THE GREAT SECRET AND OTHER STORIES

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CONTENTS:

FOREWORD.

Stories founded on LIES have been numerous, but stories founded on the FACTS of the supernormal life are rare. This is not because of a lack of material or interest but because writers of fiction, over-zealous to please, have forgotten that "art is the highest form of truth."

If these tales established on facts of the supernormal life awaken in the mind an interest in that life which skirts the field of our common experience and promises soon to invade it, they are not written in vain.

GHOSTS IN THE WHITE TOWER

Late in the evening, as the lamps of the city were lighted Cardinal Deitrichstein held a secret rendezous with Balsamo in the White Tower. When the jailer admitted him to the chamber, Balsamo was lying on his cot, his face and hands bruised and bandaged, his eyes sad and troubled, his lips set and his habit torn in shreds. He heard the keys clicking in the door, then the door opened. Raising himself he saw, by the dim light which flickered on the table, the jailer and then Cardinal Deitrichstein. Closing the door without a word, the jailer left them.

"Well!" said the Cardinal.

"Well," replied Balsamo coolly. "This is a sorry predicament you find me in. I had hardly expected such rough treatment from the Protestants and Catholics alike," and, shrugging his shoulders, he gathered his torn habit about him with melancholy self-consciousness; "but an eye for an eye, you know! I must learn to take my own medicine."

As he spoke the boom of cannon and blast of trumpets broke the silence, and shouts from the populace across the river could be distinctly heard. It was Saint Michaelmas day.

"They still make revel, Monsieur Balsamo, as though life were one continuous holiday. To-morrow who knows what will happen?"

He watched the monk closely, but Balsamo's mind was apparently deeply cogitating other things. His question struck wide of the mark.

"But an hour ago," continued the Cardinal, "while at a garden party, I learned that you were in the city—in fact, that you had been mobbed and arrested, and that the King had placed you here! I come to render you any service within my power." But even as he spoke he moved restlessly under the clear, penetrating eyes of the monk.

"By to-morrow, Cardinal, even the walls of this tower may be battered down! I smile at my incarceration. We live in an age of extraordinary occurrences. I fear nothing but a defenseless beating!" Rubbing his legs and arms, he with difficulty moved them. "The mob that would sacrifice me," flashing his eyes at the Cardinal, "would sacrifice you or the King," he added, vindictively.

"Sh!" The Cardinal with his finger on his lips, looked about him. "King Rudolph, Monsieur Balsamo, is sacrificing himself. His malady is most serious! He talks of abdicating the throne!"

"And you, Cardinal? Does the King know of your ambition?"

"He knows nothing—suspects nothing."

"How will he deal with the present uprising of the people? They mean business, as you see by what there is left of

me. They want a change and will have it at any cost. Principle or no principle, war is inevitable."

Casting a most dubious glance at Balsamo, and then going to the door, the Cardinal examined the narrow hallway. It was still as death. Returning, he approached Balsamo, and, leaning over, said in a hoarse whisper, "King Henry of France is out of the way—the Church is safe!"

The monk was taciturn. Heaving a sigh, he relieved his mind by thinking that, had it been Deitrichstein and not Henry of Navarre he might not have been in prison.

"You have gained much by his death, Cardinal!"

"Northern and Western Europe, even the Pope had no greater foe than Henry of Navarre, Monsieur Balsamo!"

"The Pope and the House of Cardinals did not forget the Queen, his mother," replied Balsamo, sagaciously.

"What do you mean, Monsieur Balsamo? His death was a political necessity! You Jacobins but executed the will of the people."

"I?" cried Balsamo, scathingly. The monk knew too much, in fact, was too shrewd a man to be misled by such subterfuge. Cardinal Deitrichstein could not deceive him, much more trifle with him. Incensed, he asked:

"Do you think me a fool? Do I forget that sixteen times, following your instructions, we made unsuccessful attempts upon the King's life? Do I forget Chatel and what he tried

to do in 1594, and his confession to me which implicated you? For you, your power and preferment, they connived at his death!"

Deitrichstein winced but made no reply.

"And now you come here in my cell, you who glory in Henry's death because you and your party favor the House of Hapsburg,—you come here to torture me with insolence, to single me out of all your enemies, as the Judas Iscariot, heaping upon me the ignominy which should fall upon yourself. When you plotted his death what cared you for the people of France? They loved—aye, worshiped their King! Even Ravaillac who assassinated him was your friend. Poor Ravaillac, he died an inglorious death to crown France with an immortal name, and that the Republic should triumph at last. Not for you, Cardinal Deitrichstein, nor the autocracy, did the King die, but for liberty—only liberty!"

"Be it so!" sneered the Cardinal. "He is gone—that is enough. His death is what I wished. The end—ah, the end is near!"

"Then," cried Balsamo, springing from his cot, his eyes afire with rage, "we are done with each other! You go your way—I shall go mine. I'll treat you as a scorpion, and dog your footsteps to your final undoing! Wretch that you are, I order you from my cell! Ingrate! My hate will pursue you to the bitter end. Go! Let the darkness swallow you up!"

As he uttered this imprecation the coarse, flickering flame of the lamp became extinguished, but the Cardinal had succeeded in reaching the door, and, opening it quickly, slammed it after him, making his escape in the narrow, damp hall leading to the outer court. The jailer, who had been waiting for him, heard the door of the cell bang violently and turned as the distinguished visitor was feeling his way through the passageway, but not a word was spoken between them. Opening the door and holding his lantern before him, the jailer looked into the cell. Balsamo was sitting on the cot, staring at him as he entered.

"Monsieur Balsamo does not wish the light?"

"No, I prefer the dark."

"Very well, Monsieur Balsamo," said the jailer suspiciously. "Good night,—may you rest well!"

"Good night," growled Balsamo.

When he left the room Balsamo heard the keys click in the door and the iron bars fall, and, as he walked away, heard the sound of his footsteps grow fainter and fainter, until the place was wrapt in ghostly stillness.

How dark and still, thought Balsamo, yet not so dark as to shut out a light within himself which seemed to illumine the room and tower as with a lurid flame, circle on circle beyond and above the prison walls; nor so still as to drown the voices whose never-ending wail fell upon his soul like the

moaning of the sea. And to think, he reflected, that Cardinal Deitrichstein had risen to one of the foremost positions within the power of man, the high office of Cardinal, and sought to rise to the still higher office of Pope, by intrigue and crime; that he would shift the responsibility of his actions upon him, or insincerely attribute them to the accidents of fate! Deitrichstein knows no authority or law but his will! I must be sacrificed for him! He indeed must rise, but I must fall! When I had almost succeeded in gaining my end, in making liberty the heritage of the people, he, under cover of a secret service, has me mobbed and thrown into prison! You have marked me for a fool. Fool I may be, but, Cardinal Deitrichstein, you will not have the pleasure of ending my life! I shall escape and be revenged."

A cool breeze began to blow about the room, circling round his head. He arose, standing near the cot,—motionless—concentrated—self-poised—thinking—wondering and waiting.

Presently a red, luminous spark wandered in spirals about the room, and an occasional voice, thin and bodiless, awoke out of the air, followed by weird sounds, horrible screams and a noise as of moving bodies. Then an ominous silence ensued, the red light settling just above the lamp, but not a shadow or reflection did it cast, for it seemed to be no part of the substance of the world. Balsamo knew the light, and heaved a sigh of relief.

Drawing his right hand slowly and dreamily across his eyes, heavy with a power stronger than sleep, he made a few downward passes on the eyelids. This he repeated several times, until, his brain growing numb and his nerves atrophied, he lost the sense of feeling. A light, airy, forgetful state of mind crept over him. Then, sinking into unconsciousness, he became the mechanism of the spirit of the world, the mightiest known to man. The red light, which had gradually grown faint, vanished. He was more than himself—he now became a god.

A horrible scene followed, which, could he or any mortal have seen, would have maddened him. The spectral forms of the thousands who had been tortured, poisoned or starved to death in the dungeons of the towers, who had yielded their heads on the block, who had been hung or burned in the court yards and public square, passed in review before his glazed and senseless eyes. As the procession swept by him a piteous moaning filled the air. Some of the forms reached out their thin, guant, white hands to touch him, as if to draw him into the ever-flowing, swirling current of action which drove them round and round the city. Others cried aloud, rending the air with terrifying shrieks of agony and madness, or speaking incoherent words which were lost in the din of the moving mass of apparitions.

Balsamo stood as if nailed to the floor, his eyes blind to

the vitascopic scene, his ears deaf to the horrible sounds. Around him swept the spirit of the world, holding him and his will as in the hollow of its hand; an influence and not a personality.

He, who for the love of supernatural power had yielded himself to magic, became in body, mind and soul the oracle as well as victim of the spirit of the world. It he must obey, its work he must do. The vow he made when he left the monastery and married, kept his heart in touch with Saturn, his mind with Mars, his senses alive to the one deadly aim of his life, his hand ready to strike the final blow. To save himself from doom, he must perpetuate the old feud, he must live on death! Fatal contract which Science proved was the contract which Michael Balsamo made with this demon.

Possessed by this spirit, he knew intuitively, before he had surrendered to it, that locks, bolts and bars, dungeons and prisons were no barriers to the exercise of its power, because its power is greater than man's; yet it, not he, or he, when it was ascendant and dominant in his soul, could effect a miracle.

Blindly he obeyed the rationale of black magic, the unimpeachable, irrefragible law of necromancy.

Presently, as this spirit closed in upon him, he walked to the door, and, within an arm's length of it, stood like an automaton. Not a finger did he lift. Dead to the senuous world, wrapped in a deeper sleep than somnambulism, he waited for

his liberation. There was nothing now, to all appearances, stirring in the darkness but the spectres, which, with hideous sombreness, were slowly ebbing away into incorporeal, indefinite, aerial outlines. The gruesome sounds had ceased.

A soft clicking, as of someone working at the locks, caused a tremor to pass over his body, and then a shudder. An unearthly sound of exultation followed. The bars were lifted noiselessly, as if by fairy fingers, the door swung open, and Michael Balsamo, the Rosicrucian, moved out of his cell into the passageway and then into the court.

The high walls of the towers stood black against the starless sky. The night air was chilly and damp. Balsamo reached the courtyard just as the clock in the city struck the hour of three. For some reason he paused, as if the spirit of the world that held him was reckoning with time and space; as if it knew that each step, each impulse of the mind, each movement of the heart, had its time,—that it must not act a moment too soon nor a moment too late!

In the extreme north end of the White Tower a light gleamed from the jailer's quarters through the latticed blinds. As Balsamo stood in the shadow of the walls a peal of coarse laughter, followed by singing, rang out upon the air, awaking him. Somewhat dazed, he looked wildly about. Again in the open air! He breathed freely, he smiled cynically, triumphantly! Looking back toward the cell, he heard the boister-

ous singing. Louder it grew, more wild and swaggering. Could he escape the walls he would be free. At once he realized the situation. Each step of ground was familiar to him. The outer gate, fortunately, was open. Crawling cautiously toward it, he then crouched and listened. The sentinels were off guard, carousing with the jailer. Moving stealthily out of the gate into the street, he made his way down the steep abutment into the ravine, crossing the rustic bridge to the main road leading toward the great bridge over the river Moldau. Once across the river and in the Gloriette, he would be safe! Not a human being was in sight. The bridge looked like an illusion in the misty darkness. The water sounding below, as the river splashed against the buttresses reminded him of a vague, mysterious something which he could not understand but which he feared, always pursuing him, whether awake or asleep, relentlessly on his journey. Over the bridge he crept like a panther, the very darkness concealing his own shadow. Nor did he turn to look back. The darkness and his trail through it he would leave behind him forever. His eyes, sharp as an eagle's, clairvoyant as a cat's, dilated in the phantasm of things real and unreal. Prague was still asleep, but, running no risks, he stole with failing strength up a winding lane circumventing the Gloriette, and, upon reaching the doorway of the Inn, fell prone upon his face. The night porters, running quickly to his rescue, picked him up and carried him to his room.

As the day dawned and the city awoke from slumber, groups of Capuchin monks, with their unique habits and long beards, were passing by the Hradschin and over the bridge into the city. A company of soldiery, armed with pikes and followed by cannon drawn by four heavy horses were moving rapidly forward to the western ramparts to re-inforce the small garrison stationed there. In fact, the walls of the city about the Strahow monastery showed great activity. As the troops moved up the road along the hill the call of trumpets from the fort was distinctly heard. Trades-folks and peasants. afoot and in wagons were crossing the bridge to the shops and market-place. Guards were moving to and fro in and about the Hradschin, and sentinels paced slowly up and down the grounds outside the State buildings and the King's palace.

A certain young woman was in that palace. Her name was Annette de Montpensier. She had passed a horrible night, and about daybreak, having a presentiment, she arose and dressed. She went to a window of her room looking out into a beautiful court, where stood the famous fountain of Saint George and the dragon. The air was pungent and sweet with the exhalations and fragrance of the trees, the shrubbery and flowers. The water splashed musically from the fountain into the red basin below where grew a variety of lilies, white, pink and red. The birds warbled in the trees, but Annette did not

hear them, or, if she did, their songs were lost in the anxious, worried state of mind which kept her eyes fixed upon a tower, rising coldly above the adjoining buildings, in which she had been told her husband was confined. What would this day bring to her, but most of all to him, for whom, despite his neglect of her and his persistent devotion to black magic and the Order of the Bats, she still felt the old attachment which, try as she did and would, she could not forget nor overcome.

As she was watching she heard, in the direction of the courtyard, a cry go up,—"He has escaped! He has gone!" This was followed by a loud noise as of the opening and shutting of doors, the quick movement of the guards, the clash of arms, by oaths and coarse threats. Three guards, in great excitement, rushed into the court, hurrying to the left wing of the palace. Annette impatiently waited for their return. Hailing them as they passed her window, she asked who had escaped?

"Monsieur Balsamo—his cell is empty—the lock unharmed—he has gone"—they cried, rushing out of the gate. She tried to learn, from the loud talking and grumbling in the court-yard, at what hour he had made his escape, but could only catch an incoherent word now and then, and these led her to infer that he had disappeared in the night. Hastening into her sister's room, she awakened Rosemary and told her the news.

"Deadly as his work is," she said to her," I could forgive him everything would he but renounce this pernicious magic which has separated us and just be like other men. You know, I cannot forget our first meeting in Paris, nor the little form we laid away in the churchyard of Santa Marie. I should be so very happy could we again return to France, but since King Henry's death I feel that Paris will never be what it once was."

"The king's death is an irreparable loss to our cause," replied Rosemary. "Though feared by Rudolph he was not an autocrat. His love of the people was magnanimous, his devotion to their happiness superb. Regicide can never destroy the evil which is common to human nature. Michael will some day see the folly of his career, and then, well, he will return to you. But hush—someone comes."

A page knocked at the door and Marie, the maid, responded. Father Benedictine of the King's chapel, and confessor to Rudolph, wished to see Annette.

The Father and Annette met in the hall and entered the large reception room. Through the windows they could see the beautiful fountain in the court, beyond which were the towers, partly hidden behind a group of trees.

"He is no longer there, Madame," said the priest. "I am glad for your sake." Annette bowed her head. "King Rudolph passed a wretched night and is confined to his bed. He has

had a shock. His Majesty has not yet been informed of Monsieur Balsamo's escape, but he wishes to assure you that he will not prosecute him. Whatever his crime, even though it were treason, he will make him free, 'I am through with wars, prisons and crime—I am through with everything!' These were his words. I fear that his Majesty will not be able to see you before your return to the monastery, but he sends you his regrets and hopes that the unfortunate affair of yesterday will not prey upon your mind."

Then taking his leave, he retired to the King's room. Later in the day Annette and Rosemary returned to the monastery Cor de Rosicrux, guests of Madeleine, the mother Superior.

At the Gloriette, Balsamo had taken every precaution to keep his whereabouts a secret. Through the expressed wish of the King no further attempt was made to molest him, which, had he known, he could boldly have sauntered through the streets of Prague, defying the populace, even the officers themselves, or used to advantage against Cardinal Deitrichstein. However, having no occasion to leave his room, he passed the time attending to his belated correspondence and making ready, as his feeble strength would allow, for a long journey. Early that morning when the fire was kindled in the hearth he arose, changing his tattered cassock for a new one. Drawing his chair close to the blazing fire, he stretched

out his sore, bruised form. Taking from his pocket a letter which he had written to Annette, he read it slowly, then tore it into bits, flinging them into the fire. Mentally concentrating upon her, he sent a telepathic message, willing her to come to the inn. Would she respond?

"How the time flies, and what changes come to us in the course of a decade," he mused. "The lilies of France will some day bloom from the hearts of the common people, when the oriflame will become the flag of a universal democracy. Ah, then I see the end of my work! I see France and the East, even England, no longer a prey to political and ecclesiastical vultures or the monarchical genius of the times. I see them rise, Phoenix-like, out of the ashes of a past inglorious history, each race losing its hereditary instinct for self-preservation and self-perpetuation, the very foundation of such a spirit slipping away from the old earth into oblivion, and the nations celebrating, in that day of days and year of years, the age of immortal freedom. The Lilies—ah, what are they and who are they? Who plucked them from paradise and transplanted them into the earth to bloom alone in the bosom of three kings? The banner of the abbey of Saint Denis shall have but one interpretation and not three,—the three in the one. Yes, only the one!" he repeated thoughtfully, his hands falling upon the arms of the chair, his eyes absorbed by the consuming flame of fire. "It shall not be anyone who is now con-

tent to sit upon an earthly throne. The lily of Saint Denis shall rise whence it came, as the fleur de lis of the soul, from the earth to the skies to receive on its snowwhite brow the golden crown of paradise. And I—I too must give up my life to this end. I must go down that it may go up—that is worth everything—it is everything."

As he gazed into the fire his face shone with a lurid light, as though it had caught the reflection of the world-passion which was burning in his heart. Would that passion ever die on that inner mystic hearth? His sleepless eyes were concentrated on the involving and evolving circles of lights and shadows which seemed to rise out of the fire and become a part of the immediate sphere of his life. Deeply retrospective and introspective, he imagined the spirit of the world eyeing him from the heart of the fire, as if it were watching him where he least expected to find it, awaiting the hour when it could claim him as its own. The horror of the hallucination almost froze his blood. A cold icy chill passed through his veins, making him shrink within himself. His eyes stared vacantly into space. He tried to arouse himself, but the torpor was descending upon him with malignant haste. Rubbing his hands nervously, automatically, he felt that they were icy cold. "Mon Dieu, am I losing my mind—am I dying?" He arose tremblingly, then felt about for the table, for something

on which to lean. Everything was dark before him, everything seemed to float away before him. Staggering forward, he stumbled, falling across the chair to the floor, senseless.

As he lay there breathing mechanically, a loud knocking sounded on the door. It was repeated several times.

As no response came, the innkeeper pushed open the door, and seeing Balsamo prostrated on the floor, sought at once to restore him to consciousness.

"Come, Madame," beckoning to a woman in deep mourning who was waiting in the hall, "he is here!"

With great presence of mind and divining the situation, Annette bent over Balsamo, stroking his forehead gently and rubbing his icy hands. He made an effort to turn, his eyes twitching and opening slightly. A shudder, as of a nervous reaction, passed over his form, his lips parting slightly as though he would speak. She continued the passes, alternating with upward strokes on the eyelids, when he visibly awoke, and, looking wildly about the room, saw her. The agony of the years awoke in that stare. He bade the innkeeper by a gesture, to leave them. Pressing Annette's hand, he looked wildly into her eyes.

"You read my mind?"

"No—I only knew that you called me."

"You see, Annette," speaking brokenly and with difficulty, "this is my fatality—my work! I will finish it—or it

will finish me!" He tried to rise, but fell back weakly.

"You are free, Michael, free," exclaimed Annette, "the King will not prosecute you!"

Controlling his weakness by a strong force of the will, he sat upright, gazing at Annette.

"The King?—Who told you this?"

"Father Benedictine, his confessor."

"Ah, he is a true Rosicrucian," whispered Balsamo. "He could not prosecute me. I knew that!" Then, looking at her with delirious eyes, he murmured, "It will soon be over."

"What, Michael?"

"My work!" but it was of his life he thought.

"The King has changed!"

"How changed?"

"A shock."

"The soul obeys the sun-dial of the planets!" murmured the monk, glancing at Annette. She did not see that fearful glance.

"He regrets his whole life, he has wearied of the crown—it is a bauble to him."

"So it must be with us all," said Balsamo reminiscently. "Life is a renunciation. The cradle is justified by the grave." Annette did not divine his meaning.

He seemed exhilarated by the report. With Annette's help he arose and walked unsteadily to the chair by the fireside.

"I had hoped," he said, "that we might have been together before this, might have been in the paradise we promised ourselves many years ago, but you see how it all is! I cannot seem to know when I shall end the work, when, indeed, I shall be free. My life has been a mystery to me. To-day I say—the end will be tomorrow; and in the tomorrow I dream over and over again that it will surely be the next day; but the work goes on and my hopes and dreams seem to die away as stars in the abyss of night. We live and grow old together, even though we live apart from each other,—there, dry your tears, Annette,—but," looking at her with an expression of calm which she had never seen in his face before, he added, "one kind of life has gone beyond recall, leaving but a sad memory; another kind of life will come when the stars so order! What is there, what was there in me that ever drew you to me? I am still at a loss to know, and when alone and in my wanderings, I have tried to solve the mystery of the attachment. I am not—I have never been worthy of you nor of your devotion. I am not worthy of Him whom I should serve," and, lifting the small golden crucifix suspended about his neck, and which Annette had given him, the year of their married life, he pressed it to his lips, "of Him who died on the cross. You will never know all that I have suffered for the cause I espoused, all that I have sacrificed to lose you. But that is my fatality. It is my Nemesis! When my heart is

read as it may be some day, read in the light of what men call truth, love and justice, the Balsamo whom you once hated, the mere counterfeit and masquerade of himself, will have disappeared. All that was hideous, repulsive and diabolical in him will have perished. Tradition and even history will see what the world now cannot see and Balsamo, the apostate and traitor will appear in a light which will make his life clear as day. His death will reveal the secret of his life and birth." He paused, and fell into a profound study of her face.

"You are as young and beautiful as on the day I first met you! Why are we kept apart?"

"I do not know, Michael—I cannot understand. Why do you always speak to me in enigmas?"

"It will be made clear some day! I thank you, Annette, for coming here. But leave me now—I am better, stronger! Let me feel my way through the dark alone, until I can come to you as I am, not as I appear."

"Where shall I go?"

"Listen. I go to Paris soon, leaving Bohemia forever. In France the work will go on which will leaven the life of Europe, which will some day bring the children of men, like wandering sheep, into the fold of universal brotherhood. I ask you to meet me there on Christmas, the day we buried our child in the graveyard of Santa Maria. Meet me on Mont Valerien which overlooks the city. I shall be there at high

noon, twelve o'clock in the calendar. There—the new life will begin." * * * * * * * * *

From a post script added to the original Ms. by Fra Latino in the year 1613, Michael Balsamo and Annette met in Paris on Mont Valerien, the hill once sacred to the Druids. The Parisian guides still point to the traditional spot of the ruins of Le Calvaire, a monastery erected during the eventful reign of Louis XIII, in which the dust of this illustrious Rosicrucian once reposed. Fra Latino, a member of "The Order of the Bats," a branch of the Rosicrucians, of which Balsamo was the nominal head, confessed in his annotation that, knowing the woman and that she had made threats upon the life of the necromancer, and fearing her, he had, on that Christmas day, followed them to the summit of the hill. Secreting himself in the dense shrubbery, he overheard the last and fatal interview between them. He learned that Balsamo was none other than the nameless dauphin, the second son of Catherine de Medicis who, as a babe had fallen into the hands of the Rosicrucians. They had exploited him for political reasons. Fra Latino also discovered that Annette was the illegitimate daughter of Antoine de Bourbon. It seems that he had led Annette to believe that they had been solemnly wedded. The startling disclosure of a mock marriage in the face of all the facts unhinged the woman's mind. She raved like a maniac. Balsamo, congealed with fear, stood immovable. The woman

obsessed by a demon uttered an imprecation which, to use Fra Latino's own words, "froze his blood." The imprecation is here subjoined.

"Michael Balsamo, we meet at last. You stand helpless before me a weak, outraged woman. My grief is absolute, my shame unspeakable, my soul lost. I, a woman withered at your touch. Monster that you are, I meet you on the oldest mount of Europe, where the three tribes that peopled France once met in deadly combat. I am your Nemesis! See in my eyes the hate which whets the dagger of my revenge. You a child of a Queen, are the child of the devil. Catherine loathed you —you whose eyes were veiled at birth that none might see your soul. To gain a throne you would kill kings. You, a dauphin, are an outcast. The world loves not you! The church lives and defies your dagger. It will ever be so. Richelieu will undo your work and Louis will gloat over your defeat. France will mock at your dreams of liberty and democracy. She will seek me alone! My life she will love with hot kisses. She will sacrifice everything for me. She will covet me, the woman that moulds the clay into forms of beauty and distills into them the magic of my passion. I laugh at your futile work! To you, crouching there on your knees, I say the world hates you because you hate me. For bread you offer a stone, for a fish you give a serpent, for love you lift the sword! Die, wretch that you are, the ignominious death of a criminal."

Quick as a flash, added Fra Latino, the woman leaped at Balsamo, before he had time to recover his senses, offering him no quarter. Drawing a dagger, which she had concealed in her bosom, she plunged it into his heart. "Die, Michael Balsamo," she shrieked, "the death I promised you—die the death you deserve."

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*Among the few Manuscripts in almost perfect preservation, discovered in a mysterious way by a hermit in the subterranean chambers of the ruins of the once famous castle of Rudolph II, Emperor of Germany and King of Bohemia, located a few leagues from Prague, was one which told the story of the strange exploitations of a certain Jacobin monk, a revolutionist, by name Michael Balsamo. It seems that while the hermit was in a monastery in Vienna, he had acquired a perfect knowledge of the chyeocaldiac language, the cypher code of the Rosicrucians, whose existence even is not known by the most learned philologists. He had pored over these cypher records for sixty years, following every possible and hidden clue to satisfy himself of the historical existence of the Rosicrucians. He learned from these cryptographic records in the possession of the monastery that after the death of Rudolph II, and before the Thirty Years' war, the Rosicrucian Brotherhood, of whom the Emperor was a member, fearing a destruction of their Order, had secreted, in a golden chest, their most precious documents, and to preserve them, had placed the chest underneath the castle, within an iron casement, ten feet deep and four feet wide, hewn out of the solid rock. The entrance to these treasures led through a subterranean passage, the key to which he found, curiously enough, through a geometrical figure concealed in the form of Solomon's seal. He had every reason to believe from the accumulative records and carefully preserved annotations of three hundred years, that these concealed Manuscripts had not been disturbed. Curiosity led him at length to apply to his Superior and through him to the Pope, for a special dispensation to found a new monastery on the site of the ruins of this once memorable palace. His wish was granted. In course

of time, he, with the cooperation of nine of his fellow monks, built the hermitage. It bore the name, "The Place of Solitude." He concealed the ulterior motive of his separation from the parent monastery and his interest in "The Place of Solitude" for reasons which were personal. He, however, confided to me that by a cabalistic interpretation of his name, and more intrinsic proofs, he was the reincarnation of Michael Balsamo whose adventures in the White Tower I have related.

In the summer of 1894 I had occasion to visit Bohemia on official business. I cannot here disclose the purpose of my mission. This recluse knew of my coming and my mission by an occult science which operated as a psychometre or thought machine. Suffice to say that by the unmistakable signs of the Rosicrucian Brotherhood, with which we were familiar, I had no difficulty in establishing my identity. As Albertus Magus once said "the Rosicrucian needs no passport." We instantly knew and understood each other. My protracted stay in the hermitage, for I tarried with him some two years, was the one delightful romance of my later life. I went over with the aged hermit the detailed story of his incarceration in the White Tower, a record written by himself in that remote period. I detected at a glance that his scrawl bore a close resemblance to the cryptic characters of the Manuscript setting forth his desperate obsession by demons. The psychological description of Michael Balsamo was a striking photograph of himself. External evidences corroborated internal.

Here in America, where fiction has superseded science and the cant of theology has usurped the sphere of the supernatural, this story will seem indeed strange. Be this as it may, it is the uncommon record of an extraordinary life. I do not attempt to explain the supernatural. That is the province of the scientist or theologian—not the historian. One word about Michael Balsamo. He was a regicide, the leader of the Jacobins, the Revolutionist party of France. In the year 1613, at a public meeting held on Hradcany Hill in the City of Prague, he was seized by the populace, and thrown into the dungeon of the White Tower. The reader must bear in mind that the White and Black Towers were built by Charles IV as a state prison.

THE COACH AND THE STRANGE DRIVER

It was in eighty-eight, when my official duties as a govenment surveyor brought me into Iowa, Missouri and Illinois, to follow, if I may use a phrase then in vogue, the trail of "the Father of Waters," that greatest of rivers, the Mississippi. Like the Missouri, she was cutting up all sorts of capers with adjoining farms, inundating them during the heavy rains, or sucking them into her rapid, treacherous currents, and, with seeming malice and forethought, keeping me guessing at her channel and her banks by continuously differentiating the river bottom and the broad, desolate lowlands which skirted her shores.

One very rainy season in April I was on number 42, a small steamer which had been consigned to Mississippi river service, after a previous dredging record on the Ohio. She was an ugly, menacing side-wheeler with one single smoke-stack, carrying the usual crew and dredging machine and tugging a large scow. Her shrill whistle was sufficient to raise the dead. When under steam her belching smoke, thick with soot, besmirching her recent coat of white paint and concealing her contour, made her look from the shore like a river monster,

burrowing in the depths of hell. One day toward the close of that eventful month while prospecting near a point on the river a mile up stream from New Boston, number 42 ran amuck and hove to suddenly. She became stuck in a formidable sand bank. Our recent surveys and bearings as shown by our charts convinced me that it was a recent formation. Upon making the usual soundings I found that the current had zigzagged to the right and left of this deposit, which, because of its extent, imperilled the traffic through the main channel. The men were set to work, the big shovels of the machine lowered, and in three hours of hard work we had the channel well cleared to a depth of six feet and some thirty yards across and fifty yards down stream. The clearing happened none too soon, for our dredge had hardly pulled up the last shovelful when the large mail packet, the May Flower, the pride of the river, hailing from Dubuque and bound for New Orleans, was sighted a quarter of a mile distant, having put out from Davenport an hour earlier than was expected. Three deep sonorous blasts from her whistle made Captain Eldridge of number 42 hug the east shore and give her the right of way. She passed us like a swan and was soon rounding the bend of the river beyond the hills and out of sight. We lazily plied between the banks of the stream doing minor dredging work and keeping a close eye on the infinite eddyings of the currents.

Toward evening the air grew heavy and muggy and the heat intense. The smoke brooded over the river like diaphanous dragon's wings and refused to shift. The sun set red and burning in a lurid sky. Not a bird was on the wing. The dense smoke of our steamer which had kept in her path all day and menaced our work, even shutting out much of the sky, now conspired with the rising fog and shades of night to hide us completely from view, as though we were a part of its shadowy, incorporeal formation. To add to the unpleasantness a mist began to fall. Distant rumblings of thunder warned us that an equinoctial was brewing. The captain at once gave orders to put in for the night, for it was about five o'clock.

"These storms are as much to be feared as a lost channel," he said.

She had hardly wheeled around and was poking her nose down stream toward the wharf on the Illinois side where she could dock and unload at any time, when the mate, who had been standing with me on the lower deck smoking, pointed to a strange object on a sand-bar which the bright glow from the fires lit up.

"It's a man," he gasped.

Rushing to the gangway which led to the pilot, he shouted hoarsely: "For God's sake, captain, stop the boat, a man's overboard!"

All hands rushed forward. The boat heeled over, throwing some of the crew sprawling on their hands, and bellying toward the shore where the corpse lay. When our flash-light was brought into action, we saw clearly the body of a man half buried in the white sand. While the crew were working the dredging hooks I recognized the face. It was that of my old friend, Jim Landsdow, the driver of the mail coach between the wharf and New Boston, who had been missing since last December. The night before Christmas after he had put up his team, he said to his wife: "Now, Sis, I'm going out to get that Christmas tree for the kids. You know we promised it to them last year. I'll be back shortly." But he never returned. The town searched the woods and bogs, dragged the river for weeks, but Jim Landsdow could not be found. He had disappeared as though swallowed up by the earth. I knew him by his grizzly beard, high forehead and the missing left arm.

When his poor form was lowered on the deck the crew recognized him to a man, but somehow we were all tongue-tied. Not a glance was exchanged. When I looked for the captain they told me that he had gone back to his wheel. We took a blanket and laid the body in it for a shroud.

Later, while the captain was steaming down stream, keeping his eye out for the red light, I stepped into the pilot box and told him that I should see that the body got to New Boston that night. The captain, a rough but whole-souled

river dog seemed rather grave.

"Where are we, captain?" I asked as the boat pounded her way through the water, for we were enveloped in an impenetrable cloud.

"A half-mile from shore, I reckon."

Again there was a silence in which my mind went back to that bleak Christmas eve.

The captain rang the bell, signalling to the engineer to slow up. By the flare of the lamp I could see that his mind was not on the boat but on Jim Landsdow.

"So he lost his way in the bog, John," he said. Throwing the wheel to port he added, "it's a devil of a river to snap you up, if you're not watchin' or knowin' her ways. Why, a swimmer like Jim had no show in them quick-sands. I can't help thinkin' of the little 'uns. Many's the time I've fondled them on my knees."

Just then a rosy light as though born of the waters hove in sight. We both saw it. The captain blew the whistle and we leaned forward staring at the darkness to see if the light returned, but the rain beat against the windows and the surging river and the hollow wind plaintively moaned as the steamer churned her way through the waters.

"That's 'er!" he added with relief, "Thank God!"

I looked and saw the red gleam of a big lantern swinging from a pole on the Illinois wharf.

"I'll be glad to get ashore. Those staring eyes of Jim pretty nearly put me out of commission."

When number 42 was made fast to the dock I left the boat and went direct to the stables of the Hull House to find Joe Brown, the new driver of Jim's coach. The horses were ready but I could not induce Joe to make the trip.

"It's bad enough on a fair night, but in this storm I'll be d——d if I go. I'd lose my job first."

"But there's the corpse. We want to get it to New Boston to-night."

"Can't do it, sir. Look at the gale. It's a cyclone."

As I now recast the situation in my mind I hardly blame him for his refusal. But, somehow I mentally set him down as a coward and thought of going elsewhere, but that was impossible, for no other team was available, when Joe muttered:

"You go if you likes. I'll risk the team!"

"Well, someone must go. If you don't, I will! The body must be in town to-night." I had my hand on my purse and was about to offer him fifty dollars and say: "Can't you think of the widow who would give everything to see his face again, and the children, who day after day look for his return with the little Christmas tree?" But his curt, biting words cut me short.

"By God!" he exclaimed, "I shan't go—that's the long and short of it!"

My blood boiled. I was speechless. I gave Joe one withering look which stereotyped on his brain my utter loathing for his inhumanity, and then started to leave him. Suddenly an irresistible impulse seized me.

"You go!" rang a voice in my ear.

"Who spoke?" I cried, still enraged.

Joe Brown stood at the further end of the shed, silent, watching the downpour of rain. I stepped close to the horses and was patting their glossy necks, thinking in a scattered sort of a way of that lonely corpse stretched out on the deck of number 42, drenched by the pitiless rain, when the voice again spoke:

" You go!"

I turned and looked where Joe stood, saw that he had left the sheds. Whether I was obsessed or mad I do not attempt to say, but I leaped on the box, turned the horses to the right and was soon at the wharf, where three of the hands and myself lifted Jim's dead body into the coach. After securely fastening the doors, and without a word or a goodnight to anyone, I jumped on the box and started the team on a gallop over the road winding through the thick woods, out into the bogs which stretched for five miles between the river and New Boston.

I confess that no fear but rather a lofty sense of duty actuated me as I urged the horses on faster and faster, even

when I cleared the woods and the road led across the wide and dismal expanse of bog lands. At times the ignis fatuus made me think that I was nearing the town, for these lights glow like lamps, but as I had pursued these wandering devils before, I set them down as danger signals and dove on. I permitted no illusion or deception of nature to turn me from the path of duty or cause the horses to swerve from the road over which they had gone until their hoofs had gradually worn the mud into dust. Nevertheless the conditions were appalling. The dense mist, the beating rain, the roar of the horses' hoofs, the far off indescribable sound of the Mississippi, the voices of the wind and the silent awful stillness of the dead man in the coach, awoke in my soul a terrible solitude filled with but one thought,—that of a sublime faith in my mission and a serene trust in the power of this wonderful chaos of the elements.

The rain beating in my face convinced me that I could no longer trust my eyes as I could see neither the horses nor road. I felt that I was now a creature in creation, animated by a law which disposed of my life as though I were but a drop of rain, or a shadow in the ever deepening circle of the night. Luckily for me and the corpse the horses kept the road with wonderful prescience, born as I then believed of instinct rather than of habit, neighing now and then as though conscious of a presence they once knew or sniffing the air

as though it afforded them power to gallop faster.

A sense of my incompetency to dictate to them, or of my inability to see what was imminent made me in this perilous crisis hold the reins tight and fast. The horses were leading me. I was but the passive vehicle like the coach in their power. The face of my mind like the hands of my watch pointed to the hour of eight as the time fate had designated as the end of my journey, but that hour seemed eternity. Each moment made me forget the hour and think less and less of time. A repulsive fear seized me. Perhaps even now I was on my way to death and that at any moment I might end my life like Jim's in the river. Faith buoyed me up like an angel. I became very negative. Somehow I lost all sense of danger as the horses sped on like automatons through the splashing rain.

The wind had carried away my hat and now as the rain beat more violently than ever in my face, it so blurred my sight that I began to see various beautiful colors—violet, purple, green, red and blue, moving swiftly in multiform, interlacing spirals or in concentric circles of most marvellous expansibility. This unique color display, this kaleidoscope of living forms so real to my mind's eye, so interested and absorbed me that I forgot all about the horses, the storm, the journey, the corpse, even the lines which I still held with might and main, and became lost in reverie. How long this

abnormal mental state lasted I cannot say. I now recall vividly the piercing cry, the sudden halt of the horses, the jolt of the coach and the splash of water which soaked me from head to foot, awakening me as one awakens from horrible nightmare. I arose, almost congealed with fear and stood staring at the blackness before me. I could see nothing but a dark, dismal vacuity. I heard distinctly the rush of waters through the wheels of the coach and by stooping down and feeling about, realized that the horses were wading in water up to their haunches.

"My God!" I cried, "we are doomed!"

Still I urged the horses on cautiously, slowly to be sure, but on just the same, believing or hoping that we were still on the road and had only struck a freshet or a creek, with which the bogs abounded during the rains, and that soon, by careful driving, we would pass through to the high ground. As the horses kept on their way and the coach its wheels I felt justified in my belief. This proved to be the one fatal mistake which a later familiarity with these flat lands corrected, a mistake, by the way, which caused Jim Landsdow his life.

The rain luckily had ceased. The wind, soughing through the willows and reeds soothed my excited brain. The fog, however, became denser as the night wore on. The thought came to my mind that the horses were fording the stream with a slowness which was both painful and aggra-

vating. They seemed indifferent to my safety. This was not a sudden, foolish inference. It made me wonder and caused me fearful anxiety. When, however, a sudden flash of lightning lit up the water and I saw that we were inevitably, irresistably drifting toward the river which was but a few yards distant, and that the team stood in at least four feet of water. I jerked in the horses, arose and faced the crisis, feeling that it would be but a matter of a few moments before horses, driver, coach and corpse would go down into the river. My mind was in a whirl. What could I do? The wind still moaned among the willows, the waters dashed against the coach and broke in sprays over my face and hands. A lurid red cloud closed in upon me. I saw shadows drawing me out of my senses. In a spasm of despair I brushed my wet hair from my brow and listened. What a night! The solitude was horrible. Then it was that I realized what Shakespeare wrote that "that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy." A form soaked with water and covered with ooze and grime slowly raised itself from below and snatching the reins from my hands, pulled the horses together, and with a familiar sound of the mouth which the animals seemed to recognize, drove them forward. The coach heaved about and ground over the bogs until we were pretty nearly clear of the water. I now could see the lights of New Boston. The wraith had taken a seat

beside me and when the horses stepped out of the water upon dry soil it turned, and as I recognized by the glare of a lamp light near the ford, the face of Jim Landsdow, the form slid back into the water and I was left on the box alone. I glanced at the shade as it slipped into oblivion. Gasping for breath I drove furiously to Jim Landsdow's home.

I delivered the body to the widow and her children with full particulars of how we found it but not a word did I utter of how Jim Landsdow brought his own body to New Boston and saved me from death. To anyone who asks me if I believe in ghosts I repeat the story of the coach and the strange driver.

A BIT OF OLD BOSTON

In the sixties Boston had outgrown her provincialism. She began to receive immense cargoes and ever increasing emigrations from the Old World. Her organic system quickly devoured and digested this heterogeneous mass. What is known as the West and North End began to quiver with the strange, new life and show signs of decadence. The streets radiating from Beacon Hill to the Charles took on the color of this chameleon population. One by one the patriarchal establishments became vacated. The stereotyped yielded to the plastic and volatile spirit of the foreigners. Houses once the residences of the blue blood were converted into small stores and cheap tenements and were let to whoever had the price. The dignity of the West End soon became a myth. All that made it Bostonese gradually disintegrated and faded away into the dim and ever widening circle of what is now the city's "Vanity Fair."

When the civil war ended, Mrs. Klein, a buxom German widow from Bremen, with her son Georgie, a child not yet in his teens, landed in this modern Athens. Her blind daughter, Elsie, five years old had died on the voyage and been buried at sea. This was a sad blow to her buoyant spirit. With a small competency which she had inherited from her deceased husband, and a trade, she hoped to establish herself in America. She tooks rooms in a tenement on Blossom Street

in the West End. All went well, for her trade proved a lucrative one. One Saturday night while returning from Faneuil Market, she saw in front of her tenement a little maid, wandering about aimlessly. The child was crying piteously. She was lost. By the flare of the street lamp the woman observed that she strongly resembled her deceased blind daughter. Without asking any questions, she snatched her from the street, and hurried her into the house. To Mrs. Klein this waif was the reincarnation of her own child.

The nature of the woman's work kept her closely confined to the house. The little one often asked to go out, but Mrs. Klein could not bear to have her out of her sight. So she held her as a prisoner of love. Her trade was to fashion all sorts of artificial flowers. This she had learned in her native town. It was not strange therefore that she taught the girl by the sense of touch to work the parts into the more simple patterns. Thus they spent the days and nights together. At first the little one made futile and awkward attempts, spoiling much paper; but the woman was patient and the child persevering, and soon she was rewarded. One morning, while the children were asleep, Mrs. Klein stole into the street, after securely locking the door. When Stella, for that was her name, awoke, she called for Mrs. Klein, but hearing no response she dressed and without even her breakfast took her

accustomed place at the table and began to make from most intricate designs, forget-me-nots, daisies and roses.

When the woman returned she found Stella asleep at the big table with a garland of these blossoms about her head. The sound of the key in the door awoke the child and when Mrs. Klein entered, Stella taking the wreath from her head, said, "See, here are some flowers mamma taught me to make. I placed them on my head for a crown!"

"Your mama vas here?"

"Yes."

And Mrs. Klein became frightened.

"She vas in dis room?"

"Yes. I saw her star and then, I went to sleep."

"Ach du lieber Gott—Stella vas dreaming!"

Shaking her head, she kissed the child and put the garland carefully away.

"Boor Stella—her mama iss deat."

These flowers excelled all the others which she had made, and were revelations of art to Mrs. Klein. The next day while they were both at work at the long table she watched the child design the flowers. The little fingers worked the paper with marvelous dexterity and ingenuity.

"Mein liebes kint, vhere do you got dem vflowers?"

"I do not know—I just see them."

"Aber vhere doos you see sitch lofely vflowers? Dare iss none live ones in der house, und you iss blint!"

The child grew thoughtful and, as though brushing the velvety petals of real flowers, she replied, "Mama shows them to me and I copy them."

"Yah, aber your mutter iss deat!"

"No, Mrs. Klein, she is alive," and the little maid beamed with light. "See," pointing her finger at the incorporeal air, "there is her star."

Mrs. Klein stared long and hard at the emptiness of the room, and then at the child, expecting at any moment to see a ghost.

"You iss sure dat she iss not deat?" she asked in a low voice.

The child nodded her golden curls.

Mrs. Klein was naturally superstitious. To see where there was nothing to be seen made her regard the child with more than ordinary interest. Frequently, when she fell into a perusal of her face, she would exclaim, "Ach mein lieber Gott! If I had not looste mine Elsie, I voot svear aber she vas her herselves. She iss yoost like her. Boor Elsie."

Stella often felt on her cheeks the scalding tears which the mother shed over the loss of her own daughter. Day after day the girl would ask if Mrs. Klein had seen or heard from her papa, but she would invariably be told, "nein." So

the days drifted into years while the child grew into the lithe form of a girl, tall and winsome.

When the vison of her mother first came to Stella, she was fashioning bits of paper into white blossoms. Feeling intuitively that her sense of touch could never equal her sense of sight, she prayed with all the earnestness of her soul that she might be able to see a pattern. It was then that the ideal forms appeared and with them, her mother's presence. She soon loved to work with the tinted paper because it brought her close to the vision. And there came to her the consciousness that as her mother knew where she was she would soon lead her back to her papa.

Sometime after, she asked her, "Vat iss Stella?" and the child replied, "It is my mama's name—she comes to me as a star." Then Mrs. Klein became inquisitive.

"You nefer seen your bapa?"

"No, I was born blind."

"Aber you remembar vhen you ferst koome to me?"

"I was lost."

"Drue—das iss drue!"

"Did you ever think," pleaded the child, "how my mama and papa must have cried over me as you cry over Elsie?"

The woman involving her mind deeply within itself, was touched by the question. She felt a pang of remose and trembled at the darkness which the question brought.

"You told me," added Stella, "that my mama and papa never tried to find me. I always wondered why! They were so good to me!"

"Vat I meant vas dat dey nefer knew dod you vas here."

"Why didn't you tell them?"

"I didn't knows vhere dey vas! I coudn't read der bapers, und I lofed you so. You vas so like Elsie. You don't mind, did you? You vill lof me yoost as dem?"

"My mama tells me that she knows where I am and intends to take me home."

This statement alarmed the woman and brought her to the girl's feet. Clasping her about the waist, she implored her not to leave her.

"Vat will you do? You mama iss in heafen! You vill not die? You lof me, don't you? You iss all dat I've got in der vorld. You iss vat Elsie vas to me," and burying her face in Stella's lap, she trembled and wept with the anguish of her strange love. The child recoiling in utter helplessness upon herself replied, "How can I leave you?"

For the first time in the seven years since Stella had been with her the woman awoke to the solitude of the girl's loneliness. Her own and the imagined despair of the child's father and mother had wrought a noticeable change in her. She gave the child more latitude and out-door recreation. Realizing the extreme selfishness of her devotion, she gradually awoke as a

criminal from a sense of moral blindness. The sin of her act had been obscured by her love.

"Listen, Stella. I haf made up my mint to help you fint your bapa right avay quick. I vill haf Georgie dake you out on der streed und he vill shows you der vay. As soon as he komes from school ve vill dake some vflowers, und mit a dable vich I gif him, ve vill spreat dem vflowers out so as to look butiful. Beoples on der sdreet vill look at dem vflowers und spy you. Maybe you vill be found out."

"O, Mrs. Klein, you are so kind. Georgie is a dear little fellow. I can see now what mama meant!"

"Vat you say?"

"I can see that what you are going to do will bring me to my mama."

"Boor Stella. She does not know dat her mama iss deat."

The peculiar state of the child's mind, the long anxious waiting and the darkness in which she dwelt, made her a subject of aberrations and hallucinations. She knew that her mother was alive—that is, that she was not dead. Evidences are sometimes misleading. As comparison is lacking between things visible and invisible, the subjective world becomes to the blind a fruitful source of mystery, a realm as it was to Stella, in which her fancy conjured with the supernatural. Yet the more she insisted that her mother was alive, the more Mrs. Klein felt convinced that she was dead. The natural and

the supernatural often present this anomaly. At the time Stella was lost she was too young to have formed any composite or concrete idea of how her parents looked—for she was but five years old. Yet at lucid moments she imagined that she saw the person of her mother. This never puzzled Mrs. Klein. She was sure that Stella actually saw and talked with a ghost.

Mrs. Klein kept her promise. That afternoon when Georgie returned from school, a northeaster with a driving rain, was lashing the city, but the next day which was Saturday, the boy, the mother and Stella, with table, boxes and chair went into the street. Trundling along they soon reached Bowdoin Square where, in a conspicuous hallway, close to the Revere House, she set up shop. Such an exhibition was a novelty in this locality. Stella, with her white face, peeping through a thin crimson shawl, sat on the three-legged stool; Georgie, with a German cap much too large for him, with the vizor pulled down over his eyes, squatted on the floor; while Mrs. Klein conspicious in a sun-bonnet and a big gingham apron, watched the flowers arranged in bouquets on the table. The hurrying throng ogled the group. Children lingered at the table, touching and smelling the blossoms and casting curious and wondering eyes at the blind girl. She saw, she heeded no one.

When it began to grow dark, and the East wind arose, Georgie became restless and wished to go home.

"Why do you want to go home, Georgie?" asked Stella.

"'Cause it's cold und gittin' dark, dat's vy!"

"I'm cold too, but won't you wait with me until I find my papa?"

Georgie soon fell fast asleep. When the night set in, Mrs. Klein gathered up the flowers and put them carefully away in the boxes.

"Vake opp, Georgie! Kome Stella, ve are going home! Kome along! "

And they hurried through Cambridge into Blossom Street, the children shivering, the boy leading the girl and the mother showing the way.

"Ven ve get heim I vill get you somedings goot to eat—some pretzels—you like dem?—some bickles und a stick of brodt, candy too, und cakes."

And she hovered over them with motherly devotion, clasping them every little while in her arms and kissing them.

"Ve vill go again soon to der same blace und ven Georgie, he knows der vey, he vill dake you by himselves.

That night Stella dreamed that she had found her papa, but in finding him she had lost the presence of her mama. The dream was so real that she awoke much troubled with a bitter joy and could not go to sleep again.

The German mother often took the children to the shop where she feared, yet hoped, as a relief to her conscience, that Stella might find someone who knew or could identify her. But she did not realize how soon the lost are forgotten! Seven years in a child's life, indeed in the life of one so precocious as Stella, make changes which obliterate the tender, responsive mould of babyhood. A child outgrows its identity as a plant its blossoms. Personalities wear out as often as clothes. As she sat at the table, listening to each wandering, separate sound, she wondered if anyone would recall having ever seen her? The very thought almost stopped the beating of her heart. If her papa should pass and miss seeing her? That would be terrible. How could he do so since he must know how she had wished for him, how she had cried for him, how she had waited for him! No! He could not pass her and not see her, although she would never know how near or close he came, how he looked into her face and passed on.

During the summer months when the schools were closed, Georgie took her out alone. Each day he sat by her with stoical patience. This comforted her. When he would fall asleep, she would lean over and feel if he were there and then she would sit for hours, just waiting and listening. At noon Mrs. Klein would bring them a lunch which they would eat together. After lunch, she would take Stella in her lap and croon old legendary German songs which the child grew to

love. The days were monotonous enough for Stella, with only these sweet intervals. On Saturdays or days when the vessels from foreign ports came to dock, sailors, longshoremen and fishermen would fill the square, and, crowding about their shop, would buy the bouquets for their "gals." Stella would hearken to their voices but never speak to them, while Georgie, in great glee, would rattle the money-box in her ears. She sat there so still that children imagined that she was a wax doll with eyes closed.

"Will he never come?" she often asked of Georgie.

That made Georgie look down and wonder. One very hot, sultry day in September they went to the shop earlier than usual. After the flowers had been placed on the table and the boxes shoved back in the doorway, Georgie fell asleep. As she sat on the chair in a white dress with a blue sash and curls tied with a blue ribbon, she attracted an art student, who near by, was making a rough sketch of her. After finishing it, she approached the girl and asked where she lived.

"I live at No. 6 Blossom Street."

"Thank you," said the young woman, caressing Stella's hands, as she was working on a rose."

"You make flowers which you never see. How do you ever do it?"

"Mrs. Klein taught me how!"

"Is she your mama?"

"No, she is Georgie's mama. See, he is there sound asleep. I make flowers," Stella added, "for others to see . I want my papa to see them. Do you know where he is?"

"Who is your papa?"

Then Stella told the stranger all that she could remember of her father, how she had been lost, and how Mrs. Klein had found her.

"What is your name?"

"Stella."

"What a pretty name. And what is your last name?"

"I do not remember my last name. I lost it when I was lost."

"Poor girl—how unfortunate. And that is what you should never have forgotten!"

"Yes, that is what mama told me, but I was so frightened and I lost my way, and—I forgot! I couldn't help it!"

"There dear, do not cry. I will help you find your papa."

Kissing Stella on the forehead, and promising to see her on the morrow, she hastened toward Beacon Hill.

II.

When William Ellery Frothingham had abandoned his career as an artist to become a stock broker, he created a sensation in the Artists' Quarter. At first the report was discredited. A man who had become celebrated in the old world and the new, who had been made a knight of the Legion of Honor by the French Government, and whose name had been exalted to the sphere of the Immortals, must have had a plausible reason for so abrupt a change. But thirty-nine years of age, he was not only rich but had married an heiress. Some hinted that too much money had turned his head, while Society blamed Mrs. Frothingham for his eccentricity. Be this as it may, he closed his studio and dropped out of the artists' colony. Within five years after his father's death he left Boston for Chicago, purchased a seat in the Board of Trade and plunged headlong into his speculative career. After an absence, however, of six years, he returned to Boston as suddenly as he had left it, broken down in health, and with his vast fortune squandered. Strange as it might seem, he reopened his studio on Beacon Hill. He shunned society and lived as a recluse. Few, if any of his closest friends knew anything at all of his private life—that part which stranded him and left him desolate. He had always been pensive by nature but since his return he had become melancholy. In his studio which overlooked the Common, he would sit for

hours at the window, with some childish trinkets in his lap, gazing absentmindedly on the blue reaches of sky, the top branches of the trees and the outlines of houses far in the distance; or going to a bureau, he would lift a dainty lacey thing, and kissing it, would replace it with tender and sacred regard. Some relic of the old life, indeed a constant intimation of it, and which kept him conscious of all that he had been and lost, the link between the dead and the living, was a life-sized portrait of his wife. It hung on the bare walls. Like an apparition she seemed to keep her eyes always upon him. To him she had been and was still the most beautiful of women. He could not gaze at her, however, without feeling a sharp pain. In those moments of despair, when she overshadowed him, the impulse to paint moved him, and he would work, recalling out of the depths of his soul the ideal passion which he had thought was forever dead. She made him realize that grief's flood gates let in light as well as gloom. So day by day he walked more and more in the light of her presence, recalling himself to his art, recreating the dreams of his youth, expressing himself in some virile, hopeful, tangible form.

Whether it was because he wished to please his father's friend and his own tutor, or to again sit at his feet and listen to his words of wisdom, he had invited Bronson Alcott, the founder of the Transcendental Movement, to sit for his port-

rait. When a boy this peripatetic philosopher had saved him many a thrashing by his eloquent moralizings. Bronson Alcott had known his wife's mother from a girl, in fact had lectured in his father-in-law's house in Chicago. He was working on his portrait when the Concord sage entered the studio.

"Good morning, William. The door was open and I came in. You feel better today?"

"Yes, Mr. Alcott. Let me have your hat and cane. You have helped me a good deal."

"I am glad indeed to know it—very glad."

"Sit here and rest and as you rest we will talk and I will paint. You have plenty of color in your face today."

"Do you know, William, I am glad you have gone back to art. You were born for it."

"I should never have left it."

"I felt so at the time. Your father and I had a talk about it when you were a child."

"Indeed?"

And Mr. Frothingham wondered what could have led to so prophetic a conversation.

"Your father had an ambition."

"Yes, I know, but I thought his was to be rich."

"His struggle to accumulate wealth was only a means to an end. He never told you that he once aspired to be an artist?"

"Never. When I returned from Paris, I reached home just in time to clasp his hand, see him smile and then close his eyes forever on this world."

"At first he toiled for himself. That was before you were born. Then he sacrificed everything for you. You know he left you the residuum of his vast fortune?"

"And I? I squandered it on air bubbles. O how I loathe myself for being such a fool."

"Be assured, William, that your father made no mistake. An accident is our lack of understanding. He built wiser than he knew. You went to Chicago to resume your career here."

"You mean—"

"I mean that you were a victim of heredity."

"I!"

"Let me explain. One day your father grew tired of the rod and sent for me to tutor you. You were about six then. He had succeeded in business and was preparing to retire. He told me that when a boy in Vermont, it had been the dream of his life to become an artist, but he was very poor. He set out to overcome this obstacle, and so came to Boston. Here he soon won his way to the front. When he became the partner of J. D. Millard Company, dealers in alcohol, he had solved his problem, but he had reached his sixtieth year. Fitting up a studio in his house he tried to revive his earliest

ambition as one might recall the broken fragments of a dream, but his mind was unresponsive, his thought wandered, the brush trembled in his hand, the colors blurred before his eyes—he failed. You cannot understand what that failure meant."

Mr. Frothingham was silent and reflective.

"To use his own words, 'he could not get back his youth —it had gone, old age alone remained.' Then he saw you draw and paint. It flashed upon him as an intuition, that as the child is father to the man, you might redeem his past; you, William, might materialize the dream of his youth. You remember what he did for you, both here and abroad?"

"Yes. He made me what I am. But why did I at his death lose my head, give up art and become a fool?"

"Your father feared that such a crisis might happen. One day he said to me, 'Mr. Alcott, I wonder if our children are human phonographs, psychic machines, reproducing what is put into them? I wonder!' And I replied, that is heredity."

"And do you believe this, Mr. Alcott?"

"Absolutely!"

"Then I am right. I understand. You, of course, recall Stella?"

"You mean your daughter?"

"No, her mother. There is her painting—the only one I saved out of a heterogeneous lot. I keep her there, because, well—I did her a great wrong."

"You?"

"Yes. I reproach myself daily with her death." He rested his palette on his knees. "Do you know, she never would have died had I not accused her of causing the child's blindness? O, I did not know what possessed me but when the babe was brought to me, blind—I could not speak. It came home to me with all the severity of God's Law that she was responsible for her affliction. She was her mother. Now, I know better. She was innocent. I was a brute. Money was my God."

"Stella was such a sweet child—I cannot understand why she was born blind."

The artist arose and faced the philosopher.

"Mr. Alcott, I was a hypocrite—a criminal. The life is what counts—one's secret thought. I became great in art—that was but paint; but in the art of living, I was a bawd—a sham—nothing! Money, money, money I tell you, bought my soul!"

"You are too severe upon yourself!" said Bronson Alcott sympathetically.

"Did I not prove unworthy of him and of her and the child who wandered away from me! Did I not the very first year of our married life abandon my career—the ideal which God had implanted in my soul? Did he not punish me with Stella's blindness? And I, I became a bushwhacker of men's

fortunes! You know that I was not fit to marry? Why did you not come and force me back into my place?"

"I loved you too much to interfere. Besides—"

"But you knew that I was unworthy of her!"

"Even so—she loved you."

"Mr. Alcott, you will pardon me if I seem harsh, but you were the only one who understood me. You might have saved me from myself."

"I am very sorry, William, that I did not come to you at that critical time."

"It's too late now. I can only make expiation. The mother and the child are dead. I can never hope to be myself again. You see, there is nothing on the walls but her. I must face that problem. She is there and I am here, but an eternity divides us."

There was an ominous silence. Mr. Alcott ventured to ask a question.

"You never knew what really became of the child?"

"The police concluded that she was drowned. That was my punishment. God knows how I have suffered!"

Mr. Frothingham resumed his seat at the easel. Bronson Alcott drew his chair close to him.

"William, there is still hope. Begin your life anew. In your heart the seed of genius is not dead. It is only asleep.

Wake it. It will again take wing and soar. God will show you the way. Your name and fame have never suffered by your experiences."

"But my soul has."

"I do not think so. On the contrary you will now see with a clearer vision and paint with a diviner art."

"Mr. Alcott you inspire me with hope."

"William, you can retrieve the past. For Stella's sake, make your art the miracle of your life. You will then overcome heredity!"

When Bronson Alcott left the studio, Miss Eleanor Ames, Mr. Frothingham's cousin and pupil, brought a portfolio filled with sketches.

"I have something I wish to show you, Will," she said excidedly, as she untied the strings, "it's a surprise. See!"

Mr. Frothingham took the sketch and glancing at it, remarked as Miss Ames' eyes watched his face, "What's the matter with the eyes, Eleanor?"

"Don't you see?" she asked still observing him.

"Why—she's blind! How unfortunate. Who's the chap asleep on the floor?"

"He's a German boy who cares for the girl."

"The poor, little maid!"

"Don't you see, Will?"

"What?"

"Why—Stella!"

"By Jove she does favor her—but Stella is dead!" Then he fell into a study of her face. "The forehead and mouth resemble her. How old is she?"

"Twelve."

"That would have been Stella's age had she lived."

"Suppose I bring her to you?" suggested Miss Ames.

"Do so, Eleanor."

"What if it should be her?" she asked as she stood in the open door.

"I should have everything to live for."

"You shall see her at once."

Miss Ames lost no time. Down the stairs she flew and out into the street. The child lived at the foot of aristocratic Beacon Hill. What if Stella were not dead, she thought, as she quickened her pace, and it were she? Besides, she may never have been drowned—the river never told her secret. Flushed with excitement, she at length entered the tenement and climbing the stairs, knocked at No. 6. A stout German woman opened the door.

"Madame—I have come—O, there you are, dear," she cried, springing to where the child sat and clasping her in her arms.

Stella did not at first recognize the voice. Mrs. Klein was dumbfounded.

"Vat iss?" she stammered when she had recovered her presence of mind. But Miss Ames continued to caress and address the child.

"O, I have found you, you darling. I have found your papa, too. I am sure of it. Aren't you glad? We all thought that you were drowned, but you are alive. O how glad I am."

Stella, recovering from the sudden confusion into which the conversation of Miss Ames had thrown her, began to realize the situation.

"Don't you remember me, dear? I knew you when you were a wee bit of a girl. I am Eleanor—your papa's cousin. I saw you yesterday in the square, and felt sure when I had talked with you that you were his darling. You recall my voice, don't you, dear?"

O, yes," cried Stella, leaning out of the chair, "and you have found papa?"

"Yes, dear, and I have come to take you to him."

The joy of that ecstatic moment lit up the gloom of her long night of darkness. She thought she felt an angel clasping her waist and seemed to float away into a new and happier world of reality. She now clung to Eleanor's arms as though the hope of her life lay bound up in that sweet anchorage.

"Are you really sure," she asked earnestly, and the spaces of her eyes seemed to lift as the child waited for Eleanor's reassurances.

"Yes, dear, I am sure of it."

Turning to where Mrs. Klein stood, Miss Ames apologized for her seeming rudeness. "You will be glad to know, Madame, that I have found Stella's father."

"You haf fount him? You know vhere he iss?"

"Yes, and I wish to take her to him at once. You will not object?"

"Nein." Then she thought what if Stella's father should arrest her? "Aber if Stella iss mistakens—you vill bring her back to me vonce more? She iss such a schveatheart—yoost like mine Elsie."

"Come, dear. Madame, you will put on her hat and coat. I will tell you all about it when I return."

Mrs. Klein tied her hat under her chin and put on her jacket.

"Stella," she said brokenly, swallowing her heart, "you iss going away, berhaps nefer to see me no more. You vill lof me yoost der same as if I vas by you alvays?"

"Yes, Mrs. Klein," and Stella caressed her rosy face with her hands,—I love you now because you have been a good mama to me."

"O Stella—" and Mrs. Klein bursting into tears, buried her face in her white apron.

"Do not cry, Mrs. Klein. I shall never forget you and I shall come and help you make the flowers."

"O you dear Stella—I lof you more als ebber!"

Miss Ames assured the woman that should Stella find her papa, he would not forget her kindness, for as she expressed it, "it was you, Madame, who caused her to rise from the dead."

In the midst of this good feeling, Stella went out again into an unknown world, this time, however, with the inner horizon bridged with rainbows and the darkness of her eyes made glorious by a great expectation. Mrs. Klein and Georgie followed them into the garish street, filled with other children, and lingered as they passed up the hill to the new life which seemed just dawning out of eternity. She and perhaps Georgie in his boyish way, felt that as Stella passed out of their home a void would be left which nothing in this world could fill.

When Eleanor led the child up the winding stairs and into the studio of Mr. Frothingham, Stella's heart beat as it had never beaten before. The air seemed still, the darkness appalling. When they entered, Mr. Frothingham was sitting at the open fireplace, with a bunch of letters in his hand, apparently asleep. When Eleanor called him, he started as from a reverie, arose and faced the child. Despite her wan face and slender body, he recognized her instantly.

"Stella, my darling," he cried, taking her into his arms, "it is you!"

He gazed into her dead eyes. She felt his face with her hands.

"You have my papa's voice. Are you really my papa?"

"Yes, yes, my darling! O how can I convince you?"

"Where is mama?" she asked.

"She has gone away, dear!"

"Tell me what I can do to make you know me? Wait!"

Stepping to a bureau, he brought a doll and placed it in her hands. "This is yours, dear, don't you remember the dollie?"

Stella felt the inanimate thing with curious joy. The mouth, the ears and the hair, the eyes which opened and closed were there just as she had left them. Then in the sweet passion of her awakened girlhood, with the pure innocent love of her babyhood not yet forgotten, she clasped the doll to her breast, exclaiming, "This is my dollie! Mama gave it to me the Christmas before I was lost. See, the eyes open and close! Are they brown just as yours? Mama said they were!"

"Yes, dear, just like mine."

"And this is my home?"

"Yes, dear, you will never be lost again," and hot tears filled his eyes. Pressing her curly head to his bosom, he sat down with her at the hearth, kissing her curls and thinking. He would have shown the girl her mother's picture, or the sky, brighter than he had ever seen it before, or the sweet things which she wore when she was a babe, before her mama died, but he remembered that she was blind. He sat there,

with Miss Ames nestling close to the chair, while Stella with sad delight reiterated the story of her wandering and absence.

"I owe it all to you, Eleanor," he said, "all to you. How can I ever thank you?"

"You are happy, dear, aren't you?" and Eleanor kissed Stella on the forehead.

Months afterwards as he was painting her, he tried to delineate the eyes. The old agony of the dead years returned—he could not lift the brush. In utter despair, stealing to where she sat like a frozen vision, he wept and prayed in the silence. Those tears, that prayer, the anguish of a long expiation, the solemn moment in which two souls meet and face eternity, touched the secret spring of the universe. There swept through the room as though the spirit of the archangel had passed that way, a light, a wind, a power, which made him tremble. Stella was wrapt in its awful mystery. When he looked up—he knew not why—he saw her with eyes wide open—eyes as brown as his, and she cried, "O papa, I see!"

"Stella, my darling! I have found my soul in yours!"

"Papa, where did you say mama is?"

"Dear, she has gone on a long journey—you will see her some day."

And he painted her with her eyes open and this portrait, the link between the past and the present, brought him to himself.

MRS. WINDERMERE'S COUNTRY HOME.

In the fall of 1897 the aristocratic town of Brookline was startled by the announcement of a house party at the country home of Mrs. Windermere, the widow of Dr. John Windermere of the United States Navy and late of the battleship Massachusetts. A house party was not an unusual event in this social centre, but this one, because of the circumstances attending it, threatened to cause a small-sized scandal.

Mrs. Windermere was a woman of strong individuality who often did very eccentric things. Society had of course taken it for granted that she was still in mourning, for the doctor had been dead hardly a year and rumor had it that so painful was the thought of her loss that on several occasions she threatened to renounce the world and enter a monastery. The announcement of the party startled the old set because it was so manifest a violation of propriety. They would not view the event, as the younger set explained, in the light of a much-needed reform. The more the affair was gossipped about the more shocking it became.

All knew of Mrs. Windermere's strange psychic experiences with Dr. Charcot, the French psychologist, and how she could do table tipping and operate the Ouija board, vulgar as that was. But as a scion of one of the oldest aristocratic families of Boston she could do things which in one of less

prominence might not so easily be excused. Besides, did not Professor Hyslop of Columbia University approve of psychical research?

It was also known that she had espoused Theosophy and that since her return from a recent cruise with her husband in oriental waters and her sojourn in India and Egypt she had become inoculated with certain peculiar necromantic and magical practices. She believed in Spiritualism too, and carried her belief so far that when the doctor died she refused to wear anything but white, maintaining that black was not only a pernicious negative but a symbol of evil.

"Death should be like a sunrise," she said, "in which every shadow or form of darkness is dissipated in the dazzling brightness of day."

But the older set refused to listen to or entertain such ultra-heterodox notions. "We are not living in Cairo or Calcutta," they insinuated reproachfully.

When, however, Lieutenant and Mrs. Scoffield, leaders of the younger set, insisted that Mrs. Windermere knew her own mind and should be left unmolested in so sacred a matter as grief—in short, that she should be permitted to mourn as she saw fit, the affair was soon glossed over and hushed up, while the usual preparations went on for the gala event.

None of this gossip reached the ears of Mrs. Windermere. If it had she would have smiled and replied, with a

pretty shug of her shoulders—"One can't get away from karma, you know."

One day she explained what karma meant. When indiscretions of certain young ladies at bridge whist were mentioned to her by Mrs. Scoffield she said:

"Now that's karma! Karma, my dear, is something you can't help doing. You are born to it. It excuses everything. When you know what karma is you expect certain things to happen as the most natural thing in the world."

A year before his death and at the age of fifty Dr. Windermere was compelled because of a nervous breakdown to go the way of the retired list. This proved a severe blow to him. In naval circles it was said that he was very badly off. At his hotel the malady was not taken so seriously. An extended respite from official duties, a quiet rest in his apartment at the Beardsley in New York, might benefit him. Rest, however, was not what he desired. To a man of his temperament rest was equivalent to a suspension of life—it meant death. It was therefore not strange that, believing his career to be at an end, he brooded upon the chronic nature of his malady and in the seclusion of his hotel often thought of his unhappy life. He knew that he was beyond hope. The incessant, grinding pain at the base of his brain had driven him to bromides, with the usual result of gradually benumbing his power of feeling, atrophying his moral sense and paralyzing his nerves. At

last his physical breakdown brought on melancholia. He became hopeless. His once abnormally large love of life sank down into the bulb, with no impulse to ever rise again. A mania for suicide took possession of him.

Mrs. Windermere, though a clever student of human nature, was too engrossed in theosophy to observe the stupor which at intervals came over him, or the drifting, incoherent character of his talks. While reading she would listen in an absent-minded sort of way to his ramblings and remark—"Yes, dear," until the doctor, tired of his own life, forced himself to believe that it was also a bore to her. In a moment of mental aberration and without saying a word to his wife he packed his valise and left the hotel. Mrs. Windermere was so fascinated with her books, so completely absorbed in her psychical experiments, that she did not notice his absence, but the next day she received a terrible shock. A yellow envelope was handed her. It was a telegram announcing his death. Later she learned that he had been found dead on his old battleship, the Massachusetts, which was then anchored in Newport Roads. The circumstances of his death were comunicated to her nephew, Lieutenant Scoffield, but for various reasons were kept from the widow.

Mrs. Windermere, as might be expected, was inconsolable. She abandoned all occult study and went into seclusion. Absenting herself from society, she received no callers except

Lieutenant and Mrs. Scoffield, and continually reproached herself for her lack of devotion to him. "The poor dear died of a broken heart," she would say, "and I drove him to it!"

One evening about a month after the funeral the lieutenant was with Mrs. Windermere, talking over the settlement of the estate, when the room became saturated with a strong odor of carbolic acid. Mrs. Windermere became very much disturbed, but she made no mention of it to the lieutenant. At last, however, it grew so disagreeable that she was compelled to throw open the windows, and this in the middle of January.

"You don't mind a draft even if it is a little frapped, do you, Lieutenant?"

"Oh, not in the least," he replied, shifting his eyes, although she observed that he seemed embarrassed and tried to suppress a cough.

"Since the doctor's death I can't get enough air," she added. "I fancy that I am being buried alive, and all those horrid things."

The lieutenant looked at his aunt, smiling dryly.

"My dear, I hope it has not become as serious as that," said he as he stepped to the window. Mrs. Windermere's eyes followed him with some misgiving.

"What do you mean?" she asked curiously. "I hope you do not think I imagine it?"

"Imagine what?" he asked.

"Why, the odor. Don't you smell it?"

The lieutenant did smell it, but refused to commit himself.

"It's nothing, I am sure," he replied, reseating himself.

Mrs. Windermere shook her head. With a sudden inspiration he pointed to her furs.

"You do not suppose they produce it?"

"Charles," she exclaimed indignantly, "you know very well that my seals have not the slightest odor. What I smell is carbolic acid and there can be no mistake about it."

"Well—it may be, but I have a very hard cold. If carbolic acid is in the air there is a natural cause for it, even though you may be unable to trace it," and Lieutenant Scofield settled back in his chair, ill at ease and hoping she would change the subject. But she harped on it with tiresome monotony which annoyed him very much. He knew that she would, for the lack of a better reason, associate it with something supernatural, and so when she suggested the idea of ghosts he smiled cynically.

"My dear aunt, you know that all this talk about ghosts is nonsense! I discredit everything of the sort. Why—the thing's impossible! Ghosts! They are simply films on the eye. When a man's dead, he's dead. That's all! It's over with him. His life is closed. He's dust, mist or smoke or

anything you please to call it." And ogling his aunt, the lieutenant began to think that perhaps she was losing her mind.

"You're not a bit comforting, Charles, to say the least," she said good-naturedly. "I believe the soul immortal so we can never agree on that question."

"As you please," he said, waving his hand.

While she was speaking, and despite the cold breeze which was blowing in from the windows, the air became so pregnant with the odor of carbolic acid that the lieutenant began to squirm in his chair and make horrible grimaces. It annoyed him despite his endeavor to explain it away. He knew a few things which Mrs. Windermere did not and which, if she had known, would have thrown some light on the mystery. She detected, however, through his gruff, bluff manner and his atheistic tendencies a more than curious interest in the strange and inexplicable phenomenon. For while he was even denying that he smelt it she saw him covertly sniffing the air and trying to locate the source of the gas. Man-like, he had a reason for every contradiction. When the odor became so nauseating that he could stand it no longer, he arose hurriedly as though suddenly conscious of another engagement, and stepping to the hall took his hat.

"My dear aunt," he explained, "I must go. I will call later in the week when we can talk over our business matter.

You know Eleanor expects me. Meanwhile, without alarming you, I beg of you to leave this place. I think it is very unhealthy." And bidding her good-night, he left the hotel.

Mrs. Windermere did become alarmed, for the odor refused to be dissipated, and acted at once on her nephew's advice. Within the fortnight she removed from the Beardsley to a hotel further uptown. But even here the odor followed her like a nemesis, until she was compelled to leave New York and go to Boston. Hardly had she taken up her quarters at the Abbottsford when the odor disappeared entirely, as mysteriously as it had come, and for three months she enjoyed an uninterrupted peace of mind and a freedom from its tormenting presence.

Lieutenant Scoffield was the first to congratulate her on her deliverance and to assure her that in the advent of her return to society her mind would become so occupied as to make her soon forget altogether the unfortunate episode. It was then, to his great surprise but pleasure, that she proposed for May a house party in her country home in Brookline. Social dissipation, she felt sure, was what she sadly needed. Retirement had brought on a melancholia which she feared might become chronic.

"You never knew," Mrs. Scoffield asked her a few days after the party was announced, "what caused that obnoxious odor in the Beardsley?"

"No," she replied. "I myself examined everything. I questioned the servants, had my physician look over the place, even called in the plumbers and gas-fitters. We made a thorough investigation, but we found nothing at all."

"Indeed!" replied Mrs. Scoffield, "it was strange. You can thank your stars that it has gone."

II

On May tenth, Mrs. Windermere's large house on the hill overlooking the Reservoir, was opened to her guests. None appeared gayer and more charming than the hostess herself. She seemed a new being.

All went well until the second day, when four of the guests became violently ill at breakfast and had to be hurried to their respective homes. Mrs. Windermere interviewed the chef and even talked the matter over with the table maids, but while they seemed puzzled over the accident they insisted that it was not the fault of the food. Then it was that the odor of carbolic acid again appeared, and so strongly that chef, maids and hostess looked at each other in horror and Mrs. Windermere actually fainted and had to be carried from the room. Nor was this all, nor was it the end. The next day, which was the third, and evidently a marked day in her occult calendar, Mrs. Scoffield fell ill, so that she could not appear that evening at dinner. Her absence created much surprise and the few guests who remained became very panicky, fearing that perhaps some awful calamity awaited them. When the next morning Mr. Blakely, who was standing on the farther end of the veranda, saw Mrs. Scoffield, pale as a ghost,

assisted to her carriage and driven away, he called to the lieutenant as he was entering the house. Both stepped into the parlor arm in arm in anxious conversation.

"I say, Lieutenant," urged Mr. Blakely, " it's very queer and I really don't know what to think about it, but don't you suppose there is a leak somewhere, gas or something? I smelt it all night in bed, and Mrs. Blakely remarked about it. By Jove! I smell it now, don't you? See, the windows are up and we should be getting the odor of those hyacinths and magnolias yonder in the garden, but that other smell—what do you call it?—drowns everything. I think it's a leak!"

"A leak?" replied the lieutenant, lighting a cigar and looking up at Mr. Blakely. "That's impossible." Stepping to the window he wondered where the odor really came from. The faint sound of the carriage conveying his wife to their home, fell upon his ears. "Something must be done or there will be a scandal."

"I say," added Blakely, "its very queer why everybody's leaving, just the same. There go the Deacons."

The lieutenant made no reply but was very much disturbed.

"What made the Frothinghams and the Deacons leave? Can't something be done?"

"Hush," interjected the lieutenant, "here comes my aunt." And he bowed gracefully to Mrs. Windermere as she entered the room, while Mr. Blakely stepped into the gardens.

Mrs. Windermere was pale and excited. "Oh, dear," she cried, "what shall I do? Can't you help me, lieutenant?" She was an object of commiseration.

"Really, aunt, I don't know what to say. It's very annoying and puzzling, too."

"Yes, and just think, Eleanor was taken home sick. O, I shall lose my mind, if this thing keeps up."

"There don't worry any more about it. You can't help it." But Mrs. Windermere, utterly prostrated by the succession of unfortunate events, sank into a chair dazed. The whole affair was becoming serious. Then it was that the lieutenant approached Mrs. Windermere and assuring himself that no one was in sight, said, "Aunt Elizabeth! I have something to tell you. You never knew how the doctor died? Of course not, but I—"

"My dear Charles, that was the mystery. I suspected—"

"O, yes," interrupted the lieutenant, I understand!"

"Understand what?"

"Why, you know—his death? That is what I wish to tell you about. You see it was a secret. I felt, however, that you knew."

"I? I, knew what? Heavens, Charles do not involve me in any more mystery."

"Did you not know exactly how he died?"

"You mean—"

"Why—yes. The carbolic acid!"

"What? John committed suicide? You mean this?" And Mrs. Windermere burst into tears at this startling announcement. "Why did you not tell me in the first place," she sobbed.

The lieutenant consoled her as best he could by telling her that he was not permitted to do so, that state etiquette prevented. But Mrs. Windermere was inconsolable. Finally, brushing away her tears, she became more composed. "I see it all now. That is why I studied Theosophy, Spiritualism and Occult Science. How could I ever have stood it had I not had a knowledge of the future life to comfort me. And poor John is still involved in that obnoxious atmosphere. You see lieutenant, he would not deceive me. And he's dead!"

The lieutenant looked sheepish. He made no reply to her accusation.

"You will agree with me that one ought to know a few things beside the A. B. C.'s."

Still the lieutenant was obstinately silent. He hung his head, while she nervously tapped the floor with her foot.

"It's devilish queer," he murmured at length as though awakening from a nightmare, "positively devilish." Then he wondered how a ghost could produce carbolic acid.

"It's bosh! That's all." Looking up, he approached Mrs. Windermere. "Aunt, if you can enlighten me how so

immaterial a thing as a ghost can produce carbolic acid, I'll believe in the strange phenomenon."

"Then come lieutenant, let me show you something." Stepping to a cabinet, she took from a shelf a curious toy, placing it on the table.

"What is that?" asked the lieutenant amused.

"Wait," replied Mrs. Windermere. And drawing a chair close to the table, she bade the lieutenant, in a victorious spirit, to be seated.

One thought ran through his mind—what is she up to? "O I see," he blurted out, "it's that Ouija board, eh?"

"Exactly. That little instrument can connect the two worlds by a process greater than wireless telegraphy."

"Egad," exclaimed the lieutenant, "I should like to see it do it."

"It will," said Mrs. Windermere with a dry smile, as she seated herself at the table beside the lieutenant, "only wait and give the forces time."

"You have more faith than I have," replied her nephew.

"Now place your fingers so, and the dial will do the rest."

"I'll do it," cried the lieutenant excitedly. "If the Doctor's ghost is here I'll be astonished to say the least."

"Careful," said Mrs. Windermere as the dial oscillated from one side to the other, much to the amazement of the officer. "You are a great psychic, lieutenant."

"Don't call me any more names than I have, aunt. What's a psychic anyway?"

"Why, a medium of communication, like this Ouija board, only human."

"Look, it's up to all sorts of capers now. See it swing and swerve. Whatever it is, it is scheduled for business, that's certain."

"It is spelling words. Take down the letters, lieutenant and they will compose a message."

The lieutenant took down the letters as the dial indicated them, and, in an incredibly short time, the dial stopped. The two eagerly put together the letters until the following intelligent message was read, addressed to the Doctor's widow:

"My Dear Elizabeth:

"I had no other way of reaching you and telling you what a terrible mistake I made in taking my life. I was a fool. Now that you know how I died I shall bow to the fates and never trouble you any more.

Dr. John Windermere, U. S. N."

The lieutenant smiled dryly, but kept his eyes screwed to the Ouija board.

"Well," said Mrs. Windermere.

"It's very queer," he murmured, still eyeing the curious psychic battery. "Am I asleep, or dreaming? Why the odor of carbolic acid has entirely disappeared. I smell the mag-

nolia blooms and the hyacinths, too." Again he pored over the message and examined the instrument.

"You are puzzled, lieutenant?"

"Why, aunt, I am completely dumbfounded. What does it mean?"

"It means this, lieutenant, that life is greater than death, and living is more to be feared than dying. Death lifts one burden while it adds another. Our responsibilities make our destiny."

The lieutenant and Mrs. Windermere sat at the table, thinking of many things and wondering if the Doctor were better off after all.

THE GREAT SECRET.

George Gruelle was an artist and a great one, if the world's judgment, that is, if the number of the canvases he sold, counts for anything. But he had one towering fault, as his contemporary artists conceived it; one fatal eccentricity, as the critics dubbed it,—he painted Madonnas. There was nothing extraordinary about his essaying so difficult a task, for his drawing was faultless, his coloring superb, his technique perfect, but who ever saw such Madonnas? They were weird, unearthly faces which haunted one, such white faces as might peep at one from the dark. This specialty so grew upon him that it was soon whispered about that he could paint nothing else. The fact is that after he won fame and money he painted nothing else.

One strong feature of Gruelle's Madonnas was their spirituelle character. They grew upon one, but they seemed super-terrestrial creations. As no one had ever seen a Madonna and only judged of her likeness by traditional descriptions and medieval paintings, none could weigh or measure the genuineness of his portrayals. So he let the critics rave. They were certainly superlative creations, even if the critics did condemn them; superlative because as color dreams they were too ethereal to appeal to a common-

place realistic sense. To him color was a form which revealed rather than concealed art, a diaphanous cloud rather than a solid body, through which the soul shone. The fact is, Gruelle made the real ideal rather than the ideal real, and by so doing damaged his reputation, so far as human appreciation of an artistic production was concerned.

"You conceive the Madonna to be the godmother of the human race," he once said to a critic, "while I conceive every woman to be a godmother. That is the difference. Your dogmas degrade your art. Madonnas, my dear fellow, are women, our own mothers, conceived in the divine essence, radiating the divine atmosphere. Though you do not look upon celestial motherhood as I do, believe me, it is more than an historical figment. Dante might have called his Beatrice a Madonna, a woman whose soul was apotheosized from human dust into the white rose of the empyrean. I try to make the faces of the Madonnas faces in which passion and art are sublimated. I paint what I realize as the beautiful subject back of or within the deformed object. With Burne-Jones I am seeking the mystical within the physical."

This explanation did not appeal to the critic, who was trying to reconcile originality with the established traditions and customs. He smiled cynically.

"Gruelle, your peculiar mysticism is essential to theology, but in art, it is bewildering. Art is sensuous, not supersen-

suous. Your Madonnas are unreal and that is why I condemn them. They are fantastic creations."

So they disagreed.

"Some art critics," said Gruelle, after he had left the studio, "are like Liebersmith, the piano tuner, who, though deaf, pretends to tune instruments. Their eyes are in their heads but not in their souls. They see only what is material."

That evening, sitting alone in his studio, before the blazing fire, he looked over some of his old forgotten sketches and consigned them one by one to the flames. A dreamy spirit seemed to invest him. Had the critic been present he would have heard him speak audibly to his paintings, as though they were more than the children of his brain.

"I had meant to keep these, my first efforts. But youth hopes and prospects while age retrospects and dreams. I see deeper now. A Madonna is more than a mere conception; she is an ideal. Here is a youthful fancy—a Madonna I took from a Russian type. She was a peasant to be sure, but she had such large and wistful eyes and an adorably sweet mouth. There is something lacking. She has an aquiline nose! That is vile —a Madonna could never have a nose like an eagle's beak." And throwing it into the fire, he watched the flames devour it as though they knew his loathing for the imperfect.

"Now this one," he said, as he held before him a loveable creature, a Parisienne, "is indeed charming! Mademoiselle,

your neck is very chaste and your brow such as might have graced Diana. But your lips pout a bit. That's a trick of the Parisienne—a defect which art must remedy. Besides, a nimbus would ill become so low and narrow a brow, though yours is white as snow and adorned with raven tresses." So it went the way of the fire.

"Here is one which pleases me!" and his eyes feasted on the arms and neck. "These eyes kindle in my soul that universal passion which men call love. Dare a Madonna do this? I believe my model was an English woman, and if I recollect rightly was one who, as I said at the time, had the heart of a red rose. Heigh-ho! That is why I must consign you to oblivion. The red vibration is not celestial—I see that now. What's a face? A magic mirror. But where does beauty conjoin with virtue? That's a nut for the superman and woman to crack.

"Here," he added, "is a German type. What a strong face! She must have appealed to me when I was in Berlin. You, my dear, would make a superlatively sweet Mignon, but no Madonna. There is disaster in your eyes, and your lips are too human. You, too, must go into oblivion, for I fear that you might like wine better than truth.

"And this last one of the lot—I wonder why it is the last? Of course, someone must always be last, but why she? It happened so, our fatalists would say. That's democracy for

you. Why, she is an American, too. What a coincidence! A compromise? No, a composite creation of feminine excellencies, the luscious fruit of a democracy and a monarchy! How queenly you appear, with each feature perfect. Methinks the head lacks poise. A Madonna must have poise above beauty, for how else can she centre the ideal through her womanhood and so let the perfect Son of Man appear through her perfect motherhood? She should love her beloved, not for the sake of the child or herself, but for the sake of the ideal. Alas! I must lose you, too, in that mystery where all things of sense are forgotten, where forms dissolve into chaos."

The fire devoured it, licking up the paint as though enjoying it. Gruelle watched the ash crumble into sighs which made his heart ache. Soon his eyes became heavy with sleep, for it was dusk and the glare of the fire had died with the inflammable substance which fed it. The room was wrapt in ghostly silence and ever-deepening shadows which soon melted into darkness. Yet there at the hearth he slept, or seemed to sleep. He slept, but awoke to a consciousness which was as day to twilight.

Suddenly a light twinkled in the room, stole close to his chair, and disappeared. Mysterious sounds arose and then became bodiless. The room, wrapt in an almost opaque darkness, seemed astir with live things which, could they have

become visible or even audible, might have told whence the spirit of his pictures had gone.

When the clock struck ten a form arose out of the mystery of the darkness and stood near the artist, making the room light with a radiance not of earth. It was that of an aged man with long white beard, leaning heavily on a cane. He carried under his arm a portfolio bulging with curious drawings. One might easily have mistaken him for the incarnation of Isaiah or of one equally venerable and patriarchal. There was a kindly, dreamy look in his eyes, hid under bushy eyebrows. When the artist turned to address him the old man spoke.

"You are Mr. George Gruelle, I believe, from Cincinnati?"

He laid his burden on a camp chair and went on before Gruelle had time to reply.

"I knew you when you were a golden-haired boy sitting on your mother's knee. Though dead, she still lives in you. Her name was Mary, and you paint her because—well, you know people said that she looked like the Madonna."

"Indeed?" replied Gruelle, interested in the fresh light thrown upon his work. "You knew my mother, sir?"

"Yes. We were old school friends. You were destined to become an artist. I told her so when you were born. How could you help it with such a mother? She both idolized and idealized you. But I was not prepared to learn, as I do now, that you embodied some feature of her likeness in each Madonna you ever painted."

"I?" ejaculated Gruelle, puzzled and astounded. "You mean—" and he wondered what he did mean.

"Why, look," said the stranger, pointing to several of his canvases, hanging on the walls. "There she is, if I remember her, true to life. The eyes and mouth, and the nose,—yes, and the serene expression of the face are hers. You must have taken her as your model. And the hair and forehead—no one who ever knew her could fail to identify her."

To Gruelle, all that he said seemed the wildest conjecture.

"Why, she is dead," he murmured. And yet as he began to synthesize the expressions of the different faces he did see a similarity, almost a resemblance. This he dismissed as a mere coincidence, for he knew very well that he did not consciously insinuate his mother's image into the various types of the Madonnas that he painted? Was it, he asked himself, accidental, or an idiosyncracy which heredity alone could explain?

"Come," said Gruelle, his curiosity aroused, "you interest me. I must confess that your superior knowledge and powers of observation enable me to now see what I should have thought impossible. I realize as never before that no son can forget his mother even though her likeness is effaced from memory."

The old man eyed him strangely and shook his head.

"True, and that is why I have come to you all the way

from Egypt with these precious parchments." And he bent over to take the manuscripts from their covers. The artist watched him eagerly as, untying the soiled strings of the portfolio, he fumbled among the yellow time-worn documents.

"Did it ever occur to you, Master Gruelle," he said, pausing in his search among the manuscripts and looking up at the artist, "that mathematics has anything to do with birth —your birth, for instance?" And casting a sidelong glance at him, he again busied himself with his papers.

"I never even imagined it," replied the artist. "How can that be?"

The old man grinned mysteriously.

"Let me show you," and, arising, he unrolled on a table a paper covered with curious symbols, geometrical figures and tables of calculations. Gruelle seemed to see the parchment without arising.

"You were born, I believe, September 22, 1861?"

"Yes."

"Just as I have it here," and with his long finger he pointed at the birth date written in red ink at the top of the document. "You, Master Gruelle, are the proof of my theory. Even these Madonnas which hang on your walls attest it."

Gruelle was at a loss to know what to say. The chart, for such it was, seemed a Chinese puzzle to him; and as for

mathematics having anything to do with a man's birth, the fellow was crazy—why, it was preposterous! "Birth is purely accidental," he mused with worldly wisdom. "It sort of happens, that's all."

"Your birth, Master Gruelle," began the seer, as though he read his mind, "is not, as you suppose, accidental, but a divine event. How else will you explain your Madonnas? Births do not happen by chance but are wisely ordained! Let me explain my science. Before you were born your mother was informed by your father, who, by the way, was a man of superior individuality, well versed in astrology and the occult sciences of the Ancients, when it would be the fitting time to have a son. In order to produce a certain psychological and temperamental effect upon embryological life, she did what he asked. She herself had once been a pupil of Chevalier du Le Strange, whom you remember as a successful pupil of Mesmer. He it was who, toward the close of his career, showed how the will and even a thought, if sufficiently charged with vital magnetism, could almost change the destiny of a soul. The fact is, so remarkable was his power that he dared even to prove that the criminal could be redeemed and made a useful member of society by psychiculture. In fact, he took two of the notorious criminals who had just been released from prison, one a forger and the other a kleptomaniac and drunkard, and by his treatments—for he re-

garded crime a disease—he soon caused the subliminal self to so assert itself that in the one case the man's hand at first became so charged with a power to resist the pen that the poor fellow thought he never would again be able to even write his name; when suddenly his hand again became free and, incredible as it may seem, he had no desire to use it. At length he wrote, but though placed in a more responsible position than the one he occupied before he was sent to prison (he had been an influential man), he never did the least wrong. The experiment covered ten years and so criminologists pronounced him sane, that is, cured of his mental disease. A remarkable feature of the case was that even under auto-suggestion (which both he and the doctor tried upon his mind) he stood the rigorous test, and never so much as received the suggestion, which proved the power of the subliminal self to maintain its sovereignty under adverse or opposite material conditions."

But with the other it was a more difficult case, I suppose?" suggested the artist.

"Not at all. The appetite for liquor was extracted, so to speak, as you would dig a nerve out of a tooth, but by the most delicate psychic and mesmeric process, and he lost the abnormality, that is, these criminal tendencies and the desire for liquors, as a snake that sloughs off his outer skin,—the change in him was so radical and absolute."

"It is all very wonderful," replied Gruelle, staring at the drawing and trying to find the head or the tail of it.

"Now, let me proceed, Master Gruelle. First let me impress upon your mind that God geometrizes, that is, He works through certain forms of motion which appear as geometrical figures. This diagram is a geometrical figure of the universe, supposing, of course, that a sphere or circle is the acknowledged symbol of Deity. Life must appear to exist somewhere in this sphere. Where, when and how it appears is the trinity of mysteries which I will try briefly to explain. If it appears in space it is space comprehended by this sphere, and if it manifests in time, it is at a certain moment in the vibration or action of this sphere; and if in a certain form, it is with a body which must respond to the law which fixes its place and rates of vibration. Every form of life is here, and if one has the key he may know why. The Ancients from whom I derived my knowledge, knew that a child conceived under benefic planetary influences would have a certain career. Suppose he was born at a certain place—Bethlehem, for instance—and at a certain time, say December 25, A. D. 1 (that is a canonical and not an historical period of time), **a pure male child would be born** who **could** not (potentiality) and **would** not (possibility) sin, being above temptation and essentially having in him the divine spark or essence so fused with the atoms of matter as to escape the influence of Adamic

adulterations or magnetic energy, called in occult science the power of the dragon or serpent."

"A moment, sir! I must tell you here that I do not believe in this claptrap called astrology as exploited by the fortune teller. I demand science or nothing."

"Master Gruelle, let me proceed without further interruption. What I am revealing to you is not astrology but mathematics. Granted that the Christ was so born, you will perceive that with his mother, Mary, and his father, Joseph, they conjointly formed the pyramid of life, the base of which rests solidly and fundamentally on the earth but the elevations tower toward and unite in one sublime apex. The four equilateral triangles represent the four principles of the universe—spirit, soul, mind and body. As the Christ was born, so mankind can be, is to be born.

"Now, Master Gruelle, observe closely. From this point, which is on the earth in Bethlehem of Judea, to this point, which is in the heavens at the intersection of ten degrees of Pisces and ten degrees of the sun on the equator, lower Egypt came up out of the water about twelve times twenty-five thousand years ago. When this configuration of the earth and sun again appeared A. D. 1, or in exact figures B. C. 6, Joseph knew it was the fitting time to marry Mary in order to conceive a God-child. You know the historical result. It was so wonderful, extraordinary, supernatural, men even to-

day dismiss it as a myth. But it illustrates my point and embodies my science. That is what I mean by a birth produced by mathematics. Your modern astrology is a rehash of this ancient science which construed matter into rates of vibration algebraically expressing time, geometrically manifesting space. Need I remind you that as the Christ said, 'every hair of your head is numbered?' How could it be otherwise? As each sand drops from the hour glass, as each moment falls back into eternity, as each wave of the sea ebbs back into the abyss, so life is born out of eternity and re-enters it again. Spirits swarm to the earth as suns honeycomb the Milky Way or crowd the circle between Sirius and the trillions of systems of suns beyond, too far to be seen even with our most searching, powerful telescopes. And to think, Master Gruelle," and his voice grew solemn and slow, "we were not the least in the scheme of life, nor were we forgotten when God swung the pendulum to our universe and said, 'Live!'"

"What a stupendous plan," exclaimed Gruelle, as his eyes began to see a light dawn on the hitherto obscure drawings. "What are these stars which seem to encircle the golden centre?" and he put his finger on the glittering asterisks.

"They are the seven planets, and according to the Chaldeans they wrought a special influence or momentum upon each one born on the earth. Each sense and faculty, each organ and centre of nerves, the blood and vital fluid, receive a

definite vibration from them. Saturn supplies intelligence and reason; Jupiter, the power of action; Mars, the irascible principle; the sun, sensation and speculation; Venus, the appetites; Mercury, the power of expressing and declaring thoughts; the moon, the faculty of generating and augmenting the body."

"And these influences are distributed among the inhabitants of the earth by mathematics?"

"Exactly. In one it is Mars that rules, in another Saturn, and so on. Some find in their lives a dual or a triple influence at work, hence the mystery of the multiple personality, and so it goes. Often the seven are fused into one, or a radical power is so blended as to incline the person to evil or good. But all receive these prenatal planetary influences from choice and so are in a certain place at a certain time by their own wills. I dare say you are in Boston now because, well, you chose to be here as it is the law of mathematics for you to be here and nowhere else. You are an artist because you follow a will which though superseding yet harmonizes with your own. You paint Madonnas because you were born at a time when the imagination conceived of motherhood in that divine form and when your ideality found in it the object and end of art.

"And now, Master Gruelle, I wish to impart my message to you, for I must soon return to my cloister in Egypt. Like your elder brother, the Christ, your effort to idealize art is foolishness to the world, because they cannot see nor under-

stand what is outside of their geometrical sphere of consciousness. They are the human oysters, preferring ooze to sparkling ideality and scintillating thought, vegetating in the dark rather than living in the light. I tell you your pearls are cast before swine. These automatons can talk, say pretty things, invite you to dinners, show you by coarse, jarring methods a vulgar appreciation of your talents; they can even think themselves wise enough to condemn your creations, but as you well know, **they buy everything of you but your Madonnas.** That is your cross. Go on, Master Gruelle! Originality is rare. Most talents run to uniformity and consequent dry rot, but the western world needs you, even though you seem incongruous with her heart's desire. Be brave and paint what is divine. It is the bread of life. Art must triumph over matter, even as spirit triumphs over the grave."

While Gruelle was pondering over the discourse, delivered in a voice which to him seemed superhuman, he suddenly awoke. Turning toward the table where the old man had stood, and to the chair where he had rested his portfolio, and to the paper which they had been studying, he saw nothing strange nor unusual. The fire was cold and only the darkness remained to haunt him with its chill and mystery.

"How strange," he exclaimed, as he arose to light a lamp. "I must have been dreaming. I wonder!"