the priory treasures secret, he evaded the laws regarding treasure-trove, and probably during his and his daughter's visit to London of which Madge had spoken—other visits too, in all likelihood—he had disposed of some part of the gems and gold that had once decked a shrine. Thirteenth and fourteenth century golden ornaments would be immensely valuable for their workmanship, and there were markets for such things in which no questions as to their origin would be asked, as Gees knew.

But there was no proof—there was no proof of anything, nor even suspicion enough on which to act in any way. The vicar and Gees himself might be certain that McCoul had discovered what Hugh de Boisgeant had hidden, and might believe that it was McCoul who loosed the vile hounds to their killings, but open accusation of anything of the sort would be akin to lunacy on their part. It was difficult—damned difficult, Gees told himself. And yet there must be a way.

He came to the doorway of Dowlandsbar and found Tyrrell standing out on the step, gazing across at all that showed of Locksborough above the intervening ridge. There was a softened look in Tyrrell's eyes, and he appeared free of the nervous irritability that the strain of the past six months had induced in him. He smiled at Gees.

"News for you," he said. "I didn't lunch alone, after all."

"No-o," Gees, said softly. "But she's gone, evidently."

"How—why, do you know already?" Tyrrell asked in surprise.

"I can see what you've got on the shoulder of your coat, man."

Tyrrell looked down, and then reached up to detach one silver, shining hair. He held it carefully between his fingers and smiled.

"I hadn't noticed it," he said.

"Well, aren't you going to congratulate me? I know! Come in and have a drink on it."

"Don't want a drink—till tea time," Gees answered, "but I hope you'll be happy, all the same—when this sheep trouble is settled."

"I can forget even that, today," Tyrrell said confidently. But, for a moment, a frown clouded his expression. Gees had shown no more enthusiasm over his news than had Annie—and, he realized, had acknowledged it with just such words as she had used.

"But look there!" Gees said suddenly, and pointed towards the castle.

Swathes of whitish reek were veiling the machicolations of the keep, and as Gees spoke they thickened, while over the ridge came the advance guard of the fog. Locksborough appeared to sway in the haze, and while they looked it vanished entirely. The sunlight striking on Dowlandsbar was suddenly dimmed, and then put out like a candle, while the air grew chill as the first wreaths of vapor swirled round the doorway. And now the ridge over which the fog had marched so suddenly was invisible behind a white, icy wall, solid-seeming as they gazed.

“This is what I’ve been afraid of, but I didn’t expect it so soon,” Tyrrell said. “I mean—I hoped those grey things would have been destroyed before the winter fogs began. This is rolling in off Solway, and heaven only knows how long it will last. The sheep—Cottrill—” He broke off, and all the nervousness that his joy of the day had driven out, for a little while, returned. “I wonder if he—” he began again, and again did not speak all the thought aloud.

“Where is Cottrill?” Gees asked, after a moment’s pause.

“Out—where would he be?” Tyrrell answered. “I went to see him in Anker’s Glen this morning, after you’d gone. He wanted to keep the gun for the present, so I let him have it—he won’t come to any harm, though. But with this coming on so suddenly, he won’t be able to get the sheep back to the fold tonight—they scatter in all directions during the day, and to find them and get them together in this—well!”

“Yes, an impossible task,” Gees assented thoughtfully. “But—something else. Which is the Neverns’ cottage—where Cottrill lives?”

“About a quarter of a mile along the lane, on the other side from here—it’s in a hollow, and the gate from the lane is painted blue. Why, though? Cottrill is out on the fells, now. You can’t—”

“Not Cottrill at all, for this,” Gees interrupted. “Miss Amber is there—at Nevern’s place, and she can’t go home alone in this. I’ll get my Webley.” He went into the house, and Tyrrell heard him taking the staircase two or more steps at a time as he went up.

He came out with his big overcoat on, a minute later.

“Back for tea, I expect,” he said without pausing. “I’ve had one meal with them today. Save me a bun if I’m late. I’m beginning to feel peckish again already—it’s the air.”

Hurrying on, he crossed the lane when he emerged from the drive and, keeping over to the right hand side, soon came in sight of a little blue gate. He opened it and found himself descending a steep pathway, down which he went slowly and cautiously, since the white fog that wrapped round him was now so thick as to reduce visibility to a couple of yards or less. A door showed, and he knocked and waited. The door was opened, and a small girl looked up at him timidly.

“I want to see Miss Amber, dear,” he said. “Is she here?”

“Miss Madge?” the child shrilled. “Here’s a gempleman for you!”

The girl appeared, her empty basket in her hand, and stared at him wonderingly. Apparently she was ready to return home.

“I’ve come to escort you, Miss Amber,” he said. “I’ll wait, if you’re not ready—I’m not in any hurry, except to catch you before you start. That is to say, the hurry is over since you haven’t gone.”

“I was just going—how very kind of you, Mr. Green! But you ought not to have troubled—I can’t possibly lose my way to the village.”

“A worse thing than losing your way might have happened, if you’d gone alone,” he said. “It was not that I had in mind.”

She glanced down at the small girl, who stood listening. Then she stooped and kissed the child, and faced him again.

“All ready,” she said. “Good-bye, Ethel—take care of mother. The gentleman means I might fall into a ditch and get muddy.”

“It wasn’t what you meant, I know,” she said to Gees as they emerged to the lane and the blue gate clattered against its post, “but I wanted Ethel to feel cheerful about being in the cottage with only her sick mother and the baby till Nevern gets back tonight.”

“I was a fool to say what I did in her hearing,” he remarked.

“I don’t think she caught your meaning,” she dissented. “And even if she did, the cottage is shaded by a rowan. You might have seen the red berries if you’d looked up and if the fog would let you.”

“Do you think its being there makes any difference?” he asked.

“It’s what they think that counts,” she pointed out sagely.

“Well, what is the special significance of the tree, then?”

“The mountain ash—oh, Mr. Green! Surely you know quite well how they regard it as a protection from all evil? Some kind of survival of the old reverence for it as Ygdrasil, the world ash-tree of power.”

“And McCoul cut his down and poisoned the roots,” he remarked.

“So you know that too? Yes—eight beautiful rowans between the moat and the keep doorway. And he had the roots poisoned with arsenic. A big auger hole bored in the centre of each of them after the trees had been cut down, and the powder poured in, and then a piece of metal sheeting nailed over the hole. Ben Latimer told me how it was done.”

“What you might call a series of deciduous murders,” he commented.

“Deciduous—oh, yes. Of course—they’re not coniferous.”

“And McCoul didn’t want protection from evil—hold up, Miss Amber. Take my arm, won’t you?” For she had stumbled and almost fallen over one of the potholes of the lane, and, by her expression as she limped onward, had wrenched her ankle rather severely.

“Thank you,” she said, and leaned rather heavily on him for support. “It’s painful at first—my foot twisted. Not seriously—I shall lose the feeling of it in a minute or two, but just at first—and if anyone from the village sees us like this, they’ll think I’m a brazen hussy and walking out with you already.”

“Well, you’re walking home with me instead,” he replied. “And now what about a cigarette—or isn’t smoking one of your virtues?”

“I’d love one,” she assented. “I left my case at home, by mistake, and was just wondering if I were brazen enough to ask for one.”

They stopped while he produced his case and lighted cigarettes for her and himself. And, though he put the case away and offered his arm again, he did not go on when she took it. She looked up at him.

“Why—what—why do you look like that?” she demanded. “What is it? Did you”—he felt her fingers tighten on his arm—“did you hear anything?” She stared up into his face, her own eyes wide.

“Quiet!” he bade, his right hand in his overcoat pocket.

They stood quite still. The shadow of a shape seemed to pass in the reeking whiteness beyond the low stone wall. The dead stalk of one of last summer’s tall weeds crackled, and Gees’ hand came out from his pocket. There was a soft rustling, as of pads on grass—and then it died out, leaving utter stillness in which they stood for nearly a minute facing each other. Then Madge’s fingers slackened.

“Nothing,” she said. “That is, nothing now. There might have been!”

“I’m very glad I saved you from going home alone,” he said gravely.

She held up her cigarette with over half an inch of ash on its end. “I did keep still, when you told me,” she said, and smiled—but he could see that her lips were trembling, and, as her hand trembled too, the ash fell. “I—I don’t know how to thank you, Mr. Green.”

“It was a rabbit, or something, probably,” he said reassuringly. “You said yourself that those—the other things—don’t come out in daylight, so it couldn’t have been anything to fear.”

“But this is not daylight,” she dissented. “I—do believe I want to be sensible, won’t you? But I’m so glad you’re with me, now.”

“Well, I’m glad I’m with you—and that’s no compliment, but the truth,” he said lightly. “And you’re eminently sensible.”

“I wish I were!” she exclaimed. “You are being good to me, Mr. Green. If I had started from the cottage and been alone now—”

“But you’re not,” he interrupted. “I’m taking care of that—and of you, till you’re safe at home. And my friends usually call me Gees.”

“Oh, what a name! But do you mean me to call you that, then?”

“Most certainly I do, Madge. We’ve known each other quite a long time, now—let’s keep moving. This fog is icy, and your coat’s thin.”

They went on, down toward the stone bridge between Dowlandsbar and

Locksborough. Gees kept well to the left side of the lane, for guidance by means of the low whitethorn hedge that formed a boundary here. So they came to the bridge, and, halfway over it, Madge dropped her basket and clung to Gees' arm with both hands, pressing close to him. For something went past them with a rush on the far side of the bridge, a softly-padding shape that vanished in a moment—and again Gees scented a foul reek that he recognized. The padding went up the hill behind them, towards Dowlandsbar and the open fells, and died out.

"Oh!" she exclaimed fearfully. "The other one!"

He saw terror in her eyes, and held up the Webley for her to see.

"You're quite safe," he said reassuringly. "And it's gone, as frightened of us as you are of it. A dog, most likely."

"No." She released her grip on him as she shook her head. "Not a dog—you know it was not a dog. There is no dog as big as that anywhere near here. It was the other one—they are out, Mr. Green."

He put his hands on her shoulders, the pistol still grasped in his right hand. "Now look here, my child," he said, "you've got to pull yourself together. Even if they are out, they are not after us. I'll land you safely at home, never fear. Will you believe it?"

She gazed up at him. "Ye-yes," she said shakily. "Oh, what must you think of me for being such a coward? But—they're not of earth."

"Quite probably there's a perfectly rational explanation for them," he said. "Things not of earth don't descend to killing sheep—they don't do material damage either to animals or human beings. Now come along and be sensible, before your father begins to worry about you."

She achieved a smile and took his arm again. "Why, yes," she said, as they went on uphill. "But I'm keeping close to you till we get there. And then—what about you? You can't go back alone?"

"I both can and shall," he answered decidedly. "I told Tyrrell I should be back for tea, and asked him to keep some for me."

She made no reply, and Gees wondered whether mention of Tyrrell had silenced her. They tramped on, and passed where two ghostly things rose in the reek—the standing stones at the entrance to Locksborough. And then, nearing Odder, they heard voices, and two beings loomed up and stopped within sight of them. Gees recognized Harold Amber and a brawny being in velveteen coat and corduroys —Tom Cotton.

“We were coming to fetch you home, Madge,” Harold said. “Father got worried about you, and asked Tom to come along with me.”

Cotton peered hard at Gees, and smiled broadly. “Glad to meet you agin, sir,” he said. “You took us all in nicely, last night.”

“Glad to hear it,” Gees answered. “And now I needn’t come any farther, Miss Amber. Why, hullo! What’s Jimmy doing here?” For a dog appeared from beyond Cotton in the fog and sat down beside him.

“That ain’t Jimmy—it’s his sister—belongs to me,” Cotton explained in jerks. “Same litter, but she’s got better brains.”

“You can’t possibly go back to Dowlandsbar alone, Mr. Green,” Madge said. “Tom, we saw the grey things—they passed us. They are out.”

Again Gees held up the Webley. “I’ve got a friend with me,” he said, “and the pair of us are a match for any other pair.”

“Aye, maybe, mister,” Cotton remarked, “but so be as you ain’t ashamed o’ my company, I’ll walk along with you, an’ go an’ see my sister—Mrs. Nevern, that is. I ain’t been near her since the baby was born, an’ now’s my chance. If so be the fog don’t lift, I can turn in along o’ Cottrill for the night. Miss Amber’ll be safe wi’ her brother—it ain’t more’n a quarter of a mile to the vicarage from here.”

“That seems a reasonable way of saving us from escorting each other about all night,” Gees observed. “I’ll say good-bye here, Miss Amber, and leave you to your brother’s care for the rest of your way.”

He glanced at Harold, who, he noted, had refrained from speaking a word to him. Madge Amber held out her hand.

“Yes, I know you want to get back,” she said. “Oh, my basket! I must have dropped it down by the bridge. Could you keep it for me if you see it—till we see you again, Gees?” With the last word, she smiled, and Gees smiled back as he released her hand.

“I’ll save it for you,” he promised. “Now we’ll go.”

But, when she and Harold had vanished in the fog, he stood for a minute or two listening, and Tom Cotton listened too.

“It’s all right, mister,” Tom said at last. “They’re too near home to come to any harm. That was a rare trick you played on us last night!”

They started toward Dowlandsbar, and the dog walked quietly beside its master. Cotton turned up his coat collar and buttoned it, for the white reek that enveloped them was chilling.

“You didn’t reckon we had anything to do wi’ this sheep killin’, did you, mister?” he inquired after a silent half-mile or so.

“I wouldn’t be such a fool,” Gees answered, “but I didn’t want to freeze you all up by appearing as my natural self, so I got Cottrill to give me the freedom of the house, to learn what I could.”

“About the killin’s, that’ll be,” Cotton surmised. “Well, it didn’t do no good, did it? We’d nuthin’ to tell useful, like.”

“I found it very useful,” Gees dissented. “It gave me an idea of what you are all like—put me in touch with the place.”

“Aye, it would,” Cotton agreed gravely. “I never thought o’ that. Well, ‘s’long as I’m in the *George* if you happen in, you’ll be welcome. Any friend o’ Miss Amber’s good enough for me—an’ all of us, too.”

“A general favorite, is she?” Gees encouraged him.

“All of ‘em, except that silly young devil,” Cotton told him. “In fifty mile round, there ain’t a man to touch our parson. If anyone’s in trouble—an’ Mrs. Amber, too. Salt o’ the earth, them three.”

“And what do you do?” Gees inquired after another period of silence. “That is, if I’m entitled to ask you such a question.”

“Me? Oh, I worked at Bandon’s up to midsummer, but then he cut down, times not bein’ too good, an’ me bein’ a single man I had to go. Got a few odd jobs since, enough to keep me an’ Effie in grub.”

“Effie being your sister, I suppose,” Gees suggested.

“Lord, no, sir! This is Effie. All right, old gal,” he said as the dog looked up at him, “we’re just talkin’ about you, that’s all. No, Mrs. Nevern’s my sister, an’ I ain’t been near her for some while, lest she should think I was cadgin’ a meal, but I just finished a fortnight on a stable-roofin’ job wi’ Ben Latimer, so now I can go an’ see her wi’ a few mutton chops in my poachin’ pocket an’ a drop o’ somethin’ good for me an’ Nevern—which I’d got all ready before the fog come over an’ Mr. Amber asked me to go an’ meet Miss Madge. So there it is, an’ here I am. But Miss Madge said you’d seen they devil hounds. Didn’t try to go for you, did they?”

“On the other hand, we hardly saw them,” Gees answered. “They passed us in the fog, going toward Dowlandsbar, separately.”

“That’d be—both of ‘em was the other side o’ this place?” He jerked his thumb toward the shadowy monoliths of Locksborough, abreast them as he spoke—and, Gees saw, he crossed himself.

“Why, yes, they were both on the Dowlandsbar side,” Gees said.

“Aye, last night, when Ammon spotted ‘em by the churchyard, was the only time they’ve been seen or heard on the Odder side o’ the castle. Mister, I thought about that, an’ you know what I think?”

“That they were waiting to get me alone,” Gees said quietly.

“Aye, you’ve hit it, mister! Master Tyrrell let it get about that you’d be comin’ from London to track ‘em down, an’ they were after you. They got a lot more sense’n any animals—look at the way they don’t go near the sheep as long as Cottrill’s on watch, an’ the first night he’s off, there’s two more done in. They ain’t animals. They know!”

“It looks like it,” Gees admitted. “But what are they, then?”

“That man McCoul,” Cotton answered indirectly. “S’posin’ he’s what he looks to be? Locksborough’s queer, haunted by no end o’ things. An’ you’d say as soon as you look at him—he ain’t altogether natural. Black magic, I make it. S’posin’ he’s havin’ truck wi’ the old dead, the bloody old dead buried there, an’ raises ‘em. They lived an’ died in blood, if all that’s said is true, an’ if he raised ‘em for his own ends they’d go out after blood. Why he’d want to raise ‘em I don’t know, an’ it’s no use askin’ me, but I say these things are the old dead, raised to life in the shape o’ wolves by that man McCoul.” He spat as he ended, a gesture obviously directed against the man McCoul.

Gees stooped and picked up Madge’s basket, for by this time they had reached the stone bridge, and he had been looking for it.

“Apparently you don’t like McCoul,” he remarked.

“Like him?” Cotton echoed, and at the sound of the words the dog padding beside him growled. “All right, Effie,” he said to her. “You ain’t no cause to concern yourself—yet. He come to live here in March, an’ them things first appeared in March. He’s in league wi’ the devil, his father, an’ he raises the hell hounds for his own ends an’ lets ‘em out to hunt for blood, which is the only reward he can give ‘em an’ the only one they want. Else, why’d he poison the rowans, the only good things that ever came out o’ the earth at Locksborough, bar grass which’ll grow even on a suicide’s grave—grow anywhere? An’ his cat-eyed witch daughter—in old time, they’d ha’ burned her at the stake, an’ a damned good thing too! Ben Latimer’s wife’d be alive today if it wasn’t for them McCouls. Do I like McCoul!”

“Apparently, as I said, you do not,” Gees remarked again. “But what proof have you of any of this? What evidence, even?”

“If I had a shadow of anything to back what I’m sayin’, I’d raise all Odder against ‘em, get ‘em stoned whenever they show their faces,” Cotton said savagely, and the dog growled again. “Here, Effie, don’t get fretted, old girl! You’re like our inspector, sir, if you’ll forgive me for sayin’ it. He goes smellin’ around for evidence, lookin’ up every dog for miles round, an’ it’s here—here all the time! An’ if you’ve come down from London to do the same, well—an’ maybe I’ll be givin’ offence by sayin’ it, but I say it all the same—if that’s all

you reckon to do, you'd better go back. It ain't no good."

"No?" Gees asked gently. "What ought I to do, then?"

He halted outside the gateway of Dowlandsbar, and gazed at Cotton as he asked it. Cotton shook his head, and grinned.

"To tell the truth, sir, I don't know," he said. "No. Well, will you be all right between here and the Neverns' place, or shall I walk as far as the gate with you?" Gees asked.

"Lord love you, sir, you're a real good sort, but I'll be quite all right. Come an' see us in the *George* again—an' you needn't come from Sussex, next time. I'll stand bail for you, if Cottrill ain't there."

They parted with a hearty handshake, and Gees went on—he kept a careful eye on the copse beside the drive, but it was innocent of any presence such as had tenanted it the preceding night. When he came into the big hall of the house, Tyrrell gestured silently at a tray on the table beside the fireplace. Gees went to it and removed a cover.

"Man, you're a friend!" he said. "Four scones all hot and buttered, and I'm ravenous, though I had a whale of a lunch. It must be the—"

"Cut it out!" Tyrrell interrupted, almost shouting.

"Fog, I was going to say," Gees completed. "Have you had tea?"

"Aye," Tyrrell said. "I waited some time, and then gave you up."

"Ah! That's the air," Gees told him, and grinned widely. He put Madge's basket down, and poured himself cup of tea.

Tyrrell stood up and put down the book he had been reading. "I'm a little troubled in my mind about Cottrill, Gees," he said.

"Yes?" Gees bit a scone, and, because he could speak no more, looked the rest of the question.

"Yes. I know he's out on the fells with the sheep—was when this fog came down

—and I don’t know if he’ll be able to get back.”

“What can you do?” Gees asked, before taking a second bite.

“Nothing, till the fog lifts, of course.”

“I didn’t know it was ‘of course.’ When will the fog lift?”

“Oh, why ask such a blasted silly question?” Tyrrell aimed.

Gees took two more bites, and there was no more of that one. He took a drink of tea, and refilled the cup. Then he took another scone.

“What time was it when Miss McCoul left?” he asked.

“About half an hour before you got back—why?” Tyrrell answered.

“Is McCoul on the telephone?” Gees disregarded Tyrrell’s query.

“No. I wish they were, now—especially with this fog.”

“Aye,” Gees said thoughtfully. “It’s a pity.”

“Here, what do you mean?” Tyrrell demanded sharply. Gees gazed full at him for some seconds. “The grey shapes are out,” he said at last.

“The—Cottrill—out there!” Tyrrell almost gasped the words. Then a blaze of anger came into his eyes. “Here, what the hell do you mean, asking about McCoul and the telephone like that? Do you dare suggest *he* has anything to do with the grey shapes?”

“Quiet—quiet, man!” Gees bade. “Did I say anything of the sort?”

“Why—why, no, you didn’t,” Tyrrell half-stammered. “But you asked—about him—and about Gyda. It sounded as if—” He did not end it, but stood looking at Gees in a puzzled, half-resentful way.

“So the fog may last days?” Gees suggested thoughtfully, taking no heed of Tyrrell’s attitude.

“May last days, and may all be cleared off by tomorrow morning—or even

sooner," Tyrrell said more easily. "There is no telling."

"In that case, nothing can be done till tomorrow morning, or sooner," Gees said, and bit away nearly half of the scone between his fingers. "That is, except to finish these, and take care of that basket. I've promised to return it to Miss Amber."

"Er—did she mention me?" Tyrrell asked awkwardly.

"Now would she?" Gees retorted, and laughed. "Besides, after what you told me before I went to escort her, would it matter if she did?"

Tyrrell shook his head, gravely, and less in negation than in concern, and Gees finished the scone he held and took another.

"I haven't had such an appetite for years," he said. "It must be"—he made a long pause and gazed hard at Tyrrell—"a renewal of my youth—Yah!"

And he bit into the third scone.

Chapter X MISSING

INSTEAD of the view of Locksborough Castle and the valley between it and Dowlandsbar, Gees saw only a blank whiteness when he looked out from his window next morning, and the daylight was so far reduced by the fog that he had to turn on the electric light for his shave. He went downstairs to find Tyrrell standing before a log fire in the dining-room, anxiety in every line of his face.

“Bad,” Tyrrell said. “It’s bad. Utterly unexpected—no warning of it. No fall in temperature—nothing! Let’s have breakfast.”

He rang, and Annie brought in their breakfast of kidneys and bacon. Tyrrell removed the cover and looked at Gees.

“Are you still under the influence of the air about here?” he asked. “I mean—how many kidneys, and much bacon do you want?”

“It must be bad,” Gees answered. “I’ll have a lot, please.”

Tyrrell helped him liberally, and, after some hesitation, took one rasher of bacon for himself and sat gazing at it.

“I’m going to sell the flock,” he announced abruptly.

“Well, you can’t till the fog lifts,” Gees told him, “and if you don’t eat, you’ll get so weak that you won’t be able to sell anything. And not all your fretting will push the fog away. Eat, man!”

Tyrrell shook his head. “It’s no use,” he said. “I was awake half the night, listening, thinking. The gods are against me—a fog like this ought not to happen so early in the year. And the grey things were out last night, you said—that will be two more gone, at the least. Cottrill could never fold them after the fog dropped down.”

“He might,” Gees said. “Anker’s Glen is on the south side of the lane, and you told me you only have two hundred acres on that side—”

“But he drove them across the lane in the morning,” Tyrrell interrupted. “There’s

not much more than twenty acres of good grass in that two hundred, and since it's sheltered we save it as late in the year as we can. When the fog dropped down, they were scattered all over the fells, easy game for the grey things. And I've not heard from Cottrill either, which means he didn't get back last night."

"I suppose he's got a hut or two out on the sheep runs?" Gees asked.

"Oh, yes! He knows how to take care of himself. He'd make a fire for himself, and he keeps tinned stuff out there for use in the lambing season, when he knows he'll have to be out all night. But—" He broke off and looked at the piece of bacon, untouched on his plate.

"Then it means two more sheep gone," Gees said. "I told you—or rather, I believe I told him—two or four more. In that, you must realize, I was reckoning without this fog. I counted on having a plan of campaign arranged to make it no more than four at the outside, but the fog upsets my calculations as much as it upsets you, apparently. And now it may be six, or even eight, if they stick to their habit of pairs and no more. But eight is the limit—don't sell the flock."

"Look here, how much do you know?" Tyrrell demanded acridly.

"So far as telling you anything I could prove is concerned, nothing," Gees answered. "In my own mind, everything about it." He applied himself industriously to kidneys and bacon, and passed his cup for more coffee, disregarding Tyrrell's expression of impatience.

"Damn it, man!" Tyrrell observed as he refilled the cup. "Can't you be more explicit? If you know everything about it—"

"And can't prove a single word of what I know," Gees interrupted. "Tyrrell, we're up against something—as you've realized, if only you bring yourself to admit it, that you can boil down to one word—fear. Fear of the uncanny, fear of the unnatural, and you've got to face the fact that it is unnatural. Those things have chosen their times, acted as no dogs would act if they were worrying sheep —you admit that?"

"I've got to admit it," Tyrrell said after a pause for thought.

"As nearly as I can make out, they appeared twice in six months, before I got here—two men saw them, and obviously it was through carelessness on their

part—I'm regarding them as beings with more sense than mere animals. Since I arrived here, you've seen them, Shaun Ammon has seen them, and I've seen them—and Miss Amber was scared to the point of holding on to me like death by glimpsing them. Apparently you rather advertised the fact that I was coming here to end the trouble, and they're out after me, as nearly as I can make it out to catch me alone, though the way I loosed off with the Webley the night before last rather discouraged them. But they don't like me, and—I want you to take particular notice of this—_they like you!_"

"What on earth do you mean by that?" Tyrrell asked amazedly.

"Why weren't you torn to pieces in Anker's Glen the night before last?" Gees asked in reply. "There you were, ready to be torn."

"I've wondered over that, myself," Tyrrell admitted, and shuddered at the recollection. "That thing over me, stinking at me, and the other one charging it and knocking it away before I lost consciousness!"

"Queer—you've got to admit it. By the way, if you're not eating the rest of those kidneys, I am. You can't warm 'em up, and it's a pity to waste them. Might I?" He held out his plate.

"By all means," Tyrrell assented, and scooped the remainder of the contents of the dish on to the plate. "I'd sooner keep you for a week than a fortnight, if you go on eating at this rate. But I don't understand—what is the queerness? You're so damned mysterious about it."

"Because I've no proof. I've nothing that would justify me in saying one word—about anything. Yet, in my own mind, I know."

"What?" Tyrrell asked.

"Something so fantastic," Gees said soberly, "that you'd probably turf me straight out if I put it into words. Miss Amber said it yesterday, though I wouldn't agree for fear of frightening her too much—these things are not of earth. And yet they are, in a sense, material enough to do material damage. Neither brutes nor human, though."

"They must be one or other, surely," Tyrrell said, after a long pause in which he watched kidneys and bacon disappear with incredible swiftness. "Or halfway

between brute and human—”

“Neither,” Gees interposed. “There is another state, and if I said that within hearing of a bus-load of London office workers, they’d jeer themselves black in the face. And now the marmalade”—he reached for it—“as a groundwork for the final drink of coffee and the post-prandial cigarette. Good word, post-prandial—good, sound, Victorian epithet. What do we do with ourselves this morning?”

“What the hell can you do?” Tyrrell demanded savagely, and gestured at the window, beyond which showed a blank whiteness.

Gees made no reply, but finished his toast and marmalade. Then he produced his cigarette case and offered it. Tyrrell took one.

“I know,” Gees said, as he lighted his own cigarette. “We’ll go out to the front door and look at the weather. It may thin out—”

“Oh, shut up!” Tyrrell interrupted disgustedly. “Can’t you see I’m all on edge? Unable to do anything, and—”

“Exactly,” Gees interrupted in turn. “Unable, even, to get rid of me, unless you turn me out into this wet blanket. I’ve told you I know what’s wrong, and I’ve told you I’ll put it right, if you give me time. And I know, too”—he spoke very seriously—“you’ve got a fear, now, behind and distinct from your original fear. Justifiably, too.”

“What do you mean, man?” Tyrrell demanded with sharp anxiety.

Gees shook his head, silently—and the door of the room opened to admit Annie, at whom Tyrrell stared with a sort of angry questioning over the interruption as she approached him.

“Beg pardon, sir,” she said, “it’s Mr. Cotton wants to see you. About Mr. Cottrill, he said, and could he see you now?”

“One minute, Annie—tell him in one minute.” Tyrrell waited until she had gone out. “Now, Gees,” he demanded, “what did you mean by that remark—a fear behind my original fear? Out with it, man!”

“After I’ve laid your ghosts—not before,” Gees answered with a sort of

inflexible determination in his tone. “You’d better see this man Cotton, and if you don’t mind, I’ll come too. About Cottrill, he said—it may be something more important than I could tell you.”

Tyrrell stood up. “All right,” he said coldly. “We will see this man Cotton. But if you mean what I think you mean—” He broke off, and stood for a half-minute or so gazing intently at Gees.

“I’ll tell you nothing that I can’t prove,” Gees said. “So far, I can prove nothing. Ergo, I’ll tell you nothing. And Cotton’s waiting.”

They went out, then, to the front doorway, where Tom Cotton stood waiting, silhouetted against the white curtain of the fog, with his dog Effie patient and still beside him. He touched his hat to Tyrrell.

“It’s about Cottrill, sir,” he said, without waiting for Tyrrell to speak. “I kipped in at my sister’s place last night, an’ he didn’t turn up all night. Ain’t turned up yet, either. I reckoned, considerin’ what’s been happenin’ lately, I’d come along an’ tell you.”

“Yes,” Tyrrell said, “and what do you think I’m going to do about it, Cotton?”

“I don’t see as how anyone can do anything, till this fog lifts, sir,” Cotton said dubiously. “Weelum told me the fold is in Anker’s Glen, now, so I s’pose I might get that far wi’out losin’ myself, but it’s ten to one against his bein’ there, for foldin’ ‘em last night was past mortal man’s doin’, I know. But—he’s out there, somewhere.”

“Well?” Tyrrell snapped out the query, sharply.

“An’ the grey things was out, too, sir,” Cotton said soberly.

“Possibly. But that doesn’t mean anything has happened to Cottrill,” Tyrrell said. “He’s got a gun of mine, and there’s the dog.”

“Aye, sir, but what gets me is that he knows these fells as no other man knows ‘em,” Cotton pointed out. “I’d trust him to find his way in this, or in the blackest night, from here to Whitrigg, cross-country all the way. If he’d suffered no damage, he’d have been back, now.”

“Then what do you propose about it?” Tyrrell asked.

“Well, sir, I’m pretty much at home about these fells myself, but I don’t propose to go over ‘em alone, while the grey things are about. I reckoned, if so be as there was two or three of us, now.” He paused, and glanced from Tyrrell to Gees and back, questioningly.

“You mean, you’d guide in this?” Gees poked an index finger toward the dense fog that enfolded them, and the gesture was incredulous.

“Well, sir, I don’t say I’d go everywhere,” Cotton answered. “But the tracks I know, an’ there’s a good man somewhere out there, maybe needin’ our help. I’d do my damndest to find him, though not alone.”

There followed a silence, in which Tyrrell stood irresolute.

“A good man,” Cotton said again, earnestly. “One o’ the best shepherds that ever whistled a dog, an’ a good man as well.”

“Well, do you want me to come with you?” Tyrrell demanded harshly.

“No, sir, I wouldn’t ask that. I’d rather you didn’t, to tell the truth. If you got a couple o’ breechloaders, an’ I took Weelum an’ Nevern—neither of ‘em’s doin’ anything till the fog lifts, I’ll be bound—wi’ them two, I’d make as good a search as I could.”

“Wait a minute, then,” Tyrrell bade.

He went back into the house, and Gees and Cotton waited in silence until he returned, carrying a pair of hammerless breech loading shot guns. He handed them to Cotton, who took them reverently, as one who could appreciate a beautiful pair of guns when he saw them.

“There!” Tyrrell said, and, putting his hand in his pocket, brought out a handful of cartridges. “Loaded with number three—stuff to stop a bull, let alone a dog.” He handed the cartridges over and produced more. “Three dozen, altogether—but what about you, though?”

“I’ll take Cottrill’s own gun,” Cotton said, “an’ bein’ a twelve-bore, it’ll take these cartridges. Thankye, sir. I’ll find Weelum, an’ then go along an’ pick up

Nevern on the way—an' come back here to let you know after we've found him, some time today."

"Good luck to you, Cotton," Tyrrell said. "Fetch him back—tell him not to trouble about the sheep till the fog lifts. He can do nothing till then, and he's better sitting over a fire than out there."

"Aye, that's right, sir. I'll find Weelum an' do my best."

He took four steps, and was no more than an indistinct shadow: two more, and he had vanished altogether, while, such was the deadening quality of the fog, even the sound of his footsteps ceased to reach Tyrrell and Gees by the doorway. The stillness about them was absolute.

"I wonder why he didn't want you?" Gees reflected aloud.

"Wants to go his own way, and is afraid I might give orders, I expect," Tyrrell said. "Also I know none of them like my friendship with the McCouls. It's made a difference, but"—a note of determination came into his voice—"I'll make them accept her! That is, unless I sell out and go. This—these killings—can't go on."

"Quite so," Gees assented. "But what would you do?"

"I don't know," Tyrrell said doubtfully. "As you remarked, I'm not a poor man, and I suppose I'd find something—I don't know. But you see—perhaps you've seen already, that is—how this hellish business is getting me down. I'm not myself, Gees. I'm losing poise, getting irritable and hating myself for it. My nerve is going, I know."

"Not to be wondered at, after six months of it," Gees commented. "Let's go in—it's chilly out here." He turned to the doorway.

"Why, yes." Tyrrell followed him into the big hall and closed the door. "I think I'll go over and see McCoul and Gyda. Cotton won't be back for hours, and there's nothing else to do."

"I'll come with you," Gees offered. "Or"—as he saw Tyrrell's sudden stare—"don't you want me? Just as you like."

“Yes, come along,” Tyrrell said. “I’ll get my coat.”

Gees, getting his own coat, slipped the Webley in its pocket. They set out, guiding themselves by keeping to the edge of the drive and then to the side of the lane. Tyrrell, evidently engrossed in thought, kept silence until they came to the stone bridge, and Gees, except for swearing when he stubbed his toe against a stone, made no remark. Then Tyrrell halted and looked back, as if he sought to pierce the fog that prisoned them from sight of their surroundings.

“I’m badly worried about Cottrill,” he said. “I wonder if I ought to have gone? He’d have gone home last night, unless—”

Gees waited. Presently Tyrrell faced about again.

“He may have been out where he didn’t think it safe to try getting back, though,” he said, as if to comfort himself with the supposition. “And Cotton’s got two good men with him—no, I could do nothing more than they can, if I did go. Not as much, in fact.”

They bent to the ascent that faced them, and came to the standing stones at the entrance to Locksborough, where Gees halted.

“I won’t come in with you, after all,” he said. “Go on alone.”

“Why, what on earth’s the idea?” Tyrrell asked in surprise.

“Oh, just changed my mind,” Gees answered. “I mean it, though.”

“It isn’t—it isn’t because you don’t want to meet her—them—is it?” Tyrrell demanded, with a hint of resentful suspicion.

“Not that at all,” Gees answered frankly. “Something altogether different, I assure you. And you’ll want her to yourself.”

He smiled as he said it, and Tyrrell looked reassured. “Odd of you after coming so far,” he said. “Still, just as you like.”

“Go on, man,” Gees urged. “I’d only be the unwanted one.”

“Well—see you for lunch, then,” Tyrrell said, and went on.

He vanished almost instantly along the grassy way leading to the castle. Gees gave him two minutes or less, and then followed, his hand gripping the Webley in his coat pocket, and his thumb on the safety catch in readiness to slide it off. The track was easy to follow, in spite of the fog, and he held to it until he came to the outer end of the causeway built up to form a level crossing over the deep, steep-sided moat. Here he turned off to make the circuit of the moat by way of its outer edge, going slowly, and gazing down all the time. The slope of the cutting, he saw, was so steep as to render climbing either up or down difficult, if not impossible, for the greater part of the circumference. But, at a point which he judged as almost opposite the causeway, a path ran down diagonally, grass grown and evidently little used. He took it and, reaching the bottom of the moat, found it dry and grassgrown. Then, ascending by the path again, he resumed his tour of the circumvallation, and came back to the causeway. That diagonal path made a second means of entry to the walled enclosure in which the keep and all the rest of the castle buildings had stood, and, except for these two points, the moat formed an almost, but not quite, impassable obstacle. One could clamber up or down that slope, but only with great difficulty and even risk of falling and rolling down.

“And that,” Gees told himself, “is that.”

Silently he crossed the causeway, and came under the towering wall of the keep by the deeply-set door which guarded the main entrance. He noted that its latch turned by an old-fashioned iron ring, like the fastenings of church doors, but the door itself was new-looking. A pause to inspect it, and then he set off to circle the keep itself. He came to the postern by which he had seen Shaun Ammon enter, a tiny portal set deep in the thickness of the massive wall, and showing an ordinary brass knob as means of opening. At sight of that Gees nodded his head as if some theory he held were being confirmed, and went on. At the back was yet another entrance, and it appeared to him that it had been cut in the wall not long since, and again the door was brass-knobbed and modern, while beside it stood a big, galvanized water tank, with a pipe leading into it from a semi-rotary pump. Here, evidently, was the water supply, and probably the means of access that Ammon generally used. Gees went on, found the fourth wall of the square blank and solid, and halted at the corner of the frontage.

For a period that he could not have measured as time he stood, his back pressed against the solid stone, his right hand gripping the pistol in his pocket, and every nerve a-quiver with something approaching panic terror. There was no sight nor

sound, to his physical senses, to cause him fear, but he had a consciousness that the whiteness which now seemed to press on him was filled with presences, evil things not of earth—though he gripped the pistol, he knew it was quite useless against these impalpable presences. He would have shouted, useless though any cry would be with the thickness of the wall intervening between him and any other human being, but he had no voice. He would have moved away, but had no power of movement—and yet, so far as sight or feeling told him, there was nothing to prevent cry or movement. Yet there were things crowding on him, foul as murder in the dark, more fearful, more evil, than any tangible beings—Amber's tale of the old dead came into his mind, and that other tale of the specter of Thorfinnsson, whose human assailant had withered away after battle with him. And though he stood in utter silence, yet there were voices at his ears—voices that told of unimaginable evil, yet made no sound.

"In the name of God!" he whispered desperately—whispered, because he had no voice. But with the whisper he was alone again, drawing a long breath of more than relief and, lifting his hand to his forehead, he found it wet with a cold sweat.

He had seen nothing, heard nothing, felt nothing. To all outward sense, he had experienced no more than a waking nightmare—but he knew now why the people of Odder feared to pass the standing stones in the dark, and knew that his own soul had been given a glimpse of the presences that throng hell. They had gone, and earth and air were clear of them, for this present, but they might return.

He went along the wall toward the main entrance. Suddenly a tall figure loomed before him in the fog, and resolved itself into McCoul, standing by the doorway and gazing at him bleakly.

"Ah, Mr. Green," McCoul said. "Lost your way in the fog, eh?"

"I must have done," Gees answered, and, seeing the faint, satiric smile that grew about McCoul's lips, felt sure the man knew that he had not lost his way—knew, possibly, where he had been, and why.

"Won't you come in? I suppose you came to take Mr. Tyrrell back for lunch, since he said he would have to go. He is inside, with my daughter." And McCoul gestured toward the open door and stood back, waiting for Gees to precede him.

“Thank you, I will,” Gees assented, and entered through the mighty wall—it was over a dozen feet in thickness, he saw.

Inside, he saw that the apartment to which he had entered ran the full width of the keep from right to left, but lacked possibly a third of its depth. Remembering the water tank and pump by the doorway at the back, he decided that Shaun Ammon had his quarters and kitchen there, but there appeared to be no communication between the back premises and this great room, in which he could see, as means of ingress, only the door by which he had entered and, in the left-hand front corner as he stood, the beginning of a spiral stairway set in the thickness of the wall. There was a plain, white plaster ceiling a good twenty feet from the floor, which was of new-looking pine boards, unstained and unpolished, but with rugs scattered over it—and, in the vast area of the room, they looked like mere postage stamps. As for the sparse furnishing, Gees decided that everything had been delivered in plain vans, and that in making his selection McCoul had determined on keeping the monthly payments as low as he could with decency. And the uncovered grey stone walls gave the place a grim, chill look.

Yet there was warmth enough; in each end wall was a fireplace, in each a log fire burned, and each had its big wicker basket of sawn logs for replenishing the fires at need. By the one at the left side, not far from the gaping, gloomy staircase entrance, stood Tyrrell and Gyda, clearly defined in the light of a pendent Aladdin lamp, the light of which supplemented such as was admitted through the four arrow-slits, two in the front wall and one at each end. Gees advanced toward the pair, and McCoul followed him, breaking away to put more logs on the fire before which a long, plush-upholstered settee was placed.

“I found Mr. Green outside,” McCoul said, addressing nobody in particular. “It appears that he lost his way in the fog.”

“Not difficult,” Tyrrell observed. “But—Gees, old chap, what’s wrong with you? You look as if you’d seen a ghost.”

“It was nothing,” Gees answered—quite truthfully. “I’d no idea I looked anything different from the ordinary—morning, Miss McCoul.” It was a belated salutation, he felt.

“Good morning.” She stretched out her hand, and he took it and felt her clasp as

something warm, vital, even thrilling. And she smiled at him: she was different, softer, more woman and less mystery, than when he had seen her at dinner at Dowlandsbar. Again she was wearing grey, a plainly-cut, fleecy-looking frock that set off her perfect figure and appeared to emphasize her height. “I suppose you have come to drag Philip away?”

“To make a morning call myself, say,” he suggested. “From what I know of Tyrrell, the man who wants to drag him anywhere ought to turn out with a four-horse team and a crowbar to prize him loose from what he’s holding. You have spacious quarters here, Miss McCoul.”

“And that is about all you can say for them,” she said, and smiled.

“Oh, no!” he dissented. “Think of the historic associations of the place. And you might stumble on the de Boisgeant treasure at any moment—the plunder of the old priory that de Vere couldn’t find.”

“I’m afraid neither my father nor I have been interested in the history of the place,” she said, her smile vanishing.

“Tyrrell, I thought you told me Mr. Mccoul had antiquarian tastes?” Gees accused. “You hear what Miss McCoul is telling me?”

“My interest is in ancient architecture,” McCoul put in, turning from the fire. “Early Gothic, for instance—this keep is no more than a stone box, as you may have noticed. Its occupants—I am not interested in them. They built for use, and ignored symmetry or decoration.”

“But that, now”—Gees nodded at a blurred escutcheon carved in the stone over the fireplace. “There’s decoration, surely—the arms of the de Boisgeants, I take it. Two—yes, two wolves, couchant and regardant, as supporters to a—I don’t know, though. If that thing in the middle were a bit clearer, I should say it was a harp. And if there ever were a motto on that scroll underneath, it has worn away.”

“I have not studied heraldry,” McCoul said, very stiffly.

“Philip has been telling me he is very anxious about his shepherd,” Gyda cut in—Gees had an impression that she was determined to change the subject of conversation. “I do hope nothing has happened to the man. It must be awful,

being lost on the fells in this fog. And those awful dogs that have been killing the sheep—not that they would dare to attack a man, and I understand the shepherd has a gun with him."

"You think they are dogs, then?" Gees asked, gazing full at her.

"Why, of course!" Again she smiled at him. "What else?"

"I believe," Tyrrell put in, "Gees—that is, Green—has a theory about these things, Gyda, and believes they are—"

"Several theories," Gees cut in harshly, and glared at Tyrrell. "For instance, if a couple of beasts of any kind got loose from a menagerie, they could hide among the fells and do damage like this."

"Quite a feasible solution," McCoul remarked approvingly. "And if that is the case, Mr.—er—Green, how do you propose to catch them?"

"By another drive," Gees answered promptly, "such as I understand was organized by the police earlier in the year."

"Ah, possibly," McCoul said, as if he considered the suggestion and would deliver a verdict on it later. "Yes, possibly."

"Meanwhile," Tyrrell remarked, "if we're going back for lunch—" He glanced at his wrist watch, and then at Gees, and did not end it.

Then Gees looked at his watch, and discovered to his amazement that two full hours had passed since he had parted from Tyrrell by the monoliths. He recalled the timeless terror in which he had stood backed against the wall of the keep—it had lasted far longer than he had thought. McCoul touched his arm, and glanced at Tyrrell significantly.

"Shall we make our adieux outside, Mr. Green?" he inquired.

"Why, yes," Gees assented. "Considerate of you to think of it, sir."

They went out. From the corner of his eye, as he passed out from the place, Gees saw Gyda's arms go up and about Tyrrell's neck. Outside, McCoul looked up at the sky, and nodded approvingly.

“The fog is thinning, Mr. Green,” he said, “and I believe I can feel the beginning of a breeze. Do come and see us again while you’re here, won’t you? Though, I understand, you are not staying long.”

“No, not long,” Gees answered, “but we shall meet again.”

McCoul gave him a long, questioning look, but did not put the question into words. And his eyes, Gees felt as he met that gaze, were twin wells of blackness in which dwelt hypnotic power. For awhile they stood, the will of each strained to its utmost, McCoul compelling, and Gees resisting. Then Tyrrell came out, and McCoul relaxed and smiled.

“Yes,” he said, “I think we shall meet again,” and there was in the words a sound as of one sword blade grinding along another. “You will always be welcome, as Mr. Tyrrell’s friend.”

“Thanks so much, Mr. McCoul,” Gees answered. “I shall look forward to our next meeting.”

“And now we’ll go and see about that lunch,” Tyrrell said heartily. “The fog is thinning, obviously, and we may have news of Cottrill when we get back. If so, Mr. McCoul, I shall accept Gyda’s invitation for tea this afternoon. I—er—well, you know, it’s all new.”

“May it never grow old,” McCoul answered. “I shall hope to see you, and hand you over to her care for tea.”

At the inner end of the causeway across the moat, Gees glanced behind him. The fog had certainly thinned, for he could see the towering frontage of the keep as a darkness in the reek, and, before it, a figure that he knew was McCoul’s, though it was but a line against the background of stone.

“May it never grow old,” Tyrrell, beside him, echoed softly. “It can’t—man, she’s wonderful! I never dreamed—”

He lost himself in recollection.

“That steak we had for lunch yesterday was wonderful too,” Gees said. “I hope there’s something as good today.”

“You—you hog!” Tyrrell gasped.

“Aye, hoping there’s good offal in the trough. Step it out, man, or your gong will have gone before we get there.”

Chapter XI FOUND

BY mid-afternoon, when Tyrrell, more anxious than ever now over what might have happened to Cottrill, went out to the front of the house to gaze toward the entrance to the drive, a south-west breeze had driven the fog away, and the rugged landscape was plain to sight in the soft, slight warmth of the late autumn sun. Gees, following his host, saw him gazing toward the tower of Locksborough, and realized that his thoughts were divided between Cottrill and Gyda, fear for the one and longing for the other.

“If only they’d come back!” he said. “She’s expecting me.”

“They are coming back, now,” Gees said.

Tyrrell spun on his heels to face toward the drive entrance. Only one of the three who had set out appeared—Cotton, with a breechloader in the crook of his arm and his dog plodding beside him. And, because of the way he walked, Tyrrell made no move toward him, but stood until, with his message in his eyes before he spoke, Cotton faced him.

“Found?” Tyrrell asked—though he knew. “Speak, man!” There was, in that adjuration, the anger that bespeaks fear.

“Aye, found,” Cotton said. “Him an’ Jimmy, in Valgersby. Up at the top end among the rocks, an’ his throat torn like the sheep. God!” He made a queer gesture with his free hand. “That a man should—”

“Do you mean he’s dead?” Tyrrell’s words were whispered.

“I left Nevern an’ Weelum by the body, while I come to tell of it,” Cotton answered. “Neither’d stay alone, so I come back to tell it.”

“You came back alone?” Gees asked incredulously.

“I fear God—nought else, mister,” Cotton said. “I reckoned”—he addressed Tyrrell again—“maybe the police’d want to see the body where ‘tis lyin’, so I told ‘em not to move it, not to touch it, till I’d seen you an’ heard what you say. But Weelum an’ Nevern’ll never stop in the Cleft after sundown—Weelum’s all

of a tremble wi' fright now. Was when I left 'em there to come an' tell you about it."

Tyrrell glanced at the westerning sun. "Wait," he said, and went within the house. Presently Gees heard the faint "Ting!" of the telephone bell, and then the murmur of Tyrrell's voice.

"Where is this place—Valgersby, Cotton?" he asked.

"Valgersby Cleft, sir—it's more'n three mile from here, that way"—he gestured over the roof of Dowlandsbar—"an' a sort of valley between two ridges, like all of 'em. Only the sides are a bit steep compared wi' most of 'em, an' the top end, where we found him, is sort of walled all round wi' rock. I've heard my old grandfer say, when I was a boy, he could remember when there was a sheep farmer lived there, an' there's the remainders of a house there yet, but it's all part o' Mr. Tyrrell's land, now. Cottrill had a hut there, for the lambin'."

"And being out that way, meant to go to the hut for the night, rather than try to find his way back through the fog," Gees suggested.

"I reckon that'd be it, sir, except—he'd gone up past the hut to the top end, where it's shut in by the rocks. I reckon he found them things there, knew they were there, an' went after 'em. Got one cornered betwixt him an' the rocks, I'd say, because the right barrel of his gun'd been fired—an' then the other one sprung on him from behind. That's how I read the signs of it—an' the stock of the gun is tooth-marked, where one of 'em took hold of it to drag it away from him. All tooth-marked—deep marks, too. Lion's strength in the jaws that did it—a little more, an' they'd ha' broken the wood to pieces."

Tyrrell came out to them. "I've talked to Moore," he said. "He's ringing through to tell Inspector Feather and then coming along with Doctor Markham. He wants the body left where it is till he's talked to Feather, so I'm going to Valgersby without waiting for them. Are you coming with me, Gees?" He gave a glance toward Locksborough as he spoke. "Or perhaps—no, though. I told her—she'll understand."

"What'll I do, Mr. Tyrrell?" Cotton asked. "D'you want me to come?"

"If you'll wait here—not here, but by the gate—for Moore and the doctor, and then come along with them," Tyrrell said. "And whatever Moore says, I'm not

leaving the body out there all night. Perhaps you could help to bring it in, if—will you do that, Cotton?" The final question was an appeal, as if he had no right to ask it.

"Aye, I'd do anything for Cottrill, alive or dead," Cotton said soberly. "I'll wait as you say, sir, an' come along with 'em."

"Thank you," Tyrrell said, almost humbly. "Shall we go, Gees?"

They stayed only to get overcoats and sticks—Gees put his automatic pistol in the pocket of his overcoat—and then set off, Tyrrell making a pace that, Gees knew, would render overcoats superfluous before they reached the Cleft, if he kept it up.

"I blame myself," he said. "And yet, with that fog, what could I do? If others had gone out last night, it might have meant other lives."

"As far as I can see, you could do nothing," Gees assented.

"This alters everything," Tyrrell declared after a silence. "I must sell the flock at once—next week. Nobody—no shepherd would think of taking Cottrill's place, with that danger to face. I must sell."

"Much may happen before next week," Gees pointed out.

"You've done nothing!" Tyrrell retorted fiercely. "No more than Feather has done—except that you've talked about what you may do. And what can you do—what can any man do, against this?"

No reply was possible, Gees felt. He could understand how Tyrrell felt over this tragedy, how he saw no possibility of tracking down the beasts that had killed Cottrill. And Tyrrell was right, of course. No shepherd would risk taking Cottrill's place, to face this danger.

"I want to give you every chance," Tyrrell said in an altered tone. "I haven't altogether lost faith in you, Gees, so stay out your week—longer, if you like. But I don't see that you or any man can do anything. It looks utterly hopeless, to me."

"I'll stay out the week, at least," Gees promised.

*

The valley ran north and south, narrowing at its northern end to a horseshoe-like tract, not more than twenty yards from side to side, shut in by almost perpendicular walls of bare rock some twenty to thirty feet in height, and quite unclimbable. In the point of the shoe a dark, irregular line on the rock marked where a spring oozed and trickled, and there were tufts of moss like green warts on the smooth stone to mark its way. Where the valley widened from the horseshoe stood a rough hut of unmortared stones, roofed by an old tarpaulin that was held down to the walls by big stones laid on its edges, and round this erection the walls of an old-time house rose a foot or less above the short, thick grass. And, between the house and the trickle of water, Nevern and Weelum stood well back from something that had been covered by an overcoat. Near by lay the carcass of the dog Jimmy, its throat a mess of mangled flesh, and a gash behind the shoulders where jaws that had met to crush the animal's backbone had torn away the skin and flesh. Between Jimmy's bared teeth Gees found a few coarse, grizzled hairs: the dog had fought back, evidently, but whatever had killed him had been a thing of far greater strength than any dog.

Then, while they waited for Moore and the doctor, Gees ventured to lift the overcoat and look beneath it, but dropped it again and stood back, sick with horror. Something had set teeth into Cottrill's carotid artery above the shoulder-blade—the clothing was ripped away from the left shoulder—and had torn away the side of his neck. Cottrill's swarthy face, as Gees remembered it, was now ashy grey, and the lips were whitish, leaden-looking. *They* had bled him as they had the sheep, and then, down towards the ribs, had eaten.

Gees staggered towards the rock wall, and was violently sick. He sat down on the grass, and Tyrrell stood over him and looked down.

"They—they didn't touch his face," he said. "Thank God, they didn't touch his face! But—don't look, Tyrrell! Don't look!"

"Don't fear it," Tyrrell answered, shuddering. "Can you-?"

He did not end it, but Gees understood, and got on his feet.

"By the living God, I'll get them!" he said. "Tyrrell—trust me, man! I'll get them, I tell you! It's got to end."

Then, speaking no more, they waited, and a little apart from them Nevern and Weelum waited too. The edge of sunlight crept up the rock on the eastern side of the cleft, foot by foot, and after an interval that no one of the four thought to reckon as time Moore, heavy and slow of movement, and Doctor Markham, a rather shabby, middle-aged little man, came up the valley and joined them. Tyrrell gestured at the overcoat as he nodded a greeting at the doctor.

“There,” he said. “But—you can do nothing. Dead long since.”

“It must be examined, Mr. Tyrrell,” Markham answered gravely.

He went and removed the overcoat to make his examination, and, standing back from him, they saw him start and heard his exclamation of horror. Then he knelt—what he did, none of the four knew—and after what seemed a long time replaced the overcoat, and, rising to his feet, gestured to Moore, who had been standing back with the others, his helmet in his hand. The man went toward him.

“There is no purpose in leaving the body here,” Markham said. “I can tell you—he has been dead more than twelve hours, and there are not four ounces of blood left in the body. The opening of the carotid artery was the cause of death. There is no purpose in leaving the body here and from what I have seen it would not be wise to leave it, unless you care to stay the night and watch over it.”

“God forbid, sir!” Moore exclaimed. “I’d be next, if I did.”

“Perhaps you will arrange, Mr. Tyrrell,” Markham suggested.

“Yes.” Tyrrell looked down the valley, toward the lane, and saw Cotton and his dog approaching. “Nevern—you and Weelum—get a hurdle or something—no, you’ll find planks in that hut, though, to put him on. We’ll take turns at carrying him back—there’s no time to send for a cart before sunset. A wide plank, if you can find it.”

The two went toward the hut, and Cotton approached Tyrrell.

“I stopped to tell my sister he wouldn’t come back, sir—Mrs. Nevern, that is. Are you takin’ him back, sir?”

“Yes, carrying him,” Tyrrell answered somberly.

“I was thinkin’, sir—I’ll take his place, if you like.”

“*What?*” Tyrrell exclaimed, thunderstruck.

“Take his place,” Cotton repeated calmly. “Y’see, sir, Effie here is as good as Jimmy was—better, if anything, wi’ sheep, an’ if I take his place I might stand a chance o’ gettin’ them. To even things up for him—the best man for miles, he was.” There were tears in the man’s eyes as he ended his explanation, chokily.

Tyrrel held out his hand. “Tom, you’re a good man, too,” he said. “But I wouldn’t let you or any man take the risk of night watching, after this. You may have Cottrill’s place, at Cottrill’s pay, but run no risks. I shall blame myself if you do—and suffer by it.”

Nevern, carrying a wide deal plank, came out from the shepherd’s hut, and Weelum followed him. The doctor and Moore helped them to place the body on the plank, and then, Nevern at the head end and Weelum carrying the other, they set off without waiting for any word from Tyrrell, and Moore and Markham went with them. Gees picked up the gun that Cottrill had carried, and saw, near the butt-plate, indentations a quarter-inch and more deep in the polished walnut of the stock. There was, too, a gouge in the under side of the wood where a piece had been bitten out altogether. Breaking the gun, Gees saw a fired shell in the right barrel and an untouched cartridge in the left.

“Well, sir,” Cotton said to Tyrrell, after a long pause in which he watched Gees’ movements, “if so be the grey things are to get me, they’ll get me, whether you take me on or no, for as sure as God made me I’ll haunt these fells till they or I come to an end. If so be I’m to get them, it’ll be so—I shan’t go before my time. An’—you go along, sir, an’ I’ll fold ‘em in Anker’s Glen tonight.”

“You will do nothing of the sort,” Tyrrell declared firmly. “It’s far too late to set about rounding up the flock, and as one of those who found the body you’ll be wanted by Inspector Feather to tell your tale. No. Whatever I lose by it, the sheep stay out, tonight.”

“All right, sir. Just as you say, and I’ll be after ‘em in the mornin’. There may be one or other on its back—I’ll do my best to take his place. An’ poor old Jimmy—I’d like to bury him, sir.”

“Tomorrow,” Tyrrell said. “You’ll come back with us, now.”

They followed the way the bearers had gone down the line of the valley until they reached the lane and saw the more slowly-moving little party going on ahead. Then Gees spoke abruptly.

“Where do you burn the carcasses of the sheep, Tyrrell?”

“Down in the dip the other side of the house,” Tyrrell answered. “There’s a line of trees and brushwood along the stream that goes under the stone bridge, as you may have noticed, and it takes a lot of wood, as well as cans of paraffin. And then we bury what’s left of the bones.”

“Ah! Can you pile me a heap ready for a burning—a big heap?”

“Why, yes, I could have it done,” Tyrrell answered. “Why?”

“Because it may be needed soon—any time, now,” Gees said. “A big pile—half as big again as you’d make for two sheep, say, and fully a dozen cans of paraffin if you have that many about the place.”

“As many as you want,” Tyrrell assured him. “I always keep a big stock for the engine that runs my electric light plant—in winter, we get practically cut off, at times, so I run no risks.”

“Good! A dozen two-gallon cans, and a big pile. I’d like it laid and the paraffin cans put beside it—with a bucket to throw more paraffin on the fire as needed—tonight, if you can manage it.”

“I don’t know—why do you want this done?” Tyrrell demanded.

“Remember what I told you,” Gees said. “If I’m to put an end to this—this hellishness, it’s got to be in my own way, and what I say goes. And that—making the pile ready, is all I shall ask of you.”

“All right, it shall be done,” Tyrrell promised, rather sulkily, “but I wish you were not so damned mysterious about things.”

“I’ve got to be,” Gees told him. “You may see that I have my reason for that, even, later on. If all goes well, not much later on.”

“Twenty-four gallons o’ paraffin,” Cotton remarked abruptly, as Tyrrell did not

speak again. “You’re goin’ to have a mighty fire, mister.”

“I shall need it, I think,” Gees said. “Also, I shall want a word with you later, Cotton. Don’t go back from Dowlandsbar to wherever you’re going before you’ve seen me. Have you got a twelve-bore gun?”

“Aye sir. Most of us round here like a bit o’ rabbitin’.”

“Good! And you’ve got that pair of beauties as well as this I’m carrying, Tyrrell. Four-yes, four will be enough.”

“Oh, damn all this mystery!” Tyrrell broke out harshly. “Why the devil can’t you say plainly what you mean to do, man?”

But Gees, foreseeing all that he hoped to do, was unruffled by the outburst, for he knew that to tell Tyrrell would be to spoil all.

“You promised I should carry out my contract in my own way,” he said. “This *is* my way. Until you think I’ve failed, let me follow it!”

They caught up with the other four and their burden. Constable Moore had relieved Weelum, who now carried the pair of guns. Cotton drew alongside Nevern and touched him on the shoulder.

“Give it over to me, Bill,” he said. “You’ve had about enough, I reckon, an’ he was my friend. Let me take that end.”

They made the exchange, and the little party went on in silence for awhile. Where the lane topped the last ridge before Dowlandsbar, Gees paused for a second to look round the fells. The sun was no more than a half hour above the horizon; bare, treeless ridges, rock-spotted, purpled with heather, lay soaking in the mellow sunset light. A line of rooks straggled across the sky to northward, heading for a clump of firs in the very far distance, and Tyrrell’s sheep dotted the nearer sides of the heights in ones and twos and little groups. From the hollows in which cottages were hidden lines of smoke rose and wavered north-eastward in the faint breeze that brought a tang of the sea, and a light haze began to gather with the approach of night.

“He’s light, so light,” Tom Cotton said softly, as if to himself. “He was never more’n a little man, but he had a heart of gold.”

*

Inspector Feather, in company with a lank, dour-looking, uniformed police sergeant, came out from the shed in which Cottrill's body had been placed at Dowlandsbar, and saw Gees and Tom Cotton waiting outside. Following the two police officers came Tyrrell and Doctor Markham, and the doctor spoke to Tyrrell as they emerged.

"I should like to wash my hands, Mr. Tyrrell," he said.

"Why, certainly, doctor," Tyrrell answered, and led on toward the house. But, when Feather and the sergeant would have followed them, Gees held up a beckoning finger, and they paused.

"What do you make of it, Inspector?" Gees asked, accenting the first pronoun as if he anticipated an opinion of value.

"Make of it?" the inspector snapped. "What can I make of it? You said, when I saw you before, you knew something of police work, so I expect you know this means my resignation. Six months of sheep-worrying might pass, but with a man killed—well! I'm finished."

"Because you can't get what's doing it?" Gees suggested. "No, stay here, Cotton"—as Tom turned away—"I want you too."

"*You* want?" Feather demanded sharply. "What the-?"

"Inspector," Gees said in the pause, "if you caught these things, put an end to it, you wouldn't have to resign, would you?"

"If!" Feather echoed bitterly. "What can I do? I've tried everything I know. A couple of regiments of soldiers to comb all this country—for a month on end, and *then* it's began again! What can I do?"

"I'll forfeit five hundred pounds to any charity you like to name, or to you personally if you like, if those two things are alive at the end of another fortnight," Gees said. "That is, if you'll put yourself under my orders, and unless they're charged with murder and held for trial—which is next to impossible. Is it a bargain?"

“You—charged with murder—dogs?” Feather gasped in semi-stupefaction. “Here—five hundred pounds—what are you talking about?”

“Saving your resignation, if you do as I tell you,” Gees answered.

“Well, but what—who are you, anyhow?” Feather demanded.

“Remember the Kestwell case?” Gees asked in reply.

The inspector nodded. “There’s no police officer in all England who doesn’t,” he said. “A proper cause celebre, that.”

“Well, I’m Gees.”

“Oh, my God!” Feather exclaimed. “And you want me to—”

He broke off, staring, and shook his head. “Gees!” he murmured.

“I want two good men, and absolute secrecy,” Gees told him calmly. “That is, in addition to this very good man—you, Tom Cotton. Four of us, with our hearts in it—and good shots, too. We’ve got to be good shots, and bag our game without reloading. To save you from resigning, Inspector—will you follow my lead, and get these things?”

“Gladly, so long as you don’t go outside the law,” Feather promised.

“Right! I suppose you can handle a twelve-bore breechloader, eh?”

“As well as the next man. So can Rapkin, here—Sergeant Rapkin, Mr. Gees—er—Mr. Green, isn’t it? This business has got me down.”

“Green—Gees, anything you like, as long as you play in with me. You’ve got to lose a few nights’ sleep, watching for them—”

“Oh, damn it, that’s been done for six months, now!” Feather interrupted. “If that’s all you can do, we’ve done it already.”

“Wait, man!” Gees urged gently. “Watching in a certain place. Supposing I know where these things hide, and we wait for them there—wait to catch them coming out or going in? I know, I tell you.”

“Yes, but how do you know?” the inspector asked dubiously.

“That’s my business. Resign if you like, of course. But I’ll put up five hundred pounds, and put the check into anyone’s hands you like to appoint—made payable to you, in the event of failure.”

“Well, I’m damned,” Feather said rather feebly.

“Not yet,” Gees assured him. “Come under my orders—do as I tell you, and you won’t be—that is, you won’t have to resign through failing to catch these things. Are you game to try it?”

“Yes, I will,” Feather answered decidedly. “And for your fourth man—Sergeant Rapkin here. A better shot than I am, if anything.”

“Glad to meet you, Sergeant,” Gees said to the man. “Now, do either of you know anything about Locksborough?” He nodded towards the castle.

“You don’t mean—these silly rumors about Mr. McCoul?” Feather asked incredulously. “Because if you’re after him, I’ll have nothing—”

“I don’t want you to meet McCoul—I don’t want you to have anything to do with McCoul,” Gees interrupted. “Beast, not men, we’re after.”

“But—you said Locksborough,” Feather said doubtfully.

“Oh, *will* you do as I tell you?” Gees broke out, with a momentary gust of impatience. “Locksborough isn’t McCoul, man!”

“It’s damned near him, though,” Feather pointed out. “Well, what do you want us to do? Go there? If so, when? And what for?”

“There is a moat round Locksborough,” Gees said quietly. “There are two ways of crossing it, one at the front, and one at the back. Some night while we watch—it may be tonight, those things will come out and go back in by one of those two ways. Cotton and I will watch all night in front, and you and Sergeant Rapkin will watch the back way—I’ll post you, and come and tell you when to leave your posts, every night that we have to keep watch. Take it or leave it.”

Inspector Feather gazed towards the house, and saw the doctor standing on the

doorstep, apparently waiting to speak to him.

“What do you think of it, Sergeant?” he asked.

“Well, if the gentleman knows what he’s talking about—” the Sergeant said noncommittally, and left it at that. “All right!” Feather made up his mind. “I’ll try it, Mr. Green, on the strength of what you did in the Kestwell case. Half a minute while I have a word with Doctor Markham, and then I’ll come back. You’d better come along with me, Sergeant—he wants to know about the inquest.”

They went off, and Gees turned to Cotton. “Are you in on this, Tom?” he asked.

“Up to the neck, Sir,” Cotton answered. “If so be as reckon you know, I’ll trust you. An’ since it’s Locksborogh—” he broke off and gazed toward the frowning outlined as it was against the last of the sunset. “Aye, I felt it was there, all the time,” he ended.

“I think,” Gees remarked, as he saw Feather and the sergeant returning, “you’re the surest of us all, Tom. Don’t go—listen.”

They waited, and the two police officers faced Gees again.

“Well?” he asked. “Do I put up the five hundred as proof of my belief in myself. I’ll write the check now, you like.”

“No, Sir,” Feather said. “Here’s two men witnesses to what you’ve said about it, and if I counted you one who’d go back on his word I’d have nothing to do with you. It’s because I believe you won’t have to write the check that I’ll stand in with you. And now, what?”

“Is there a private room at the *Royal George?*” Gees inquired.

“There’s a little snuggery round the back,” the inspector admitted.

“Right. Now see Mr. Tyrrell, tell him you want to a couple of guns, one for yourself and one for the sergeant, and ten rounds apiece loaded with number three. I’ll meet you in that snuggery at half-past nine tonight, and till then, say nothing.”

“You can trust me for that,” Feather said decidedly.

“Yes, I thought I could. Tom, can you be here at nine tonight?”

“Just when you say, sir,” Cotton answered unhesitatingly.

“Nine it is, then, and we’ll go together. Mind, Inspector, it may be tonight, or six or ten nights hence. But if you have patience, the thing I’m waiting for will happen—and then you won’t have to resign. I’m as sure of it as I am of death or an income tax form.”

“Nine-thirty at the *George*, Sir,” the inspector answered. “It’s irregular, and all that, but so’s the whole business from start to finish. And I believe you know what you’re talking about.”

Chapter XII VAIN VIGIL

“WE will have a look in the bar, first,” Gees suggested. “It’s not quite half-past nine, and I’d like to get the feeling of the meeting.”

“Right you are, sir,” Tom Cotton assented, and led way toward the main entrance of the *Royal George*. Gees spared a thought for Tyrrell, glooming at home alone. He had had an idea of accompanying Gees as far as the gateway of the castle, with a view to calling Gyda, but, when Gees had stated that he might stay at the vicarage talking to Amber up to any hour, had decided not to risk it. That, as Gees knew, would be the decision of everyone in the district, as soon as the news of Cottrill’s death got about: nobody would venture out alone after dark, which, for Gees, simplified matters to some extent.

He followed Cotton into the bar, and saw twice as many men there as when he had visited the place with Cottrill. As he and Cotton went up to the counter, he heard buzz of talk, and Cottrill’s name separated itself from the general gabble in more than one place. The news got round—possibly Constable Moore had been talking. But there it was, and there was no other subject for discussion, for that night.

“Pints, Tom, eh?” Gees suggested.

“Pints it is, sir,” Tom assented, as Querrett nodded a genial welcome at them both before turning to fill another order.

He returned, and Gees requested two pints. Querrett grinned at him.

“Thankye, sir. Takin’ it to Sussex with you?”

“Inside,” Gees answered. “I’d hate to let beer like yours go flat.”

“Eh, the man from Sussex!” It was Ben Latimer’s voice. “Howde do, mister? Have they started clampin’ up their taters down yure way yet?”

“I really couldn’t say, Mr. Latimer,” Gees answered. “I hope to be going back in a day or two, and I’ll write and let you know, if you like. Meanwhile, what do you say to a pint—beer, not taters?”

“Mister, that’s a fine idea,” Ben assented gravely. “An’ to think that the last time you come in heer, ‘twas wi’ poor Cottrill! Ah, a good man if ever there was one! Straight as an ash-plant, he was.”

Gees turned to the bar to order another pint, and took the two that Querrett had already filled, handing one to Cotton and taking the other to Ben. Returning to get his own and pay, he saw Harold Amber enter, and saw, too, that the lad checked momentarily at sight of him, and then came on up to the bar in a swaggering, defiant sort of way. Then, with his own tankard in his hand, Gees turned to Ben.

“What was that you said?” he asked.

“Only’t he oughter come in, when the fog dropped down, mister,” Ben said. “Whether ‘twas the old dead, or them”—he splashed some part of his drink on the floor as he spoke the accented word—“he oughter come in. You knew him—he brought you heer, an’ stood for you.

“Aye, he did,” Gees assented. “But what do you think—what, Ben?”

“Mister”—the old man looked up at him—“three more year, an’ I make my threescore an’ ten. From a child I’ve’ heard tales, fairy tales like Jack an’ the beanstalk, an’ put no more to ‘em than a grown man should. I’ve believed what I’ve seen, the good grass on the earth, an’ trees, an’ flowers bloomin’, an’ the cattle on a thousand hills, as the Book says—an’ sheep too. An’ men friendly an’ not afraid, men like Cottrill doin’ their jobs an’ payin’ no heed to fairy tales, no more than I did. An’ then this—a thing no mortal man can believe in daylight—things that know as much as men, an’ act like men, except that men don’t drink blood. Fairy tales, people of the hills, Men of Peace,” and again he splashed drink on the floor with the words, “an’ the tales that made us shiver when we were little children are true! True, mister! There’s no man heer’ll go home alone tonight. We know. Hear ‘em talk—listen to any of ‘em. The things that do this’ve tasted human blood, an’ we know. The old dead, or *them*.” And again, with the last word, he spilled beer on the floor. “Heer’s to you, mister,” he ended, and, lifting the tankard, drank of its depleted contents.

“Mr. Green?” Harold Amber stood beside Gees. “Can I have a word with you? Sorry to interrupt, and all that, but—well, you know.”

“I’m afraid I don’t,” Gees said. “Excuse me, Mr. Latimer—just a moment.

Well?” He faced Harold. “What is it?”

“Must you show me up in front of my father?” Harold asked bitterly.

“Well, I don’t know,” Gees said, thoughtfully. “For a start, could I? You’re rather a blot, aren’t you? Show you up—”

He caught the fist raised to strike him, twisted the youngster’s arm, and Harold moaned feebly with the pain of it. So quietly was the altercation conducted that nobody saw enough to interfere.

“Don’t,” Gees warned, quietly. “Don’t be a bigger fool than you are now, and never tackle a full-grown man till you’re sure he’s drunker than you are, Harold Amber. And before you get drunk on this very good beer, understand that there isn’t a yokel in this bar that doesn’t despise you as a chap that can’t carry his drink—I saw that, the last time I was in here. I’m not going to do sob-stuff over your mother and father and what your damned silliness means to them, but just telling you—you’re letting yourself down. When a village like Odder despises you, you must be a blot. You are a blot—turn yourself round and be a man.”

He released Harold’s wrist, then, and the boy rubbed his shoulder wincingly, his face dull red with anger. But he made no reply, and after a second or two Gees turned and saw Ben Latimer nod at him approvingly. Evidently the old man had heard some part of Gees’ admonition.

“Do him a power o’ good, that will, when he’s had time to think it over,” he said. “Us chaps can’t talk to him like that, more’s the pity, but he can’t reckon he’s any cut above you. Mister, they’re sayin’ you come here after them things that killed poor Cottrill.” He made more than half a question of the final statement.

Gees shook his head. “It’s a police business, now,” he answered.

“Aye, I s’pose it is,” Ben assented regretfully. “But ‘tis no use tellin’ Jack Moore or that inspector chap what we’re beginnin’ to know is true—what we do know is true! Tell ‘em to look for what that black-eyed devil’s got hid under Locksborough, an’ they’d call ye silly.”

“Why, what has he got hidden there?” Gees seated himself on the bench beside the old man, that their talk might not be overheard.

“Keeps ‘em down there, mister,” Ben accused. “Things he’s raised by his black arts, an’ lets ‘em out to go ravenin’. Unholy things, raised from their graves for his own use, whatever that may be. Else, why did he go to live at a place like that? No ordinary man’d go to live at a place where you can feel the old dead round you, even in daylight.”

Gees shook his head. “If he kept things like these, that man Ammon wouldn’t stay,” he dissented. “You saw him in here the other night.”

“Ammon?” Ben echoed skeptically. “He’s no more’n a half-wit. Moreover, mister, I had the doin’ o’ that place for the McCouls—put in two floors an’ roofed it in, an’ did the partitionin’ of it. An’ Ammon is shut off so he can’t tell what’s goin’ on. The entrance to the underpart is by a stairway at the front corner o’ the ground floor, an’ Ammon’s two rooms at the back are altogether cut off from the big front room where the two fireplaces are. To get in there, he’s got to go up a little staircase to the first floor, an’ then come down into that big front room, an’ McCoul’s only got to bolt the door at the top o’ the stairs on the first floor to keep Ammon from knowin’ anything o’ what goes on, either in that big room or in the dungeons under.”

Again Gees shook his head. “What goes on, then?” he asked.

“How should I know, mister? I never studied black magic, nor seen it worked. But you mark my words, it’ll be well to keep childern indoors after dark, round here. Else, they’ll begin to disappear as ‘tis said they did in the far-back days, when there was black magic goin’ on at Locksborough. As there is now, wi’ Diarmid McCoul makin’ it.”

“*What* name did you say?” Gees asked, startled.

“Why, Diarmid McCoul—_his_ name,” Ben answered. “‘Twas on the agreement I had for my work there, an’ on the check he sent me too late to save my wife. She’d be alive today, but for him—rot his soul!”

For a minute or more Gees sat silent, recalling the vicar’s story of the siege of Locksborough and the end of the de Boisgeants. Then, realizing that Ben in his bitterness was capable of accusing McCoul of anything, he glanced at his watch and rose to his feet—by this time Inspector Feather would be wondering what had become of him.

“Well, I must go, Mr. Latimer,” he said. “I shall see you again, I hope, and talk about more pleasant things.”

“Aye, I’m here most nights,” Ben said. “But ‘tis a pity you’re givin’ up lookin’ for them things. Maybe as you say ‘tis a police job, now, but police ways ain’t no use, here. They don’t believe.”

Gees bade him good night, and went to the door, where Tom Cotton already stood waiting for him. They emerged from the place.

“Ten minutes to ten, mister,” Tom said reprovingly.

“I know,” Gees answered. “Latimer was interesting. Which way now?”

“Just here,” Tom said, indicating a door near the corner of the inn frontage. “We might ha’ gone through by that door at the end o’ the bar, but this way’s better, so we’re not seen. Aye, Ben’ll always talk against McCoul an’ his daughter, if he’s half a chance, an’ no wonder, either, the way he was kep’ waitin’ for his money while his wife died.”

He opened the door, and they entered a small room, lighted by an ordinary paraffin lamp standing on a red cloth-covered centre table. Inspector Feather and Sergeant Rapkin, both in heavy, uniform overcoats, stood side by side on the hearthrug, and four double-barreled breech loading guns leaned against the wall opposite them.

“You’re rather late, Mr. Green,” the inspector remarked coldly.

“I am,” Gees agreed, “but I haven’t wasted the time.”

“And now what?” Feather asked. “You’re in charge, I suppose.”

“If I’m not, you may as well go back and write out that resignation of yours,” Gees answered. “I want my instructions carried out implicitly, perfectly. All three of you must understand and agree to that.”

“It is understood,” Feather told him, very coldly indeed, and Tom Cotton nodded and murmured some form of indistinct assent—but Gees knew it was genuine enough. He gestured at the guns by the wall.

“One each, as arranged,” he said. “Load them in here, and slip the safety catches off before we pass the standing stones on our way to Locksborough—and then keep your fingers off the triggers till it’s time to shoot. Further to that, no word is to be spoken by any one of you, once we get outside this room, and as far as possible you are to make no sound. Now, Inspector—and you too, Sergeant—do you know anything about Locksborough? Could you find your way about there?”

Both men shook their heads, and waited for him to speak again.

“No, I thought not. Well, there’s a moat all round the place, dry, now, but with sides as good as unclimbable, except in two places. One is a causeway filled in to make a road to the front of the keep, and the other is a narrow, diagonal path running down and up the sides of the moat at the back. Your post, Inspector, and yours, Sergeant, is where that path comes up the outer side of the moat, or rather, a few yards back from where it comes up, so that you get anything coming up that path between you and the sky—and if you get one of them, I think Tom here and I will get the other, unless you can bag both. There is a little mound set back from the edge of the moat, and there you’ll lie, after I’ve posted you, either till we get them or till I come from behind—from behind, mind, for you’re to shoot anything that shows in front—to tell you the watch is over for tonight.”

“Do you mean, if a man shows up against the sky, you want us to fire at him?” Feather asked incredulously. “Because, if so—”

“I’ll stake my own life no man will show up,” Gees interrupted. “That path leads nowhere, except to grass land and the valley where the stream runs between the castle grounds and Dowlandsbar, and it would be dangerous in the dark even for a man who knows it. All you’ll see, if you see anything, will be four-legged things. Is it all clear?”

“Yes, except that neither of us will shoot until we’re sure whatever shows up *is* four-legged,” Feather answered. “I’ll detain a man, if you think fit, since I’m following your instructions, but I won’t shoot him.”

“That’s agreed—detain him by all means,” Gees said. “Finally, no word spoken, no smoking, and no sound of any kind. Agreed?”

“Quite,” Feather assured him. “Though whether this is any use—”

“Back out if you like,” Gees said in the pause.

“No, I won’t back out. For six months, now, I’ve been badgered over this business, and officially reprimanded twice for not catching the things, whatever they are. After the inquest tomorrow it won’t stop at a reprimand unless I can show results, and I’ve got a wife and family to think about. We’ll try your way, and see what happens.”

“Tonight, and for several nights, nothing may happen,” Gees warned him. “All I feel sure about is that they will come out eventually.”

“Then why not a search warrant, at once?” Feather inquired.

“Could you get one?” Gees asked in reply. “You have no evidence of any sort to offer, and I certainly wouldn’t come forward to give you any, because I know perfectly well that a search on a warrant, however thorough you might make it, would be utterly useless.”

“Then I suppose we’ve got to do as you say,” Feather responded after a long pause. “But aren’t we rather late about starting?”

“You may leave that to me. Now, take a gun apiece and load it, and we’ll start—you and the sergeant will follow us two. And mind, once outside here, no word is to be spoken by any one of us. I’ll point you and the sergeant to your places, and then Tom and I will take ours.”

He took a gun and loaded it from the cartridges already in his pocket, and the other three followed suit. Then they went out and, turning away from the lighted entrance, went up and out from the village. There was no soul in sight: tonight, and for many nights to come, Gees felt certain, nobody would remain abroad in Odder: the frequenters of the *Royal George* would come and go only in pairs or more, and would both come and go straight from and to their homes.

With the coming of night, the south-west breeze that had driven away the fog had strengthened. Clouds obscured the sky, and the night was dark as any Gees had known, though clear; the air was soft, threatful of rain. There would be little hardship, clad as they were, in their watch, unless the rain came down before dawn. Silently they came to the standing stones and passed between them, and now Gees, gesturing to Cotton to fall behind him, took the lead, the other three following in single file. Then the raised embankment of the moat’s outer edge

showed dimly, while beyond it two lines of light in the lower wall of the keep showed that the ground floor was occupied. Gees led on, swerving off before he reached the causeway to circle the moat on its outer side.

Peering downward, he found the point where the diagonal path emerged at the back. There, waiting till the other three grouped round him in a little hollow, he took Feather by the sleeve and led him to his post, gesturing him to lie down, and then returning to place the sergeant beside him. From where they lay, the entrance to the path showed as a V-shaped cut in the embankment, clear of the keep and outlined against the night sky. He pointed toward it, kneeling beside Feather, and won a nod in response. Then he rose and went back to where Tom Cotton waited, and, gesturing to Tom to follow, led the way to the front of the keep again, noting, as he passed, the lighted arrow-slit in the side wall, corresponding to the two strips of light in front.

The pair of them crossed over the grassgrown causeway. At its inner end, a score yards or so distant from the front of the keep, were the moss-grown remains of an outer fortification that had once housed the drawbridge windlass, in all probability. Silently, so faced that they commanded both the entrance to the keep and the causeway, the two lay down and began their watch, side by side in a niche of the ruined wall, which, here, rose little more than a foot from the ground level, and so afforded concealment for their bodies but still gave them full range of view, both toward the causeway and the main entrance to the keep. From the clock in Odder church tower eleven strokes sounded to them faintly, not long after they had lain down with guns ready.

A long age went by. The night-breeze moaned eerily over and about the two watchers, and once it seemed to Gees that he heard faint voices in it, high up, as if someone were speaking and some other answering at the very top of the old keep—or even as if the sounds came from the air itself, and they who spoke floated independently of any support. It may have been fancy, he knew, but he heard Tom Cotton beside him breathe sharply, suddenly, as if he too heard or fancied the sounds. Then came a faint click at which both tensed to full watchfulness. Gees saw the doorway as an oblong of faint light that did not ray outward, and then saw McCoul’s tall figure emerge and stand outlined against the light. A minute or less passed, and Gyda appeared beside her father, who stood out from the light and became a mere shadow against the wall as he made way for her.

“He will not come, now,” they heard her say.

“No,” McCoul’s voice answered. “I could have told you that an hour ago. And if he had, he would have brought Green with him.”

Gyda laughed, the tinkling laugh that reminded Gees of metal tapping on glass. He could see the shining whiteness of her head in the faint light from the doorway, and all the line of her slender figure.

“You might have entertained him,” she said.

“Pah!” McCoul exclaimed impatiently. “But he will not come tonight, your Philip. It is far too late, now.”

“Father!” Gees heard, and knew it was no imagining of his, a sudden eagerness in her voice as she spoke the word.

“No,” McCoul said, as if it were a forbidding. “Not tonight.”

He returned through the doorway. A minute or more the girl stood before it, and then she followed him, and the door was closed. Not only closed, for Gees heard the sharp clack of bolts being shot into their sockets. He recollected them, one at the top and one at the bottom of the door, heavy iron bolts, level with equally heavy hinges.

Watching, he saw a third arrow-slit illuminated in the wall, some twenty feet or more above the first two, and decided that either McCoul or Gyda had gone up from the ground floor—it was unlikely that Shaun Ammon was responsible for the light, at this late hour. Midnight struck from Odder church tower, and, minutes later, the two lower lines of light in the wall of the keep vanished, and a second slit above became illuminated. The McCouls were going to bed, apparently.

First one, and then the other, of this second pair of lights was extinguished after another long interval. Then, with a touch on Cotton’s shoulder, Gees rose to his feet, and Tom rose too.

Together they went round to where Gees had posted the two police officers, and Gees signaled to them to get up. The four went single file back to the lane, and, out beyond the monoliths, Gees spoke.

“Over for tonight,” he said, keeping his voice down almost to a whisper. “It may mean many nights of watching, Inspector.”

“I’ll risk a few more,” Feather answered, “if the weather keeps as it is now. Though, to tell the truth, I’m not in love with it. With your idea, I mean. You seem pretty sure, I know.”

“Five hundred pounds sure, as I told you,” Gees said. “Meanwhile, where do I find you tomorrow, to make any necessary arrangements?”

“The inquest will be at the *George* at three o’clock, and I shall be there. Moore is putting up Rapkin for the night, and I’m staying at the *George*. What about these guns—are you taking them?”

“No—you’d better take charge of all four of them, if you will. I’ve something else in my pocket—and a police permit to carry it.”

They separated, Cotton and Gees going toward Dowlandsbar,—Cotton had arranged to lodge with the Neverns, as Cottrill had done before him—and the two police officers taking the opposite direction. Late though it was after Gees had parted from Cotton, he found the front door of Dowlandsbar unlocked and Tyrrell seated before the fire in the hall. Tyrrell looked round at him rather unamiably as he entered.

“Had a good evening?” he asked. “What’s that on your coat?”

Gees looked down. The front of the coat was green stained from pressing against the ruins of the gatehouse at Locksborough.

“It’s as dark as a stack of black cats, and I bumped against something,” he answered. “It’ll brush off—looks like that stuff that you get on old dead branches, which is what it is, probably. Yes, I had quite a good time, thanks, and now”—he yawned behind his hand—“I think a spot of ear-pounding is indicated. You didn’t sit up for me, did you? I mean, I’m sorry if I kept you up.”

“Not in the least,” Tyrrell assured him, more cordially. “If I’d felt like going to bed, I’d have gone.”

“Well”—Gees turned toward the staircase—“I feel like going to bed, and I’m going. Good night, mine host.”

Chapter XIII A SURVEY

LOW-HANGING clouds were chasing swiftly across the sky when Gees looked out from his window the next morning: there had been a little rain in the night, as the state of the drive in front of the house showed, but now it had ceased, though still, from the direction in which the clouds were driving, the wind was in the south-west—the rainy quarter. As he shaved Gees queried whether the police inspector would consent to a night's watching in the rain: to his practical, unimaginative mind, the vigil they had already kept and its lack of any result was evidence of the slenderness of their chance of saving him from resigning, and with him, as with Tyrrell, Gees was and knew himself at a disadvantage in that he could not tell of what he believed. If he did anything of the sort, Tyrrell would turn him out of the house instantly, and Inspector Feather would decline to have anything more to do with him: he had to keep his plans and his belief as well from Tyrrell's knowledge, and make use of Feather and his sergeant without disclosing the actual nature of that use.

By the time he and Tyrrell had finished breakfast—a silent meal, for Tyrrell seemed very depressed—the sun had begun to break through the clouds, and when, with a cigarette apiece, they went out to the front of the house, shadow and sunlight were chasing each other across the grassy slopes between them and the square tower of Locksborough. For a little while Tyrrell stood gazing at the old keep.

"I want to go and see—see Gyda," he said, with an odd kind of constraint for such a remark. "Would you care to walk over with me?"

"Why, certainly, if you don't think I should be in the way," Gees answered. "Now, or have you things to do before you start?"

"Now—or practically now," Tyrrell said. "I've been round my men, and had a talk with Cotton—told him he can fold the sheep tonight if he prefers to do so, but is not to stop out on watch over them—before you came down. It's not too early to go—there." He nodded toward the castle and made half a question of the statement.

"No, I should think not," Gees agreed, but rather dubiously.

“Gees”—Tyrrell faced him with the air of a man who drives himself to put the question—“what do you think of her—Gyda?”

“I—well, I’ve seen practically nothing of her,” Gees answered, rather embarrassed by the question. “Very unusual—unusually attractive, I mean. Not a bit ordinary. But my opinion doesn’t matter.”

“I had an impression that you disliked her,” Tyrrell said.

“I? My dear chap, why on earth should I dislike her? I know what it is, you’re all strung up over yesterday’s tragedy—and you were badly strung up before it happened, too. You’re imagining all sorts of things, with no foundation whatever. A very charming girl, and very attractive, in her own way. And I can’t say fairer than that.”

“You don’t sound—oh, I don’t know what it is!” Tyrrell exclaimed impatiently. “But you see, all Odder’s cold-shouldering them, her and her father, because Amber must go and poke his nose into something that was not his concern, and McCoul very rightly put him in his place over it. The result is the same as if McCoul had been in the wrong—Amber’s been here thirty years, more or less, and nobody must go against him. McCoul is a stranger, and they take years to accept strangers, here. I know, when I marry Gyda, I’ve got to fight the whole crowd of them to get recognition for her, to get her accepted as belonging here.”

“Umm’m! Is it worth while?” Gees asked incautiously.

“Is it—do you mean is *she* worth while?” Tyrrell demanded sharply, “because, if you do, you’re insulting my future wife, and the sweetest girl, and best, too, I’ve ever met—”

“Oh, don’t be so damned silly!” Gees interrupted. “You spoke of selling out the sheep and getting out from here, and I merely questioned whether it wouldn’t be better to do that than try to overcome local prejudice, which I know can be a very fearsome thing. And from what I’ve seen of this place so far, ranging yourself in opposition to Amber is like butting your head against a brick wall. It would be better for you, and better for Gyda Tyrrell, to start new elsewhere.”

“For her, yes, perhaps,” Tyrrell said, his transient wrath all evaporated, “but for me—the Reformation hadn’t begun when a Tyrrell first lived at Dowlandsbar, and it would be an uprooting, a hard thing.”

“I expect she will make the decision for you,” Gees remarked after a pause. “They generally do, the dear things! You’ll be wax, as usual in such cases, and think you’re deciding everything yourself, too.”

“Well, I shall have to sell the flock,” Tyrrell said decidedly. “After this—Cottrill, I mean—I’ll have no more men on night watching, even if any of them would do it. I believe Tom Cotton would, if I’d let him, but I won’t. And so, the sheep must go, worse luck.”

“When?” Gees asked after another pause.

“I’ll go over to Carlisle and arrange it early next week. It’s a big flock, and I don’t want to lose money by being too hasty over it.”

“In other words, you’ve quite lost faith in me?” Gees suggested.

“While it was only sheep,” Tyrrell answered, “I was prepared to carry on and give you your chance. Now a man has been killed, I’m not sure if I have any right to let you take risks over it. In any case, I won’t. Make what inquiries you like, and stay as long as you like to make them, but at night, the sheep take their chance. You don’t.”

“Well, they’re your sheep,” Gees observed calmly. “But while I’m here, one thing I want to ask you. Neither with the McCouls, nor with anyone else, do I wish you to say one word as to what I am doing or where I spend my time. The fact that I was not here with you last night, for instance—I don’t want that known, anywhere. I don’t want anything at all known about me. Can you remember that?”

“Yes. Short of actual lying, I can promise it,” Tyrrell answered. “By the way, that brushwood pile you asked me to have made. It’s down there”—he gestured toward the stream in the valley before them, “but you didn’t find a use for it last night, after all.”

“I might, before I go,” Gees said. “I suppose it’ll stay there?”

“Till it’s wanted for another pair of sheep, as it’s certain to be before I can get rid of them. Those things will come back.”

He turned toward the house abruptly. “Let’s go,” he said. “I shall have to attend

that inquest this afternoon, so it won't be possible to see her then. And—you're a good chap, Gees, if you weren't so infernally secretive over something you've found out. I know there is something, and you're holding it back from me. What is it?"

Again he faced about as he put the question. Gees shook his head.

"I know nothing," he said. "No more than you know, when it comes down to stark facts. My conclusions may be wrong—I've seen no more than you've seen, and as for what actually killed your sheep and their shepherd, frankly, I don't know. So I can't tell you."

"Sell out here—it's no use staying—take her right away from the place"—Tyrrell thought aloud. "Come on—let's go."

They crossed the causeway in mid-morning, and Gyda came out from the keep to meet them, her shining, snow-white hair uncovered, and a smile of welcome in her strange eyes as she gave both her hands to Tyrrell and spared Gees a momentary nod of greeting, and no more.

"Oh, I am so glad to see you!" she exclaimed. "This terrible news about the shepherd, Philip—is it really true he was killed?"

"Quite," Tyrrell answered, still holding her hands. "The inquest is to be this afternoon, so I came over this morning to see you. I shall have to attend it, so—well, here I am."

"How did you hear of Cottrill's death, Miss McCoul?" Gees asked.

"Why, Shaun told me," she answered, and, withdrawing her hands from Tyrrell's, gazed full at him. "Shaun—our cook and general servant. The boy from the store brought up some goods for us this morning, and he told Shaun, who couldn't keep a thing like that to himself. Philip, how terrible for you! What will you do about it?"

"Sell the sheep, dear," Tyrrell answered. "I wanted to talk to you about it—about a good many things. Later, of course."

McCoul came out and joined them, coatless, and with his shirt-sleeves rolled up from his skinny, sinewy arms. Seen thus, he appeared leaner and taller than ever,

and nodded down at both his visitors.

“Morning, gentlemen,” he said. “I’ve been sawing logs as a means of exercise—our fireplaces eat up a good deal of wood, and I make it one of my amusements. Philip, I see you’re occupied. Mr. Green, can I offer you anything? Some mid-morning refreshment, now?”

“Too early, thanks,” Gees answered. The man was altogether too effusive, he felt, though, possibly, he wanted to leave Tyrrell and his daughter alone, and chose this way of doing it.

“Well, come and tell me what you’re doing about this latest tragedy,” he suggested. “Something will have to be done now, of course.”

“It becomes a police affair,” Gees answered, and saw Gyda, with her hand on Tyrrell’s arm, begin to draw him apart. “When human life is in danger, amateurs like myself must walk carefully.”

“Ah! Yes!” McCoul nodded gravely. “Human life—yes. Then”—he began to walk toward the entrance, and Gees followed, leaving the other two to themselves—“you mean you withdraw altogether?”

“I shall not stay here much longer,” Gees answered evasively. “I like Tyrrell, and he’s not anxious for me to go for a day or two.”

“No, poor fellow,” McCoul assented. “Glad of a congenial spirit to divert his thoughts. Yes. I wonder—would you care to see over the castle, Mr. Green? That is, the keep—the rest of it, as you can see, is nothing but grassgrown bits of wall. I conclude it was easier to take stone from here than to quarry it for more modern dwellings.”

“I’d very much like to see over it,” Gees answered. He glanced behind him, and saw Tyrrell and Gyda crossing the causeway to its outer end. The girl had her hand on Tyrrell’s arm, and was gazing up at him as they walked. McCoul too paused to look back.

“Yes, they’re fully occupied in each other, and we shall be doing them a kindness by effacing ourselves,” he said. “Well, consider me the custodian of this ruin, Mr. Green, and present me with sixpence if you think my patter deserves it. Observe these walls, fifteen feet thick at ground level, and twelve at

the top. Built in the days of King Stephen, and today the cement between the stones is as hard as the stones themselves. Imperishable, almost, walls like these."

"Most of these structures erected before the Black Death are," Gees observed. "They had the secret of enduring cement, then."

"Ah! I see you are one of the initiate," McCoul said heartily. "It is so. When the plague fell on England, the master craftsmen were swept off so suddenly that they had no chance to impart their secrets to others, and so one may almost date a building by the quality of its cement. That is, having regard to the nature of the architecture. You cannot confuse the Norman arch with the later Gothic, and all this keep is pure Norman, though late. They built for eternity, not for time. Now see this!" They had reached the doorway, and McCoul pointed to two deep grooves just within it. "The portcullis-iron, and with projecting spikes, when it existed. Above, the slit through which was let down. And in the thickness of the wall a tiny chamber which contained the windlass. That chamber is empty now. Iron was valuable in the early days, and no trace of the mechanism is left. But we will go up into the chamber, if you wish, and you can see where the windlass stood."

"I don't think we will, thanks," Gees said, and, meeting McCoul's gaze, felt that there was a challenge in it. He began to understand that his host had seized this opportunity of proving—what? Looking back before entering the thickness of the doorway, he saw Tyrrell and Gyda making the outer circuit of the moat, and now Tyrrell's arm was round the girl's waist: they walked as lovers walk.

"Then what would you wish to see?" McCoul asked. "There is a fine view from the top, or there are the old dungeons?"

"Anything you care to show me," Gees answered, emerging from the thickness of the wall into the long apartment he had already seen. "I think—well, what about the view from the top."

"Mr. Green"—McCoul faced him, and, as once before, Gees felt and resisted the hypnotic power of the man's eyes—"I don't know if you know that the oafs of this village—and others who should know better as well as the mere clods—attribute to me some part in the things that have happened this summer. The killing of Mr. Tyrrell's sheep, I mean. You, I know, came here to investigate

these things, and now you have an opportunity of proving for yourself that there is nothing in this place, nothing and nobody except myself and my daughter and our servant Shaun Ammon. The two outside will thank us for leaving them alone as long as you wish, and I should like to show you the whole of the place."

"Purely as a matter of interest, if you do," Gees said calmly.

"Then just as a matter of interest—unless you tire," McCoul suggested—but Gees knew it was more than that. "This way—we will begin at the top and come downwards, if you will. This staircase"—he pointed to the opening of the spiral way in the corner of the room—"and halfway up to our first floor you will see the entrance to the passage that leads to the windlass room in the thickness of the wall. But we will go all the way up, first—I will lead the way, if you'll follow."

"Why, certainly—it's very good of you to take the trouble."

He followed to the staircase and began the climb. Round and round and round he went, passing four exit doorways in succession, and coming out at last, rather breathless and weary, to an embrasure at the summit, whence he could see the moss-grown, crumbling sentrywalk, with its breast-high curtain wall, running along all four walls of the tower. He looked over the curtain and saw Odder nestling in its valley to the west—it was just visible beyond the intervening ridge—and, eastward, Dowlandsbar and the rugged country beyond.

"If it were a clear day," McCoul said beside him, "you might see Skiddaw, but the distances are too clouded. It is not a long view, today. And there"—he pointed down inside the fabric—"is our roof. I would not go to the expense of having it placed here at the top, and so far we have made no use of the top floor that the roof covers. Nor do I think we shall, now. Down there"—again he pointed, this time toward an old trench beyond the moat in which Tyrrell and Gyda stood together—"is something that makes me think I shall have little more use for this place."

"You would leave them, then?" Gees asked.

"Why, yes. They will have no need of me. But there is much to show you—little here, except for the strength of the place this view reveals. All the surrounding heights are beyond bowshot, and archers here have the advantage of trajectory, you may observe."

“Had,” Gees amended thoughtfully. “Till guns came in.”

“Why, yes—had,” McCoul amended. “There—there, you see, is the place where they heated the pitch to throw down on besiegers, but in the last siege wood became so scarce that most of the pitch was not used, and they had to be content with toppling stones down. Shall we make the circuit of the walls, or would you rather go down again?”

“Down, I think,” Gees said. There were places where weather-worn stones sloped dangerously toward the inner side, and in spite of McCoul’s apparent cordiality he felt he would rather not trust himself along that old-time sentry walk with the man. An accident would be so easy to contrive, and could never be questioned, after.

“Very well—as you wish,” He entered the stairway again, and Gees followed. At the first exit to which they came on their downward way, McCoul stepped out on to a bare flooring of deal planks, and Gees, coming after him, found himself in an utterly empty apartment which, under its lofty, plain white ceiling, seemed vast. It was bounded by the four outer walls, their stones rough from the chisels of the men who had quarried them, and, except for the oblong hole leading to the spiral stairway, there was no visible means of access to it.

“Nothing to show you here,” McCoul said, “except that there is nothing. I wish you to assure yourself of that, Mr. Green.”

“It is entirely unnecessary,” Gees assured him, looking him full in the eyes. And, for that once, he had the satisfaction of seeing McCoul’s gaze fall before his own. McCoul turned toward the stair.

“We will take the next floor, then,” he said.

“Supporting a floor across this distance must have been a big business,” Gees suggested. “Even if the supporting beams run from front to back, considering this as the front, it’s a long span.”

“Steel girders, four of them—Latimer put them up,” McCoul explained, and Gees realized anew the magnitude of the contract old Ben had undertaken. “Each floor is the same, and the cross beams rest on the girders. It is all very solid—quite safe. Let us go.”

He led down to the next floor. Here they came out to an oak-walled passage leading from front to back, with one door on the left as they faced inward, and two on the right. McCoul opened the left-hand door, and revealed a room sparsely furnished, occupying the full half of the floor space on this floor: there was a narrow divan bed against the far wall, with the clothes thrown back from it in disarray.

“My daughter’s room,” McCoul stated. “She is rather untidy, you may observe, even apart from the fact that Ammon has not yet made the bed or done anything to the room. And no exit but this, observe.”

Irritated at the persistent mockery in the man’s voice, Gees took a couple of steps into the room to look round it, and then emerged again. McCoul closed that door and opened the one opposite. “My room,” he announced. “Occupying only the front half of this side, you will note. Behind it is our dining-room, with a stairway down to Ammon’s quarters.”

There was nothing in this bare, even poorly furnished apartment to give Gees pause, and he emerged as McCoul opened the third door of the corridor and revealed a fairly well-appointed dining-room, oak-furnished with leather upholstery, and its walls tapestry-hung. McCoul crossed it and drew aside a tapestry curtain to reveal a stout door, fitted with a bolt which he shot into its socket before turning to face Gees.

“There,” he remarked, with a note of satisfaction. “That is Ammon’s only communicating way with all I have shown you, and now he is barred out until he comes round by the front and unbolts this door. And, as you see, these three rooms are all of this floor.”

“Yes, I see,” Gees answered quietly. “And the walls, you say, are fifteen feet thick, so if I chose to doubt that you are showing me everything—well, you can get a lot into fifteen feet, can’t you?”

“Why the insinuation, Mr. Green?” McCoul asked coldly.

“Because you’re not earning the custodian’s sixpence,” Gees answered with a smile. “You’re suspecting me of suspecting you, apparently.”

“Coincidence—my arrival here coinciding with the beginning of this outbreak of sheep-worrying—has caused me to be suspect,” McCoul said. “I wish to

convince one man—and one who has interested himself in the affair on Mr. Tyrrell's behalf, at that—that there is no possibility of my being connected with it. That is why I am endeavoring to show you everything, and to make you realize you miss nothing that there is within these walls. That is why I barred Ammon out till you have seen him, prevented him from coming out from his own room—"

"One moment, Mr. McCoul," Gees interrupted. "Do you think that I suspect you of keeping here two such hounds—if they are hounds,—as have killed over fifty sheep and a man on Dowlandsbar lands?"

McCoul smiled. "I merely wish to prove to you—to one man, as I said, and a reasonable man at that—that I do not," he answered.

"Then lead on," Gees invited. "We'll miss out the windlass room, though, and go down. The dungeons ought to be interesting, if it's possible to see them. I know the ground floor room, of course. Oh, by the way, there's a postern door at the corner of the wall in front. Does that lead into the big front room downstairs?"

"No," McCoul answered. "It gives access to a passage in the thickness of the wall, leading straight through to Ammon's quarters—into the kitchen, in fact. But he rarely uses it, since it is badly lighted and the floor is not in very good condition."

"I see. Well, the dungeons, eh?"

Down on the ground floor, McCoul raised two sections of board, and, getting his fingers under the edge of a stone slab, lifted it up on end, revealing a stone staircase that went down into black darkness. The effortless way in which he raised the massive thing proved that he had strength far beyond the ordinary, and there was no sign of undue strain about him as, flicking the dust from his hands, he took up a big electric torch which lay on a table beside the fireplace. He clicked the light on, and, pointing the torch at Gees, momentarily dazzled him.

"I'm afraid this is all the light here, unless we go round and get candles from Shaun," he observed. "But if I go first, this will give light enough to show you everything. Bare cells, and a torture chamber which you may find rather interesting. The rack is still there."

He entered the stair, and Gees, with yellow spots still wavering before his eyes

after the beam of the torch had struck on them, followed his lead. A half-score of damp stone steps took them down to a passage-way of equally damp earth, with a slimy stone wall to either side, and in each wall were doorways—the doors had rotted, long since, and only traces of them remained. Each doorway gave access to a cell, some so small that a man could neither stand upright or lie at length in them, others somewhat larger. McCoul flicked off the torch, and the darkness, in spite of the aperture behind at the top of the stair, was so intense as to seem tangible. He flicked it on again, and moved forward, sending a ray into each doorway as they passed, and waiting while Gees looked in before going on to the next earth-floored, terrible prison.

“There was no light, as you see,” he said. “The things done down here would not bear light. There is air, from some crevice that I have not found. Sometimes the prisoners were meant to live.”

“Darkness like that is death itself,” Gees observed. “No man could live in it for long—days only, I should think.”

“Their nerves were tuned differently,” McCoul said. “Hence—this!”

They had come to the end of the passage, Gees saw, and now stood in the entrance to a large, low-ceiled chamber which, as nearly as the torchlight declared it, was circular in shape. At the far side the ray revealed a rotted wooden structure, enough of which remained to show that it was, as McCoul had said, a rack, on which many a man had shrieked in torment, if Amber’s tale of the de Boisgeants were true. A rusted brazier, and a little pile of moldering implements beside it, came next into the light as McCoul swung it round, and then he advanced to the centre of the chamber, where was a raised, coffin-shaped stone.

“A unique survival, I think,” he said, throwing the light on it. “I have never seen another. Observe, Mr. Green, those sunken channels would fit arms and legs, and there is a depression into which the head would lie. Iron clamps—here are the holes for them—would hold the patient down at the knees and waist and neck and forearms, while the surgeons at the brazier yonder operated on him—or her, as the case might be. And here, and here—these channels for the blood to run off into vessels. See how the stone is blackened with it, to this day.”

“I think I’ve seen enough,” Gees said.

But McCoul swept the light round the slimy stone walls, revealing pairs of rusty manacles high up, so that one in them must hang by his wrists; fetters pendent from the ceiling, for hanging victims head downward while, as he observed, the brazier was placed under them, and other hellish devices which he explained until Gees felt sick with the horror of it. Then, turning, as if by accident he sent the ray of the torch full into Gees' eyes again, temporarily blinding him.

"Yes," he said calmly, "their nerves were tuned differently. Shall we go back? I think except for a cell or two we may have missed, I have shown you all there is underground here."

He went back to the passage between the cells, but halted before one doorway and threw the light across to its far wall, high up.

"I think—yes, this must be the one," he said. "A rough sort of carving on the stone, if you care to examine it before going up."

Still dazzled by the light, Gees took one unthinking step forward—but then, almost beyond the edge of the light, he caught a whitish glimmer as of lead or some such metal, and flung out a hand to grip the edge of the doorway as he felt McCoul's hand on his back. He could have sworn that McCoul had tried to push him forward, though the pressure was only momentary, and the instant that his hand went out to grasp the wall, it ceased, while McCoul gripped his coat and pulled him back.

"My God, the wrong one!" he exclaimed, and there might have been fear for his guest in his voice, or the rage of disappointment. "If you'd taken another step—thank heaven I realized in time!"

He dropped the ray of the torch and revealed a stonewalled, circular hole occupying nearly all the area, and going down to blackness. And the glimmer of metal that Gees had seen was a leaden pipe. It was the well, he realized, from which Shaun Ammon pumped water into the tank beside his door at the back of the keep, and if he had fallen down there and McCoul had gone up the stairs and replaced their covering—or even if he had gone to get help—there would have been little chance of anything but a corpse coming out of that doorway. And McCoul had tried to push him in: he felt utterly certain of it.

"Well, all's well that ends well," McCoul said awkwardly.

“That well very nearly ended me,” Gees retorted, and felt inclined to add—“or you did,” but refrained. “I won’t bother about any carvings on the stones, thank you all the same.”

“Just as you please,” McCoul said coolly. “And in that case, we will go up again. Except for Shaun Ammon’s quarters, you have seen all there is of the keep, now—as I wished you should.”

“We won’t bother about Ammon’s quarters, either, thanks,” Gees said. “I expect Tyrrell will be wondering what has become of me.”

If McCoul could have had his way, he knew now, Tyrrell would have had far more cause for wonder.

Chapter XIV IMPLICATIONS

BACK in the big ground-floor apartment although the Aladdin lamp had not been lighted and the arrow slits afforded no more than a dimness, Gees felt grateful for the light after the blackness of the dungeons. Tyrrell and Gyda had returned from their communings outside the walls, and now the girl sat on the settee before the fireplace, while Tyrrell, standing before her, appeared as almost a different man: the strained look had gone from his face altogether, and, Gees thought with a twinge of pity for him, he seemed as happy as a bridegroom.

“Father, do put on your coat!” Gyda exclaimed as McCoul turned from replacing the stone he had up-ended to descend into the dungeons. “I wonder you didn’t think of it before. What must Mr. Green think of you?”

McCoul advanced and took up the coat, which lay across the back of the settee. “It would only have got stained, down there,” he said, and rolled down his shirt sleeves to put it on.

“You look as if you’d been seeing ghosts, Gees,” Tyrrell accused.

Gees glanced at himself in a long mirror on the wall beside the fireplace, and saw good ground for the remark: the color had not yet come back to his face after his experience on the edge of the well. Then he looked at his hands, and saw them soiled with a greenish slime from the walls that he had gripped to save himself.

“No, not ghosts,” he said, and held up his hands. “I wonder”—he turned to McCoul—“would it be possible to get rid of this?”

“Why, certainly,” McCoul answered. “Up the stair, in the passage leading to the windlass room—I had better show you.”

Again he led the way up, and turned in at the first exit from the spiraling way. Gees found himself in a narrow, dark tunnel in the wall, in which he could scarcely stand upright. By the light of his torch McCoul revealed a hole in the side of this passage and opened a door of modern, unpainted deal, and there was a bathroom about ten feet by six, lighted by an arrow slit in the outer thickness of the mighty wall. A cheap-looking enameled bath, a towel rail, a plywood wall

cabinet, a basin with taps beside the bath, and a plain Windsor chair, were all its furnishings. McCoul paused in the doorway.

“Soap and towel—there is a clean one, I see,” he said. “Shall I stay, or will you find your own way down?”

“Oh, I can manage, thanks,” Gees answered. “But you have water laid on to this height? An unexpected luxury.”

“Rain water, collected from the roof into a tank higher up,” McCoul explained. “If that should fail, there is it pump to force up a supply. You will find a clothes brush in the cupboard there.”

Taking off his coat to wash, Gees found that he had need of the brush—and of more than that, for the stains from the dungeon walls remained on his sleeves after he had done his best to get rid of them. He came out from the bathroom and closed the door, and, save for the very faint semblance of light at the entrance to the stairway, stood in absolute blackness. A match guided him back—he had no mind to explore in the direction of the windlass chamber—and he returned to the ground floor, to find the other three standing before the fireplace.

“I hear Mr. McCoul just saved you from a very nasty accident,” Tyrrell observed as Gees joined them.

“Yes,” he answered. “Just. How deep is that well, Mr. McCoul?”

“Sixty feet, to the water level,” McCoul said.

“Then it would have been a very nasty accident,” Gees commented, and again, looking McCoul full in the eyes, saw him avert his gaze.

“Are you staying here much longer, Mr. Green?” Gyda asked.

“I shall have to get back next week,” he answered, “to investigate a case which looks”—again he glanced at McCoul—“like attempted murder. Almost impossible to prove, though, from what I know of it.”

He saw the strained look reappear momentarily on Tyrrell’s face, but, as if she read her lover’s thoughts, Gyda clasped his hand as he stood beside her, and the expression passed.

“Mr. McCoul,” Tyrrell said, “I’d like you and Gyda to dine with me again tonight, if you will. She has already consented.”

“Why, yes, thank you very much,” McCoul answered slowly, after a brief pause in which his brows contracted and then relaxed.

Gees thought hard for an excuse—he did not want to be a member of the party, and he had to find some reason for absence, quickly.

“I’m afraid I shall not be able to be with you, Tyrrell,” he said. “When I rang my secretary yesterday, I asked her to send me some rather important papers to Carlisle, and I thought of turning out the car and going over for them after the inquest. I may be very late back.”

“Umph!” Tyrrell looked rather disconcerted. “Well, I’m sorry. But why Carlisle—why didn’t you have them sent to Dowlandsbar?”

“Because I had an idea I might have left Dowlandsbar—finished all I came to do here. And I must have those papers—they’re urgent.”

“This is the first I’ve heard of them,” Tyrrell said, with frigid skepticism. “Bearing on your attempted murder case, perhaps?”

“Indirectly,” Gees answered. “You’re thinking of the problem of getting back here after dinner and returning alone, of course?”

“Yes, but I know!” Tyrrell’s expression lightened. “I’ll turn out my car, Gyda, and drive you and your father back here.”

“There is no need,” McCoul said. “I have not the slightest fear of walking back with Gyda. An escort is quite unnecessary.”

“What do you say, Gyda?” Tyrrell asked, and pressed her hand. “Are we to say good night at Dowlandsbar, or here?”

She gave him a smile. “It is for you to say,” she answered. “Then that’s settled,” he said happily. “Go and get your old documents, Gees, and I’ll expect you back when I see you. Midnight, eh?”

“I’d better stay for dinner in Carlisle,” Gees said reflectively. “Since I’m not sure

what time I shall be back, I mean—and that would make it midnight or thereabouts. Or I might even put up there for the night, instead of risking the drive along your lane in the dark. If so, I could ring through and tell you I'm not returning till morning."

"Just as you like." Tyrrell appeared to have forgotten his skepticism, perhaps in anticipation of driving Gyda back and managing an interval alone with her, at which, obviously, McCoul would willingly connive. "You do as you like, and I'll expect you and your father about seven, Gyda. We can tell him all we've been talking about, then."

"In that case, my absence will be a boon," Gees observed drily.

The glance Gyda gave him was assurance that she would consider it in that light. Tyrrell took her arm and moved forward from the fireplace.

"Time to be going," he said. "It's much later than I thought."

He went out with her, and Gees and McCoul followed. They emerged to the sunlight of full day, brilliant after the gloom within the keep.

"I shall be sorry to miss seeing you and Miss McCoul tonight," Gees observed to McCoul. "And very many thanks for showing me round. You proved an admirable cicerone, once you'd got over suspecting me of suspecting you. Your explanation of the methods of torture in the old days, for instance. You must have studied that subject pretty thoroughly."

"In the course of a long life, one learns much," McCoul answered.

"True in your case," Gees remarked thoughtfully. He nodded at the hump of grassgrown ruin before them: beyond it, Gyda and Tyrrell had already crossed the causeway, and were going on toward the monoliths. "That will be where the drawbridge was managed, I suppose?" he asked.

"Yes," McCoul said. "It was a tower in the outer wall, with an arch slotted for the portcullis and the mechanism for both portcullis and drawbridge in a chamber over the arch. Only starvation—" He broke off abruptly, with the air of one who had already said too much.

"Then de Vere's men didn't succeed in breaking a way through the outer wall,

even?” Gees suggested coolly.

“Breaking—” McCoul almost gasped, evidently caught off his guard for the moment. Then he recovered himself. “I am afraid I have not looked up the history of the place sufficiently to tell you what happened in the final siege, Mr. Green,” he said coldly.

“No? Well, many thanks for all you have told and shown me,” Gees remarked. “And now I’d better chase after Tyrrell—after lunch, rather, for obviously Tyrrell is interested in only one person, for the present. Good-bye, Mr. McCoul—I hope we shall meet again.”

And he hurried off, but slackened his pace after he had crossed the causeway. Tyrrell and Gyda had already emerged to the lane and turned toward Dowlandsbar, and, for the moment, Gees did not want to overtake them. Quite apart from their absorption in each other, he had plenty to think over, in addition to the fact that McCoul had attempted to push him into the well under the keep. For he knew that for a fact.

Up at the summit of the tower, McCoul had spoken as if the old-time strength of the place were a thing of today. “Archers here *have* the advantage of trajectory,” he had said, and had acknowledged the slip when Gees had pointed it out. Then, in the torture chamber, he had described the nature and uses of the various implements with the certainty and detail of one who had actually witnessed their use. And, just now, he had spoken of the gatehouse tower in a way that only one who knew it could have spoken—or had he a vivid imagination that he called to use in answering Gees’ question? This last was a possibility.

From beyond a bend in the lane, where, Gees decided, she had paused for a last embrace with Tyrrell, Gyda appeared, and as she faced him Gees saw that she looked radiant with happiness, as might any girl who had just parted from her lover for only a few hours.

“So kind of you to linger, Mr. Green,” she greeted him, “and very kind of you to give Philip and me so much time to ourselves.”

“But I found your father so very interesting—almost overpoweringly so, in fact,” he answered—and knew that, if he had not grasped at the sides of the cell in time, McCoul would have overpowered him.

“I’m so glad,” she said. “Do forgive me for neglecting you, though. I do hope we shall see you again before you go.”

“I hope so, too—and now I must hurry after Tyrrell.”

They went their ways. Before he rounded the bend in the lane Gees looked back and saw the slender, almost perfect grace of the girl’s receding figure, and her silvery little head held high—she went as one quite happy, quite carefree. Then he went on, thoughtfully.

Tyrrell waited for him in the gateway of Dowlandsbar, and he too looked quite happy, and laughed a little as he saw Gees’ expression.

“Not all the cares of the world, surely?” he queried. “Though you look as if you were carrying a few of them. What’s on your mind?”

“Gunpowder,” Gees said, “hadn’t come into use in the time of Henry the Third. That was what I was thinking at the moment.”

“Oh, your inspection of the keep, eh?” Tyrrell suggested.

“And de Vere found it too tough a nut to crack,” Gees pursued, “but badly provisioned—short of firewood, too. So he sat down and starved it out. And bagged and hanged the lot, bar two.”

“You’ve been hearing about it, eh? Well, I’ll forgive you your desertion for dinner tonight, in return for the way you left Gyda to me this morning. Has McCoul been telling you about the siege?”

“No, Amber told me that,” Gees answered.

Tyrrell made no response, and, Gees noted, he stiffened and increased his pace at mention of the vicar’s name. They entered the house, and Tyrrell took up a parcel, inspected the address on it, and held it out. “For you,” he said, in an altered, constrained way.

Gees took the parcel, tore one end of the wrapping, and saw the edges of two bulky books. He shook his head.

“Eve Madeleine has come up to scratch, as usual, bless her,” he remarked. “The

morning’s post, evidently—but I don’t want them, now.”

*

After lunch, Gees got out the Rolls-Bentley and, stopping in front of the house, waited while Tyrrell got in beside him. Then he drove on until they were just about to cross the narrow stone bridge before taking the ascent to Locksborough gateway, and there stopped.

“Trouble of any sort?” Tyrrell inquired.

“No. I was just taking a look at that pile you made for me.”

He gazed over the fence beside the lane at a breast-high heap of mingled logs and brushwood, with, beside it, an array of two-gallon cans of paraffin surmounted by an ordinary galvanized iron pail. Then, as he gazed ahead again, and let the car move slowly on, he laughed.

“You must be out of civilization, here,” he remarked. “To stand a dozen cans beside an ordinary road, even as far from it as they are, would be equivalent to giving them away to somebody.”

“Savagery,” said Tyrrell acidly, “evidently has its advantages.”

He had relapsed from the mood to which Gyda had won him earlier in the day, and now was broodingly quiet, oppressed by the prospect of the inquiry into the causes of Cottrill’s death. Gees of necessity kept his eyes on the way before him: they bumped past the standing stones and, reaching the crest of the ridge beyond Locksborough, dropped down into Odder, where Gees drew up in front of the *Royal George*. Until he saw the assembly that the forthcoming inquest had drawn together there, he would not have believed that the district was so populous. When Tyrrell got out from the car, half-a-dozen or more gaitered and tweed-coated farmers came forward to greet him, and not far short of fifty working-class men eyed the car and its driver curiously. For such a place, it was a crowd, but there were no women in it, and no children. Possibly the men had decided that this was no fit scene for their wives and families, for, Gees reflected, the women would hardly have stayed away of their own accord.

He saw the vicar, who raised a hand to him in friendly greeting from where he stood talking with an aged villager, but made no move to approach. Feather and

Sergeant Rapkin stood apart from all the rest, and, while Tyrrell talked with his farmer acquaintances, Gees approached the two police officers, and nodded in response to Feather's salute.

"You are prepared to carry on tonight, I hope?" he asked.

"I said I'd carry on," the inspector answered, rather irritably.

"That's good," Gees commented, and smiled. He understood that the inspector, like Tyrrell, was apprehensive over the forthcoming inquiry, and thus decidedly on edge. "Make it the same meeting place at nine forty-five, and I've decided to make a slight change. I'll have you with me, Inspector, and Cotton and the sergeant can pair at the back."

"You're taking charge," Feather replied, as if to say that Gees could do what he liked—also, that whatever he did, Feather himself had little faith in the result. So it sounded to Gees.

"Quite so," he answered. "And that," as a small saloon car came through the village toward them, "will be the coroner, I expect."

"It is so—see you tonight, nine forty-five," Feather said, and moved to meet the official, Rapkin accompanying him. Gees went back to Tyrrell, and they entered the *George*, ascending to a big first-floor room which had been prepared for the inquest, and into which as many as could crowded as audience to the proceedings.

It proved a brief affair. An uncle of Cottrill deposed to having identified the body, and then Tom Cotton described how he and Weelum had discovered it in Valgersby Cleft. The doctor gave his evidence as to the cause of death, and then Tyrrell was called and taken through a *resume* of the sheep-killings of the past six months, ending his story with the sudden and unexpected fog that had driven over the land, with Cottrill out in it somewhere. He made it clear, and the coroner expressed entire agreement with him, that it would have been useless and perhaps dangerous to others to attempt to find Cottrill in the fog.

Lastly, Inspector Feather took the oath, and stated that he and his men had made every effort to find the dogs responsible for the sheep-worrying, and had failed utterly, as he had to admit. He bore patiently with the coroner's bitter sarcasm over his inefficiency, and declared that he had done all that man could do, and

must abide this result. After he had been dismissed, the coroner addressed the seven men who had been empanelled as a jury, and who had accepted the evidence without question or comment. They had all known the dead man, and knew Tyrrell, too.

“Sheep-worrying by dogs that have become subject to that form of mania, in sheep-farming districts, is a rather rare thing,” he said, “but it is a well-known trouble, all the same. As a rule, the dogs responsible for the damage are either caught or shot after only one instance of the worrying, or two at most. Here we have a police inspector declaring that he has checked up and examined every dog licensed or exempted to its owner over a very large area indeed, and that he has been unable to find the offending dog or dogs, though he has had six months and more in which to do it, since the first case was reported to him by Mr. Tyrrell. There is, you must note, a certain strange uniformity about these cases, so far as the sheep are concerned. In place of indiscriminate worrying of several sheep, two are killed on each occasion, and, further to that, they are all the property of one owner. It would almost seem as if there were human direction behind these dogs, except that it is impossible to conceive human beings capable of such senseless destruction. However that may be, a human life has been lost now, and unquestionably that life was taken by the animals which destroyed the sheep. Of this there can be no doubt whatever. The terrible state in which the body of the unfortunate man was found, and the fact that it had been drained of blood as had the sheep, points to an identical agency. It appears, from what the witness Cotton has told us, that Cottrill cornered these beasts in Valgersby Cleft, and they turned on him and overpowered him. Possibly, as Cotton suggests, he cornered one, and the other attacked him from behind. You can regard his death only as a matter of accident—there is no other possibility.

“With regard to what caused that accident, and to its being abroad and capable of doing damage six months and more after the first case of worrying had been reported by the owner of the sheep, I can only say that the full report of this inquiry will be forwarded to the proper quarter, and, if there is blame attaching anywhere”—here he gazed hard at Inspector Feather—“that blame will be duly apportioned and will receive its just recognition. It is no concern of this inquiry. Now, gentlemen, you may retire to consider your verdict, or, if you find that unnecessary, deliver it here and now.”

He had pointed them to the verdict so plainly that they had no need to retire, and after a minute or two of headshaking, nodding, and whispering, the one they had

appointed foreman gave it, and the solitary local reporter in attendance scrawled "Accidental Death" on his notes and went off to write the necessary paragraph and head it—"Shepherd's Tragic Death." Outside, Gees waited until Tyrrell appeared.

"You'll forgive me for not driving you back?" he asked.

"Why, of course!" Tyrrell answered cordially. "Thank heaven, that's over! I felt sure he was going to blame me for not going out to find Cottrill, as soon as the fog came down with him out in it."

"Man, he wouldn't be such a fool!" Gees remonstrated.

"Well, he wasn't, but they take queer views, at times, though Cottrill has been out in fogs dozens of times before. Now you want to get off to Carlisle—yes. I'm sorry you won't be with us tonight—selfishly sorry, for it would have given me a better chance to get Gyda to myself. But there it is. Come back when you feel like it, tonight or in the morning, just as you like. I'll get off back, now."

He was as good as his word, and Gees knew, as well as if the intent had been spoken, that Tyrrell would stop by the gateway to Locksborough in the hope that Gyda would be visible. Gazing at his retreating figure, Gees questioned what to do with the time between now and a quarter to ten. He might run over to Carlisle, of course, and return in plenty of time to meet Feather, but it seemed an aimless sort of excursion. Then he sighted Tom Cotton emerging from the inn, and beckoned to him.

"The private room here, Tom, at a quarter to ten tonight," he said when Tom faced him. "You're willing to make another night of it?"

"As many as you ask, sir, if it means gettin' 'em," Tom answered gravely. "Since I'm not keepin' watch over the sheep, it's no use foldin' 'em, an' as for bein' willing, when I think of how I found him out there, I'd do anything on earth for a half-chance to get 'em."

"That's all right, then," Gees said with a faint smile. "Hullo! Here's Mr. Amber—how are you, sir? I saw you inside there."

"Yes—call it curiosity, if you like," the vicar said. "Well, Tom, I understand you are to be shepherd at Dowlandsbar, now?"

“Yes sir, that’s so,” Tom assented, “but I’d forfeit that an’ a dozen other jobs to have him back, right willingly.”

“I don’t doubt it,” Amber said gravely. “He was a general favorite, was Cottrill, and I never heard a word said against him.”

“Tom has spoken his epitaph, sir,” Gees put in. “A just one, too, I think, from the very little I saw of him.”

“Yes?” The vicar turned to him. “His epitaph? What was it?”

“He was never more’n a little man”—Gees looked at Tom Cotton and quoted his own words to him—“but he had a heart of gold.”

“It might justly be his epitaph,” Amber commented. “Yes—but you didn’t go back with Mr. Tyrrell, Mr. Green. You’re not leaving us yet, surely?” He glanced at the Rolls-Bentley standing a few yards away.

“No-o,” Gees said, rather dubiously. He nodded good-bye to Cotton, about to move away, and then an idea suddenly occurred to him. “Is Miss Amber anywhere about—I mean, is she available, sir?” he asked.

“Why, yes, if you wish to see her,” Amber answered. “At home—we should be glad to give you tea, if you care to come in.”

“Thanks all the same, but that wasn’t my idea,” Gees said. “I wonder—would you mind if I took her out to tea—Carlisle, or somewhere of the sort? Just for the run—I’ve hours to waste, somehow.”

“You’d better come in and ask her,” Amber suggested. “She’ll be delighted, I expect—she gets out so little, poor girl!”

Leaving the car standing, Gees accompanied him to the vicarage, and the girl he sought opened the door to them.

“I saw you over the churchyard wall,” she said, “and you’ve come for tea, haven’t you, Mr. Green? Do say you have!”

“It’s Gees, and I haven’t,” he answered. “I’ve got your father’s permission to ask you, and the car here ready—would you like to run over to Carlisle with me for

tea—or anywhere else you like?”

“Oh, Mr. Green, you don’t mean it!” she exclaimed, her eyes shining with sudden excitement.

“But I do,” he insisted, smiling at her. “What abaht it, now?”

“Just that you’re a perfect dear—isn’t he, daddy? I won’t be one second getting a coat and hat.”

Chapter XV CARLISLE INTERLUDE

“GREGORY GEORGE GORDON GREEN, four of ‘em-Gees,” the owner of the name explained patiently as the crazy signpost at the entrance to the lane appeared. “Don’t blame me. Pity me, if you feel like it.”

“I’m not sure—no,” Madge said. “It isn’t you. Not—not big enough. I’d like to think of you as something else. Something”—she broke off, at a loss for a word—“something more heroic.”

“Heaven save us!” he ejaculated, and swung the long bonnet of the car southward, away from the signpost. “If you want real heroics, my old man always calls me Gordon, but I warn you I shall weep if you start it. Why couldn’t my godfathers and godmothers have thought of Eric, or little by little, or grail for Galahad, or even Augustus? There’s a nice mellow flavour about Augustus, when you come to think of it.”

“George!” she said. “It is your name, too. Yes, plain George.”

“Hellish plain,” he remarked, and, being on a straight stretch, put down the accelerator. “Rub it in all you like—I’ll keep cheerful.”

“Oh, but you know I didn’t mean that!” she expostulated. “Ooo-h! Are we going to Carlisle, or Southampton? The country’s whizzing.”

“Do you feel unhappy about it?” he asked.

“Do you know what the young lady in Venice wrote to her friend?” she asked in reply.

“I’ll buy it,” he offered—and, glancing at the speedometer, saw the pointer at seventy. “She shouldn’t—never put compromising things on paper. But what did the young lady in Venice write to her friend?”

“I am sitting on the bank of the Grand Canal, drinking it all in, and life has never seemed so full before,” Madge quoted. “Oh!”

He had only swerved for a slight bend, and the car held the road perfectly. The

girl relaxed her hold on the door strap, and sat at her ease as Gees drove down another straight stretch at seventy-five.

“I wonder if she finished it—the Grand Canal, I mean,” Gees said.

“But you should have laughed,” she complained. “The dead cats and things—Daddy took us for a holiday in Venice, five years ago, and if only you’d seen the Grand Canal! But, Mr. Green—Gees—George—why did you bring me out like this? Why me? I’m loving every moment of it, and I want to know why? In a car like this.”

“Because, for one thing, it’s the only car I’ve got,” he answered, and slowed for a series of irritating bends. “For another—why you, you said—you’re an antidote. I’m not swearing at you, mind. I suddenly felt I wanted a spot of sanity, and I thought of you. Someone human and sweet, someone as fresh from God’s hand as these hills, and as pure as the air that blows over them. That’s why. Now sit quiet.”

There rose before them a hill, a gradient of one in four, or even less, as he knew from having descended it on his way to Dowlandsbar. He opened out to take it, and, quietly, the long car rose to its task, the bonnet humping up before them as if it sought the sky. And ever the engine purred quietly, evenly, until they came to a summit and began to drop down to the valley beyond. Madge touched Gees’ arm.

“I’m so proud,” she said. “You think that of me?”

“I’ve a lot to tell you before we go back,” he answered. “Not yet. We’ll find a quiet table somewhere for tea, and then talk, eh?”

“George, you’re a genius for fitting the scene to the occasion.”

“Well, if it’s got to be George, George it is,” he said. “Now we must turn left, for Carlisle. If we’re to go to Carlisle, that is.”

“I don’t care where we go,” she declared. “You’re in charge.”

At that, he had a momentary thought of Inspector Feather, but put it aside. He wanted absolute freedom from the thought of Cottrill’s death and what had caused it, for the time.

“Madge, we’re going to talk seriously over tea, I warn you,” he said, after making the sharp left turn toward Carlisle. “That turn was less than a right angle, by the way—horrible Elisha ought to be told about it. But I want you to consider me as a father-confessor, and—”

“Oh, but you’re much too young!” she interrupted. “Brother-confessor, say, and I’ll try and bear it. My sins are many, though.”

“I’ll go easy on penances,” he promised.

“Thank you, George. But be careful how you drive, just here. Cows walk out of gateways suddenly at this time of day, here and hereabouts. It’s afternoon milking time, and a cow is a valuable animal.”

“So is this car. Then you know this road well?

“I used—” she began, and then broke off and sat silent. Gees felt that he knew what she had been about to say, and the reason for her failing to complete the admission. And, glancing at her, he saw that her color had heightened, and she gazed straight ahead.

“Used to come this way often,” he said, “up to, say, six months ago.”

“Yes,” she assented deliberately, “but Philip—Mr. Tyrrell—had no right to talk about me to you, or to tell you he used—”

“He has told me nothing,” he interrupted. “He’s never mentioned your name or referred to you, apart from once asking whether you had spoken of him, after I’d lunched at the vicarage and seen you home.”

“Then you shouldn’t make deductions,” she said. “It wasn’t because of me that you came here—to Dowlandsbar. And even if it means excommunication, I’m not going to confess—anything. Why should I, to you?”

“You’re far short of being excommunicated, as yet,” he answered. “I keep on forgetting that we’re strangers, really, and I ought not—”

“We’re not strangers!” she broke in, energetically. “I could repeat all the old platitudes, and all they amount to is that I feel as much at home with you as with my own father, able to talk to you as I can to him. But about—about what you

hinted just now, I won't talk to anyone. It's finished, forgotten, buried beyond resurrection."

"Maybe," he said, as if he doubted the statement. "And since you make that declaration, we'll talk about other things. For one thing, now, I don't know this village, so you'll have to direct me to the best place for tea. Hotel for preference—I don't like tea shops."

Under her guidance he drove into the old city, and, ten minutes later, faced her across a table while she glanced at her wrist watch.

"Fifty minutes," she observed. "Why, they'll only just be having tea at home! Do you know, George, I yearned for a ride in your car, even before you came to lunch with us. And here I am!"

"Yes, but why the yearn?" he queried. "No—you order what we're going to have for tea"—for a waiter stood over them—"and remember I've got a large appetite, owing to the air in this district."

She gave the order, and the waiter went to execute it. "We all eat more largely here than you do in London," she remarked. "A north-country tea would frighten the average Londoner, from the size of theirs."

"I want to know more about this yearn," he reminded her. "Why?"

"Well, Weelum—the man at Dowlandsbar, that is—told Annie, and Annie told our Jenny, all about this wonderful car, and I felt if I could travel in one like it—just as we've traveled today—I wanted to run away from Odder, or rather be carried away, like this. In luxury, not having to plan it myself—and it's come true, and I'm happy."

"But you've got to go back," he reminded her.

"I'm quite content to go back—it isn't that, at all. The mere change, sight of fresh things, sense of movement. And most of all, escape if only for an hour or two from the oppression that hangs over Odder, and has hung over it all this summer. Something—something not of earth, brooding and waiting always, even in daylight. Fear."

"You have felt it all this summer?" he asked.

She nodded, waited till the waiter had gone, and then poured the tea. “Many of us have felt it,” she said. “Daddy has, I know, and men in the village—Tom Cotton and a friend of his who saw the things—Jack Baldwin, his name is—for others. It is there, all the time.”

“The Shee,” he suggested. He saw a way of getting round to the main purpose for which he had brought her out, a roundabout way, but still a possibility. But she shook her head at the suggestion.

“No. Most decidedly, no. Another name for them is ‘Men of Peace,’ and what has happened at Dowlandsbar this summer—and especially the last thing, Cottrill’s death, would drive them away.”

He nodded a grave assent. “I want to propound a theory,” he said.

“Yes?” She looked her interest. “About—your talk with daddy?”

“What he told me,” he assented. “And yet—no, we won’t begin on that. This way—it’s an adaptation of a theory put forward in a play I saw some time ago, one of those plays that go outside material, normally possible things. Supposing you could stand at a great height—on some hill, say, and look down on a road winding past—see miles of the road, and see clearly all that was on it? People far back along the road, people directly under you, and others far forward—and assume that all the traffic on the road is going in one direction?”

“A one-way road—yes,” she assented. “And I see it all.”

“Not all, but a very long stretch of it. Now say that you have come up to the top of the hill from a long way back on the road, and are at liberty to go down again to any point on it you choose?”

“Any point I choose—yes,” she assented again.

“Now say that the road is time,” he went on. “Up on your height, you are out of time. You have come up there from far back, and you go down again to the nearest point—down to today. And you are exactly as you were when you came up from the far back point—from long ago.”

“Uninfluenced, not aged by time, you mean?” she questioned.

“Just so—I see you get it. Beings on whom time has no visible influence, though they are not immortal. They are merely independent of time, in a different state from ours. On another plane, say.”

“A higher plane?” she questioned again, earnestly. “A lower, I think,” he answered. “Like the Shee.”

“Elementals—earth-bound,” she suggested after a thoughtful pause.

“More like—leave them for the minute, though, since you understand what I have been trying to explain. And I’ll have that other scone, since you’ve gone on to cakes. Now—I suppose you know the story your father told me, of the final siege of Locksborough?”

“Yes. I felt that Locksborough was coming into it,” she said.

“And before the siege, how members of that family dabbled in black magic, kidnapped children, and all the rest of it—you know that?”

“I know it all,” she answered. “I’ve read all daddy’s copy of Mancius, and he and I have discussed the story, often.”

“Yes. Well, Diarmid de Boisgeant, who was not found when the rest of that race and their followers were exterminated by de Vere and his besiegers—Diarmid was a descendant of de Boisgeants who had dabbled in black magic and so owned the devil as their lord, and he was also a descendant of the Shee, the fairy folk. Is this rank nonsense to you, or do you keep an open mind about these things, like your father?”

“I go further,” she said soberly. “Yes, I see. Diarmid de Boisgeant went back up to the height from that time, being so much of the Shee by birth that he was independent of time, as you put it. And came down into life again—yes. I think my father believes that, but he won’t say it. Only—you know how he went to see McCoul, about Ben?”

“Yes. When McCoul told him to mind his own business.”

“And it was his business—daddy was trying to save Mrs. Latimer’s life. Ben couldn’t keep from her what it would mean to them if McCoul didn’t pay, and the mental worry of it killed her, even more than her illness. But daddy came

back that day simply white with rage, and he told me something that he has never told anyone else. When he was almost a boy—it was while he was at Balliol—he went on a long vacation to the west of Ireland, to Galway. And one day he met a man and a girl riding along a road on ponies. The man was McCoul—daddy is sure of it, he says—and the girl was McCoul's daughter, looking exactly as they look now. And that was nearly forty years ago. You see?"

"If he's right, McCoul should be in his grave, and Gyda an old woman," Gees commented thoughtfully. "That is, if they were in time as we are. And quite possibly McCoul's hostility is due to recognition."

She smiled. "If you'd seen a photograph of daddy as he was then, you wouldn't say that," she said. "He was a handsome youth, then."

"Well, we're getting on," Gees observed, "and since that was the last scone, I'll turn on to cake too. Also, more tea, please. Now the next point. When the solution of the sheep-killings and Cottrill's death is reached, at the very least McCoul and his daughter will be implicated. I'm as sure of that as I am that Cumberland air gives me a whale of an appetite. You see what that means?"

"Yes—and I see what the appetite means," she answered. "Shall I ring and ask the waiter to bring some more cakes?"

"Don't frighten him—this will stay me till dinner time. It means that—I've been long enough with Tyrrell to see that he's infatuated with Gyda McCoul. I daren't say a word of what I believe to him—"

"I am no longer interested," she broke in. "Please don't."

"But I must," he persisted. "Note the word I used infatuated. Naturally—grant, as I believe you will, that Gyda McCoul is a being out of time, possessed of something different from human attraction, and you'll see that in his present state Tyrrell is not himself. Under a spell, if you choose to call it that. She wanted him, and she's got him, for this present. And that is why I want you to —"

"Please!" she broke in again. "You don't understand, altogether. I'll tell you—yes, I will confess to you, now. Philip and I and Peter Bandon, and sometimes Harold, did everything together till Peter married, and then it was Philip and Harold and I—we were all much younger than Peter, and Harold was youngest

of us all. Philip grew into my life till I knew I loved him, and knew too that he loved me. Placidly, say—we were so utterly sure of each other. It was all understood, settled—until last March, when the McCouls finally came to live at Locksborough. Then, all that had been was finished. No more drives to Carlisle with him, no more seeing him coming up the path to the vicarage—Oh, I'm confessing everything!—no more looking forward to the time when I should leave the vicarage for Dowlandsbar. A bitter month or two, and then it all died and left me cold. Now, if there were no man but Philip Tyrrell left on earth, I'd turn my back on him."

"That is, as he is now," Gees urged. "But think forward, think of him needing some influence, someone to whom he can turn, after—"

"He must not think to turn to me" she interrupted. "I can pity him then, but no more. No." She smiled at him. "No, George, nothing he could say or do would ever bring it back to life. Impossible."

There are shades in negation, but, he knew this of hers as final, absolute, for tomorrow as for today. Again she smiled at him.

"You've tried your best" she said, "and I don't like you less for it. Give me absolution, and let's talk of something else, shall we?"

"Anything. You suggest the subject, and I'll jabber."

"Or gibber," she amended, and laughed. "I know, though. What time is it now—what time must you be back at Dowlandsbar?"

"The time now is five-fifty. I want to get back to Odder not later than nine-thirty, and to Dowlandsbar tomorrow morning."

"That means—Oh, what does it mean, George? Odder goes to sleep by ten o'clock, or at least when the men from your royal namesake get thrown out. Odder nine-thirty—you can't stay out all night, there."

"Say I must be back by nine-thirty, and leave it at that," he suggested. "What happens after is yet to be seen, if anything."

She gave him a long look. "I wouldn't be me if I were not curious about it," she said, "but—say six o'clock, by the time we get out. Now be guided by me.

Thursby, Wigton, Abbey Town, Calvo, and Skinburness. In this car of yours, you can do it and get me back home in time for dinner. I'll tell you the roads, from Skinburness to our lane."

"All of which means what?" he asked, and signed to the waiter to bring a bill. "It sounded perilously like bad language, as you said it."

"I'm incapable of anything of the sort," she retorted. "It means a sight of the sea, and at sunset, too. And then—you said you wanted to be back by nine-thirty—it means you'll come to dinner with us, and still have plenty of time. It is being a good day, George."

He paid the bill, and went out with her to the car. They took the road to the south-west, and Madge snuggled down luxuriously.

"Thursby, George—do you realize it? Thor's place. And Valgersby, the place of the Valkyrs, Odin's maidens who chose the slain. And Brownhill Scar—Brynhild's Scaur. All the country reeks with old legend, if you examine its names. Norse, Danish—Thorfinn Thorfinnsson fought his last fight somewhere near Valgersby, daddy says, and died gloriously while his men wiped out the Picts and saved Locksborough—but it hadn't been named Loki's Barrow then, until he was buried there. He was a little, dark man, rather like Cottrill, but a bad man."

"How do you know what he was like?" Gees asked.

"Because—I must have been about twelve, and it was a school holiday. I went up to Locksborough one day in a hot August, and went to sleep behind the long barrow, and I saw him in a dream. Bandy-legged, with a winged helmet, and a little dark man with a beak of a nose and a hard face. Just saw him, and—I'd never sleep near the long barrow again, although he didn't seem to see me. Locksborough was empty, then. Nobody thought it would ever be lived in. Loki, the god of evil."

Gees made no reply. They went through Wigton, and Madge warned him in time for the turn on to the road to Abbey Town.

"Then Calvo, and then the sea," she said. "You're not George at all. You're a god out of old time, carrying me to where I want to be, to sight and smell of the sea at sunset—and the whole of this is a dream, because one's wishes don't come

true in real life. The unexpectedness of it. I shall go back home and live it all over again."

She looked up at him, and saw his eyes directed to the road ahead.

"Impersonal, quite," she said. "Don't think I'm asking you to feel any of it. I'm just—happy, somehow. You're not in it, personally. You're just—don't be offended—you're just the agent of my happiness. Yes—no, right, quick! That other road goes to Silloth. Yes, just the agent, but a god all the same. Bragi, perhaps. George, why the devil did you come to Odder? I'm going to miss you badly—not you, but all you're giving me—when you go away again. Remember, I'm a parson's daughter, and they're worse than the majority. Else, I wouldn't be talking like this. Why give me all this?"

"To try to make you realize what Tyrrell will need, at the end," he answered. "Whether I bring about that end, or it just happens."

"Yes—no, hard left! There! Now stop. If we stay ten minutes, we can still get home in time for dinner. Now don't speak, yet."

They sat up over the quiet sea, its little, uncapped waves rolling lazily in under the south-west breeze, and there was a path of golden light that led to a far coast and the height of Criffel dim in the west. The last of the sunset was about them, and the breeze lapped over them, bringing the tang of salt water, chill and heartening.

"What he will need," she said very thoughtfully. "Yes. But had he any thought for me in my great need? We people of the north—I am of the north, George—we feel very deeply, if we feel at all. There was a time, a little time, when I wished to die, and it was nothing to him. A bitterness, and there was no comfort anywhere, for I knew he was hungering for that strange beauty—unearthly beauty that even then I knew was not altogether good. Gyda McCoul—or Lynette de Boisgeant?"

"I am not sure," Gees said. "No, I am not sure."

"No. There are other things at Locksborough. The very old dead, and Thorfinn's people, and the men and women who did sacrifice in a circle of the standing stones—the two in the gateway are part of the circle. Sacrifice to strange gods—and now Philip Tyrrell has gone away after strange gods. He may come back, but

not to me. So all this, your taking me out and making me feel so very happy for a little while, is quite useless. All my love for Philip Tyrrell is quite dead."

"Well, that doesn't mean our excursion has been useless," he said.

"No?" she gazed up at him. "Then where is the use?"

"Making you feel so very happy," he answered, and smiled at her. "'Sun, moon and stars, brother, all good things. There is also a wind on the heath.' Take Petulengro's wisdom to yourself, my dear, and go on being happy. I'm very glad I thought to ask you to come out."

"Oh, brother mine, you've got big hands and a big heart!" she said. "Daddy was right—you are one of us, and I'm happier still, now."

Gees laughed quietly. "I have also big feet," he observed.

"Yes, I know, but I couldn't catalogue everything. You're all big. Now one last look, and a bit of a verse you won't know—

'One swelling tide of ocean, darkly green.

One sunlit path, that meets the dying day—

One step between.'

And not long ago, I wanted to take that step, but not now. It's time to go back, and you're to stay for dinner since you're free till nine-thirty and not going back to Dowlandsbar, and I haven't talked so much since Angus Maconochie's pig walked to Inverness on stilts. You've got to turn round somehow, and I'll give you the turns to take us back to Odder as we come to them. Let's go, please, or we'll be late."

Driving on a little way, he found a gateway which gave him room to turn the car, and they went back. The girl sat quite silent except for directing him at need, and at last the crazy signpost pointing to Odder and Dowlandsbar showed: to Gees it seemed an age since he had first stopped and backed to follow the guiding of that post.

But, short of the signpost, where a half-dozen firs grouped beside the road, he

pulled in and stopped with two wheels off the metalling. Madge looked up at him questioningly.

“I shall need headlights along the lane,” he explained, “and after we get out of the first dip, they’ll be visible from the top of Locksborough keep, for a little while. What time do you have dinner?”

“It’s a movable festival, like Easter,” she answered, “later at some times than others, with half-past seven as the average. But what will happen when your lights are visible at Locksborough?”

“Nothing, if they’re not visible too soon,” he answered. The McCouls, he knew, were due for dinner at Dowlandsbar at seven, but he would take no risks of being seen returning. “I am still in Carlisle, dining there, and not due back here till midnight. And it’s hardly likely that another car would be coming along here at this time.”

“It’s all rather puzzling,” she said dubiously.

“On the contrary, it’s all quite clear, now,” he dissented. “Somehow this run out with you has made everything plain, filled in the gaps in my theory—all but one, that is.”

“May I know the theory?” she asked after a pause.

“I don’t see why not,” he answered thoughtfully. “The gap is—what are the things that have done these killings? What are they using to bring Tyrrell to the point where he will finally decide to go?”

“Decide to go?” she echoed, in a puzzled way.

“This is how I see it, now,” he said. “First, though—when did it occur to you that Tyrrell was in love with Gyda McCoul?”

“She came here with her father very early in the year,” she answered, “before the alterations were completed for them to come to live here in the castle. The change in him began then—I knew then.”

“And in that case, Gyda McCoul knew too—meant to get him.”

“It may have been so. I know he changed from that time, to me.”

“Yes. They didn’t come here because of Tyrrell, but for a different purpose altogether. Then Gyda saw him, and he became their second purpose, but she doesn’t mean him to stay here at Dowlandsbar, doesn’t intend that they shall live there after marriage. As far as their object in being at Locksborough is concerned, they have already achieved it. Remains only to make sure of Tyrrell, and for Gyda to go with him, quite away from here, where she and her father are ostracized.”

“But he wouldn’t leave Dowlandsbar, surely?” she protested.

“He has already talked of it to me,” Gees assured her. “He has made up his mind to sell the flock, realizing now that he can’t ask Tom Cotton or anyone else to take the risk of guarding it. And Dowlandsbar is primarily a sheep farm. She means him to leave it altogether.”

“And so—you mean they instigated these killings, to make him feel that the place—his home—is altogether useless to him?”

“Just that. And McCoul is a master of old magic—”

“But if they didn’t come here because of Tyrrell, why did they come at all? What was the different purpose you spoke of just now?”

“You saw a part of it, in London,” he answered. “The diamond crescent and ruby —pendant, wasn’t it? McCoul was too poor to pay Ben Latimer at first, and then —remember, neither de Vere when he took the castle, nor anyone since his day, ever discovered the priory plunder and all else that the de Boisgeants collected in their day.”

“And you think-?” she asked after another thoughtful pause.

“Well, isn’t it clear? That hoard was hidden so securely that only those who knew the hiding place, saw it put away, could find it. By buying Locksborough, McCoul ensured undisturbed ownership of all that was there, and the law of treasure-trove doesn’t apply until someone beside himself knows for certainty that he has unearthed the de Boisgeant hoard. How many times have they been away since they came here?”

“Twice. They went away in June, and then I saw her as I told you, when we were in London not long ago. Yes, I see. He took things to sell—jewels, parts of what he found. And—the beasts?”

“Brought to being somehow,” Gees said doubtfully. “Things with a blood lust, tangible things, not ghosts. I wonder—”

He broke off and sat silent, thinking of how McCoul had shown him over the keep—but what other chambers were set in the thickness of the mighty walls? What, besides the range of cells and that terrible room beyond them, was there of hiding place under the fabric?

Madge clutched at his arm, and he looked down at her.

“Yes?” he asked.

“Please take me home,” she begged. “I want the comfort of four walls round me, and not—it’s growing eerie, and I don’t know what the shadows hide. Please! It’s been such a happy time, but—”

“I understand,” he said, and roused the engine to life. “Twenty past seven now—I’ll put the car round at the back of the vicarage, and you’ll be in time for your movable feast.”

But he looked down at her upturned face, and did not start.

“Madge?” he asked.

She put both arms round his neck. “You dear! Oh, you dear!” she said, and gave him her lips.

“This—it doesn’t spoil your day?” he asked.

“Completes it—crowns it.” She released herself from his hold and settled herself close beside him. “And now—home, George.”

He drove on and turned into the lane.

Chapter XVI DINNER FOR THREE

GYDA MCCOUL put down her coffee cup and rose to her feet, and at her movement Tyrrell too stood up, and turned to open the dining-room door for her. But before he could move toward it she spoke.

“No-please, Philip. I don’t want to leave you—only to come and sit with you while you finish your coffee. Do sit down.”

Clad, as when she had dined at Dowlandsbar before, in shimmering grey, she was a ghostly, indistinct figure outside the range of the candlelight from the table as she came past her father toward Tyrrell’s chair. McCoul, so leaned back that his face was in shadow, stirred his coffee absently, and Tyrrell seated himself again as Gyda perched herself on the arm of his carving chair, and then laid her arm across his shoulders. He looked up at the touch, and smiled at her.

“Not too comfortable, is it?” he asked.

“Close to you, my dear,” she answered caressingly.

“I see you expect to lose more sheep,” McCoul, still stirring his coffee, observed. “More than two, next time, it seems.”

“Why, what makes you think so?” Tyrrell asked anxiously.

“Merely the bonfire laid where the others have been,” McCoul answered. “This one is so much bigger—big enough for roasting an ox.”

“Ah, that!” Tyrrell said, with a note of relief in his voice as he realized that McCoul had seen no more definite portents. “As a matter of fact, Gees—Green, that is—asked me to have that pile laid. I don’t know exactly what he expects, unless it is that he hopes to catch those infernal beasts and burn them as we burned all the sheep.”

“Then he is still hopeful of catching them?” McCoul asked.

“I don’t know,” Tyrrell answered slowly, remembering that Gees had asked for silence regarding his plans. “But after Cottrill’s death, he can hardly interfere

with police work. I believe he thinks of going back to London early next week, which looks as if—”

“As if he had given it up,” McCoul suggested in the pause.

“Well, yes,” Tyrrell admitted. “If it hadn’t been for this idea of his, spending the evening in Carlisle, he might have told you what he thinks about the situation, and what he intends to do. I’m not sure.”

“And what do you intend to do?” McCoul asked. “This cannot go on. The police have proved themselves quite ineffective—it cannot go on.”

“No,” Tyrrell agreed. “Gyda and I were talking of it this morning, while you were showing Green over the castle. I shall make arrangements next week to sell the flock, which means, of course, the end of living here for me. A big wrench, but—you’ll be pleased, won’t you, Gyda?”

“It is as you said this morning,” she answered. “The sheep are the life of the place, and if they cannot be kept here, it dies.”

“True.” Tyrrell voiced the confirmation rather gloomily. “It’s a most amazing thing, an impossible thing in these modern days, and yet there it is. Somebody will discover the cause, put an end to these horrible things, sooner or later, and then sheep can be run on these fells again. But I give it up—Cottrill’s death ends it, for me, and I’ve told the man who took his place to keep to his home dark.”

“Yes,” McCoul said gravely, and drank his coffee. He put the cup down on the table. “Until the dogs are found, the sheep must go.”

“And I’ll risk no other man’s life over finding them,” Tyrrell said. “If they are dogs—and to me they seemed like something worse, something fiendish and awful. I told Gyda this morning how they nearly—”

“Ah, don’t recall it, darling!” she interposed, and laid her hand momentarily across his lips. “Say that it is all over—or next week, when the sheep are gone, it will be all over. And in a little time—”

She did not end it, but bent to drop a light kiss on his forehead as he looked up at her. His face cleared as he met her gaze.

“She told me of that,” McCoul said coolly. “And you gained an impression that they were not ordinary dogs, you say?”

He waited. Gyda, sitting erect again, appeared as if she too waited for Tyrrell’s reply, which was long in coming.

“They were four-legged, I know,” Tyrrell said at last, “and grey—one paler than the other. And—dogs? Well, I felt that they came from the kennels of hell. Think of the cunning of them, too. Until then, never once had they come near the sheep except when the flock was unwatched. Holding off as long as there was a guard, and instantly it was taken off, another killing! Like—like human intelligence.”

“But ordinary dogs might scent human beings and keep away,” McCoul urged. An outsider, had there been one, might have thought he was leading Tyrrell on to commit himself definitely to some course of action. “Perhaps you are a little—well, strung up over this, Philip.”

“To this extent,” Tyrrell said with decision. “The flock goes, and Dowlandsbar goes—to whoever will have the nerve to buy the place. I know these are no ordinary dogs—say I’m superstitious, say I’m running away from the trouble, if you like, but since Green has failed to discover them—and his going off to Carlisle like this is proof that he’s given it up and is interesting himself in other things—since he has failed and the police are utterly useless, I give up—go!”

“Not alone, Philip,” Gyda said, very softly.

“My compensation,” he said, and drew her hand round to his lips to kiss it. “I don’t know—do you think of staying on at Locksborough, sir? I mean, after Gyda and I are married and gone?”

“I should not stay on in any case,” McCoul answered. “The place is too gloomy, and fully modernizing it is out of the question.”

“Not worth while,” Tyrrell agreed thoughtfully.

“Also, the prejudice of the people of this place—I could never overcome it,” McCoul added. “That man Amber—they follow him. And the fact that I have dared to live in such a place as Locksborough—your people here are full of superstition, Philip.”

He rose from his chair and stood beyond the candlelight, a tall indistinctness in the gloom. Only his eyes showed, and to Tyrrell it seemed that some vagrant ray from the candles must have rested on them, for he could see them plainly, luminous pools of darkness. Then McCoul turned toward the door, averting his face from Tyrrell.

“You two will not need me for awhile,” he said.

“But—but we can’t leave you alone?” Tyrrell urged, halfheartedly.

“Oh, yes.” McCoul’s voice was softly satiric. “There is a good fire in the hall, I know, and you have much to say to each other. Consider that your friend is here with us, and I am talking to him.”

He went out, closing the door on himself very quietly. By the fireplace in the big entrance hall, Annie the maid had just placed a tray containing decanter, siphon, and glasses, on the occasional table that stood there, and, turning and catching sight of McCoul’s tall figure advancing, she started and then crossed herself as she turned away.

“Why do you do that, girl?” McCoul demanded, keeping his voice low, but with an angry, almost growling note in the question.

She turned again to face him, fearful, yet defiant.

“You’re not my master,” she said, “an’ heaven forbid that you ever should be! An’ I don’t answer to you for what I do.”

Then she faced about and went out hurriedly by the door leading to the servants’ quarters. McCoul gazed after her for a few moments, and then went to stand gazing into the log fire.

In the room he had left, Gyda moved from her seat on the arm of Tyrrell’s chair and dropped down on his knees, reclining against him. He pressed her head against his shoulder, kissed her passionately.

“Soon, darling,” he said. “It must be soon.”

She leaned back in his clasp to look at him. Her eyes were all amber, then, her gaze intense, and he had an instant’s half-consciousness that somewhere, at some

time, just such eyes had gazed at him before. In some other state, it must have been—a half-memory out of childhood, perhaps—and then the consciousness passed as he heard her voice, whisperingly soft, the velvet of her lips almost touching his own.

“Quite soon—dearest, quite soon. But not here, not in this place. You shall take me away. I can tell you now how glad I am you have decided not to stay in this place, and my father is glad too.”

“And yet—it’s my home, Gyda darling. So many associations, things of all my life, and the lives of my people before me. Roots, deep down in me—I might put some man in to manage till those things are caught, and then come back here with you. For they must be caught, sooner or later. And then to have you here, mistress in my home!”

“Philip, shall I not be your home?” she almost whispered.

Again he kissed her, and for an interval was silent, holding her close to him. Half-past eight chimed from a clock in the corner of the room, and Gyda laid her cheek against her lover’s, sighing contentedly.

“I wonder whether Green will get back tonight,” Tyrrell said.

“You mean—before we go?” He felt her stiffen slightly in his clasp, and heard in the question a note almost of anxiety.

“Why, no—he said he would not be back till midnight, if at all,” he answered. “Don’t you like him, then?”

“He does not like me,” she answered evasively.

“Oh, absurd!” Tyrrell protested. “He told me how charming he thinks you. And why on earth should he dislike you, my darling?”

“It was my impression. Philip, has he said anything to you of my father showing him over the castle this morning?”

“Not a word—he hasn’t mentioned it since we came back,” he assured her. “But why should you think he dislikes you—I’m sure he does not. And in any case, he will be gone in two or three days’ time.”

“And you—you will take me away, Philip, when I belong to you?” Her arms tightened about his neck, and the words, almost whispered, were yet tense with earnestness. “Quite away from this place?”

“My dear, I have said I would,” he answered, puzzled by her insistence. “Why—why are you so determined that we should not stay here?”

“It is—it is”—she smiled at him with tremulous lips—“just a little fear, Philip. As if there were danger for me here—even death, if I stay too long. I know I must not stay though—”

“Darling, it’s this awful business of Cottrill’s death that’s upset you,” he interrupted her. “It’s cast a gloom over all of us, and you are over-sensitive. No harm shall come to you—why, I love you!”

Minutes later, he laughed softly as he gazed into her eyes.

“Danger!” he exclaimed. “Oh, but you’re much too wonderful to come to any harm, my Gyda! Yes, we’ll go quite away—among your own people, if you wish. Over in Ireland, isn’t it?”

“I have no people,” she answered. “My father and I are quite alone. I think we had better join him, Philip. It will soon be time for us to go, and we cannot leave him alone all the evening.”

“Oh, but you needn’t go yet,” he objected, as they stood up and she patted her disarranged hair. “It isn’t even nine o’clock.”

“No?” She smiled at him. “An hour longer, then. If we go and talk to him for a little while, I think he will find a way of leaving us to ourselves again before we go. But now you must find me somewhere to put my hair straight, Philip. You’ve tumbled it about so.”

“Darling, it’s lovely anyhow,” he assured her, “but I’ll get Annie to show you”—he went to the bell-push beside the door and pressed it—“and then you can come and join me and your father in the hall.”

Annie, her lips set in a thin line, answered the bell.

“Just take Miss McCoul along to put her hair straight, Annie,” Tyrrell bade.

“And then you’ll join us again, dear.”

“This way, miss,” Annie said, with distaste in her voice.

Tyrrell gazed after her as the two went out, his anger at her attitude evident in his face. Then he followed out from the room, and saw the two ascending the staircase. Annie led on to a bathroom, pushed open the door and switched on the light.

“There,” she said. “There’s a brush an’ comb on the shelf”

“Were you taught to speak to your master’s guests like that?” Gyda demanded sharply, pausing in the doorway of the room.

“I’ve done what the master told me,” Annie retorted sullenly.

“Girl!” Gyda bent toward her, and before the sudden, fierce blaze of the amber eyes the girl recoiled, terrified. “You should be whipped in the courtyard—”

But then, suddenly, she herself started back and closed the door between them. Annie stared at its panels, gradually recovering herself.

“Courtyard?” she whispered. “Courtyard—what courtyard?”

She turned away slowly, and made her way to the kitchen, where Tyrrell’s cook sat reading, but looked up at the girl’s entry.

“Cook,” Annie broke out, glad of a confidante, “that yellow-eyed witch said I ought to be whipped in the courtyard, because I wouldn’t bow and scrape to her when the master told me to show her where she could tidy her hair. Whipped in the courtyard, she said!”

“Did she?” the cook queried ponderously. “Well, you can’t, because we ain’t got no courtyard here, whatever that might be. And what’s more, the day she comes to reign here, I walk out, I do.”

“Me too,” Annie agreed fervently. “What’s come over the master, takin’ up with her like he’s done, is a mystery. That’s what it is, a mystery. Whipped! I’ve a good mind to tell him an’ give notice first thing tomorrow. I’m not to be talked to like that by her!”

*

McCoul was not in the entrance hall, Tyrrell found, and the outer door stood open. He went to look, and found McCoul on the step.

“Enjoying the night,” McCoul explained. “It is not in the least cold. And you two have settled everything, I hope?”

“Settled? Oh, yes!” Tyrrell answered, a little surprised at the question. “You mean, about Gyda’s wishing to get away from here?”

“I have been thinking,” McCoul answered indirectly, “and it seems to me that when you put Dowlandsbar up for sale, I might arrange to sell Locksborough, since I have no intention of continuing there. A buyer of this place would be glad to get the two hundred acres of good grazing that go with the castle. It would be a good opportunity.”

“That is, if I sell,” Tyrrell said. Though, lover-like, he fell in with Gyda’s wishes after little persuasion, it was quite a different thing when McCoul assumed that Dowlandsbar was already as good as in the auction market. It seemed to him that his prospective father-in-law was trying to force his hand, and he felt a faint resentment.

“Why—what else could you do?” McCoul asked calmly.

“I might put a man in to manage while the place lies fallow—until these things are caught and the trouble about them has died out,” Tyrrell answered. “Then Gyda and I could come back to live here.”

“Ye-es.” But there was doubt of the suggestion in McCoul’s hesitant response. “But if you form fresh ties elsewhere, what then?”

“I shall never form such ties as bind me to this place,” Tyrrell said decidedly. “Generations of my people have lived and died here, I myself grew up among these people—” he broke off abruptly, remembering how, in siding against Amber, he had isolated himself from nearly everybody in the place. “Dowlandsbar is home to me,” he ended.

Then Gyda came out to them: she may have heard Tyrrell’s last declaration, for she laid her hand on his arm and urged him forward, into the shadows beyond

the doorway, and he saw McCoul draw back.

“I want you to myself for a little while, Philip,” she said softly. “Not for long—we must go, soon. Not for long, father,” she added over her shoulder to McCoul, who went back into the house.

“Yes?” Tyrrell asked her. There was a somber, troubled note in his voice: it seemed to him then that McCoul was trying to urge him too far and too fast, and that Gyda, too, failed to comprehend all that Dowlandsbar meant to him. He went with her beyond the graveled frontage of the house to the grassy slope beyond, and there, pausing to face him, she reached up and put her arms round his neck.

“What is home, but the place where love is?” she asked tenderly.

“Ah, darling!” he answered. “You’re so wonderful! But, Gyda, now I face the actual fact of leaving here, think of it as a thing done, I begin to realize all it will mean. I know your wish—my dear, it’s only that there must be some regret, some natural regret.”

She leaned close to him. “My dear, you are sad tonight,” she said caressingly. “I love you, Philip, yet not even I can make you happy.”

“I should be far less happy if it were not for you,” he answered. “But it came over me—why my sheep and no others—why my shepherd and no other? Why am I singled out for this fantastic, absurd visitation that nobody seems able to trace or end? Why should my farm be cursed—it is no less—cursed? I feel it as that, feel that there is no remedy. Else, I would not think of leaving my home.”

“Yet, since it is so,” she said, very softly, “you have decided. My dear, the whole world is before us—neither of us is poor, and the whole world is before us. And my love all yours, Philip, all that I can give—more than you can dream till you know me fully, become—”

She broke off and laid her lips on his. In a little while he held her, back from him to gaze at her, and felt himself half-dazed by the intensity of her passion. Yet there was in it some strange, ethereal quality that was beyond passion, and with all the longing for her that he felt there was a trace of wonder at her, even of fear.

“Become—what?” he questioned, and saw her strange eyes shining in the light

from the doorway—or so he thought at first, but realized for one instant that they stood beyond any light that could ray out.

“Mine, all my own,” she whispered back. “Body and spirit, soul and strength. Oh, my lover, how shall I live through time when you are not? I who have waited so long, so long—kiss me and have done with words, for they tell nothing. Your lips—the heart of you—”

Even as he kissed her he laughed, laughed with a happiness such as he had never known. It seemed to him that she breathed into him a life beyond his life, lifted him to a level on which, hitherto, he had never stood. And her soft laughter came back, answering him.

“Oh, my beloved, how shall I wait?” he asked passionately.

“A little while—a very little while,” she answered him.

McCoul’s tall figure shadowed the doorway—Tyrrell could not have told whether he had stood in the darkness with Gyda for a minute, or an hour. He knew only that he had entered and returned from some world of feeling, poignantly, achingly intense, and that he longed for Gyda to take him back there. He knew that in truth there was more to her love than he had dreamed, that she was wonderful beyond his understanding.

“Gyda, we must go back,” McCoul said, and the practicality of the words was like cold water on Tyrrell. “It is past ten.”

“Wait, and I’ll turn the car out,” Tyrrell said.

“Oh, but you mustn’t take all that trouble,” McCoul expostulated.

“I insist. Gyda shall not walk back. You wish it, darling?” Secure in the darkness, he held her close till she answered.

“We are one in our wish, my lover.”

“Wait for me—only a minute,” he said, and set off toward the cart shed that had been set apart for his car, beyond the end of the house. The doors had not been closed since Gees had taken out his Rolls-Bentley, and Tyrrell had only to fling up the dickey cover of his old two-seater, crank up the engine since the self-

starter was too weak to turn it, and drive out to halt before the doorway to the house.

“Hope you won’t mind sitting behind, sir,” he said to McCoul, and switched on the headlights. “Gyda, here with me.”

McCoul climbed in. Gyda seated herself beside Tyrrell, and he drove off along the graveled way and out to the lane. They were near the narrow stone bridge when he felt her hand clutch his arm.

“What?” he asked. “Did you leave anything behind?”

“No,” she answered. “It was nothing,” and her grasp relaxed. “Only, as these hinds and serfs say, as if someone stepped across my grave.”

“Hinds and serfs.” He puzzled over such an expression, but did not question it, while he drove up to the standing stones and, passing between them, went on across the grassy slope till he reached the end of the causeway across the moat. There he stopped the car, and McCoul got out.

“You will come in for a minute, Philip?” he asked, and took the answer for granted. “I will go on ahead and light the lamp.”

Then Tyrrell got down from the driving seat, went round to the near side of the car, and opened the door. He took Gyda in his arms, hungrily, as she stepped out, and held her.

“You’ve wakened so much—so much I never knew was in me,” he said. “Gyda, Gyda mine, it must be soon, very soon!”

“Can you come to see me tomorrow?” she asked.

“My darling, I’d come from the ends of the earth when you ask,” he answered. “Tomorrow—how soon?”

“In the afternoon, alone?”

“Darling, when you wish.”

“And then, we can decide how soon—for always. My dear, it cannot be too soon

for me, as for you. And now you must come in, only for a very little while, and then go. My dear—yes, I wait, too."

They passed along the causeway, Tyrrell's arm about her waist, and her little white head laid against his shoulder. Before them, the yellow oblong of light in the wall of the keep showed that McCoul had lighted the Aladdin lamp, and they passed in, for a few moments obscuring the dim ray laid along the grass.

Chapter XVII DINNER FOR FIVE-AND AFTER

THE clock in Odder church tower clanged out the half-hour as Gees pulled on his handbrake at the back of the vicarage, and, without moving, he grinned down at Madge beside him.

“Seven-thirty and no blinkin’ error,” he said. “That is, if that clock’s right. Mine here says it’s two minutes slow, and you’re late for dinner unless mine’s a liar. I believe it’s truthful.”

“I’m not necessarily late for dinner,” she said, and, opening the door for herself, got out. “If I am, it was worth it. Come along and let’s see. Mind, they’ve got to lay an extra place for you. George, you’re a terrible lot of trouble, but you’re worth it. Come along.”

Following her, he found that she was wrong, for a place was already laid for him. The vicar explained, with an air of modesty.

“We—er—well, you see, Mr. Green, my wife decided you had only suggested taking Madge to Carlisle for tea, and—er—well, you would acquire an appetite on the way back, and if we could persuade you to stay and dine with us—er—well—quite possibly Mr. Tyrrell is not expecting you back, although of course he might, but—er—do stay and share our simple meal. I can ring through and tell him—”

“He’s not expecting me,” Gees said, “and I don’t wish you to ring him. Also, your daughter has already invited me, and as a final and altogether conclusive reason, I’m glad of a chance of seeing you and Mrs. Amber again. So I accept, with joy and goodly glee.”

The vicar’s eyes twinkled. “Glad you know your Burton,” he said. “I’ve studied him, and if I were a writer, I’d go to him for plots. I have the original edition, with the sixteen pages that ought never to have been printed. I keep it locked, of course—”

“Measly blighter!” Madge interposed. “But I’ll find that key one of these days, if it means picking your pockets.”

“My dear, Jenny rang the gong just before you came in,” her father protested. “And you haven’t even taken your hat off. Mr. Green, do let me take you along to get rid of your coat and hat. I’m afraid we are rather lax in our ideas of dinner time—my fault, mostly, but also we must defer to the vagaries of a cook, to some extent. I fear she regards me as a great sinner. There was a *souffle*, once—a tragedy. A perfect tragedy. It went—so!” He extended a hand floorward. “We have never had a *souffle* since. My wife and the cook are in unison about it. One must treat one’s cook, it seems, with a certain amount of deference. Things have altered sadly since I was a young man.”

“They’re still altering,” Gees assured him, following to the alcove which served as a cloak room. He found a peg for his hat and coat. “Now we won’t keep Mrs. Amber waiting—lead on, sir, and I’ll follow.”

The talk over the meal ran on general subjects for awhile. Harold, it appeared, had decided on the Air Force as a career: both Mrs. Amber and Madge, Gees concluded, knew more about recent books and plays than he himself did, and the vicar, contributing an occasional remark, proved himself fully conversant with topics of the day. After one of his comments, he saw Gees’ amused smile, and questioned it.

“I want to know how you all do it?” Gees asked in reply.

“How we all do what?” the vicar queried, slightly puzzled.

“Why, know so much of what’s going on, when you’re here as you are.”

“Quite simple, my dear Watson. I have, fortunately, a small income of my own in addition to my stipend—the living is not a very good one—and every year we take three weeks’ holiday and make the most of it, sometimes in our own country, and sometimes abroad. One can store up much in three weeks, by the aid of white magic.”

“That being?” Gees queried.

“Well, say the steam engine, the internal combustion engine, and a few electrical devices, all of which would have been the rankest magic a little more than a century ago, and not even considered white, in all probability. And our rather older friend the printing press—magic again, now that I can read today what happened on the other side of the world yesterday. We have reached what I

should call the beginning of comprehension, touched the fringe of knowledge."

"A fairly deep fringe, surely," Gees urged thoughtfully.

"Oh, no! The veriest outer fringe, of no depth at all. The common fallacy that is it more, and that man has made himself in reality a lord of creation, leads to skepticism over all that remains to be learned. Man has gone utterly material, let his machines master him, and will believe only what he can see and prove by material means. The vast field of the immaterial remains almost untouched. The why of being, even the influence of the ductless glands on character."

"But the ductless glands are material enough, daddy," Madge urged.

"Character is not," he said dryly. "Then in the material—what is electricity? We are no nearer the answer to that than men were in Faraday's time. Apart from the veriest crust, the composition of the interior of the earth is utterly unknown—there may be life within the planet as well as on its surface, for all that we can tell. A little while ago, all the elements of which matter is composed were said to be known—but two outside the known range have since been discovered. In every direction, we have to say we do not know, and your brief investigations here should have convinced you that in yet another field we know nothing at all, and discredit as superstition the little that has been guessed."

"Other planes of being, that is," Gees suggested.

"If the cost of, say, a couple of battleships had been devoted to research, man might have been master of the fourth dimension by now," the vicar answered indirectly. "There may come a day when we are no longer fixed in time, but able to travel in it as we travel in space."

Madge looked across the table at Gees and smiled, as if to say that she recalled his theory of such a possibility.

"Take a few machine guns back to the battle of Hastings," Harold suggested, "and upset all the history books."

"But then we as we are should never have existed," Mrs. Amber said.

"Do we exist?" Madge asked. "What is reality?"

“Coffee, my dear, I’m glad to say,” the vicar answered her. “Mr. Green, will you take yours with me in my study? We can rejoin the others afterward, but I’d like a word or two with you first.”

In the study, Gees faced his host questioningly.

“For one thing,” Amber said, “will you tell me if you are going on with your investigations, or giving up and leaving us?”

“I’m very far from giving up,” Gees answered unhesitatingly.

“I am glad to hear it—very glad to hear it,” the vicar observed. “I believe you have—the right angle, let us say. Sufficient credulity to accept the fantastic. That is, fantastic from the material, commonplace standpoint. And you regard Locksborough as the centre of the trouble, as I do?”

“Between ourselves, I regard McCoul as the originator of it,” Gees admitted frankly. “An experience I had there this morning proves to me that the man is afraid of me—or afraid of what I may find out.”

“Possibly. Also quite between ourselves, Mr. Green, I once met McCoul and his daughter, exactly as they are now, nearly forty years ago.”

“I’m glad you mentioned that,” Gees said. “Madge—your daughter—told me of it today, while we were out. But are you sure?”

For a moment or two the vicar reflected, and then he nodded gravely.

“In this way,” he said. “I saw them quite plainly as they passed me, noted things about them—eyes and hair, particularly. It is possible that a son might resemble his father enough to be mistaken for him when he has grown to the father’s age. It is possible, too, that a daughter might reproduce her mother’s eyes and snow white hair, but very unlikely that she would inherit both characteristics so as to be mistaken for her mother. But the double coincidence—to me it is an impossibility that both father and daughter should be exactly like their immediate forbears. Make every allowance you like for possible lapses of memory on my part, and still I say these two are the two I saw then.”

“I accept it as fact,” Gees remarked quietly.

“One more thing, Mr. Green, and then we can go back to the others. If your belief justifies you in taking any action against McCoul—if you have any grounds for taking action—take it quickly.”

“Yes?” Gees queried. “Where is the need for that?”

“Here, in Odder,” the vicar answered. “Feeling against McCoul—and against his daughter too—has been growing almost since they first came to live at Locksborough. Tyrrell has alienated himself from everyone by his association with them, and now it is known that he intends to marry the daughter, he is almost as much outside the pale of these people as the McCouls themselves. And Cottrill’s death has intensified the feeling against them to a dangerous point. Odder almost openly accuses McCoul of being responsible for Cottrill’s death, instigating whatever caused it. The police can take no action against him, I know, for they have no material evidence to connect him with what has happened here. But the people of the village, and for miles round—they are simple folk—rather primal in their instincts to this day, and all the old beliefs and superstition have been roused to full life among them. They might take action themselves, before long.”

“Such as?” Gees asked.

“Such as setting fire to the castle, say. Putting themselves in the wrong, putting McCoul in a very strong position, and possibly ending any action you may contemplate. If they force Inspector Feather and his men to take McCoul’s part, for instance—”

He paused, and Gees thought it over. Certainly, if Feather had to protect the McCouls, there would be an end to his co-operation in these night watches—but Gees could not tell how long they must go on without result. And he could see no other course but the one on which he had determined: open accusation, or search on a warrant such as Feather had suggested, he felt sure, would ruin everything. He shook his head.

“I must risk it,” he said. “I cannot take action yet.”

“It is difficult, I know,” the vicar reflected. “Against the abnormal, normal planning or action would be useless. One personal warning. Do not go to the bar of the inn alone. I know you have been there with Cottrill, and with Tom Cotton too. But do not go alone—remember, everyone here knows you are staying with

Tyrrell."

"Yes, I see," Gees assented. "The feeling against the McCouls might extend through him to me. But I think I have finished with that bar."

Then Amber took him to the old-fashioned, comfortable drawing-room of the house, and the four of them—Harold had disappeared—talked until, at twenty minutes past nine, Gees rose and intimated that he must go. When he had said his good-byes, Madge got ahead of her father on the way to the door, and turned to Gees.

"Since you left your car at the back, it will be quicker to go out that way," she suggested. "I'll show him, daddy—you needn't come."

She escorted Gees out by the back door, and went with him to the car. There he opened the tool chest and took out an electric torch, which he dropped into his overcoat pocket. Then he turned to the girl.

"No, get in," she bade. "I've something to say to you, after you are inside, but not before."

"I am not taking the car just yet," he said. "It may remain here for several hours, yet. I am going off on foot."

"Where?" She moved quite close to him and looked up into his face.

He shook his head. "I am not taking the car," he repeated.

"You're going after the grey things," she accused. "And Cottrill—"

"Cottrill was alone—I shall not be," he pointed out.

"Then—but you know what they are—don't tell me any more. And it was not for that I wanted to come out to speak to you, but because of—of what happened this afternoon, just before you drove home. When you stopped beside the road, and—you remember?"

"Do I remember, Madge!" he echoed, and smiled at her.

"Just this—it wasn't today that it happened. We came down from the height that

is out of time, just for a minute—a minute that does not belong to any day we know. A little space apart from life as I must live it—as you must live it. Not less sweet, not less dear, but apart as a yesterday, or some tomorrow that we cannot see, now."

He put his arms round her. "Not less sweet, not less dear, than you," he told her. "I understand, Madge, perhaps better than you think."

"Then I can be happy in remembering it. Bless you, dear-good night."

She withdrew herself from his hold and ran back into the house.

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"Now, Inspector, the procedure is exactly as last night, except that I want you with me outside the front entrance, and the sergeant and Tom Cotton to watch the path at the back. All loaded and ready?"

"All ready," Feather answered. "But why the change?"

"Say that I want official support for both Tom and myself, instead of our acting independently of you. Account for it in that way, if you like. And we'll go—we ought to be in position by ten o'clock."

"Are you sure this is going to lead to anything?" Feather paused to ask, after taking up one of the guns and making certain it was loaded.

"I'm sure no other way is going to lead to anything, and sure enough of this to forfeit that five hundred pounds if it doesn't," Gees snapped out acidly. "Do I write you the check now, or do we start?"

"If we draw blank tonight," Feather said, "you can write it before we start tomorrow night, and hand it to someone to hold either till I call off and lose it or till your fortnight is up and you lose it."

"That's agreed," Gees remarked cheerfully. "Now let's get going."

Ten o'clock was striking as Cotton and Sergeant Rapkin settled into their post that commanded the exit from the path through the moat, and Gees went back with the inspector and crossed the causeway, two silently flitting figures that

disappeared altogether when they lay down in the niche of the ruined gatehouse. The frontage of the keep showed no light from any of its arrow slits, but, after a long period of waiting, Gees saw the glow from the headlights of Tyrrell's car advancing from Dowlandsbar. Then, since their niche was too near the direct line between the causeway and the main entrance, while ordinary people went by, he clambered on all fours, Feather following him, to another secure shelter in the ruins. There they saw the car halt, its headlamps striking a cone-shaped ray over them to end on the wall of the keep, and McCoul came first alone and entered the place, the heavy iron latch of the door clacking hollowly as he moved it. Light showed from within soon after, both from the two arrow slits and from the doorway itself, and after another, longer interval Tyrrell and Gyda appeared, her silvery hair shining close to Tyrrell's shoulder as he held her near to him. The two watchers heard her soft, caressing voice—"My dear—yes, I wait, too," and then the pair passed and disappeared within the keep. Gees noted that the door remained open, for the entrance still showed as lighted. For just one moment he felt compunction over thus spying on the lovers, but then he remembered Cottrill's body, bloodless and mangled as he had seen it, and forgot all softer thoughts.

Another long interval passed, and then Tyrrell and Gyda emerged again. They passed to where the car stood, and, five minutes or more later, Gees heard Tyrrell crank the engine to life. He had turned to go out to the lane when Gyda returned across the causeway, and now McCoul became visible, still in his evening clothes, and framed in the doorway of the keep while his daughter advanced toward him.

"It is a perfect night," she said, quite audibly to the watchers.

"A hunting night," McCoul answered her, and laughed aloud.

Then they both went within the keep, but still, Gees noted, the door remained open, and the light from the big, ground-floor room was kept on. For a minute or less another faint light appeared in the arrow slit that Gees knew now was in the wall of Gyda's room on the first floor: it disappeared, and then came another long interval of stillness. A little breeze sighed about the place, but so little sound was there that Gees, his senses strained to full acuteness, could hear his own wrist watch ticking. And then, he knew, fear came.

Silent as was the night itself, intangible, invisible, fear came as he lay there

watching the lighted doorway. Some hideousness, some unnatural, devilish presence tensed his every nerve and chilled him. He saw dimly that Feather, beside him, moved, and reached out to grip the inspector's arm while, subduing his own terror in the need of keeping his companion quiet, he managed to whisper, "Quiet!" and keep his teeth from chattering. And Feather lay still again.

Something showed for an instant and no more in the lighted entrance and, before either man could lift a gun, a grey shape passed out along the causeway and was gone. Another followed, and, since the two men were lying to leeward of the track, the foul smell that Gees knew came to his nostrils for a moment. There had been no chance, no time to fire a shot, before the things were gone. Then Gees stood up.

"Inspector," he said, keeping his voice very low, "I am going to sign their death warrant." And, moving noiselessly across the grass, he went to the door and closed it, lifting the latch by turning the iron ring, and dropping it so that the door was fastened. He tried it to make certain, and then returned to where Feather stood.

"Now we'll post ourselves closer," he whispered, "and when they come back and stop against that closed door shoot, and don't miss."

"And then McCoul—arrest him," Feather whispered back. "He sent them out. Get them first, then him."

"Aye, arrest McCoul!" Gees said aloud.

They moved up to within a few feet of the doorway, and there lay down again. Time ceased to be. Gees thought of Cottrill, of the sheep scattered and unguarded on the fells, of two things rending at throats, drinking hot blood—a soft pattering on the grass, and he nudged the man beside him gently. *They* were returning.

He saw them, two shadows on the darkness. One went within the thickness of the wall where the closed door was set, one held back, as if waiting while its partner made a way, and, his gun already at his shoulder, Gees aimed as nearly as he could in the gloom.

"Fire!" he bade sharply, and pressed his trigger.

An awful, half-human screech mingled with the report of his gun, and then the crash of Feather's shot sounded beside him. He let off the left barrel, aiming into the doorway, and again Feather's gun spat flame. Then, on his feet, his automatic pistol ready in his right hand and the electric light in his left, Gees went to where the grey thing outside the doorway wriggled hideously and yapped in a wolfish way—a pellet had struck some nerve centre, and with blood pouring from its chest the thing jerked about on the grass. Gees put the pistol to its ear and pressed the trigger, and all movement ceased.

He rayed the light into the doorway, where the smaller, paler one of the two lay quite still, its green-flecked, amber eyes glaring in death, its evenly set little teeth exposed in a wolf's grin. But the eyes of the one through whose brain Gees had sent a bullet were black as the night.

"My God, we've got 'em!" Feather said, half-incoherently. "Got 'em at last! Got 'em! And now—and now for McCoul!"

"And now for McCoul," Gees echoed grimly.

"He's guilty—they're his, and he let 'em out," Feather declared excitedly. "And he knows we're after him—else, he'd have opened this door with all this shooting going on. Wait, though! Let's call in the sergeant and your man Cotton. My God, what a night!"

But the night was not over yet, Gees knew. He waited while the inspector went to the corner of the keep and, cupping his hands about his mouth, sent out a stentorian call—"Rapkin! Errrapkin!" that went in bellowing echoes down into the hollows—perhaps, Gees thought, crossed to strike on Tyrrell's ears at Dowlandsbar.

He played the ray of his torch over the two dead grey shapes. They were wolves in build, but far bigger than any wolf he had ever seen. The grizzled-furred, larger one of the two was male, and the other, with finer, lighter fur and green-flecked amber eyes, female—there was no doubt, now, in Gees mind as to what they were.

"Could be destroyed. I repeat that—could be destroyed. Don't think for one moment that they are immortal."

He remembered the vicar in his study, insistent on his theory. The black magic

that had evoked these shapes had failed, and they had been destroyed. Then Feather returned from his summoning.

“He answered me—they’re coming back,” he said. “I wonder—no, we won’t try to make an entry till they get here. Then—”

He broke off and stood musing. At his return, Gees had switched off his torch, and the things on the ground were no more than outlined shapes, the smaller one a mere dimness in the shadow of the doorway—until, at a thought, Feather stooped over it, seized it by its tail and a hind leg, and dragged it out beside its fellow. He made a little exclamation of disgust as he straightened himself after his task.

“It’s heavy,” he said after a pause. “Heavier than you’d think.”

And, after another brief period of waiting for Rapkin and Cotton:

“Where the devil did he *get* such things?”

“Aye, where the devil?” Gees echoed grimly.

Rapkin and Tom Cotton came trotting across the causeway, and Gees flicked on his light as guidance for them. He looked up the blank, grim frontage of the keep, and saw the stars overhead. Then, gazing downward, he rayed the torch momentarily on to each carcass, that the two men might see them as they approached.

“By gum, you got ‘em both!” Tom Cotton exclaimed. “And now,” Feather said, “I want you all with me while I round off the night’s work by arresting McCoul.”

“On what charge?” Gees asked dryly.

The inspector, ignoring the question, went into the doorway and, grasping the iron ring of the latch, used it as a knocker. His use of it sounded like the tat-tat-tat of a machine gun, and he released the handle and stood before the door, waiting.

But there was no sound of movement from within. A thin, faint line of light between the door and its framing showed that the lamp inside had not been extinguished, but, though Feather knocked again after an interval, and waited

again, the door remained closed.

Chapter XVIII CHANGE AT DAWN

“IF they’re not going to open it,” Feather said resolutely, “I am.” He turned the handle and pushed at the door. It swung inward, revealing a section of the lighted apartment. Feather went inside and turned to call to the other three waiting without:

“Come in, all of you! They’ve gone upstairs, or somewhere.”

“Probably somewhere,” Gees said to himself as he went in. He looked at his wrist watch. There was a heavy task yet to be done, but it was not yet an hour past midnight, and dawn was still far off.

“Not here, obviously,” Feather said, looking round the apartment in which not so much as a cat could have hidden. He lifted his voice and shouted toward the staircase in the corner—“McCoul? Mister McCoul?”

He waited, but there was no response, no sound of any kind. Gees gazed round the big apartment, saw the long settee angled away from the farther fireplace, and the dead white ash of burned logs.

“Those things outside,” he said abruptly.

“Well?” Feather turned on him and rasped the word out, harshly. “They’re dead enough, aren’t they?”

“Yes,” Gees assented quietly. “Who killed them?”

“Who killed them?” Feather echoed, in angry surprise at the question. “Why, we did, didn’t we? I can claim as much credit as you over it, except for your putting a bullet through the head of the big one.”

“Yes.” Gees’ voice was still very quiet. “I want you to claim equal credit with me, Inspector. More, if you like.”

“We killed them,” Feather insisted. “Both of us fired both barrels. But they can wait. McCoul!” He shouted again. “He’s upstairs,” he said. “Inside these tremendous walls, they may not have heard us shoot.”

Gees shook his head, but did not reply. Rapkin and Tom Cotton, their guns under their arms, stood together, silent and waiting, and the utter, soundless stillness of the place was an oppression.

“Yes, they’re upstairs,” Feather said at last. “I’m going after ‘em, too. That other lamp, there—light it, Sergeant, and come up with me. Mr. Green, either you or Cotton ought to stay down here, to see that they don’t go out some other way.”

He looked round the bare walls. “But there’s only the one way,” he added. “If we bolt that door and shove the settee in front of it, we shall know if they do go out. And they can’t get far.”

“No,” Gees agreed. “They can’t get far.”

“Give me a hand, Sergeant,” Feather ordered. He went to the settee, and Rapkin followed him. The two of them carried the settee over to the doorway, where Feather, putting down his end, closed and bolted the door top and bottom, and then they ranged the settee across so that the door could not be opened until it had been moved again.

“Better so,” Feather said. “We shall know now if they go out, and in a place like this it’s best to keep together. Light that lamp there, Sergeant.” He pointed to an unlighted lamp on a deal table by the back wall. “With that and your torch, Mr. Green, we should be all right. We can’t have too much light—this place gives me the creeps, and we don’t know the way about upstairs.”

“I can tell you,” Gees said. “You come first to a doorway that leads to a bathroom and another room over the main doorway, in the thickness of the wall. The next doorway leads on to the floor above us, where you’ll find two bedrooms, one for McCoul and the other for his daughter, and a dining-room, with a separate staircase leading down to Ammon’s quarters. Over that again is an empty room which takes up the whole area of the keep, then comes the roof McCoul had put in, and above that are the battlements—the four bare walls.”

“How do you know this?” Feather demanded, with a tinge of suspicion.

“I know it,” Gees answered composedly, “because McCoul showed me over the place when Tyrrell and I came here this morning—yes, it was only this morning, though it seems much longer ago than that.”

“Well, hand me that lamp, Sergeant, and I’ll go first. They don’t mean to come down, evidently. You follow me, and keep that gun handy, but with the safety catch on. Mr. Green, and you, Cotton, I want you to come up too. If there’s any trouble—resistance, or anything, I may want you both for evidence, later on.”

“I wouldn’t stop down here alone,” Tom Cotton said, “not for all the gold in England.”

“It may be silly, but I feel rather like that myself,” Feather admitted, and took the lamp from Rapkin. “Come along—I’ll go first.”

Gees went last. The little party came to the first exit from the spiral stair, and Feather halted and half-turned about.

“This the way to the bathroom?” he called back to Gees below him.

“Yes—and another room farther along.” He switched on his torch. “You and the sergeant can take the light and look—Cotton and I will wait here, so that nobody can go up or down without our seeing them.”

They waited while the lamp receded along the passage. After an interval Feather returned, the silent Rapkin following him closely.

“Nothing,” he said. “That room at the end—there’s holes in the floor and in the outside wall, too, but not big enough for anyone to get through. Iron rust on the stones, as if there’d been chains, once.”

“Quite right—windlass chains,” Gees told him. “Now will you go first? McCoul’s bedroom is on the right, his daughter’s on the left.”

With the light from the lamp to guide him up the worn, uneven treads of the staircase, Feather wound on upward until he stepped out to the corridor of the first floor. Gees, coming out beside him, pointed.

“McCoul’s room,” he said.

The door of the room was open, as was that of the larger apartment opposite, which McCoul had said was Gyda’s. Feather went along and, standing in McCoul’s doorway, held the lamp above his head.

“McCoul?” he said sharply. “Mr. McCoul?”

But there was no response, and after a second he stepped into the room and looked behind the door. Gees, advancing to look in, saw McCoul’s evening clothes dropped carelessly on a chair, and his underclothing, socks, and shoes, in a little heap beside the bed, which had been made and left tidy. Feather gazed at Gees.

“Odd,” he said, “they’re what he was wearing when he came back here in that car. He must have changed.”

“Yes, he changed,” Gees said.

Feather stepped out into the corridor, and, again holding the lamp high, looked into the other room. The shimmering grey frock Gyda had worn had been laid carefully on the tidy bed, and at the foot of the bed was a little heap of underclothing, with silk stockings hanging over the edge, and grey satin shoes on the rug. After a moment’s hesitation and utter stillness Feather stepped inside, and saw the room was empty of human presence. He emerged again.

“That other door,” he said. “Do you know?”

“The dining-room,” Gees told him. “You’d better look in there too.”

“McCoul?” Feather shouted again. Then he went toward the dining-room door, which was closed, and laid his hand on the handle.

“I don’t like this,” he said uneasily. “I don’t like it at all.”

He turned the handle and pushed at the door, and it swung wide. He entered, Gees following him, and the other two moved along the passage to look in. Feather pointed at the door that he faced.

“Where does that lead—do you know?” he asked.

“Down to Ammon’s quarters, McCoul told me,” Gees answered. “I have not been down, though, so I don’t know what it’s like.”

“Well, the door is bolted on this side,” Feather observed.

“We can come back and take that later, if they’re not hiding higher up. They are hiding somewhere—and they must have heard the shots, after all.”

“Yes, I think they heard the shots,” Gees said very quietly.

“Let’s look up on the next floor,” Feather said, and emerged to the corridor again. “I’ll go first, as before.”

Without emerging from the stairway, he looked into the big, empty room above by the light of the lamp he carried. “Not here,” he said, his puzzlement evident in his voice. “And higher?” Moving the lamp back to light the stairway, he revealed a heavy wooden door that had stood open when Gees had ascended to the battlements with McCoul, but now was closed and bolted top and bottom.

“Not up there, unless there’s some other way,” Feather said. “They couldn’t go up this way and bolt the door from this side. That man Ammon—he may know something. Let’s go and see.”

So they went down again, and, unbolting and opening the door in the dining-room, Feather revealed another stairway spiraling down, but ending on this floor. He entered, and the other three followed him, to emerge into a sort of kitchen in which stood a paraffin cooking stove and other ordinary kitchen furniture. Then another door, and in the little room to which it led Shaun Ammon slept in a narrow bed by the far wall, while yet another door bolted on the inside was visible—it was the one that led out at the back of the castle, Gees felt sure, and the water tank he had seen was on the outer side.

Feather went to the bed and bending over it, shook the sleeper.

“Wake up!” he bade sharply. “I want to question you.”

But he won no response. The man in the bed lay still.

“Here, you!” Feather shouted angrily, and shook him again, more vigorously. “Wake up, I tell you!”

Ammon slept on, his breathing heavy and even.

“Shamming!” Feather exclaimed disgustedly.

“No,” Gees said.

He moved up beside the bed, and, reaching down carefully, managed to lift one of the sleeping man’s eyelids. Only the white of the eye showed, as Feather, looking down, saw.

“What is it, then?” he asked. “Drugs?”

“No, not drugs,” Gees answered. “I think you’ll find it’s post-hypnotic suggestion, and McCoul had him under control, so that he goes to sleep at a certain hour and wakes at a certain hour. Best leave him for the present. In that state, he couldn’t let them out at the back and bolt the door after they’d gone. Besides, the door at the top of this stair was bolted on the other side, so they didn’t come down here.”

“Then where are they?” Feather demanded sharply. “We saw them come in, and they didn’t go out again by the front. Where the devil are they? Here, let’s go back and see if they’ve slipped past us somehow.”

Passing through the kitchen, he went up the stair again and, after the other three had emerged to the dining-room, bolted the door at the top. Then he went on and, entering Gyda’s room, opened the door of a wardrobe and looked within. Some dresses hung there, and nothing else. Feather crossed to McCoul’s room and looked in another wardrobe, vainly. He came out, and for some seconds stood irresolute, puzzled.

“Let’s go down,” he said at last. “They may have slipped past us.”

But, in the ground floor room, the light of the hanging lamp showed the settee still standing before the barred outer door. Feather put down his lamp on a table by the fireplace, and shook his head.

“Secret passages,” he said. “A place like this—”

Gees glanced at his wrist watch. Dawn was far off yet, he saw.

“I don’t know.” Feather moved toward the fireplace, thinking. Then he reached out and grasped one of two round iron bars, each nearly six feet in length, that leaned against the outer corner of the fire place. “Odd sort of pokers,” he remarked. “Used for levering big logs about, I suppose.” He pulled the bar to the

perpendicular, as if to feel its weight, and then leaned it against the wall again.

“Now I know!” Gees exclaimed abruptly.

“Know what?” Feather asked. “Where they’ve hidden?”

But Gees did not answer. He went to the foot of the spiral stairway, slid aside a rug, and lifted out the two sections of planking that concealed the entrance to the dungeons. But he could not lift the stone beneath, though two recesses at one end gave him hand-hold.

“Come and lend me a hand, Inspector,” he asked.

Feather, already beside him, bent to lift at the stone. Between them they got it up on end, and revealed the stain going down.

“But they couldn’t have put the boards back,” Feather objected.

“Not that. Now we’re here—those iron bars. McCoul showed me more than he meant this morning, and I’m sure—come down with me.”

He went to the fireplace and took up one of the bars. It was all he could carry down the stairs, he knew, and he beckoned to Tom Cotton.

“You bring the other, Tom,” he bade. “Light us down, Inspector.”

After only a moment’s hesitation Feather moved and took up the lamp, which he had not extinguished. Gees switched on his torch and handed it to Rapkin before taking up the iron bar.

“You may need more light,” he said. “The stairs are slippery.”

Then he went down, Cotton following him with the second bar.

“Straight on, Inspector,” he bade. “The room at the end.”

They emerged to the torture chamber, and the light of the lamp revealed its ghastly fitments. But, without heeding them, Gees went to the raised stone block in the middle, and Feather stood over it with the lamp in his hand, the light falling on the recessed shape of a human figure chiseled in it, and the black-

stained runners that told what its use had been. Stooping, Gees looked at the exits of the runnels.

“Yes, as I thought,” he said, and fitted the end of his bar into a circular hole in the side of the stone. “You’ll find another hole like this, Tom, at that end, where the deep groove comes out to the side. And I think you’ll find that bar fits in, if you try it.”

He was right. Each bar ran about a foot into the stone, leaving nearly five feet sticking out horizontally.

“Now, with me, Tom—get all the leverage you can, and lift. He shouldn’t have let me see the bits of cement he’d chipped away where the stone fits to the floor. Ready? Now—all your strength—lift!”

He put all his own strength to the task. Slowly the massive block of stone came up, like the lid of a box, and revealed a cavity beneath. They lifted the stone beyond its point of balance, and let it thud over on to its side, and the two bars stuck out from it perpendicularly, now. Feather held the lamp so that its light shone into the cavity, and Rapkin, standing at the end, rayed the light of the torch in too.

“Heavens above us!” Feather whispered, as if robbed of his voice by what he saw.

At the end where Rapkin stood, a heap of dull yellow coins. Beyond them, the sheen of gems set in golden ornaments, heaped indiscriminately. There was a crucifix of gold, blazing with great diamonds; there were jeweled bracelets and brooches, golden cups—one filled with heavy, jeweled rings; there was the red fire of rubies, and the cold green glitter of emeralds, and, since all the cavity was filled with these things, the actual bulk of the treasure was beyond their ascertaining. After a long, long silence Gees put one foot across to the far edge of the cavity, and gripped the bar he had lifted.

“I thought you had better see it, Inspector,” he said. “Tom, catch hold at your end and let’s cover it in again.”

“A king’s ransom,” Feather said, in an awed way.

“Blood and torment—murder and worse than murder went to the making of that

collection," Gees said. "It will rank as treasure-trove—which is why I wanted you to see it. Heave hard, Tom."

But it was not until Feather set down his lamp, and both he and Rapkin pushed at the bars from the other side, that the stone came over and dropped back into its place. Then Feather took up the lamp.

"Will it be safe like that?" he asked.

"Only we four know," Gees answered, "and if McCoul hadn't shown me the way down here I should never have guessed it. Ben Latimer knows where the staircase is, but no more. And you'll report it, I suppose."

"Certainly I shall report it," Feather answered. "Another charge against McCoul, concealing treasure-trove and perverting it to his own use. That is—I suppose he knew it was there, though."

"If you look over there"—Gees pointed at the heap of rusted, ancient pincers and other things of terror beside the moldering brazier—"you'll see a perfectly new heavy hammer—or nearly new, rather—and the cold chisel he used to chip away the cement from the edges of this stone. But even then I didn't guess, not until I saw these two bars and realized how he'd lifted it. Alone, probably—he was as strong as two ordinary men. And his daughter wore some part of this stuff as ornaments, proof that he knew of it."

They went back, and Gees replaced the stone and planks by the foot of the spiral stairway, and slid the rug back into its place.

Feather gazed at the settee across the doorway, and shook his head.

"They can't get far," he said in a low voice, as if to himself. "She's too conspicuous with that hair of hers—and so is he."

Again Gees looked at his watch. Time, but not too much time, remained for what he knew he had yet to do. He went over to the settee and pulled off the cushion which covered all its length.

"And now I want some rope," he said. He looked round the room. By the wall opposite the door stood a small, sham-antique, carved oak or pseudo-oak chest. Opening it, he found and took out a ball of heavy white cord, and, unwinding a

length, tested its strength as fully as he could.

“Good enough, I think,” he commented in a satisfied way.

“It’s McCoul’s property,” Feather reminded him, “and so is that settee cushion you chucked on the floor. What do you want to do?”

“Burn those two carcasses,” Gees answered calmly.

“What?” Feather barked it out. “Evidence—burn them?”

“Inspector,” Gees said coolly, “four of us here are witnesses that those two beasts have been destroyed. Get other witnesses if you like, but I’m going to burn those carcasses before dawn.”

“I’m damned if you are!” Feather exclaimed heatedly.

“When you began this,” Gees reminded him, “you agreed to put yourself under my orders, and now I hold you to that. I am going to burn those two carcasses outside, on a pile made ready down by the stone bridge, and do it before daylight, too. I intend to tie them on to this cushion, and use it as a sled—drag them there. Tom, are you willing to help me? It’s got to be done.”

“Aye, Mr. Green, you’re right—you’ve been right all along,” Tom said gravely. “I’ll help to burn the cursed things, lest worse come to us. Unless what you reckon might hap is already happed.”

“Hand me my torch, Sergeant,” Gees bade curtly. He dragged aside the settee, shot back the bolts, and opened the door. Then he rayed the torch out through the doorway, and Tom looked out over his shoulder. Rapkin, too, gazed out.

“God above us!” The sergeant gave vent to the exclamation in a frightened way. “Neither of ‘em’s got a tail!”

“Rot, man!” Feather pushed him aside to look along the ray of light. “I saw their tails when I dragged the littler one out of the way after we shot ‘em. What are you talk—”

He broke off. Gees dropped the light from the carcasses, and turned to see the inspector’s face whiter than before.

“What’s wrong, Inspector?” he asked coolly.

“What—I’d have sworn—” Feather stammered, and did not end it.

“You would have sworn right,” Gees answered. “Now, man, before the change completes itself, do we burn them? You claim equal credit with me for shooting them, remember. Do we burn them, before dawn?”

“Yes,” Feather gasped after a long pause. “Yes—Oh, my God, yes! Quick! I’d never believe if I hadn’t seen—that. Quick—yes!”

“Then put that standing lamp in the doorway to give us light enough to tie them on the cushion,” Gees bade, “and then we can drag them down the lane to the pile laid ready near the stone bridge. Come on, Tom.”

*

“Now. One—two—three—heave!”

Grasping the hind legs of the larger of the two beasts, while Tom Cotton held the forepaws, Gees swung the carcass, and with the last word let go. The thing fell into the centre of the brushwood pile, and sank from their sight—Sergeant Rapkin held the electric torch as guide for their movements. They took up the smaller, whitish-furred beast in the same way and heaved again, and it fell and lay partly visible across its fellow. Then Gees filled the pail that had been left there from one of the cans of paraffin, and flung it on the pile. Again he filled and threw the fluid, again and yet again, until eight cans were empty.

“Sixteen gallons, master,” Tom said. “Enough, surely.”

“We can see if it is,” Gees said, and, sweating from his labors, struck a match and held it to the pile for a second or more. Rapkin switched off the torch: light was growing in the east, and had grown enough already to reveal all things clearly. He stood back.

A flickering, feeble flame among the brushwood showed that it had caught alight, and Gees stepped back hastily. Then with a roar a column of flame and black, oily smoke shot heavenward, and wavered toward Dowlandsbar in the light dawn breeze. In the cast, the first purpling of clouds before the rising of the sun appeared. Feather stood back, staring at the roaring pile. Under their canopy

of smoke and flame, the two carcasses were invisible. The wood was damp, Gees knew: there was more of smoke than flame in the roaring, crackling pillar.

“What—what are you doing, Gees?”

Tyrrell leaped the fence between the lane and the fire with the shout, and came up beside Feather as Gees turned, wiping his forehead with the back of his hand.

“Ending it,” he answered, and took up one of the two remaining full cans of paraffin. He unscrewed the cap, and tilted the can over the pail, emptying it and putting it down again. As he straightened himself, he saw Tyrrell, scantily clad under his overcoat, beside him.

“You mean—you’ve got them?” Tyrrell asked eagerly. “I heard shooting in the night, and your voices here just now, and came—”

But then he broke off, his eyes wide with horror, his outstretched hand pointing at the pile. The strengthening breeze had slanted the fire, and for a few moments all that lay there was visible.

“Look! Look!” Tyrrell screamed awfully.

In the centre of the fire there showed the white roundness of a woman’s bare breast, and there was just a glimpse of snow white hair—but Gees lifted the pail and flung its contents as Tyrrell dropped in a fit beside him. Again black smoke hid all that the pyre held.

“See to him,” Gees said to Feather. “Tom and I will see to the fire. Get him away —carry him away, before he comes round.”

Nearly an hour later, Gees and Tom Cotton went among the hot ashes, heedless of spoiling their footgear, and, kicking aside the bits of logs that yet glowed, crushed to powder such of the bones and skulls as the fire had left whole.

“What’s going on at Dowlandsbar, Tom?” Gees asked as they finished this last task and came back to cool ground.

“They’ve put Mr. Tyrrell to bed,” Tom answered, “an’ the inspector telephoned for Doctor Markham. Not that he’s real bad, it seems, but the inspector reckoned he wanted him in bed for awhile.”

“Yes, he would,” Gees said thoughtfully. “And four of us can take oath that we threw two beasts on the fire and burned them to ashes.”

“Aye,” Tom assented gravely. “Only just in time, though.”

Gees gazed toward the lane. His face was grimed with smoke from the fire; there were splashes of paraffin on his clothes, and greenish stains from the dungeon walls of Locksborough. The breeze of dawn had failed, and the world lay very still in the early morning sunlight.

“I’ll go and get my car, I think,” Gees said.

Chapter XIX FOUR LETTERS

“EVE MADELEINE,” Gees told himself “Punctual to the minute over her lunch, the darling.”

He gave the girl time to install herself in her own room, then went out from his office, opened her door, and stood in the doorway. She gazed up at him over her typewriter.

“Afternoon, Miss Brandon,” he said. “Anything doing?”

“A few inquiries I have not yet acknowledged, Mr. Green,” she answered coldly. “I rang through to the number you gave me the day before yesterday, and was told by Mr. Tyrrell that you had left and he could give me no more information. So I held everything over until I could hear from you.”

“Quite so.” Advancing into the room, he seated himself on the corner of her desk. “I stepped aside into Shropshire—or rather, the car did—to tickle the aurochs under their chins and see how badly my poor papa is getting swindled through not looking after his own property. Remind me to draft an advertisement for a new bailiff for the home farm, later on. The present one accepted his resignation before I left this morning. Accepted it as a *fait accompli*, I mean. Now about these inquiries of yours. Anything very pressing?”

“They are all here.” She indicated a pile of a dozen or so opened letters, with two unopened ones on top. “Will you go through them?”

“In a minute. What about our Sussex wife-poisoner?”

“It was about him I rang you. He sent his two guineas, and I acknowledged the check and made the appointment as you told me. He rang up on receipt of my letter and asked if it would not be possible for you to see him earlier—he offered to pay all your expenses if you would go and see him at his home, and said it was very urgent.”

“Then it is—to him,” Gees said. “But he’s not me. Write and tell him I’ll call on the appointed date, if he likes, not before. I’m much too important to be hurried. Gee-whiz, it’s good to be back!”

“Then you didn’t enjoy your stay in Cumberland,” she observed.

“What I meant is that it’s good to look at a motor-bus and feel reasonably sure it won’t turn into a sedan chair or a Roman war chariot while you wait,” he explained mystifyingly. “It was—well, what you might call educative. Broadening the old mind, and all that. If I told you lycanthropy is a reality, you’d probably start walking up the wall—or out for good—so I won’t assert it. But it is, all the same. And these?” He took up the two unopened letters, and saw that both were postmarked “Odder.” Then he gazed at the top sheet of the opened scripts. “Hullo!” he said, and took it up to read:

“Green Esq..

“37, Little Oakfield Street.

“London, S.W. I.

“Dear Sir.

“On returning from my attendance on Mr. Tyrrell, I was hopeful of seeing you again. I have to thank you for your assistance in the Dowlandsbar case, which I do. So far, your unexpected absence has made no difference, but, in the event of any questions arising over what happened at Locksborough Castle and the subsequent destruction of the two animals, I trust I may count on your support of my statement as to their being animals and nothing else.

“I shall be glad to have your assurance on this point.

“Yours faithfully.

“ARTHUR D. FEATHER (Inspector).”

“Write and assure him that they were animals, Miss Brandon,” Gees said. “Put it in the first person, and say that I’m surprised at his questioning it. Ask him if he thinks they were insects—no, don’t put that in, though. Just that I’m surprised, and they were animals. Of the wolf family, but you needn’t mention that either. Now I’ll just have a look at these, before dealing with the inquiries.”

He put down Feather’s letter and opened one of the envelopes he held. A pink slip fluttered down from the letter he took out and unfolded, and he inspected the

slip first and handed it to the girl.

“I’ll endorse it for paying in presently,” he said. “Hold on.”

And he began to read:

“Dear Green.

“Among other things, you forgot your fee. I enclose check for 50 pounds, as agreed between us.

“With regard to the suitcase and contents that you left here this morning, could you give me some instructions? Do you wish the case repacked and sent to your London address? I hope that is your wish, and that you do not intend to return here, as, in spite of the great weight you have lifted from my mind, on the one hand, on the other what I saw this morning makes me wish never to see you again. I think of going abroad for a year or two.

“Thanking you for all you have done.

“Very truly yours.

“PHILIP LESLIE TYRRELL.”

“Aha!” Gees said. “Take a letter, Miss Brandon. ‘Dear Tyrrell, many thanks for yours with enclosure. I shall be glad if you will repack and send the suitcase to me at this address, all charges forward. Your decision to go abroad is a good one. Yours faithfully.’ And stick on a twopenny stamp for me to sign across, Miss Brandon—let us by all means be formal and correct. Now the next.”

He opened it, and found two letters inside. After glancing at both he began on the longer of the two:

“Dear Mr. Green.

“I am sorry that your departure from Odder was so sudden that we had not the pleasure of seeing you again. I have just had a long talk with Tom Cotton, who told me all that he knows of what you did at Locksborough, and what you saw in the fire. He saw it too, he tells me—in confidence, since Inspector Feather has ordered him to keep his mouth shut. I can only suppose that, with the directing

will gone, the bodies gradually returned to their normal shapes, and that you burned them only just in time. I can see no other explanation.

"Already, with the knowledge that the beasts are destroyed, the whole atmosphere of the place is different. There is relief evident in the looks and voices of men and women alike, and the children play and go about again happily. We owe you much, and if you come this way again, you will find a very sincere welcome awaiting you from us all. I trust that you will find your way here, and that we may have the pleasure of entertaining you to the best of our ability.

"Madge, who is posting this, is putting in a letter of her own to you, she tells me. As for the rest of us, you have our very warmest regard, and our wishes—my prayers, too—for success and happiness in your career and all your life.

"Sincerely yours.

"WALTER E. AMBER."

"Stout feller," Gees murmured. "I'll answer this myself. One more, and then we'll look at the inquiries."

He unfolded Madge's letter.

"George, dear.

"I saw you go off in the car—my bedroom window looks out at the back—but I naturally thought you were going back to Dowlandsbar. And you drove off in that awful suit, apparently to London! George, you're iniquitously careless of yourself.

"When daddy told me of last night and what you had done, I just thanked God for keeping you from harm.

"Although you wouldn't stop to say good-bye, I'm still happy over our drive, every minute of it. Shall ever see you again, I wonder?

"Over what you asked me about Philip Tyrrell, when I told you it was quite impossible and still mean it, we hear *via* the Annie-Jenny news service that he is putting in an elderly married cousin of his, complete with wife, and going quite

away, probably for a long time. But the sheep will remain, now, and Tom Cotton and his Effie will see Mrs. Nevern's baby toddle round.

"George, don't quite forget.

"MADGE."

Gees got off the corner of the desk.

"I'll answer these to make sure of the country post, Miss Brandon," he said. "The inquiries can come next."

Back in his own room he wrote:

"Madge, dear.

"Some time, by what your father told me, you will be in London again. I want you to write and promise that you will let me know in good time, and that you will not go back without seeing me. My flight from Odder—your father would understand it, I feel sure, and so will you, when I tell you.

"Yes, we shall meet again. Bless, you, dear.

"GEES (_not_ George!).

"P.S. I am sending the suit to be cleaned."

He folded the letter, put it in an envelope, and wrote the address. Then he took another sheet of paper and began writing to Amber.