

# Mr Percy and the Prophet

By Wilkie Collins

## Part One

### I THE QUACK

The disasters that follow the hateful offence against Christianity, which men call war, were severely felt in England during the peace that ensued on the overthrow of Napoleon at Waterloo. With rare exceptions, distress prevailed among all classes of the community. The starving nation was ripe and ready for a revolutionary rising against its rulers, who had shed the people's blood and wasted the people's substance in a war which had yielded to the popular interests absolutely nothing in return.

Among the unfortunate persons who were driven, during the disastrous early years of this century, to strange shifts and devices to obtain the means of living, was a certain obscure medical man, of French extraction, named Lagarde. The Doctor (duly qualified to bear the title) was an inhabitant of London; living in one of the narrow streets which connect the great thoroughfare of the Strand with the bank of the Thames.

The method of obtaining employment chosen by poor Lagarde, as the one alternative left in the face of starvation, was, and is still considered by the medical profession to be, the method of a quack. He advertised in the public journals.

Addressing himself especially to two classes of the community, the Doctor proceeded in these words:

'I have the honour of inviting to my house, in the first place: Persons afflicted with maladies which ordinary medical practice has failed to cure—and, in the second place: Persons interested in investigations, the object of which is to penetrate the secrets of the future. Of the means by which I endeavour to alleviate suffering and to enlighten doubt, it is impossible to speak intelligibly within the limits of an advertisement. I can only offer to submit my system to public inquiry, without exacting any preliminary fee from ladies and gentlemen who may honour me with a visit. Those who see sufficient reason to trust me, after personal experience, will find a money-box fixed on the waiting-room table, into which they can drop their offerings according to their means. Those whom I am not fortunate enough to satisfy will be pleased to accept the expression of my regret, and will not be expected to give anything. I shall be found at home every evening between the hours of six and ten.'

Towards the close of the year 1816, this strange advertisement became a general topic of conversation among educated people in London. For some weeks, the Doctor's invitations were generally accepted—and, all things considered, were not badly remunerated. A faithful few believed in him, and told wonderful stories of what he had pronounced and prophesied in the sanctuary of his consulting-room. The majority of his visitors simply viewed him in the light of a public amusement, and wondered why such a gentlemanlike man should have chosen to gain his living by exhibiting himself as a quack.

## II THE NUMBERS

On a raw and snowy evening towards the latter part of January, 1817, a gentleman, walking along the Strand, turned into the street in which Doctor Lagarde lived, and knocked at the physician's door.

He was admitted by an elderly male servant to a waiting-room on the first floor. The light of one little lamp, placed on a bracket fixed to the wall, was so obscured by a dark green shade as to make it difficult, if not impossible, for visitors meeting by accident to recognise each other. The metal money-box fixed to the table was just visible. In the flickering light of a small fire, the stranger perceived the figures of three men seated, apart and silent, who were the only occupants of the room beside himself.

So far as objects were to be seen, there was nothing to attract attention in the waiting-room. The furniture was plain and neat, and nothing more. The elderly servant handed a card, with a number inscribed on it, to the new visitor, said in a whisper, 'Your number will be called, sir, in your turn,' and disappeared. For some minutes nothing disturbed the deep silence but the faint ticking of a clock. After a while a bell rang from an inner room, a door opened, and a gentleman appeared, whose interview with Doctor Lagarde had terminated. His opinion of the sitting was openly expressed in one emphatic word—'Humbug!' No contribution dropped from his hand as he passed the money-box on his way out.

The next number (being Number Fifteen) was called by the elderly servant, and the first incident occurred in the strange series of events destined to happen in the Doctor's house that night.

One after another the three men who had been waiting rose, examined their cards under the light of the lamp, and sat down again surprised and disappointed.

The servant advanced to investigate the matter. The numbers possessed by the three visitors, instead of being Fifteen, Sixteen, and Seventeen, proved to be Sixteen, Seventeen, and Eighteen. Turning to the stranger who had arrived the last, the servant said:

'Have I made a mistake, sir? Have I given you Number Fifteen instead of Number Eighteen?'

The gentleman produced his numbered card.

A mistake had certainly been made, but not the mistake that the servant supposed. The card held by the latest visitor turned out to be the card previously held by the dissatisfied stranger who had just left the room—Number Fourteen! As to the card numbered Fifteen, it was only discovered the next morning lying in a corner, dropped on the floor!

Acting on his first impulse, the servant hurried out, calling to the original holder of Fourteen to come back and bear his testimony to that fact. The Street-door had been opened for him by the landlady of the house. She was a pretty woman—and the gentleman had fortunately lingered to talk to her. He was induced, at the intercession of the landlady, to ascend the stairs again.

On returning to the waiting-room, he addressed a characteristic question to the assembled visitors. 'More humbug?' asked the gentleman who liked to talk to a pretty woman.

The servant—completely puzzled by his own stupidity—attempted to make his apologies.

‘Pray forgive me, gentlemen,’ he said. ‘I am afraid I have confused the cards I distribute with the cards returned to me. I think I had better consult my master.’

Left by themselves, the visitors began to speak jestingly of the strange situation in which they were placed. The original holder of Number Fourteen described his experience of the Doctor in his own pithy way. ‘I applied to the fellow to tell my fortune. He first went to sleep over it, and then he said he could tell me nothing. I asked why. “I don’t know,” says he. “I do,” says I—“humbug!” I’ll bet you the long odds, gentlemen, that you find it humbug, too.

Before the wager could be accepted or declined, the door of the inner room was opened again. The tall, spare, black figure of a new personage appeared on the threshold, relieved darkly against the light in the room behind him. He addressed the visitors in these words:

‘Gentlemen, I must beg your indulgence. The accident—as we now suppose it to be—which has given to the last corner the number already held by a gentleman who has unsuccessfully consulted me, may have a meaning which we can none of us at present see. If the three visitors who have been so good as to wait, will allow the present holder of Number Fourteen to consult me out of his turn—and if the earlier visitor who left me dissatisfied with his consultation will consent to stay here a little longer—something may happen which will justify a trifling sacrifice of your own convenience. Is ten minutes’ patience too much to ask of you?’

The three visitors who had waited longest consulted among themselves, and (having nothing better to do with their time) decided on accepting the doctor’s proposal. The visitor who believed it all to be ‘humbug’ coolly took a gold coin out of his pocket, tossed it into the air, caught it in his closed hand, and walked up to the shaded lamp on the bracket.

‘Heads, stay,’ he said, ‘Tails, go.’ He opened his hand, and looked at the coin. ‘Heads! Very good. Go on with your hocus-pocus, Doctor—I’ll wait.’

‘You believe in chance,’ said the Doctor, quietly observing him. ‘That is not my experience of life.’

He paused to let the stranger who now held Number Fourteen pass him into the inner room—then followed, closing the door behind him.

### III THE CONSULTATION

The consulting-room was better lit than the waiting-room, and that was the only difference between the two. In the one as in the other, no attempt was made to impress the imagination. Everywhere, the commonplace furniture of a London lodging-house was left without the slightest effort to alter or improve it by changes of any kind.

Seen under the clearer light, Doctor Lagarde appeared to be the last person living who would consent to degrade himself by an attempt at imposture of any kind. His eyes were the dreamy eyes of a visionary; his look was the prematurely-aged look of a student, accustomed to give the hours to his book which ought to have been given to his bed. To state it briefly, he was a man who might easily be deceived by others, but who was incapable of consciously practising deception himself.

Signing to his visitor to be seated, he took a chair on the opposite side of the small table that stood between them—waited a moment with his face hidden in his hands, as if to collect himself—and then spoke.

‘Do you come to consult me on a case of illness?’ he inquired, ‘or do you ask me to look into the darkness which hides your future life?’

The answer to those questions was frankly and briefly expressed: ‘I have no need to consult you about my health. I come to hear what you can tell me of my future life.’

‘I can try,’ pursued the Doctor; ‘but I cannot promise to succeed.’

‘I accept your conditions,’ the stranger rejoined. ‘I neither believe nor disbelieve. If you will excuse my speaking frankly, I mean to observe you closely, and to decide for myself.’

Doctor Lagarde smiled sadly.

‘You have heard of me as a charlatan who contrives to amuse a few idle people.’ he said. ‘I don’t complain of that; my present position leads necessarily to misinterpretation of myself and my motives. Still, I may at least say that I am the victim of a sincere avowal of my belief in a great science. Yes! I repeat it, a great science! New, I dare say, to the generation we live in, though it was known and practised in the days when the pyramids were built. The age is advancing; and the truths which it is my misfortune to advocate, before the time is ripe for them, are steadily forcing their way to recognition. I am resigned to wait. My sincerity in this matter has cost me the income that I derived from my medical practice. Patients distrust me; doctors refuse to consult with me. I could starve if I had no one to think of but myself. But I have another person to consider, who is very dear to me; and I am driven, literally driven, either to turn beggar in the streets, or to do what I am doing now.’

He paused, and looked round towards the corner of the room behind him. ‘Mother,’ he said gently, ‘are you ready?’

An elderly lady, dressed in deep mourning, rose from her seat in the corner. She had been, thus far, hidden from notice by the high back of the easy-chair in which her son sat. Excepting some folds of fine black lace, laid over her white hair so as to form a head-dress at once simple and picturesque, there was nothing remarkable in her attire. The visitor rose and bowed. She gravely returned his salute, and moved so as to place herself opposite to her son.

‘May I ask what this lady is going to do?’ said the stranger.

‘To be of any use to you,’ answered Doctor Lagarde, ‘I must be thrown into the magnetic trance. The person who has the strongest influence over me is the person who will do it to-night.’

He turned to his mother. ‘When you like,’ he said.

Bending over him, she took both the Doctor’s hands, and looked steadily into his eyes. No words passed between them; nothing more took place. In a minute or two, his head was resting against the back of the chair, and his eyelids had closed.

‘Are you sleeping?’ asked Madame Lagarde.

‘I am sleeping,’ he answered.

She laid his hands gently on the arms of the chair, and turned to address the visitor.

‘Let the sleep gain on him for a minute or two more,’ she said. ‘Then take one of his hands, and put to him what questions you please.’

‘Does he hear us now, madam?’

‘You might fire off a pistol, sir, close to his ear, and he would not hear it. The vibration might disturb him; that is all. Until you or I touch him, and so establish the nervous sympathy, he is as lost to all sense of our presence here, as if he were dead.’

‘Are you speaking of the thing called Animal Magnetism, madam?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘And you believe in it, of course?’

‘My son’s belief, sir, is my belief in this thing as in other things. I have heard what he has been saying to you. It is for me that he sacrifices himself by holding these exhibitions; it is in my poor interests that his hardly-earned money is made. I am in infirm health; and remonstrate as I may, my son persists in providing for me, not the bare comforts only, but even the luxuries of life. Whatever I may suffer, I have my compensation; I can still thank God for giving me the greatest happiness that a woman can enjoy, the possession of a good son.

She smiled fondly as she looked at the sleeping man. ‘Draw your chair nearer to him,’ she resumed, ‘and take his hand. You may speak freely in making your inquiries. Nothing that happens in this room goes out of it.’

With those words she returned to her place, in the corner behind her son’s chair.

The visitor took Doctor Lagarde’s hand. As they touched each other, he was conscious of a faintly-titillating sensation in his own hand—a sensation which oddly reminded him of bygone experiments with an electrical machine, in the days when he was a boy at school!

‘I wish to question you about my future life,’ he began. ‘How ought I to begin?’

The Doctor spoke his first words in the monotonous tones of a man talking in his sleep.

‘Own your true motive before you begin,’ he said. ‘Your interest in your future life is centred in a woman. You wish to know if her heart will be yours in the time that is to come—and there your interest in your future life ends.’

This startling proof of the sleeper’s capacity to look, by sympathy, into his mind, and to see there his most secret thoughts, instead of convincing the stranger, excited his suspicions. ‘You have means of getting information,’ he said, ‘that I don’t understand.’

The Doctor smiled, as if the idea amused him. Madame Lagarde rose from her place, and interposed.

‘Hundreds of strangers come here to consult my son,’ she said quietly. ‘If you believe that we know who those strangers are, and that we have the means of inquiring into their private lives before they enter this room, you believe in something much more incredible than the magnetic sleep!’

This was too manifestly true to be disputed. The visitor made his apologies.

‘I should like to have some explanation,’ he added. ‘The thing is so very extraordinary. How can I prevail upon Doctor Lagarde to enlighten me?’

‘He can only tell you what he sees,’ Madame Lagarde answered; ‘ask him that, and you will get a direct reply. Say to him: “Do you see the lady?”’

The stranger repeated the question. The reply followed at once, in these words:

‘I see two figures standing side by side. One of them is your figure. The other is the figure of a lady. She only appears dimly. I can discover nothing but that she is taller than women generally are, and that she is dressed in pale blue.’ The man to whom he was speaking started at those last words. ‘Her favourite colour!’ he thought to himself—forgetting that, while he held the Doctor’s hand, the Doctor could think with his mind.

‘Yes,’ added the sleeper quietly, ‘her favourite colour, as you know. She fades and fades as I look at her,’ he went on. ‘She is gone. I only see you, under a new aspect. You have a pistol in your hand. Opposite to you, there stands the figure of another man. He,

too, has a pistol in his hand. Are you enemies? Are you meeting to fight a duel? Is the lady the cause? I try, but I fail to see her.'

'Can you describe the man?'

'Not yet. So far, he is only a shadow in the form of a man.'

There was another interval. An appearance of disturbance showed itself on the sleeper's face. Suddenly, he waved his free hand in the direction of the waiting-room.

'Send for the visitors who are there,' he said. 'They are all to come in. Each one of them is to take one of my hands in turn—while you remain where you are, holding the other hand. Don't let go of me, even for a moment. My mother will ring.'

Madame Lagarde touched a bell on the table. The servant received his orders from her and retired. After a short absence, he appeared again in the consulting-room, with one visitor only waiting on the threshold behind him.

#### IV THE MAN

'The other three gentlemen have gone away, madam,' the servant explained, addressing Madame Lagarde. 'They were tired of waiting. I found this gentleman fast asleep; and I am afraid he is angry with me for taking the liberty of waking him.'

'Sleep of the common sort is evidently not allowed in this house.' With that remark the gentleman entered the room, and stood revealed as the original owner of the card numbered Fourteen.

Viewed by the clear lamplight, he was a tall, finely-made man, in the prime of life, with a florid complexion, golden-brown hair, and sparkling blue eyes. Noticing Madame Lagarde, he instantly checked the flow of his satire, with

the instinctive good-breeding of a gentleman. 'I beg your pardon,' he said; 'I have a great many faults, and a habit of making bad jokes is one of them. Is the servant right, madam, in telling me that I have the honour of presenting myself here at your request?'

Madame Lagarde briefly explained what had passed.

The florid gentleman (still privately believing it to be all 'humbug') was delighted to make himself of any use. 'I congratulate you, sir,' he said, with his easy humour, as he passed the visitor who had become possessed of his card. 'Number Fourteen seems to be a luckier number in your keeping than it was in mine.'

As he spoke, he took Doctor Lagarde's disengaged hand. The instant they touched each other, the sleeper started. His voice rose; his face flushed. 'You are the man!' he exclaimed. 'I see you plainly, now!'

'What am I doing?'

'You are standing opposite to the gentleman here who is holding my other hand; and (as I have said already) you have met to fight a duel.'

The unbeliever cast a shrewd look at his companion in the consultation.

'Considering that you and I are total strangers, sir,' he said, 'don't you think the Doctor had better introduce us, before he goes any farther? We have got to fighting a duel already, and we may as well know who we are, before the pistols go off.' He turned to Doctor Lagarde. 'Dramatic situations don't amuse me out of the theatre,' he resumed. 'Let me put you to a very commonplace test. I want to be introduced to this gentleman. Has he told you his name?'

'No.'

'Of course, you know it, without being told?'

'Certainly. I have only to look into your own knowledge of yourselves, while I am in this trance, and while you have got my hands, to know both your names as well as you do.'

'Introduce us, then!' retorted the jesting gentleman. 'And take my name first.'

'Mr Percy Linwood,' replied the Doctor; 'I have the honour of presenting you to Captain Bervie, of the Artillery.'

With one accord, the gentlemen both dropped Doctor Lagarde's hands, and looked at each other in blank amazement.

'Of course he has discovered our names somehow!' said Mr Percy Linwood, explaining the mystery to his own perfect satisfaction in that way.

Captain Bervie had not forgotten what Madame Lagarde had said to him, when he too had suspected a trick. He now repeated it (quite ineffectually) for Mr Linwood's benefit.

‘If you don’t feel the force of that argument as I feel it,’ he added, ‘perhaps, as a favour to me, sir, you will not object to our each taking the Doctor’s hand again, and hearing what more he can tell us while he remains in the state of trance?’

‘With the greatest pleasure!’ answered good-humoured Mr Linwood. ‘Our friend is beginning to amuse me; I am as anxious as you are to know what he is going to see next.’

Captain Bervie put the next question.

‘You have seen us ready to fight a duel—can you tell us the result?’

‘I can tell you nothing more than I have told you already. The figures of the duellists have faded away, like the other figures I saw before them. What I see now looks like the winding gravel-path of a garden. A man and a woman are walking towards me. The man stops, and places a ring on the woman’s finger, and kisses her.’

Captain Bervie opened his lips to continue his enquiries—turned pale—and checked himself. Mr Linwood put the next question.

‘Who is the happy man?’ he asked.

‘You are the happy man,’ was the instantaneous reply.

‘Who is the woman?’ cried Captain Bervie, before Mr Linwood could speak again.

‘The same woman whom I saw before; dressed in the same colour, in pale blue.’

Captain Bervie positively insisted on receiving clearer information than this.

‘Surely you can see something of her personal appearance?’ he said.

‘I can see that she has long dark-brown hair, falling below her waist. I can see that she has lovely dark-brown eyes. She has the look of a sensitive nervous person. She is quite young. I can see no more.’

‘Look again at the man who is putting the ring on her finger,’ said the Captain. ‘Are you sure that the face you see is the face of Mr Percy Linwood?’

‘I am absolutely sure.’

Captain Bervie rose from his chair.

‘Thank you, madam,’ he said to the Doctor’s mother. ‘I have heard enough.’

He walked to the door. Mr Percy Linwood dropped Doctor Lagarde’s hand, and appealed to the retiring Captain with a broad stare of astonishment.

‘You don’t really believe this?’ he said.

‘I only say I have heard enough,’ Captain Bervie answered.

Mr Linwood could hardly fail to see that any further attempt to treat the matter lightly might lead to undesirable results.

‘It is difficult to speak seriously of this kind of exhibition,’ he resumed quietly. ‘But I suppose I may mention a mere matter of fact, without meaning or giving offence. The description of the lady, I can positively declare, does not apply in any single particular to anyone whom I know.’

Captain Bervie turned round at the door. His patience was in some danger of failing him. Mr Linwood’s unruffled composure, assisted in its influence by the presence of Madame Lagarde, reminded him of the claims of politeness. He restrained the rash words as they rose to his lips. ‘You may make new acquaintances, sir,’ was all that he said. ‘You have the future before you.’

Upon that, he went out. Percy Linwood waited a little, reflecting on the Captain’s conduct.

Had Doctor Lagarde’s description of the lady accidentally answered the description of a living lady whom Captain Bervie knew? Was he by any chance in love with her? and had



the Doctor innocently reminded him that his love was not returned? Assuming this to be likely, was it really possible that he believed in prophetic revelations offered to him under the fantastic influence of a trance? Could any man in the possession of his senses go to those lengths? The Captain's conduct was simply incomprehensible.

Pondering these questions, Percy decided on returning to his place by the Doctor's chair. 'Of one thing I am certain, at any rate,' he thought to himself. 'I'll see the whole imposture out before I leave the house!'

He took Doctor Lagarde's hand. 'Now, then! what is the next discovery?' he asked.

The sleeper seemed to find some difficulty in answering the question.

'I indistinctly see the man and the woman again,' he said.

'Am I the man still?' Percy enquired.

'No. The man, this time, is the Captain. The woman is agitated by something that he is saying to her. He seems to be trying to persuade her to go away with him. She hesitates. He whispers something in her ear. She yields. He leads her away. The darkness gathers behind them. I look and look, and I can see no more.'

'Shall we wait awhile?' Percy suggested, 'and then try again?'

Doctor Lagarde sighed, and reclined in his chair. 'My head is heavy,' he said; 'my spirits are dull. The darkness baffles me. I have toiled long enough for you. Drop my hand and leave me to rest.'

Hearing those words, Madame Lagarde approached her son's chair.

'It will be useless, sir, to ask him any more questions tonight,' she said. 'He has been weak and nervous all day, and he is worn out by the effort he has made. Pardon me, if I ask you to step aside for a moment, while I give him the repose that he needs.'

She laid her right hand gently on the Doctor's head, and kept it there for a minute or so. 'Are you at rest now?' she asked.

'I am at rest,' he answered, in faint drowsy tones.

Madame Lagarde returned to Percy. 'If you are not yet satisfied,' she said, 'my son will be at your service tomorrow evening, sir.'

'Thank you, madam, I have only one more question to ask, and you can no doubt answer it. When your son wakes, will he remember what he has said to Captain Bervie and to myself?'

'My son will be as absolutely ignorant of everything that he has seen, and of everything that he has said in the trance, as if he had been at the other end of the world.'

Percy Linwood swallowed this last outrageous assertion with an effort which he was quite unable to conceal. 'Many thanks, madam,' he said; 'I wish you good-night.'

Returning to the waiting-room, he noticed the money-box fixed to the table. 'These people look poor,' he thought to himself, 'and I feel really indebted to them for an amusing evening. Besides, I can afford to be liberal, for I shall certainly never go back.' He dropped a five-pound note into the money-box, and left the house.

Walking towards his club, Percy's natural serenity of mind was a little troubled by the remembrance of Captain Bervie's language and conduct. The Captain had interested the young man in spite of himself. His first idea was to write to Bervie, and mention what had happened at the renewed consultation with Doctor Lagarde. On second thoughts, he saw reason to doubt how the Captain might receive such an advance as this, on the part of a stranger. 'After all,' Percy decided, 'the whole thing is too absurd to be worth thinking

about seriously. Neither he nor I are likely to meet again, or to see the Doctor again—and there's an end of it.'

He never was more mistaken in his life. The end of it was not to come for many a long day yet.

## Part Two: The Fulfilment

### V THE BALL-ROOM

While the consultation at Doctor Lagarde's was still fresh in the memory of the persons present at it, Chance or Destiny, occupied in sowing the seeds for the harvest of the future, discovered as one of its fit instruments a retired military officer named Major Mulvany.

The Major was a smart little man, who persisted in setting up the appearance of youth as a means of hiding the reality of fifty. Being still a bachelor, and being always ready to make himself agreeable, he was generally popular in the society of women. In the ballroom he was a really welcome addition to the company. The German waltz had then been imported into England little more than three years since. The outcry raised against the dance, by persons skilled in the discovery of latent impropriety, had not yet lost its influence in certain quarters. Men who could waltz were scarce. The Major had successfully grappled with the difficulties of learning the dance in mature life; and the young ladies rewarded him nobly for the effort. That is to say, they took the assumption of youth for granted in the palpable presence of fifty.

Knowing everybody and being welcome everywhere, playing a good hand at whist, and having an inexhaustible fancy in the invention of a dinner, Major Mulvany naturally belonged to all the best clubs of his time. Percy Linwood and he constantly met in the billiard-room or at the dinner-table. The Major approved of the easy, handsome, pleasant-tempered young man. 'I have lost the first freshness of youth,' he used to say with pathetic resignation, 'and I see myself revived, as it were, in Percy. Naturally I like Percy.'

About three weeks after the memorable evening at Doctor Lagarde's, the two friends encountered each other on the steps of a club.

'Have you got anything to do to-night?' asked the Major.

'Nothing that I know of,' said Percy, 'unless I go to the theatre.'

'Let the theatre wait, my boy. My old regiment gives a ball at Woolwich tonight. I have got a ticket to spare; and I know several sweet girls who are going. Some of them waltz, Percy! Gather your rosebuds while you may. Come with me.'

The invitation was accepted as readily as it was given. The Major found the carriage, and Percy paid for the post-horses. They entered the ballroom among the earlier guests; and the first person whom they met, waiting near the door, was—Captain Bervie.

Percy bowed, a little uneasily. 'I feel some doubt,' he said, laughing, 'whether we have been properly introduced to one another or not.'

'Not properly introduced!' cried Major Mulvany. 'I'll soon set that right. My dear friend, Percy Linwood; my dear friend, Arthur Bervie—be known to each other! esteem each other!'

Captain Bervie acknowledged the introduction by a cold salute. Percy, yielding to the good-natured impulse of the moment, alluded to what had happened in Doctor Lagarde's consulting-room.

'You missed something worth hearing when you left the Doctor the other night,' he said. 'We continued the sitting; and you turned up again among the persons of the drama, in a new character—'

‘Excuse me for interrupting you,’ said Captain Bervie. ‘I am a member of the committee, charged with the arrangements of the ball, and I must really attend to my duties.’

He withdrew without waiting for a reply. Percy looked round wonderingly at Major Mulvany. ‘Strange!’ he said, ‘I feel rather attracted towards Captain Bervie; and he seems to have taken such a dislike to me, that he can hardly behave with common civility. What does it mean?’

‘I’ll tell you,’ answered the Major confidentially. ‘Arthur Bervie is madly in love—madly is really the word—with a Miss Bowmore. And (this is between ourselves) the young lady doesn’t feel it quite in the same way. A sweet girl; I’ve often had her on my knee when she was a child. Her father and mother are old friends of mine. She is coming to the ball tonight. That’s the true reason why Arthur left you just now. Look at him—waiting to be the first to speak to her. If he could have his way, he wouldn’t let another man come near the poor girl all through the evening; he really persecutes her. I’ll introduce you to Miss Bowmore; and you will see how he looks at us for presuming to approach her. It’s a great pity; she will never marry him. Arthur Bervie is a man in a thousand; but he’s fast becoming a perfect bear under the strain on his temper. What’s the matter? You don’t seem to be listening to me.’

This last remark was perfectly justified. In telling the Captain’s love-story, Major Mulvany had revived his young friend’s memory of the lady in the blue dress, who had haunted the visions of Doctor Lagarde.

‘Tell me,’ said Percy, ‘what is Miss Bowmore like? Is there anything remarkable in her personal appearance? I have a reason for asking.’

As he spoke, there arose among the guests in the rapidly-filling ballroom a low murmur of surprise and admiration. The Major laid one hand on Percy’s shoulder, and, lifting the other, pointed to the door.

‘What is Miss Bowmore like?’ he repeated. ‘There she is! Let her answer for herself.’

Percy turned towards the lower end of the room.

A young lady was entering, dressed in plain silk, and the colour of it was a pale blue! Excepting a white rose at her breast, she wore no ornament of any sort. Doubly distinguished by the perfect simplicity of her apparel, and by her tall, supple, commanding figure, she took rank at once as the most remarkable woman in the room. Moving nearer to her through the crowd, under the guidance of the complaisant Major, young Linwood gained a clearer view of her hair, her complexion, and the colour of her eyes. In every one of these particulars, she was the living image of the woman described by Doctor Lagarde!

While Percy was absorbed over this strange discovery, Major Mulvany had got within speaking distance of the young lady and of her mother, as they stood together in conversation with Captain Bervie. ‘My dear Mrs Bowmore, how well you are looking! My dear Miss Charlotte, what a sensation you have made already! The glorious simplicity (if I may so express myself) of your dress is—is—what was I going to say?—the ideas come thronging on me; I merely want words.’

Miss Bowmore’s magnificent brown eyes, wandering from the Major to Percy, rested on the young man with a modest and momentary interest, which Captain Bervie’s jealous attention instantly detected.

‘They are forming a dance,’ he said, pressing forward impatiently to claim his partner. ‘If we don’t take our places, we shall be too late.’

‘Stop! stop!’ cried the Major. ‘There is a time for everything, and this is the time for presenting my dear friend here, Mr Percy Linwood. He is like me, Miss Charlotte—he has been struck by your glorious simplicity, and he wants words.’ At this part of the presentation, he happened to look toward the irate Captain, and instantly gave him a hint on the subject of his temper.

‘I say, Arthur Bervie! we are all good-humoured people here. What have you got on your eyebrows? It looks like a frown; and it doesn’t become you. Send for a skilled waiter, and have it brushed off and taken away directly!’

‘May I ask, Miss Bowmore, if you are disengaged for the next dance?’ said Percy, the moment the Major gave him an opportunity of speaking.

‘Miss Bowmore is engaged to me for the next dance,’ said the angry Captain, before the young lady could answer.

‘The third dance, then?’ Percy persisted, with his brightest smile.

‘With pleasure, Mr Linwood,’ said Miss Bowmore. She would have been no true woman if she had not resented the open exhibition of Arthur’s jealousy; it was like asserting a right over her to which he had not the shadow of a claim. She threw a look at Percy as her partner led her away, which was the severest punishment she could inflict on the man who ardently loved her.

The third dance stood in the programme as a waltz.

In jealous distrust of Percy, the Captain took the conductor of the band aside, and used his authority as committeeman to substitute another dance. He had no sooner turned his back on the orchestra than the wife of the Colonel of the regiment, who had heard him, spoke to the conductor in her turn, and insisted on the original programme being retained. ‘Quote the Colonel’s authority,’ said the lady, ‘if Captain Bervie ventures to object.’ In the meantime, the Captain, on his way to rejoin Charlotte, was met by one of his brother officers, who summoned him officially to an impending debate of the committee charged with the administrative arrangements of the supper-table.

Bervie had no choice but to follow his brother officer to the committee-room.

Barely a minute later the conductor appeared at his desk, and the first notes of the music rose low and plaintive, introducing the third dance.

‘Percy, my boy!’ cried the Major, recognising the melody, ‘you’re in luck’s way—it’s going to be a waltz!’

Almost as he spoke, the notes of the symphony glided by subtle modulations into the inspiring air of the waltz. Percy claimed his partner’s hand. Miss Charlotte hesitated, and looked at her mother.

‘Surely you waltz?’ said Percy.

‘I have learnt to waltz,’ she answered modestly; ‘but this is such a large room, and there are so many people!’

‘Once round,’ Percy pleaded; ‘only once round!’

Miss Bowmore looked again at her mother. Her foot was keeping time with the music, under her dress; her heart was beating with a delicious excitement; kind-hearted Mrs Bowmore smiled and said, ‘Once round, my dear, as Mr Linwood suggests.’

In another moment, Percy’s arm took possession of her waist, and they were away on the wings of the waltz!

Could words describe, could thought realize, the exquisite enjoyment of the dance? Enjoyment? It was more—it was an epoch in Charlotte's life—it was the first time she had waltzed with a man. What a difference between the fervent clasp of Percy's arm and the cold formal contact of the mistress who had taught her! How brightly his eyes looked down into hers; admiring her with such a tender restraint, that there could surely be no harm in looking up at him now and then in return. Round and round they glided, absorbed in the music and in themselves. Occasionally her bosom just touched him, at those critical moments when she was most in need of support. At other intervals, she almost let her head sink on his shoulder in trying to hide from him the smile which acknowledged his admiration too boldly. 'Once round,' Percy had suggested; 'once round,' her mother had said. They had been ten, twenty, thirty times round; they had never stopped to rest like other dancers; they had centred the eyes of the whole room on them—including the eyes of Captain Bervie—without knowing it; her delicately pale complexion had changed to rosy-red; the neat arrangement of her hair had become disturbed; her bosom was rising and falling faster and faster in the effort to breathe—before fatigue and heat overpowered her at last, and forced her to say to him faintly, 'I'm very sorry—I can't dance any more!'

Percy led her into the cooler atmosphere of the refreshment-room, and revived her with a glass of lemonade. Her arm still rested on his—she was just about to thank him for the care he had taken of her—when Captain Bervie entered the room.

'Mrs Bowmore wishes me to take you back to her,' he said to Charlotte. Then, turning to Percy, he added: 'Will you kindly wait here while I take Miss Bowmore to the ballroom? I have a word to say to you—I will return directly.'

The Captain spoke with perfect politeness—but his face betrayed him. It was pale with the sinister whiteness of suppressed rage.

Percy sat down to cool and rest himself. With his experience of the ways of men, he felt no surprise at the marked contrast between Captain Bervie's face and Captain Bervie's manner. 'He has seen us waltzing, and he is coming back to pick a quarrel with me.' Such was the interpretation which Mr Linwood's knowledge of the world placed on Captain Bervie's politeness. In a minute or two more the Captain returned to the refreshment-room, and satisfied Percy that his anticipations had not deceived him.

## VI LOVE

Four days had passed since the night of the ball.

Although it was no later in the year than the month of February, the sun was shining brightly, and the air was as soft as the air of a day in spring. Percy and Charlotte were walking together in the little garden at the back of Mr Bowmore's cottage, near the town of Dartford in Kent.

'Mr Linwood,' said the young lady, 'you were to have paid us your first visit the day after the ball. Why have you kept us waiting? Have you been too busy to remember your new friends?'

'I have counted the hours since we parted, Miss Charlotte. If I had not been detained by business—'

'I understand! For three days business has controlled you. On the fourth day, you have controlled business—and here you are? I don't believe one word of it, Mr Linwood!'

There was no answering such a declaration as this. Guiltily conscious that Charlotte was right in refusing to accept his well-worn excuse, Percy made an awkward attempt to change the topic of conversation.

They happened, at the moment, to be standing near a small conservatory at the end of the garden. The glass door was closed, and the few plants and shrubs inside had a lonely, neglected look. 'Does nobody ever visit this secluded place?' Percy asked jocosely, 'or does it hide discoveries in the rearing of plants, which are forbidden mysteries to a stranger?'

'Satisfy your curiosity, Mr Linwood, by all means,' Charlotte answered in the same tone. 'Open the door, and I will follow you.'

Percy obeyed. In passing through the doorway, he encountered the bare hanging branches of some creeping plant, long since dead, and detached from its fastenings on the woodwork of the roof. He pushed aside the branches so that Charlotte could easily follow him in, without being aware that his own forced passage through them had a little deranged the folds of spotless white cambric which a well-dressed gentleman wore round his neck in those days. Charlotte seated herself, and directed Percy's attention to the desolate conservatory with a saucy smile.

'The mystery which your lively imagination has associated with this place,' she said, 'means, being interpreted, that we are too poor to keep a gardener. Make the best of your disappointment, Mr Linwood, and sit here by me. We are out of hearing and out of sight of mamma's other visitors. You have no excuse now for not telling me what has really kept you away from us.'

She fixed her eyes on him as she said those words. Before Percy could think of another excuse, her quick observation detected the disordered condition of his cravat, and discovered the upper edge of a black plaster attached to one side of his neck.

'You have been hurt in the neck!' she said. 'That is why you have kept away from us for the last three days!'

'A mere trifle,' he answered, in great confusion; 'please don't notice it.'

Her eyes, still resting on his face, assumed an expression of suspicious enquiry, which Percy was entirely at a loss to understand. Suddenly, she started to her feet, as if a new idea had occurred to her. 'Wait here,' she said, flushing with excitement, 'till I come back: I insist on it!'

Before Percy could ask for an explanation, she had left the conservatory.

In a minute or two, Miss Bowmore returned, with a newspaper in her hand. 'Read that,' she said, pointing to a paragraph distinguished by a line drawn round it in ink.

The passage that she indicated contained an account of a duel which had recently taken place in the neighbourhood of London. The names of the duellists were not mentioned. One was described as an officer, and the other as a civilian. They had quarrelled at cards, and had fought with pistols. The civilian had had a narrow escape of his life. His antagonist's bullet had passed near enough to the side of his neck to tear the flesh, and had missed the vital parts, literally, by a hair's-breadth.

Charlotte's eyes, riveted on Percy, detected a sudden change of colour in his face the moment he looked at the newspaper. That was enough for her. 'You *are* the man!' she cried. 'Oh, for shame, for shame! To risk your life for a paltry dispute about cards.'

'I would risk it again,' said Percy, 'to hear you speak as if you set some value on it.'

She looked away from him without a word of reply. Her mind seemed to be busy again with its own thoughts. Did she meditate returning to the subject of the duel? Was she not satisfied with the discovery which she had just made?

No such doubts as these troubled the mind of Percy Linwood. Intoxicated by the charm of her presence, emboldened by her innocent betrayal of the interest that she felt in him, he opened his whole heart to her as unreservedly as if they had known each other from the days of their childhood. There was but one excuse for him. Charlotte was his first love.

‘You don’t know how completely you have become a part of my life, since we met at the ball,’ he went on. ‘That one delightful dance seemed, by some magic which I can’t explain, to draw us together in a few minutes as if we had known each other for years. Oh, dear! I could make such a confession of what I felt—only I am afraid of offending you by speaking too soon. Women are so dreadfully difficult to understand. How is a man to know at what time it is considerate towards them to conceal his true feelings; and at what time it is equally considerate to express his true feelings? One doesn’t know whether it is a matter of days or weeks or months—there ought to be a law to settle it. Dear Miss Charlotte, when a poor fellow loves you at first sight, as he has never loved any other woman, and when he is tormented by the fear that some other man may be preferred to him, can’t you forgive him if he lets out the truth a little too soon?’ He ventured, as he put that very downright question, to take her hand. ‘It really isn’t my fault,’ he said simply. ‘My heart is so full of you, I can talk of nothing else.’

To Percy’s delight, the first experimental pressure of his hand, far from being resented, was softly returned. Charlotte looked at him again, with a new resolution in her face.

‘I’ll forgive you for talking nonsense, Mr Linwood,’ she said; ‘and I will even permit you to come and see me again, on one condition—that you tell the whole truth about the duel. If you conceal the smallest circumstance, our acquaintance is at an end.’

‘Haven’t I owned everything already?’ Percy inquired, in great perplexity. ‘Did I say No, when you told me I was the man?’

‘Could you say No, with that plaster on your neck?’ was the ready rejoinder. ‘I am determined to know more than the newspaper tells me. Will you declare, on your word of honour, that Captain Bervie had nothing to do with the duel? Can you look me in the face, and say that the real cause of the quarrel was a disagreement at cards? When you were talking with me just before I left the ball, how did you answer a gentleman who asked you to make one at the whist-table? You said, “I don’t play at cards.” Ah! You thought I had forgotten that? Don’t kiss my hand! Trust me with the whole truth, or say good-bye for ever.’

‘Only tell me what you wish to know, Miss Charlotte,’ said Percy humbly. ‘If you will put the question, I will give the answers—as well as I can.’

On this understanding, Percy’s evidence was extracted from him as follows:

‘Was it Captain Bervie who quarrelled with you?’

‘Yes.’

‘Was it about me?’

‘Yes.’

‘What did he say?’

‘He said I had committed an impropriety in waltzing with you.’

‘Why?’



'Because your parents disapproved of your waltzing in a public ballroom.'

'That's not true! What did he say next?'

'He said I had added tenfold to my offence, by waltzing with you in such a manner as to make you the subject of remark to the whole room.'

'Oh! did you let him say that?'

'No; I contradicted him instantly. And I said, besides, "It's an insult to Miss Bowmore, to suppose that she would permit any impropriety."~'

'Quite right! And what did he say?'

'Well, he lost his temper; I would rather not repeat what he said when he was mad with jealousy. There was nothing to be done with him but to give him his way.'

'Give him his way? Does that mean fight a duel with him?'

'Don't be angry—it does.'

'And you kept my name out of it, by pretending to quarrel at the card-table?'

'Yes. We managed it when the card-room was emptying at suppertime, and nobody was present but Major Mulvany and another friend as witnesses.'

'And when did you fight the duel?'

'The next morning.'

'You never thought of me, I suppose?'

'Indeed, I did; I was very glad that you had no suspicion of what we were at.'

'Was that all?'

'No; I had your flower with me, the flower you gave me out of your nosegay, at the ball.'

'Well?'

'Oh, never mind, it doesn't matter.'

'It does matter. What did you do with my flower?'

'I gave it a sly kiss while they were measuring the ground; and (don't tell anybody!) I put it next to my heart to bring me luck.'

'Was that just before he shot at you?'

'Yes.'

'How did he shoot?'

'He walked (as the seconds had arranged it) ten paces forward; and then he stopped, and lifted his pistol—'

'Don't tell me any more! Oh, to think of my being the miserable cause of such horrors! I'll never dance again as long as I live. Did you think he had killed you, when the bullet wounded your poor neck?'

'No; I hardly felt it at first.'

'Hardly felt it? How he talks! And when the wretch had done his best to kill you, and when it came to your turn, what did you do?'

'Nothing.'

'What! You didn't walk your ten paces forward?'

'No.'

'And you never shot at him in return?'

'No; I had no quarrel with him, poor fellow; I just stood where I was, and fired in the air—'

Before he could stop her, Charlotte seized his hand, and kissed it with an hysterical fervour of admiration, which completely deprived him of his presence of mind.

‘Why shouldn’t I kiss the hand of a hero?’ she cried, with tears of enthusiasm sparkling in her eyes. ‘Nobody but a hero would have given that man his life; nobody but a hero would have pardoned him, while the blood was streaming from the wound that he had inflicted. I respect you, I admire you. Oh, don’t think me bold! I can’t control myself when I hear of anything noble and good. You will understand me better when we get to be old friends—won’t you?’

She spoke in low sweet tones of entreaty. Percy’s arm stole softly round her.

‘Are we never to be nearer and dearer to each other than old friends?’ he asked in a whisper. ‘I am not a hero—your goodness overrates me, dear Miss Charlotte. My one ambition is to be the happy man who is worthy enough to win you. At your own time! I wouldn’t distress you, I wouldn’t confuse you, I wouldn’t for the whole world take advantage of the compliment which your sympathy has paid to me. If it offends you, I won’t even ask if I may hope.’

She sighed as he said the last words; trembled a little, and silently looked at him.

Percy read his answer in her eyes. Without meaning it on either side, their heads drew nearer together; their cheeks, then their lips, touched. She started back from him, and rose to leave the conservatory. At the same moment, the sound of slowly-approaching footsteps became audible on the gravel walk of the garden. Charlotte hurried to the door.

‘My father!’ she exclaimed, turning to Percy. ‘Come, and be introduced to him.’

Percy followed her into the garden.

## VII POLITICS

Judging by appearances, Mr Bowmore looked like a man prematurely wasted and worn by the cares of a troubled life. His eyes presented the one feature in which his daughter resembled him. In shape and colour they were exactly reproduced in Charlotte; the difference was in the expression. The father's look was habitually restless, eager, and suspicious. Not a trace was to be seen in it of the truthfulness and gentleness which made the charm of the daughter's expression. A man whose bitter experience of the world had soured his temper and shaken his faith in his fellow-creatures—such was Mr Bowmore as he presented himself on the surface. He received Percy politely—but with a preoccupied air. Every now and then, his restless eyes wandered from the visitor to an open letter in his hand. Charlotte, observing him, pointed to the letter.

'Have you any bad news there, papa?' she asked.

'Dreadful news!' Mr Bowmore answered. 'Dreadful news, my child, to every Englishman who respects the liberties which his ancestors won. My correspondent is a man who is in the confidence of the Ministers,' he continued, addressing Percy. 'What do you think is the remedy that the

Government proposes for the universal distress among the population, caused by an infamous and needless war? Despotism, Mr Linwood; despotism in this free country is the remedy! In one week more, sir, Ministers will bring in a Bill for suspending the Habeas Corpus Act!'

Before Percy could do justice in words to the impression produced on him, Charlotte innocently asked a question which shocked her father.

'What is the Habeas Corpus Act, papa?'

'Good God!' cried Mr Bowmore, 'is it possible that a child of mine has grown up to womanhood, in ignorance of the palladium of English liberty? Oh, Charlotte! Charlotte!'

'I am very sorry, papa. If you will only tell me, I will never forget it.'

Mr Bowmore reverently uncovered his head, saluting an invisible Habeas Corpus Act. He took his daughter by the hand, with a certain parental sternness: his voice trembled with emotion as he spoke his next words:

'The Habeas Corpus Act, my child, forbids the imprisonment of an English subject, unless that imprisonment can be first justified by law. Not even the will of the reigning monarch can prevent us from appearing before the judges of the land, and summoning them to declare whether our committal to prison is legally just.'

He put on his hat again. 'Never forget what I have told you, Charlotte!' he said solemnly. 'I would not remove my hat, sir,' he continued, turning to Percy, 'in the presence of the proudest autocrat that ever sat on a throne. I uncover, in homage to the grand law which asserts the sacredness of human liberty. When Parliament has sanctioned the infamous Bill now before it, English patriots may be imprisoned, may even be hanged, on warrants privately obtained by the paid spies and informers of the men who rule us. Perhaps I weary you, sir. You are a young man; the conduct of the Ministry may not interest you.'

'On the contrary,' said Percy, 'I have the strongest personal interest in the conduct of the Ministry.'

'How? in what way?' cried Mr Bowmore eagerly.

‘My late father had a claim on Government,’ Percy answered, ‘for money expended in foreign service. As his heir, I inherit the claim, which has been formally recognised by the present Ministers. My petition for a settlement will be presented by friends of mine who can advocate my interests in the House of Commons.’

Mr Bowmore took Percy’s hand, and shook it waimly.

‘In such a matter as this you cannot have too many friends to help you,’ he said. ‘I myself have some influence, as representing opinion outside the House; and I am entirely at your service. Come tomorrow, and let us talk over the details of your claim at my humble dinner-table. Today I must attend a meeting of the Branch-Hampden-Club, of which I am vice-president, and to which I am now about to communicate the alarming news which my letter contains. Excuse me for leaving you—and count on a hearty welcome when we see you to-morrow.’

The amiable patriot saluted his daughter with a smile, and disappeared.

‘I hope you like my father?’ said Charlotte. ‘All our friends say he ought to be in Parliament. He has tried twice. The expenses were dreadful; and each time the other man defeated him. The agent says he would be certainly elected if he tried again; but there is no money, and we mustn’t think of it.’

A man of a suspicious turn of mind might have discovered, in those artless words, the secret of Mr Bowmore’s interest in the success of his young friend’s claim on the Government. One British subject, with a sum of ready money at his command, may be an inestimably useful person to another British subject (without ready money) who cannot sit comfortably unless he sits in Parliament. But honest Percy Linwood was not a man of a suspicious turn of mind. He had just opened his lips to echo Charlotte’s filial glorification of her father, when a shabbily-dressed man-servant met them with a message, for which they were both alike unprepared:

‘Captain Bervie has called, Miss, to say good-bye, and my mistress requests your company in the parlour.’

## VIII THE WARNING

Having delivered his little formula of words, the shabby servant cast a look of furtive curiosity at Percy and withdrew. Charlotte turned to her lover, with indignation sparkling in her eyes and flushing on her cheeks at the bare idea of seeing Captain Bervie again. ‘Does he think I will breathe the same air,’ she exclaimed, ‘with the man who attempted to take your life!’

Percy gently remonstrated with her.

‘You are sadly mistaken,’ he said. ‘Captain Bervie stood to receive my fire as fairly as I stood to receive his. When I discharged my pistol in the air, he was the first man who ran up to me, and asked if I was seriously hurt. They told him my wound was a trifle; and he fell on his knees and thanked God for preserving my life from his guilty hand. “I am no longer the rival who hates you,” he said. “Give me time to try if change of scene will quiet my mind; and I will be your brother, and her brother.” Whatever his faults may be, Charlotte, Arthur Bervie has a great heart. Go in, I entreat you, and be friends with him as I am.’

Charlotte listened with downcast eyes and changing colour. ‘You believe him?’ she asked, in low trembling tones.

‘I believe him as I believe You,’ Percy answered.

She secretly resented the comparison, and detested the Captain more heartily than ever. ‘I will go in and see him, if you wish it,’ she said. ‘But not by myself. I want you to come with me.’

‘Why?’ Percy asked.

‘I want to see what his face says, when you and he meet.’

‘Do you still doubt him, Charlotte?’

She made no reply. Percy had done his best to convince her, and had evidently failed.

They went together into the cottage. Fixing her eyes steadily on the Captain’s face, Charlotte saw it turn pale when Percy followed her into the parlour. The two men greeted one another cordially. Charlotte sat down by her mother, preserving her composure so far as appearances went. ‘I hear you have called to bid us goodbye,’ she said to Bervie. ‘Is it to be a long absence?’

‘I have got two months’ leave,’ the Captain answered, without looking at her while he spoke.

‘Are you going abroad?’

‘Yes. I think so.’

She turned away to her mother. Bervie seized the opportunity of speaking to Percy. ‘I have a word of advice for your private ear.’ At the same moment, Charlotte whispered to her mother: ‘Don’t encourage him to prolong his visit.’

The Captain showed no intention to prolong his visit. To Charlotte’s surprise, when he took leave of the ladies, Percy also rose to go. ‘His carriage,’ he said, ‘was waiting at the door; and he had offered to take Captain Bervie back to London.’

Charlotte instantly suspected an arrangement between the two men for a confidential interview. Her obstinate distrust of Bervie strengthened tenfold. She reluctantly gave him her hand, as he parted from her at the parlour-door. The effort of concealing her true feeling towards him, gave a colour and a vivacity to her face which made her irresistibly beautiful. Bervie looked at the woman whom he had lost with an immeasurable sadness in his eyes. ‘When we meet again,’ he said, ‘you will see me in a new character.’ He hurried out to the gate, as if he feared to trust himself for a moment longer in her presence.

Charlotte followed Percy into the passage. ‘I shall be here to-morrow, dearest!’ he said, and tried to raise her hand to his lips. She abruptly drew it away. ‘Not that hand!’ she answered. ‘Captain Bervie has just touched it. Kiss the other!’

‘Do you still doubt the Captain?’ said Percy, amused by her petulance. She put her arm over his shoulder, and touched the plaster on his neck gently with her finger. ‘There’s one thing I don’t doubt,’ she said: ‘the Captain did that?’

Percy left her, laughing. At the front gate of the cottage, he found Arthur Bervie in conversation with the same shabbily-dressed man-servant who had announced the Captain’s visit to Charlotte.

‘What has become of the other servant?’ Bervie asked. ‘I mean the old man who has been with Mr Bowmore for so many years.’

‘He has left his situation, sir.’

‘Why?’

‘As I understand, sir, he spoke disrespectfully to the master.’

‘Oh? And how came the master to hear of you?’

‘I advertised; and Mr Bowmore answered my advertisement.’

Bervie looked hard at the man for a moment, and then joined Percy at the carriage door. The two gentlemen started for London.

‘What do you think of Mr Bowmore’s new servant?’ asked the Captain, as they drove away from the cottage. ‘I don’t like the look of the fellow.’

‘I didn’t particularly notice him,’ Percy answered.

There was a pause. When the conversation was resumed, it turned on common-place subjects. The Captain looked uneasily out of the carriage window. Percy looked uneasily at the Captain.

They had left Dartford about two miles behind them, when Percy noticed an old gabled house, sheltered by magnificent trees, and standing on an eminence well removed from the high-road. Carriages and saddle-horses were visible on the drive in front, and a flag was hoisted on a staff placed in the middle of the lawn.

‘Something seems to be going on there,’ Percy remarked. ‘A fine old house! Who does it belong to?’

Bervie smiled. ‘It belongs to my father,’ he said. ‘He is chairman of the bench of local magistrates, and he receives his brother justices today, to celebrate the opening of the sessions.’

He stopped, and looked at Percy with some embarrassment. ‘I am afraid I have surprised and disappointed you,’ he resumed, abruptly changing the subject. ‘I told you when we met just now at Mr Bowmore’s cottage that I had something to say to you; and I have not yet said it. The truth is, I don’t feel sure whether I have been long enough your friend to take the liberty of advising you.’

‘Whatever your advice is,’ Percy answered, ‘trust me to take it kindly on my side.’

Thus encouraged, the Captain spoke out.

‘You will probably pass much of your time at the cottage,’ he began, ‘and you will be thrown a great deal into Mr Bowmore’s society. I have known him for many years. Speaking from that knowledge, I most seriously warn you against him as a thoroughly unprincipled and thoroughly dangerous man.’

This was strong language—and, naturally enough, Percy said so. The Captain justified his language.

‘Without alluding to Mr Bowmore’s politics,’ he went on, ‘I can tell you that the motive of everything he says and does is vanity. To the gratification of that one passion he would sacrifice you or me, his wife or his daughter, without hesitation and without remorse. His one desire is to get into Parliament. You are wealthy and you can help him. He will leave no effort untried to reach that end; and, if he gets you into political difficulties, he will desert you without scruple.’

Percy made a last effort to take Mr Bowmore’s part—for the one irresistible reason that he was Charlotte’s father.

‘Pray don’t think I am unworthy of your kind interest in my welfare,’ he pleaded. ‘Can you tell me of any facts which justify what you have just said?’

‘I can tell you of three facts,’ Bervie answered. ‘Mr Bowmore belongs to one of the most revolutionary clubs in England; he has spoken rank sedition at public meetings; and his name is already in the black book at the Home Office. So much for the past. As to the future, if the rumour be true that Ministers mean to stop the insurrectionary risings among the population by suspending the Habeas Corpus Act, Mr Bowmore will certainly be in

danger; and it may be my father's duty to grant the warrant that apprehends him. Write to my father to verify what I have said, and I will forward your letter, by way of satisfying him that he can trust you. In the meantime, refuse to accept Mr Bowmore's assistance in the matter of your claim on Parliament; and, above all things, stop him at the outset, when he tries to steal his way into your intimacy. I need not caution you to say nothing against him to his wife and daughter. His wily tongue has long since deluded them. Don't let it delude you! Have you thought any more of our evening at Doctor Lagarde's?' he asked, abruptly changing the subject.

'I hardly know,' said Percy, still under the impression of the formidable warning which he had just received.

'Let me jog your memory,' the other continued. 'You went on with the consultation by yourself, after I had left the Doctor's house. It will be really doing me a favour, if you can call to mind what Lagarde saw in the trance—in my absence?'

Thus entreated Percy roused himself. His memory of events was still fresh enough to answer the call that his friend had made on it. In describing what had happened, he accurately repeated all that the Doctor had said.

Bervie dwelt on the words with alarm in his face as well as surprise.

'A man like me, trying to persuade a woman like—,' he checked himself, as if he was afraid to let Charlotte's name pass his lips. 'Trying to induce a woman to go away with me,' he resumed, 'and persuading her at last? Pray go on! What did the Doctor see next?'

'He was too much exhausted, he said, to see any more.

'Surely you returned to consult him again?'

'No; I had had enough of it.'

'When we get to London,' said the Captain, 'we shall pass along the Strand, on the way to your chambers. Will you kindly drop me at the turning that leads to the Doctor's lodgings?'

Percy looked at him in amazement. 'You still take it seriously?' he said.

'Is it not serious?' Bervie asked. 'Have you and I, so far, not done exactly what this man saw us doing? Did we not meet, in the days when we were rivals (as he saw us meet), with the pistols in our hands? Did you not recognise his description of the lady when you met her at the ball, as I recognised it before you?'

'Mere coincidences!' Percy answered, quoting Charlotte's opinion when they had spoken together of Doctor Lagarde, but taking care not to cite his authority. 'How many thousand men have been crossed in love? How many thousand men have fought duels for love? How many thousand women choose blue for their favourite colour, and answer to the vague description of the lady whom the Doctor pretended to see?'

'Say that it is so,' Bervie rejoined. 'The thing is remarkable, even from your point of view. And if more coincidences follow, the result will be more remarkable still.'

Arrived at the Strand, Percy set the Captain down at the turning which led to the Doctor's lodgings. 'You will call on me or write me word, if anything remarkable happens,' he said.

'You shall hear from me without fail,' Bervie replied.

That night, the Captain's pen performed the Captain's promise, in few and startling words.

Melancholy news! Madame Lagarde is dead. Nothing is known of her son but that he has left England. I have found out that he is a political exile. If he has ventured back to France, it is barely possible that I may hear something of him. I have friends at the English embassy in Paris who will help me to make enquiries; and I start for the Continent in a day or two. Write to me while I am away, to the care of my father, at 'The Manor House, near Dartford.' He will always know my address abroad, and will forward your letters. For your own sake, remember the warning I gave you this afternoon! Your faithful friend, A. B.

## IX OFFICIAL SECRETS

There was a more serious reason than Bervie was aware of, at the time, for the warning which he had thought it his duty to address to Percy Linwood. The new footman who had entered Mr Bowmore's service was a Spy.

Well practised in the infamous vocation that he followed, the wretch had been chosen, by the Department of Secret Service at the Home Office, to watch the proceedings of Mr Bowmore and his friends, and to report the result to his superiors. It may not be amiss to add that the employment of paid spies and informers, by the English Government of that time, was openly acknowledged in the House of Lords, and was defended as a necessary measure in the speeches of Lord Redesdale and Lord Liverpool.

The reports furnished by the Home Office Spy, under these circumstances, begin with the month of March, and take the form of a series of notes introduced as follows:

Mr Secretary:

Since I entered Mr Bowmore's service, I have the honour to inform you that my eyes and ears have been kept in a state of active observation; and I can further certify that my means of making myself useful in the future to my honourable employers are in no respect diminished. Not the slightest suspicion of my true character is felt by any person in the house.

### FIRST NOTE

The young gentleman now on a visit to Mr Bowmore is, as you have been correctly informed, Mr Percy Linwood. Although he is engaged to be married to Miss Bowmore, he is not discreet enough to conceal a certain want of friendly feeling, on his part, towards her father. The young lady has noticed this, and has resented it. She accuses her lover of having allowed himself to be prejudiced against Mr Bowmore by some slanderous person unknown.

Mr Percy's clumsy defence of himself led (in my hearing) to a quarrel! Nothing but his prompt submission prevented the marriage engagement from being broken off.

'If you showed a want of confidence in Me' (I heard Miss Charlotte say), 'I might forgive it. But when you show a want of confidence in a man so noble as my father, I have no mercy on you.' After such an expression of filial sentiment as this, Mr Percy wisely took the readiest way of appealing to the lady's indulgence. The young man has a demand on Parliament for moneys due to his father's estate; and he pleased and flattered Miss Charlotte by asking Mr Bowmore to advise him as to the best means of asserting his claim. By way of advancing his political interests, Mr Bowmore introduced him to the



local Hampden Club; and Miss Charlotte rewarded him with a generosity which must not be passed over in silence. Her lover was permitted to put an engagement ring on her finger, and to kiss her afterwards to his heart's content.

#### SECOND NOTE

Mr Percy has paid more visits to the Republican Club; and Justice Bervie (father of the Captain) has heard of it, and has written to his son. The result that might have been expected has followed. Captain Bervie announces his return to England, to exert his influence for political good against the influence of Mr Bowmore for political evil.

In the meanwhile, Mr Percy's claim has been brought before the House of Commons, and has been adjourned for further consideration in six months' time. Both the gentlemen are indignant—especially Mr Bowmore. He has called a meeting of the Club to consider his young friend's wrongs, and has proposed the election of Mr Percy as a member of that revolutionary society.

#### THIRD NOTE

Mr Percy has been elected. Captain Bervie has tried to awaken his mind to a sense of the danger that threatens him, if he persists in associating with his republican friends—and has utterly failed. Mr Bowmore and Mr Percy have made speeches at the Club, intended to force the latter gentleman's claim on the immediate attention of Government. Mr Bowmore's flow of frothy eloquence has its influence (as you know from our shorthand writers' previous reports) on thousands of ignorant people. As it seems to me, the reasons for at once putting this man in prison are beyond dispute. Whether it is desirable to include Mr Percy in the order of arrest, I must not venture to decide. Let me only hint that his seditious speech rivals the more elaborate efforts of Mr Bowmore himself.

So much for the present. I may now respectfully direct your attention to the future.

On the second of April next, the Club assembles a public meeting, 'in aid of British liberty,' in a field near Dartford. Mr Bowmore is to preside, and is to be escorted afterwards to Westminster Hall on his way to plead Mr Percy's cause, in his own person, before the House of Commons. He is quite serious in declaring that 'the minions of Government dare not touch a hair of his head.' Miss Charlotte agrees with her father. And Mr Percy agrees with Miss Charlotte. Such is the state of affairs at the house in which I am acting the part of domestic servant.

I enclose shorthand reports of the speeches recently delivered at the Hampden Club, and have the honour of waiting for further orders.

#### FOURTH NOTE

Your commands have reached me by this morning's post.

I immediately waited on Justice Bervie (in plain clothes, of course), and gave him your official letter, instructing me to arrest Mr Bowmore and Mr Percy Linwood.

The venerable magistrate hesitated.

He quite understood the necessity for keeping the arrest a Strict secret, in the interests of Government. The only reluctance he felt in granting the warrant related to his son's intimate friend. But for the peremptory tone of your letter, I really believe he would have asked you to give Mr Percy time for consideration. Not being rash enough to proceed to such an extreme as this, he slyly consulted the young man's interests by declining, on

formal grounds, to date the warrant earlier than the second of April. Please note that my visit to him was paid at noon, on the thirty-first of March.

If the object of this delay (to which I was obliged to submit) is to offer a chance of escape to Mr Percy, the same chance necessarily includes Mr Bowmore, whose name is also in the warrant. Trust me to keep a watchful eye on both these gentlemen; especially on Mr Bowmore. He is the most dangerous man of the two, and the most likely, if he feels any suspicions, to slip through the fingers of the law.

I have also to report that I discovered three persons in the hall of Justice Bervie's house, as I went out.

One of them was his son, the Captain; one was his daughter, Miss Bervie; and the third was that smooth-tongued old soldier, Major Mulvany. If the escape of Mr Bowmore and Mr Linwood is in contemplation, mark my words: the persons whom I have just mentioned will be concerned in it—and perhaps Miss Charlotte herself as well. At present, she is entirely unsuspecting of any misfortune hanging over her head; her attention being absorbed in the preparation of her bridal finery. As an admirer myself of the fair sex, I must own that it seems hard on the girl to have her lover clapped into prison, before the wedding-day.

I will bring you word of the arrest myself. There will be plenty of time to catch the afternoon coach to London.

Here—unless something happens which it is impossible to foresee—my report may come to an end.

## X THE ELOPEMENT

On the evening of the first of April, Mrs Bowmore was left alone with the servants. Mr Bowmore and Percy had gone out together to attend a special meeting of the Club. Shortly afterwards Miss Charlotte had left the cottage, under very extraordinary circumstances.

A few minutes only after the departure of her father and Percy, she received a letter, which appeared to cause her the most violent agitation. She said to Mrs Bowmore:

‘Mamma, I must see Captain Bervie for a few minutes in private, on a matter of serious importance to all of us. He is waiting at the front gate, and he will come in if I show myself at the hall door.’

Upon this, Mrs Bowmore had asked for an explanation.

‘There is no time for explanation,’ was the only answer she received; ‘I ask you to leave me for five minutes alone with the Captain.’

Mrs Bowmore still hesitated. Charlotte snatched up her garden hat, and declared wildly that she would go out to Captain Bervie, if she was not permitted to receive him at home. In the face of this declaration, Mrs Bowmore yielded, and left the room.

In a minute more the Captain made his appearance.

Although she had given way, Mrs Bowmore was not disposed to trust her daughter, without supervision, in the society of a man whom Charlotte herself had reviled as a slanderer and a false friend. She took up her position in the veranda outside the parlour, at a safe distance from one of the two windows of the room, which had been left partially open to admit the fresh air. Here she waited and listened.

The conversation was for some time carried on in whispers.

As they became more and more excited, both Charlotte and Bervie ended in unconsciously raising their voices.

‘I swear it to you on my faith as a Christian!’ Mrs Bowmore heard the Captain say. ‘I declare before God who hears me that I am speaking the truth!’

And Charlotte had answered, with a burst of tears:

‘I can’t believe you! I daren’t believe you! Oh, how can you ask me to do such a thing? Let me go! let me go!’

Alarmed at those words, Mrs Bowmore advanced to the window, and looked in.

Bervie had put her daughter’s arm on his arm, and was trying to induce her to leave the parlour with him. She resisted, and implored him to release her. He dropped her arm, and whispered in her ear. She looked at him—and instantly made up her mind.

‘Let me tell my mother where I am going,’ she said; ‘and I will consent.’

‘Be it so!’ he answered. ‘And remember one thing; every minute is precious; the fewest words are the best.’

Mrs Bowmore re-entered the cottage by the adjoining room, and met them in the passage. In few words, Charlotte spoke.

‘I must go at once to Justice Bervie’s house. Don’t be afraid, mamma! I know what I am about, and I know I am right.’

‘Going to Justice Bervie’s!’ cried Mrs Bowmore, in the utmost extremity of astonishment. ‘What will your father say, what will Percy think, when they come back from the Club?’

‘My sister’s carriage is waiting for me close by,’ Bervie answered. ‘It is entirely at Miss Bowmore’s disposal. She can easily get back, if she wishes to keep her visit a secret, before Mr Bowmore and Mr Linwood return.’

He led her to the door as he spoke. She ran back, and kissed her mother tenderly. Mrs Bowmore called to them to wait.

‘I daren’t let you go,’ she said to her daughter, ‘without your father’s leave!’

Charlotte seemed not to hear, the Captain seemed not to hear. They ran across the front garden, and through the gate—and were out of sight in less than a minute.

More than two hours passed; the sun sank below the horizon, and still there were no signs of Charlotte’s return.

Feeling seriously uneasy, Mrs Bowmore crossed the room to ring the bell, and send the man-servant to Justice Bervie’s house to hasten her daughter’s return.

As she approached the fireplace, she was startled by a sound of stealthy footsteps in the hall, followed by a loud noise as of some heavy object that had dropped on the floor. She rang the bell violently, and opened the door of the parlour. At the same moment, the spy-footman passed her, running out, apparently in pursuit of somebody, at the top of his speed. She followed him, as rapidly as she could, across the little front garden, to the gate. Arrived in the road, she was in time to see him vault upon the luggage-board at the back of a post-chaise before the cottage, just as the postilion started the horses on their way to London. The spy saw Mrs Bowmore looking at him, and pointed, with an insolent nod of his head, first to the inside of the vehicle, and then over it to the high-road; signing to her that he designed to accompany the person in the post-chaise to the end of the journey.

Turning to go back, Mrs Bowmore saw her own bewilderment reflected in the faces of the two female servants, who had followed her out.

‘Who can the footman be after, ma’am?’ asked the cook. ‘Do you think it’s a thief?’

The housemaid pointed to the post-chaise, barely visible in the distance.

‘Simpleton!’ she said. ‘Do thieves travel in that way? I wish my master had come back,’ she proceeded, speaking to herself, ‘I’m afraid there’s something wrong.’

Mrs Bowmore, returning through the garden-gate, instantly stopped and looked at the woman.

‘What makes you mention your master’s name, Amelia, when you fear that something is wrong?’ she asked.

Amelia changed colour, and looked confused.

‘I am loath to alarm you, ma’am,’ she said; ‘and I can’t rightly see what it is my duty to do.’

Mrs Bowmore’s heart sank within her under the cruellest of all terrors, the terror of something unknown. ‘Don’t keep me in suspense,’ she said faintly. ‘Whatever it is, let me know it.’

She led the way back to the parlour. The housemaid followed her. The cook (declining to be left alone) followed the housemaid.

‘It was something I heard early this afternoon, ma’am,’ Amelia began. ‘Cook happened to be busy—’

The cook interposed: she had not forgiven the housemaid for calling her a simpleton. ‘No, Amelia, if you must bring me into it—not busy. Uneasy in my mind on the subject of the soup.’

'I don't know that your mind makes much difference,' Amelia resumed.

'What it comes to is this—it was I, and not you, who went into the kitchen-garden for the vegetables.'

'Not by *my* wish, Heaven knows!' persisted the cook.

'Leave the room!' said Mrs Bowmore. Even her patience had given way at last.

The cook looked as if she declined to believe her own ears. Mrs Bowmore pointed to the door. The cook said 'Oh?'—accenting it as a question. Mrs Bowmore's finger still pointed. The cook, in solemn silence, yielded to circumstances, and banged the door.

'I was getting the vegetables, ma'am,' Amelia proceeded, 'when I heard voices on the other side of the paling. The wood is so old that one can see through the cracks easy enough. I saw my master, and Mr Linwood, and Captain Bervie. The Captain seemed to have stopped the other two on the pathway that leads to the field; he stood, as it might be, between them and the back way to the house—and he spoke severely, that he did!'

'What did Captain Bervie say?'

'He said these words, ma'am: "For the last time, Mr Bowmore," says he, "will you understand that you are in danger, and that Mr Linwood is in danger, unless you both leave this neighbourhood to-night?" My master made light of it. "For the last time," says he, "will you refer us to a proof of what you say, and allow us to judge for ourselves?" "I have told you already," says the Captain, "I am bound by my duty towards another person to keep what I know a secret." "Very well," says my master, "I am bound by my duty to my country. And I tell you this," says he, in his high and mighty way, "neither Government, nor the spies of Government, dare touch a hair of my head: they know it, sir, for the head of the people's friend!"'

'That's quite true,' said Mrs Bowmore, still believing in her husband as firmly as ever.

Amelia went on:

'Captain Bervie didn't seem to think so,' she said. 'He lost his temper. "What stuff!" says he; "there's a Government spy in your house at this moment, disguised as your footman." My master looked at Mr Linwood, and burst out laughing. "You won't beat that, Captain," says he, "if you talk till doomsday." He turned about without a word more, and went home. The Captain caught Mr Linwood by the arm, as soon as they were alone. "For God's sake," says he, "don't follow that madman's example!"'

Mrs Bowmore was shocked. 'Did he really call my husband a madman?' she asked.

'He did indeed, ma'am—and he was in earnest about it too. "If you value your liberty," he says to Mr Linwood; "if you hope to become Charlotte's husband, consult your own safety. I can give you a passport. Escape to France and wait till this trouble is over." Mr Linwood was not in the best of tempers—Mr Linwood shook him off. "Charlotte's father will soon be my father," says he; "do you think I will desert him? My friends at the Club have taken up my claim; do you think I will forsake them at the meeting to-morrow? You ask me to be unworthy of Charlotte, and unworthy of my friends—you insult me, if you say more." He whipped round on his heel, and followed my master.'

'And what did the Captain do?'

'Lifted up his hands, ma'am, to the heavens, and looked—I declare it turned my blood to see him. If there's truth in mortal man, it's my firm belief—'

What the housemaid's belief was, remained unexpressed. Before she could get to her next word, a shriek of horror from the hall announced that the cook's powers of interruption were not exhausted yet.

Mistress and servant both hurried out, in terror of they knew not what. There stood the cook, alone in the hall, confronting the stand on which the overcoats and hats of the men of the family were placed.

‘Where’s the master’s travelling-coat?’ cried the cook, staring wildly at an unoccupied peg. ‘And where’s his cap to match? Oh Lord, he’s off in the post-chaise! and the footman’s after him!’

Simpleton as she was, the woman had blundered on a very serious discovery.

Coat and cap—both made after a foreign pattern, and both strikingly remarkable in form and colour to English eyes—had unquestionably disappeared. It was equally certain that they were well known to the footman, whom the Captain had declared to be a spy, as the coat and cap which his master used in travelling. Had Mr Bowmore discovered (since the afternoon) that he was really in danger? Had the necessities of instant flight only allowed him time enough to snatch his coat and cap out of the hall? And had the treacherous man-servant seen him as he was making his escape to the post-chaise? The cook’s conclusion answered all these questions in the affirmative—and, if Captain Bervie’s words of warning had been correctly reported, the cook’s conclusion for once was not to be despised.

Under this last trial of her fortitude, Mrs Bowmore’s feeble reserves of endurance completely gave way. The poor lady turned faint and giddy. Amelia placed her on a chair in the hall, and told the cook to open the front door, and let in the fresh air.

The cook obeyed; and instantly broke out with a second terrific scream; announcing nothing less, this time, than the appearance of Mr Bowmore himself, alive and hearty, returning with Percy from the meeting at the Club!

The inevitable enquiries and explanations followed.

Fully assured, as he had declared himself to be, of the sanctity of his person (politically speaking), Mr Bowmore turned pale, nevertheless, when he looked at the unoccupied peg on his clothes stand. Had some man unknown personated him? And had a post-chaise been hired to lead an impending pursuit of him in the wrong direction? What did it mean? Who was the friend to whose services he was indebted? As for the proceedings of the man-servant, but one interpretation could now be placed on them. They distinctly justified what Captain Bervie had said of him. Mr Bowmore thought of the Captain’s other assertion, relating to the urgent necessity for making his escape; and looked at Percy in silent dismay; and turned paler than ever.

Percy’s thoughts, diverted for the moment only from the lady of his love, returned to her with renewed fidelity. ‘Let us hear what Charlotte thinks of it,’ he said. ‘Where is she?’

It was impossible to answer this question plainly and in few words.

Terrified at the effect which her attempt at explanation produced on Percy, helplessly ignorant when she was called upon to account for her daughter’s absence, Mrs Bowmore could only shed tears and express a devout trust in Providence. Her husband looked at the new misfortune from a political point of view. He sat down, and slapped his forehead theatrically with the palm of his hand. ‘Thus far,’ said the patriot, ‘my political assailants have only struck at me through the newspapers. Now they strike at me through my child!’

Percy made no speeches. There was a look in his eyes which boded ill for Captain Bervie if the two met. ‘I am going to fetch her,’ was all he said, ‘as fast as a horse can carry me.’

He hired his horse at an inn in the town, and set forth for Justice Bervie's house at a gallop.

During Percy's absence, Mr Bowmore secured the front and back entrances to the cottage with his own hands.

These first precautions taken, he ascended to his room, and packed his travelling-bag. 'Necessaries for my use in prison,' he remarked. 'The bloodhounds of Government are after me.' 'Are they after Percy, too?' his wife ventured to ask. Mr Bowmore looked up impatiently, and cried 'Pooh!'—as if Percy was of no consequence. Mrs Bowmore thought otherwise: the good woman privately packed a bag for Percy, in the sanctuary of her own room.

For an hour, and more than an hour, no event of any sort occurred.

Mr Bowmore stalked up and down the parlour, meditating. At intervals, ideas of flight presented themselves attractively to his mind. At intervals, ideas of the speech that he had prepared for the public meeting on the next day took their place. 'If I fly to-night,' he wisely observed, 'what will become of my speech? I will not fly to-night! The people shall hear me.'

He sat down, and crossed his arms fiercely. As he looked at his wife to see what effect he had produced on her, the sound of heavy carriage-wheels and the trampling of horses penetrated to the parlour from the garden-gate.

Mr Bowmore started to his feet, with every appearance of having suddenly altered his mind on the question of flight. Just as he reached the hall, Percy's voice was heard at the front-door. 'Let me in. Instantly! Instantly!'

Mrs Bowmore drew back the bolts, before the servants could help her. 'Where is Charlotte?' she cried; seeing Percy alone on the doorstep.

'Gone!' Percy answered furiously. 'Eloped to Paris, with Captain Bervie! Read her own confession. They were just sending the messenger with it, when I reached the house.'

He handed a note to Mrs Bowmore, and turned aside to speak to her husband while she read it. Charlotte wrote to her mother very briefly; promising to explain everything on her return. In the meantime, she had left home under careful protection—she had a lady for her companion on the journey—and she would write again from Paris. So the letter, evidently written in great haste, began and ended.

Percy took Mr Bowmore to the window, and pointed to a carriage and four horses waiting at the garden-gate.

'Do you come with me, and back me with your authority as her father?' he asked sternly. 'Or do you leave me to go alone?'

Mr Bowmore was famous among his admirers for his 'happy replies.' He made one now.

'I am not Brutus,' he said. 'I am only Bowmore. My daughter before everything. Fetch my travelling-bag.'

While the travellers' bags were being placed in the chaise, Mr Bowmore was struck by an idea.

He produced from his coat-pocket a roll of many papers thickly covered with writing. On the blank leaf in which they were tied up, he wrote in the largest letters: 'Frightful domestic calamity! Vice-President Bowmore obliged to leave England! Welfare of a beloved daughter! His speech will be read at the meeting by Secretary Joskin, of the

Club. (Private to Joskin. Have these lines printed and posted everywhere. And, when you read my speech, for God's sake don't drop your voice at the ends of the sentences.)'

He threw down the pen, and embraced Mrs Bowmore in the most summary manner. The poor woman was ordered to send the roll of paper to the Club, without a word to comfort and sustain her from her husband's lips. Percy spoke to her hopefully and kindly, as he kissed her cheek at parting.

On the next morning, a letter, addressed to Mrs Bowmore, was delivered at the cottage by private messenger.

Opening the letter, she recognised the handwriting of her husband's old friend, and her old friend—Major Mulvany. In breathless amazement, she read these lines:

Dear Mrs Bowmore:

In matters of importance, the golden rule is never to waste words. I have performed one of the great actions of my life—I have saved your husband.

How I discovered that my friend was in danger, I must not tell you at present. Let it be enough if I say that I have been a guest under Justice Bervie's hospitable roof, and that I know of a Home Office spy who has taken you unawares under pretence of being your footman. If I had not circumvented him, the scoundrel would have imprisoned your husband, and another dear friend of mine. This is how I did it.

I must begin by appealing to your memory.

Do you happen to remember that your husband and I are as near as may be of about the same height? Very good, so far. Did you, in the next place, miss Bowmore's travelling coat and cap from their customary peg? I am the thief, dearest lady; I put them on my own humble self. Did you hear a sudden noise in the hall? Oh, forgive me—I made the noise! And it did just what I wanted of it. It brought the spy up from the kitchen, suspecting that something might be wrong.

What did the wretch see when he got into the hall? His master, in travelling costume, running out. What did he find when he reached the garden? His master escaping, in a post-chaise, on the road to London. What did he do, the born blackguard that he was? Jumped up behind the chaise, to make sure of his prisoner. It was dark when we got to London. In a hop, skip, and jump, I was Out of the carriage, and in at my own door, before he could look me in the face.

The date of the warrant, you must know, obliged him to wait till the morning. All that night, he and the Bow Street runners kept watch. They came in with the sunrise—and who did they find? Major Mulvany snug in his bed, and as innocent as the babe unborn. Oh, they did their duty! Searched the place from the kitchen to the garrets—and gave it up. There's but one thing I regret—I let the spy off without a good thrashing. No matter. I'll do it yet, one of these days.

Let me know the first good news of our darling fugitives, and I shall be more than rewarded for what little I have done.

Your always devoted,

TERENCE MULVANY

## XI PURSUIT AND DISCOVERY



Feeling himself hurried away on the road to Dover, as fast as four horses could carry him, Mr Bowmore had leisure to criticise Percy's conduct, from his own purely selfish point of view.

'If you had listened to my advice,' he said, 'you would have treated that man Bervie like the hypocrite and villain that he is. But no! you trusted to your own crude impressions. Having given him your hand after the duel (I would have given him the contents of my pistol!) you hesitated to withdraw it again, when that slanderer appealed to your friendship not to cast him off. Now you see the consequence!'

'Wait till we get to Paris!' All the ingenuity of Percy's travelling companion failed to extract from him any other answer than that.

Foiled so far, Mr Bowmore began to start difficulties next. Had they money enough for the journey? Percy touched his pocket, and answered shortly, 'Plenty.' Had they passports? Percy sullenly showed a letter. 'There is the necessary voucher from a magistrate,' he said. 'The consul at Dover will give us our passports. Mind this!' he added, in warning tones, 'I have pledged my word of honour to Justice Bervie, that we have no political object in view in travelling to France. Keep your politics to yourself, on the other side of the Channel.'

Mr Bowmore listened in blank amazement.

Charlotte's lover was appearing in a new character—the character of a man who had lost his respect for Charlotte's father!

It was useless to talk to him. He deliberately checked any further attempts at conversation, by leaning back in the carriage, and closing his eyes. The truth is, Mr Bowmore's own language and conduct were insensibly producing the salutary impression on Percy's mind, which Bervie had vainly tried to convey, under the disadvantage of having Charlotte's influence against him. Throughout the journey, Percy did exactly what Bervie had once entreated him to do—he kept Mr Bowmore at a distance.

At every stage, they inquired after the fugitives. At every stage, they were answered by a more or less intelligible description of Bervie and Charlotte, and of the lady who accompanied them. No disguise had been attempted; no person had in any case been bribed to conceal the truth.

When the first tumult of his emotions had in some degree subsided, this strange circumstance associated itself in Percy's mind with the equally unaccountable conduct of Justice Bervie, on his arrival at the manor house.

The old gentleman met his visitor in the hall, without expressing, and apparently without feeling, any indignation at his son's conduct. It was even useless to appeal to him for information. He only said, 'I am not in Arthur's confidence; he is of age, and my daughter (who has volunteered to accompany him) is of age. I have no claim to control them. I believe they have taken Miss Bowmore to Paris; and that is all I know about it.'

He had shown the same dense insensibility in giving his official voucher for the passports. Percy had only to satisfy him on the question of politics; and the document was drawn out as a matter of course. Such had been the father's behaviour; and the conduct of the son now exhibited the same shameless composure. To what conclusion did this discovery point? Percy abandoned the attempt to answer that question in despair.

They reached Dover towards two o'clock in the morning.

At the pier-head they found a coast-guardsmen on duty, and received more information.

In 1817 the communication with France was still by sailing-vessels. Arriving long after the departure of the regular packet, Bervie had hired a lugger, and had sailed with the two ladies for Calais, having a fresh breeze in his favour. Percy's first angry impulse was to follow him instantly. The next moment he remembered the insurmountable obstacle of the passports. The Consul would certainly not grant those essentially necessary documents at two in the morning!

The only alternative was to wait for the regular packet, which sailed some hours later—between eight and nine o'clock in the forenoon. In this case, they might apply for their passports before the regular office hours, if they explained the circumstances., backed by the authority of the magistrate's letter.

Mr Bowmore followed Percy to the nearest inn that was open, sublimely indifferent to the delays and difficulties of the journey. He ordered refreshments with the air of a man who was performing a melancholy duty to himself, in the name of humanity.

'When I think of my speech,' he said, at supper, 'my heart bleeds for the people. In a few hours more, they will assemble in their thousands, eager to hear me. And what will they see? Joskin in my place! Joskin with a manuscript in his hand! Joskin, who drops his voice at the ends of his sentences! I will never forgive Charlotte. Waiter, another glass of brandy and water.'

After an unusually quick passage across the Channel, the travellers landed on the French coast, before the defeated spy had returned from London to Dartford by stage-coach. Continuing their journey by post as far as Amiens, they reached that city in time to take their places by the diligence to Paris.

Arrived in Paris, they encountered another incomprehensible proceeding on the part of Captain Bervie.

Among the persons assembled in the yard to see the arrival of the diligence was a man with a morsel of paper in his hand, evidently on the look-out for some person whom he expected to discover among the travellers. After consulting his bit of paper, he looked with steady attention at Percy and Mr Bowmore, and suddenly approached them. 'If you wish to see the Captain,' he said, in broken English, 'you will find him at that hotel.' He handed a printed card to Percy, and disappeared among the crowd before it was possible to question him.

Even Mr Bowmore gave way to human weakness, and condescended to feel astonished in the face of such an event as this. 'What next!' he exclaimed.

'Wait till we get to the hotel,' said Percy.

In half an hour more the landlord had received them, and the waiter had led them to the right door. Percy pushed the man aside, and burst into the room.

Captain Bervie was alone, reading a newspaper. Before the first furious words had escaped Percy's lips, Bervie silenced him by pointing to a closed door on the right of the fireplace.

'She is in that room,' he said; 'speak quietly, or you may frighten her. I know what you are going to say,' he added, as Percy stepped nearer to him. 'Will you hear me in my own defence, and then decide whether I am the greatest scoundrel living, or the best friend you ever had?'

He put the question kindly, with something that was at once grave and tender in his look and manner. The extraordinary composure with which he acted and spoke had its tranquillising influence over Percy. He felt himself surprised into giving Bervie a hearing.

‘I will tell you first what I have done,’ the Captain proceeded, ‘and next why I did it. I have taken it on myself, Mr Linwood, to make an alteration in your wedding arrangements. Instead of being married at Dartford church, you will be married (if you see no objection) at the chapel of the embassy in Paris, by my old college friend the chaplain.’

This was too much for Percy’s self-control. ‘Your audacity is beyond belief,’ he broke out.

‘And beyond endurance,’ Mr Bowmore added. ‘Understand this, sir! Whatever your defence may be, I object, under any circumstances, to be made the victim of a trick.’

‘You are the victim of your own obstinate refusal to profit by a plain warning,’ Bervie rejoined. ‘At the eleventh hour, I entreated you, and I entreated Mr Linwood, to provide for your own safety; and I spoke in vain.’

Percy’s patience gave way once more.

‘To use your own language,’ he said, ‘I have still to decide whether you have behaved towards me like a scoundrel or a friend. You have said nothing to justify yourself yet.’

‘Very well put!’ Mr Bowmore chimed in. ‘Come to the point, sir! My daughter’s reputation is in question.’

‘Miss Bowmore’s reputation is not in question for a single instant,’ Bervie answered. ‘My sister has been the companion of her journey from first to last.’

‘Journey?’ Mr Bowmore repeated indignantly. ‘I want to know, sir, what the journey means. As an outraged father, I ask one plain question. Why did you run away with my daughter?’

Bervie took a slip of paper from his pocket, and handed it to Percy with a smile.

It was a copy of the warrant which Justice Bervie’s duty had compelled him to issue for the ‘arrest of Orlando Bowmore and Percy Linwood.’ There was no danger in divulging the secret now. British warrants were waste-paper in France, in those days.

‘I ran away with the bride,’ Bervie said coolly, ‘in the certain knowledge that you and Mr Bowmore would run after me. If I had not forced you both to follow me out of England on the first of April, you would have been made State prisoners on the second. What do you say to my conduct now?’

‘Wait, Percy, before you answer him,’ Mr Bowmore interposed. ‘He is ready enough at excusing himself. But, observe—he hasn’t a word to say in justification of my daughter’s readiness to run away with him.’

‘Have you quite done?’ Bervie asked as quietly as ever.

Mr Bowmore reserved the right of all others which he most prized, the right of using his tongue. ‘For the present,’ he answered in his loftiest manner, ‘I have done.’

Bervie proceeded: ‘Your daughter consented to run away with me, because I took her to my father’s house, and prevailed upon him to trust her with the secret of the coming arrests. She had no choice left but to let her obstinate father and her misguided lover go to prison—or to take her place with my sister and me in the travelling-carriage.’ He appealed once more to Percy. ‘My friend, you remember the day when you spared my life. Have I remembered it, too?’

For once, there was an Englishman who was not contented to express the noblest emotions that humanity can feel by the commonplace ceremony of shaking hands. Percy’s heart overflowed. In an outburst of unutterable gratitude he threw himself on

Bervie's breast. As brothers the two men embraced. As brothers they loved and trusted one another, from that day forth.

The door on the right was softly opened from within. A charming face—the dark eyes bright with happy tears, the rosy lips just opening into a smile peeped into the room. A low sweet voice, with an under-note of trembling at it, made this modest protest, in the form of an inquiry:

'When you have quite done, Percy, with our good friend, perhaps you will lye something to say to ME?'

## LAST WORDS

The persons immediately interested in the marriage of Percy and Charlotte were the only persons present at the ceremony.

At the little breakfast afterwards, in the French hotel, Mr Bowmore insisted on making a speech to a select audience of six—namely the bride and bridegroom, the bridesmaid, the Chaplain, the Captain, and Mrs Bowmore. But what does a small audience matter? The English frenzy for making speeches is not to be cooled by such a trifle as that. At the end of the world, the expiring forces of Nature will hear a dreadful voice—the voice of the last Englishman delivering the last speech.

Percy wisely made his honeymoon a long one; he determined to be quite sure of his superior influence over his wife, before he trusted her within reach of her father again.

Mr and Mrs Bowmore accompanied Captain Bervie and Miss Bervie on their way back to England, as far as Boulogne. In that pleasant town, the banished patriot set up his tent. It was a cheaper place to live in than Paris, and it was conveniently close to England, when he had quite made up his mind whether to be an exile on the Continent, or to go back to his own country and be a martyr in prison. In the end, the course of events settled that question for him. Mr Bowmore returned to England, with the return of the Habeas Corpus Act.

The years passed. Percy and Charlotte (judged from the romantic point of view) became two uninteresting married people. Bervie (always remaining a bachelor) rose steadily in his profession, through the higher grades of military rank. Mr Bowmore, wisely overlooked by a new Government, sank back again into the obscurity from which shrewd Ministers would never have assisted him to emerge. The one subject of interest left, among the persons of this little drama, was now represented by Doctor Lagarde. Thus far, not a trace had been discovered of the French physician, who had so strangely associated the visions of his magnetic sleep with the destinies of the two men who had consulted him.

Steadfastly maintaining his own opinion of the prediction and the fulfilment, Bervie persisted in believing that he and Lagarde (or Percy and Lagarde) were yet destined to meet, and resume the unfinished consultation at the point where it had been broken off. Persons, happy in the possession of 'sound common sense,' who declared the prediction to be skilled guess-work, and the fulfilment manifest coincidence, ridiculed the idea of finding Doctor Lagarde as closely akin to that other celebrated idea of finding the needle in the bottle of hay. But Bervie's obstinacy was proverbial. Nothing shook his confidence in his own convictions.

More than thirteen years had elapsed since the consultation at the Doctor's lodgings, when Bervie went to Paris to spend a summer holiday with his friend, the chaplain to the English embassy. His last words to Percy and Charlotte when he took his leave were: 'Suppose I meet with Doctor Lagarde?'

It was then the year 1830. Bervie arrived at his friend's rooms on the 24th of July. On the 27th of the month, the famous revolution broke out which dethroned Charles the Tenth in three days.

On the second day, Bervie and his host ventured into the streets, watching the revolution (like other reckless Englishmen) at the risk of their lives. In the confusion around them, they were separated. Bervie, searching for his companion, found his progress stopped by a barricade, which had been desperately attacked, and desperately defended. Men in blouses and men in uniform lay dead and dying together: the tricoloured flag waved over them, in token of the victory of the people.

Bervie had just revived a poor wretch with a drink from an overthrown bowl of water, which still had a few drops left in it, when he felt a hand laid on his shoulder from behind. He turned and discovered a National Guard, who had been watching his charitable action. 'Give a helping hand to that poor fellow,' said the citizen-soldier, pointing to a workman standing near, grimed with blood and gunpowder. The tears were rolling down the man's cheeks. 'I can't see my way, sir, for crying,' he said. 'Help me to carry that sad burden into the next street.' He pointed to a rude wooden litter, on which lay a dead or wounded man, his face and breast covered with an old cloak. 'There is the best friend the people ever had,' the workman said. 'He cured us, comforted us, respected us, loved us. And there he lies, shot dead while he was binding up the wounds of friends and enemies alike!'

'Whoever he is, he has died nobly,' Bervie answered. 'May I look at him?'

The workman signed that he might look.

Bervie lifted the cloak—and met with Doctor Lagarde once more.