

“Room Number Ten”

By Bessie Kyffin-Taylor

I was feeling more tired than tongue can tell, as the month of August trailed its suffocating days along—tired of my work, tired of people and things, especially tired, I think of the neighbourhood in which I lived—a village so rapidly becoming a suburb of a large manufacturing city, that it was neither true country nor true town, the inhabitants also gave one the impression of being neither one thing nor the other—they certainly were not “country” people, nor were they what they struggled hard to appear, “town”—for people who truly live near nature, have big, broad outlooks, and busy town dwellers are too much occupied to attend to much save their own affairs. While here, in this growing village, the concerns of one, were the concerns of all, from Mrs. So-and-So’s new hat, and how much she paid for it, down to the domestic and marital affairs of all and sundry; it was a soul-killing spot to live in, and I was very weary of it and its perpetual creed of “Thou shalt not— or if thou dost, I shall repeat and add to it, until thou no longer knoweth thine own act or words!”

And so, on this blazing August day, I hailed with delight a pressing invitation to visit some friends at their house in Scotland. The invitation was oddly worded, but they were odd people—I mean uncommon—therefore interesting; they were workers, for a greater part of the year, but as much time as all could spare, was spent in this somewhat isolated spot in Ayrshire; sometimes all of them managed to get there together, at times, only one or other of them could get away, and although I had often been asked to form one of their party, I had never been able to do so, and now just when I was hungering for quietness, and freedom, and could get away, their invitation reached me—it ran—

“Dear Old Man,

Ella and I both needed a rest, so have collected a few kindred spirits and fled to our refuge. Alec will be with us, and probably some of our chums also. We shall fill the house, but if you don’t mind where you sleep! come along.

Your old Chum,
Norman Stuart.”

I read the note over more than once, it was so curious to say “if I didn’t mind where I slept,” of course I didn’t mind, I’d sleep in the bath or on the billiard table if need be, so that I could pack and shake the dust of this trying village from my feet as quickly as possible.

I answered the note by return, in the same spirit, merely saying I was delighted and would be with them soon after this letter, adding that it would cheerfully sleep in a pigstye.

As soon as my letter was despatched I shook myself figuratively, and felt all my woes and irritations slipping away into nothingness, even the village with its talking and gossip seemed to recede into its proper state of no importance, as I gaily began—what to me is ever a joy—the collecting of the little odds and ends, which go to make a holiday a real holiday and not a thing of rushing and racing from one excitement to another, so to this end I wandered round my small domain, picking up a favourite book, tucking it under my arm, while I collected writing materials, favourite pencils, fishing tackle, oldest boots, and shoes, with fine disregard of the orthodox method of packing. Some people make packing a fine art, to me it only means throwing into a large box all that tends to my comfort or happiness, and then dropping in a few clothes,

and sitting on the lid. All this I accomplished before the clock struck eleven p.m., and then with a sigh of relief I lit my final pipe, and turned in.

The following morning I was up betimes, waking with that happy feeling of exhilaration, which foretells pleasure to come, my breakfast was a hurried affair, and I was in the train and off, feeling like a schoolboy, and not by any means the staid literary man of forty-eight, that in very truth I was.

A journey is always a delight to me, and, once in my corner seat, with pipe and book, sure in the knowledge of happy days ahead, I gave myself up to the real enjoyment of this first part of my holiday. Changes at various stations only added zest and interest, for I was one of those people somewhat giving to weaving romances about the most everyday looking people. My station was about 10 miles from my friend's house, and not the least enjoyable part of my trip was the long drive in an old-fashioned open wagonette, the only vehicle kept by my friends—they would not hear the word "motor" in their rest corner, so the 10 miles was only accomplished in a little over an hour, but the scenery was splendid, and I believe after all, there is something which appeals tremendously to everyone in the steady trotting sound of a good pair of horses—far above the buzz of a motor engine! At any rate, it fitted much more appropriately with both the scenery and my mood, than the hum of the best 60 h.p. Daimler could have done.

It was growing dusk, when we drew up at an old-fashioned white wooden gate, with the name of the house written upon it in black letters—"High Crag"—Here my worthy coachman descended stiffly to open the gate, with a pat for each steaming gee as he passed them. He had not been a very talkative companion during my long drive, and I had called him grumpy in my own mind, but now as he once again clambered into his seat, he seemed to unbend.

"Staying long, Sir?" he asked. I said I was not sure.

"House a bit full," he volunteered next.

"Is it?" I said indifferently, feeling aggrieved that after silence for 10 miles, he should now feel it incumbent upon him to talk.

"Aye," he replied, "appears like as if they'll have to use it this time."

"Use what?" I asked.

"It," he answered, lowering his voice, and bending towards me. "It, Sir, Room Number 10, but I pity the one who sleeps in it, I do so."

"Why?" I asked, with a faint feeling of interest. "Best not ask, Sir, best not ask, but there we are, whoa—whoa—my beauties," he went on, all in one breath, as he rattled up to a big wide open door from which a welcome blaze of light streamed out lighting up glimpses of thick shrubberies.

"There you are at last!" sang out a cheery voice as my friend, big, strong, rugged looking, Norman Stuart, stretched out a welcoming hand and led me into the hall, where a big wood fire blazed, before which stood two figures—girls—both of whom eyed me curiously, as, without waiting for an introduction, they said simultaneously

"Come and get warm, it's nearly dinner-time, so we must run," and run they did, with a flash of pretty frills and high-heeled shoes.

"And now, old man, let me have a look at you." And with this remark my friend wheeled up a big chair in front of the blazing fire. "Come and get a warm first," he added, "and then I'll trot you upstairs to your room."

He stopped speaking somewhat abruptly, busying himself with his pipe, while I revelled in the warmth and comfort.

After a few minutes I asked him who the pretty girls were, and he laughed.

“Two of Ella’s pals,” he said—“Miriam Langdale and Joyce Wood, great sports they are, full of nonsense.”

“Who else have you here?” I went on.

“Let me see, he replied, “How many are we? There are Ella and I, those two girls, Alec and two young fellows from the same Hospital—Medical Students both of them; Professor Sturges, though he doesn’t bother with any of us, being fathoms deep in his scientific studies, is an interesting old chap, when he cares to talk; and Miss Brown.”

“Oh!” I said, “and who may Miss Brown be?”

“She’s just Miss Brown,” he said with a laugh—“rather an oddity, but .a clever woman, one of those rather silent women with curious ideas on many things, a woman who never appears to hear or see half the time, but who never misses anything. really—a woman apparently hard, cold and reserved, but, to those who know her, one of the most loyal, true, tender-hearted beings in the world, and always ready with a helping hand for any trouble.”

“A nice mixture,” I said, “do they all agree?”

“Um,” he muttered, “more or less, though the Professor and Miss Brown spar a bit, and those two saucy girls lead them both a bit of a dance, but anyway,” he added, “form your own judgment, you will see them all in half an hour—you have just that time before dinner, so I will take you to your room. We have done our best for you, so I hope you will be—er—comfortable—and—er—sleep—and all that,” and pulling himself together, he started off, up the dark oak staircase, I following, admiring as I went, the whole scheme, if one could call it so, of the decorations, the dark oak stairs, vivid crimson stair carpets, walls of duller red, bare of the orthodox pictures, which people put on their stairs and landings, when they won’t fit anywhere else! The old beaten copper lamps at the corners of the banisters and on the landing above, each dark oak door with its own specially designed knocker and number of the room in copper figures—an old oak chest, an oak table with an orange-coloured azalea in a quaint pewter jar, and one or two old engravings, gave a tone of comfort, and the whole atmosphere was one of soft restfulness.

“Sorry, old chap, we are crammed to overflowing on this landing—you are down here,” said my host, as he led me down two steps and along a passage somewhat narrow and feeling slightly chillier than the other part of the house, to a room at the far end. “You are rather far away from the rest of us,” he said, as if apologising, “but you said you did not mind,” and he put his hand on the handle of a door, at the same instant my eye fell on the copper number. *Room No. 10*, stared me in the face, and the words of my worthy driver beat in my brain, as I entered.

My friend having opened the door and ushered me in,, did not come in with me, but turned, muttering—

“Hope you’ve all you want, come right down when you are ready,” and bolted from the door, shutting it after him.

Probably if I had never heard the words “Room No. 10” spoken as they were by my driver, I should have been wholly, as I was in part, entranced by the room in which I found myself, and as I gazed around me, I determined to wipe from my memory any previous thought of the room, and put the driver’s words in their proper category, as the silly vapourings of a stupid servant, and to give myself up to the enjoyment of mj surroundings.

The room was spacious, but with a somewhat low ceiling, the floor of black oak had a square of peacock blue carpet in the centre, the ceiling was painted with gold stars, representing the Northern Hemisphere, there was an enormous oak four-poster bedstead, piled high with snowy pillows, and covered by a thick eider-down of satin in shades of blue and gold, the fireplace was

roomy and old-fashioned, with steel fittings which shone like silver in the dancing firelight, a big basket chair, with a blue and white cover, was drawn near to the fire, and a log box of beaten copper stood near at hand, piled up with logs of wood.

The only thing that struck me as out of keeping was a small modern brass and black bedstead, in a corner of the room, and this also was made ready for occupation. Was I to have a companion? or stay, possibly it was for choice, as many people do not care for a four-poster—to me, however, it appealed, and I straightway ignored the modern bed.

My dressing-table was a fine old piece of furniture, only thinly covered by a muslin cover, on it stood a quaint jar, full of late dahlias—the only really vivid note of colour in the room. It was in my opinion an ideal room, my eye fell on the fitted-up writing table in the window with joy, as I foresaw many quiet hours of happy scribbling.

No one came to help me to unpack, so I concluded the staff was limited, but I managed to unearth my dinner garments, and clothe my self unaided, just as the dinner-gong boomed in the distance. With a last glance of admiration round my quarters, I blew out the candles, and prepared to make my way down to the hall.

All the company were assembled round the fire, as I came down the stairs, and my hostess, Mrs. Stuart, came quickly to meet me.

“So sorry, Peter, I was not here to receive you, but you know us of old, also our unconventional ways, so I knew you would understand. Now let me introduce you, children,” she went on addressing them all—

“This is Mr. Peter Maxton of literary fame, some of you may have read his books, and if not, you will find them in the Library. Peter, these are two naughty girls, Miriam Langdale and Joyce Wood, of no use, except as ornaments; Professor Sturges with whom you will quarrel; and, Miss Brown, whom you will hate to-night, dislike tomorrow, endure the day after, and finally adore, as we all do. The boys are late, so we will not wait for them, but go in like Indians, single file, and eat.”

Miss Joyce Wood promptly attached herself to me, with the remark—

“Sit by me, Mr. Maxton, and I’ll give you all the wrinkles about our motley crew, and their fads. I haven’t read your books, so don’t talk about them, all my time as given to other things.”

“Bridge, I suppose,” I answered, “and golf, and buying clothes, and such things.”

“If you care to consider you have read and summed me up, very well, we will leave it at that,” she answered demurely.

“How do you like your room?” she went on, “Miriam and I arranged it; it’s nice, isn’t it?”

“It is delightful,” I answered, “No one could fail to be happy in it.”

She glanced at me quickly, but did not pursue the subject of my room, chattering through the remainder of dinner on all sorts of subjects.

The evening passed all too quickly, without any attempt at entertaining in its best known sense, but, in what I consider the truest form of it—the leaving each and all to follow their own bent. If anyone wanted to sing or play, they wandered to the piano, and did so, without any of that wearisome “Will you play?—Oh, I really can’t—I only play to myself.”

The Professor I did not see again, so concluded he had gone to the library, where I afterwards learnt he spent most of his time.

Miss Wood played and sang, my host and Miss Brown were lost to all in a game of chess; the young men had ’phoned they were dining with friends, and we were not to wait up for them, so my pretty hostess and I drew up our chairs for a gossip of old times and friends.

It was a quiet, restful evening, but my long cold drive had made me sleepy, and I was glad when about 11 o'clock a move was made, bedroom' candles were lit, and we made our way upstairs.

Laughing 'Good-nights' were exchanged on the main landing, as one after another vanished through their numbered doors. My hostess lingered a moment and then said—

“Do you remember your way, Peter, or shall I show you?”

“Not a bit,” I answered, “I know, quite well,” and I fancied a distinct look of relief passed over her face.

“Very well,” she said, “sleep well, oh!—and—er—sleep in whichever bed you prefer, both are ready—”

“Right-o!” I answered, “but give me the big one for preference; I've always longed to sleep in four-poster.”

She smiled—“Please yourself, and change if you don't like it,” and with a little wave, she followed the girls and I wended my solitary way down the other corridor to Room No. 10.

The room was in darkness as I entered, save for the red embers of a departing fire which apparently no one had made up for the night; still, it looked very cosy, even if a trifle sombre. I soon had a more cheery blaze and sat down before it, for a short read, as was ever my habit, before turning in. I was soon deep in my book, deeper than I had intended to get, and as my wood-fire subsided with a little rush of sparks, I realized it was close upon midnight, so, hurriedly prepared for bed; for a brief instant I surveyed my two beds, both looked the acme of comfort, and though, for some unaccountable reason my inclination now turned to the modern one, I nevertheless decided in favour of my four-poster, and was quickly in a comfortable nest of pillows and beginning to feel very sleepy, so, blowing out my last candle, I closed my eyes and gave myself up to sleep.

Possibly I had been asleep an hour, maybe less, when I awakened suddenly and completely, in full possession of my senses—I could not account for it, and yet was possessed by the feeling that something or some person had awakened me. The room was in complete darkness, and I groped for my matches on the table by my side where I had placed them. I could not find them, though the table was small, and my hand swept the whole of it from side to side, and end to end—“Odd,” I thought, “for I certainly remember putting them there.” However, they were not to be found, so I settled down once more. Hardly had my head touched the pillow, when I heard a faint, soft sigh—there was no mistaking it—I could not call it the wind moaning in the chimney, or anything else, but just what it was, a soft, faint sigh!

I had always thought I was a hard-headed materialist, a stolid matter of fact John Bull, but to my last day, I shall never be able to say what my feelings were at that moment—either my heart stopped and my blood froze, or my heart beat trebly as fast, and my blood boiled, I was either in a dead funk, or else I was annoyed beyond words at something quite inexplicable—I shall never know which state of mind was mine, all I was really conscious of was that I lay inert, incapable of moving, dreading I knew not what, until by sheer will power I forced myself to think. Should I endeavour to reach the door?—the door, by which I had entered this room but twice, and left once, could I then locate it in the inky darkness in which my room was now plunged? I doubted it. Should I yell—for what—to what end? I could not very well yell “help” or “murder” for I was in no need of help, and no one was being murdered, moreover, no mere yell would be heard from this backwater of a passage where my room was. What then was I to do? I lay trembling, trying to keep steady; all was still now, and I cautiously raised myself on my elbow, straining my eyes to peer into the darkness. As I did so, my pillow was gently shaken, so gently, that it seemed as if

the idea of shaking it was merely to add to my comfort—it did not, for it reduced me to a state of terror. Suddenly the thought shot through my brain—the other bed! and my hostess's words—

“Change if you are not comfortable.”

Dare I? The bed I knew was almost beside the four-posters for I had noticed that the little table for my candle, matches and books, stood just between the two beds, thereby being of the same use, whichever bed I chose to occupy. To think was to act now, so I slid out of bed, felt the table by knocking my shins on it, and fell headlong on to the other bed, grabbing the table wildly, to pull it closer, feeling at least it could be hurled at intruders. The first thing my hand came in contact with was—my matches! I seized them wildly, and with trembling hands struck one and lit my candle; holding it aloft I surveyed as much of the room as I could. Nothing of the slightest account seemed altered, everything looked perfectly normal, beyond one simple item, which I might be wrong in—I had rather hurriedly shed my garments, when I felt sleepy, and man-like had left them in a heap—I am prepared to swear to this, but, now, I saw them distinctly folded neatly and laid ready for me in the morning. Fool that I am, I thought, someone must have entered my room and tidied it, and it was that someone who sighed. That it was a fantastic and highly unlikely thing to have happened, did not seem to occur to my overwrought brain, and nature, now asserting herself, helped me to slip off into restful slumber, from which I awakened, to see the sun pouring into my room, and all as I had left it—even to my garments, in an untidy heap, on the hearth-rug! “Then I dreamt it,” I said aloud, and feeling foolish and half-ashamed, I carefully re-made the little brass bed, and got into the four-poster, where I lay contentedly smoking my pipe, until a trim maid brought my early tea, and announced—“Bath ready, sir, and breakfast in an hour.”

I dawdled over my dressing, happy in the knowledge at the back of my mind, that there were many hours before me ere I again went to bed, a weak form of reasoning surely, for a man with any brains at all, to indulge in.

An hour later as I joined the rest of the house-party in front of the jolly fire in the hall, my misgivings were fading quickly, and I was inclined to vote myself a silly ass, for being disturbed by what I was now convinced was a bad dream, resulting from too late a meal, following over-fatigue.

It might have been my fancy that one and all of the party round the fire, eyed me rather curiously, but I flattered myself that I looked fit and fresh, and showed no signs of my troubled night. My hostess asked me in a voice she endeavoured to make natural, “If I slept well.”

“Quite,” I answered, smiling, for I had made up my mind to say nothing of what I thought had taken place. Then the old Professor ambled in, glaring at me from under his shaggy brows as he barked out—

“Comfortable night?”

“Why, yes,” I answered, “perfect.”

“Umph,” he grunted, “no accounting for tastes.”

Then we settled ourselves at a well-spread breakfast table, and began to discuss plans for the day.

Mrs. Stuart merely said—

“Entertain yourselves and be happy, luncheon will be ready here at 1.30, but those who wish to take it out are at liberty to do so. I am driving into Drayton—there are a few things I need, though the shops there are not much to see—anyone come?” she asked.

Now was my chance. I would go with her, and procure, if possible, an electric torch, or failing that, would wire home for mine, which I had left behind me.

Joyce Wood looked at me with a bright quick glance, as I accepted my hostess's invitation, and said—

"I'll come too, if I may, I want some silk."

"Come along," said Mrs. Stuart, "there is just room for three of us, and you can show Peter round while I shop. We will lunch at the 'Bear Inn,' and get tea here, on our return."

"Is it far?" I asked.

"No," she replied, "only fifteen miles, but slow with horses, though I love them; we will start in an hour," she went on, "so mind you are ready." And she went gaily away to attend, I suppose, to all those little duties, which make a house like this run as if with oiled machinery.

One by one the party dispersed, until the only people left before the fire were Miss Brown and myself. I really had not noticed her much the previous evening, but now, as she sat in a deep chair, her white hands busy with some knitting, I was rather struck by the restful feeling she seemed to have about her. She was not a tall woman, but proportionate, and her face, though pale, was not an unhealthy pallor, her head bent down over some intricate part of her work, was a glossy brown—very neatly dressed and with an absence of combs and big pins, such as most women love. I could not see her eyes, but I was watching her white firm hands, with their beautifully-kept nails, when my eye caught sight of the only ring she wore, a curious ring, an ancient emerald in a dull silver setting; it was more like a man's ring than a woman's, and something made me say, in spite of appearing rude—

"I am admiring your ring, Miss Brown."

She looked up with a quick start, meeting my eyes, with a pair nearly as green as her emerald stone. I was startled. She laughed a low amused laugh.

"And now you are comparing my ring with my eyes. Everybody does," she said, "though that is not why I wear it."

"May I look at it?" I asked.

"From a distance," she replied. "It has a curious history and does not bring luck to most people, so I never let it leave me."

"You are not superstitious, surely?" I asked, for her answer amazed me. She looked so little like a person of that kind.

"What do you mean by superstitious?" she asked. "If you mean will I walk beneath a ladder, most certainly I will, and spill salt and sit down thirteen, quite cheerfully, but if you mean do I believe that certain gems have evil, attached to them, I do, as I also believe that certain impressions are retained by things worn by people at tragic moments, and, given sensitive people to handle them, I believe they can and do bring about curious happenings."

"You amaze me," I answered, "Will you talk to me again on this subject?"

"Yes," she answered, "to-morrow, not any more to-day." And with this I had to be content, and as she seemed to have relapsed into silence and her knitting, I wandered away in search of boots and coat, to be ready for my hostess and pretty companion for our jaunt to the market town.

It was a gay little drive, the country was looking superb, and it was one of those days when bushes and banks were veiled in shimmery gossamer, when shadows seemed deep and long, as the sun lit up vivid patches of red leaves here and there, making a wonderful scheme of colour and beauty.

Mrs. Stuart drove, and was too much occupied with her team to bother much with her passengers, so Miss Wood amused me by running comments on most things, though once or twice she seemed on the point of saying something, then seemed to suddenly pull herself up, relapsing into silence. Our drive took almost two hours, for the roads were hilly, but about one

o'clock we rattled up the main street of Drayton, and pulled up at the "Bear Inn." Here Mrs. Stuart gave the geese into the care of an aged ostler, and we entered in search of a meal, after which, she left us to do her shopping, leaving me wondering greatly how I was to get rid of my companion to transact my own little bit of business.

"I am going to buy some sweets," Miss Wood announced presently, "so come along."

I was a little surprised to find the girl in a rather quiet mood, and more than a little surprised, when she suddenly said—

"Mr. Maxton, tell me the truth, did you *really* sleep well last night?"

I answered her in my most off-hand manner—

"Of course, Miss Wood, but why do you ask?"

She turned and glanced at me, but without answering my question, merely said—

"Oh! very well, either you are well able to hide your feelings, or else you passed a night—not usual—for those who sleep in No. 10."

"Is there anything to prevent my sleeping peacefully there?" I asked.

"Oh! never mind," she said, in rather annoyed tones—"Mrs. Stuart may be vexed if I say anything, so don't ask me, only try to endure it, it would be a pity if you cannot, I think we are a jolly little party too," adding—"I shall be a quarter of an hour in this shop, will you meet me again then?"

Rather with too much alacrity, I said I would, and turning away, I left her to her own devices, while I hunted for a torch. I was afraid I was to be doomed to disappointment, so visited the post office to send the wire requesting my own torch should be instantly despatched. I was relying upon a dependable light perhaps more than I was fully conscious of.

The old postmaster, on reading my wire, raised my spirits tremendously by saying—

"If it will save you, sir, I have one of them new-fangled lighting things—it was give to me a week or two past by a visitor, and I've no sort of use for such things, for when I'm home, I likes my lamp, and when I'm out, the stars is good enough light for me. I'll sell it you, sir, and glad to be rid of it."

I was thankful, gladly paying him the three shillings he asked for a twelve-and-sixpenny torch. Having tried it and found it sound, I slipped it in my pocket, and went on my way rejoicing, to meet Miss Wood.

"You are punctual," she said, "now come and buy sweets," so with my spirits higher, because of my torch, and with its possession, my dread of the night much less, we behaved like two children let loose in a sweet shop, laughing, fooling, tasting, and buying.

"The others will welcome us home," she said, "but, oh! do stow some of these parcels in your pockets, we look so greedy!"

Without a thought, I took the torch from my pocket to make more room, but I realised instantly that I had given myself away as her eyes fell on it, and a quick "Oh!" fell from her lips.

"Then you did tell me untruths," she said, "and I believed you. I suppose you think buying sweets is all I am capable of understanding, very well, so be it," and she drew herself up in offended dignity.

I made no attempt to explain, but followed her from the shop as if in disgrace.

Our drive home a little later, was dull and strained, fortunately Mrs. Stuart was too busy to notice us, and as we reached our own door, we were hailed with shouts from three young men, who all rushed to be first to assist pretty Joyce, so our somewhat forced remarks to each other passed unnoticed.

Tea was a merry meal, though Miss Wood did not appear, she was tired she said, and would rest in her own room.

It seemed to me that there was a constant effort on the part of everyone to keep the tone of conversation as light as possible, and, as evening approached, there was an outcry for lamps, instead of firelight. The two young medicals promptly hauled me from my cosy chair, and marched me off for a game of billiards.

“Won’t you come, too, Miss Brown?” I asked, seeing the little lady sitting a little apart as usual, absorbed in her knitting.

“No, thank you, Mr. Maxton, I must finish this sock,” she said. “But, later, perhaps after dinner, I will play you a game.”

“That is a promise,” I said, laughing, as I followed the two young fellows.

We played on until one of them said—

“By Jove! we’ve only twenty minutes before dinner, come on you chaps,” and fled.

The other man, a tall, slim youth of about twenty-nine or so, with a pale face, sleek black hair and rather piercing dark eyes, linked his arm in mine and escorted me up the stairs and along to my room, which he entered with me, and he poked up the fire, while I was lighting my candles.

“Which bed did you sleep in?” he asked, abruptly.

“Why?” I asked.

“I was only wondering,” he answered, “personally, I loathe four-posters.”

“I like them,” I said, “I slept in that one.”

“What! all night?” he gasped.

“My dear chap,” I replied, “would you get out of a warm bed into a cold one in the middle of the night?”

“I might,” he answered, “one never knows, but I must dash off now, my room is the first you come to at the end of this passage, if—er—if you should want anything,” and he went off hurriedly. Once again I surveyed my room, and once again I thought it a perfect room. I carefully locked the torch up in my bag, hurried my dressing, and went down to dinner. I was still conscious of odd glances at me, and was faintly aware that for some reason I was of interest to the little company, even the glum old Professor cast a questioning eye upon me from time to time, but I showed nothing, gave no hint of any unusual happenings, so dinner and a merry evening passed pleasantly, although Miss Brown failed to keep her promise, saying she had some letters to write for the early post, and had promised to go and see Miss Wood who had a headache.

We were all off to bed early to-night—at least we all separated early—my friend Norman accompanied me upstairs after a last glass of whisky, but as before, he did not linger chatting to me, but merely saying—

“Pleasant night, old chap,” he went off, leaving me, for my second night in Room No. 10.

I proceeded to make my arrangements for the night, in a most thorough manner. I heaped up the fire first until the leaping flames lit up even the dimmest corners of the room, making the polished floor between the rugs shine like glass. I calmly surveyed my two beds, quickly making up my mind to occupy the four-poster, so drew the little table well between the two, but in such a position that I could, if needs be, easily reach the little brass bed. I had decided *not* to sit up in the orthodox way and await the arrival of my visitors, ghostly or otherwise. No! I determined, I would go to bed, and to sleep if possible. I whistled cheerily to myself as I undressed, tucking my torch into the pocket of my pyjamas. I turned in, and settled myself comfortably. After about an hour’s reading, I blew out my candles, and prepared for sleep. I did sleep, and was awakened

as suddenly as before, but this time by hearing the fire being gently stirred. I looked, expecting to see a bright blaze as the result, but black darkness greeted me, yet I could hear the coal being moved. I strained my eyes and ears, listening intently, and trying not to light up my torch, now ready in my hand. I heard the poker laid down. I heard the soft shuffle of felt slippers crossing the polished floor, nearer and nearer to the bed they came. I heard what sounded like a tinkle of a spoon against a glass, and a soft hand was laid on my wrist, rendering me powerless to light my torch, and turning me cold with terror. With a frantic plunge, I got to the other side of the bed, hoping and praying I should have strength to hurl myself across the little space into the brass bed, but to my unspeakable and everlasting horror, the other side of my four-poster was not empty! Someone was there—some form! With frenzied strength I sat up, flashing my torch as I did so, I suppose I *was* awake—I suppose I *was* sane though I would prefer to think I was asleep, or mad.

In my four-poster lay an old man—a man with a drawn livid face, closed eyes, and snow-white hair, one of whose hands lay outside the covers—claw-like, livid—on one finger of it shone a ring—an uncut emerald in a dull silver setting! winked in the light of my torch, as I held it tremblingly, for the light to shine as far as could be. Beside him stood a woman dressed as a nurse, holding a medicine glass in her right hand, while the other hand held his wrist; an evil smile hovered on her thin lips, and her hair, lit by my torch, was dull iron grey, flattened into a hard line above thin straight eyebrows; I glanced hurriedly round, my whole room seemed changed—a large screen stood round the bed, shielding the window, the writing table seemed full of bottles, in place of my books, garments, which were not mine, lay scattered about. I was so paralysed with terror, I could neither speak nor move, but clung to my torch as the cold sweat poured from me. I saw her raise the old man's head. I saw him drink the contents of the glass held to his lips, and then, with a frenzied leap, I made one dash for the little bed, and fell on it, fainting.

It must have been some time after when I regained consciousness, for the dim light of early morning was struggling through my drawn curtains. I got up, flung back the curtains, letting in the light; it was Just five o'clock, so the horror had occupied possibly some hours, and I was still alive, though badly shaken. My room was as I had left it; I, wearied beyond telling, now, in the blessed light of day, dropped off to sleep, heavily, dreamlessly, and did not awaken until, as before, my little maid entered with my tea, she gave a little start of surprise on seeing me in the little bed, but made no remark, beyond—

“Your bath is ready, sir, and breakfast in an hour.”

I took my tea and my bath, though I felt unhinged, and worn out. Later when I met the party at breakfast, I did not attempt, as before, to conceal the fact that I had *not* slept, and was not feeling very fit.

No one made any remark, except the old Professor, who curtly said—

“Better come and have a talk with me in the Library, I will give you a pick-me-up.” Norman, my friend, was ill at ease, and his wife seemed troubled, Miss Brown calmly eating buttered toast, eyed me, and I noticed her curious ring was not on her hand; she saw I missed it, smiled, saying, as if answering my unspoken thought.

“You need not let that trouble you, Mr. Maxton, its absence is for a purpose.”

After breakfast during which meal a sort of cloud seemed to hover over us, I wandered away alone, feeling that solitude and fresh air best suited my need. No one made any move to accompany me, so with my pipe alight, I tramped round the garden, scarcely noticing the autumn flowers, reddening leaves, or ripening fruit. The garden, like the house, was old and picturesque,

flowers grew as they liked—set borders, and that most inartistic thing carpet bedding were things unknown. Late roses hob-nobbed with gaudy sunflowers, and flaunting hollyhocks, a riot of many coloured phlox, seemed herded together, guarded by a hedge of sweetbriar, and here and there a fading clump of night-scented stock drooped pensively; until evening, when it opened its eyes, and scented all the garden with its strange arresting perfume, a quaint sundial, moss covered, and cracked, stood in a clearing and its motto—“I only count the sunny hours,” gave one thought as one passed, of other hours, hours that were *not* sunny.

At one end of a long path, was a white wood seat, flanked on one side by a laburnum tree, and half hidden from sight by a lilac bush—my steps took me towards it, as I came upon it, I saw, too late to go back, that it was occupied, occupied by Miss Brown and her everlasting knitting. Courtesy demanded that I should stop to speak, though the lady did not raise her head.

“Busy as usual, Miss Brown,” I said, in tones I tried to make cheery.

“Come and sit down,” was her reply, “I want to ask you a question.

“Am I bound to answer it?” I said.

“No,” she replied, “not bound, but I hope you will.

“How many people did you see in your room last night?”

“Two,” I replied, unhesitatingly, as if the words were pulled out of me.

“Ah,” she breathed, “did you—er—have you—ever seen anyone like them before?”

I gazed at her amazed.

“Seen anyone like them?” I said. “Why of course not, they were not real—I mean they could not have been alive!”

“No,” she said, “of course not, but oh! never mind, I only asked from idle curiosity. Are you leaving us to-day?”

“Certainly not,” I replied, “at least, I had not thought of doing so, do you wish me to leave?”

“It might be better for you if you did,” she answered, “but if you stay, you are a plucky man. I must go now. Miss Wood is not well, and I am looking after her.”

“You would be a good nurse,” I said politely, and for something to say, but I was unprepared for the change which came over placid Miss Brown, her face went paler than its usual pallor, her lips compressed themselves into a tight line, and a gleam shot into her usually quiet eyes, as she sprang to her feet, and holding the back of her seat, flashed out at me—

“I *can't* nurse, I loathe the very word, but these things seem against our will to pass down from generation to generation, and who knows what other instincts pass down with it,” and with that she was gone, and I was alone.

I felt a little taken aback at Miss Brown's quick change of manner, also her abrupt departure, but I had desired solitude so must make the best of it. The white seat appealed to me, and my pipe was always a good companion. It was odd, I thought, as I tried to go over in my mind the strange things that had befallen me, I had been here three days, at least this was my third day, and already I had unwittingly offended two of the house party—Miss Wood first, then Miss Brown—the former because I preferred to keep my own counsel, the latter, by the mild remark, that she would make a good nurse. What strange creatures women are! I should have thought any woman would have liked to have been called a good nurse, there are so few who know the meaning of the word “Nurse,” and to my mind they, the modern nurses, are the dullest of women, to judge by those I have known. Well I've certainly made a mess of things, how to extricate myself I couldn't think. An hour passed quickly in my musing frame of mind, the horrors of the night were fading or had faded here in the sunlit garden, among the perfumes of a hundred flowers. Dare I be unsociable any longer, I wondered, or was it my duty as a guest, to go

and seek the other members of our party? My question was answered by the approaching sound of footsteps, followed by the hurried appearance of my hostess, Mrs. Stuart, who breathlessly flopped on to the seat saying—

“Oh, Peter, you idiot! you’ve gone and upset Miss Brown. Wasn’t Joyce enough for you, you big clumsy manbody?”

“Dear lady,” I managed to say, “I am quite at a loss to understand you, I merely intimated to Miss Wood that a still tongue suited a certain happening, and to Miss Brown I paid the highest compliment of saying she would make a good nurse!”

Speechless for an instant, Mrs. Stuart looked at me, and then—

“Peter, you didn’t? Not really? Oh, for heaven’s sake, tell me you didn’t say *that!*”

“Most surely, I did,” I answered, “and why not, good nurses are extinct, or so it has seemed to me—tell me where I have stumbled please, that I may goon bended knee humbly apologizing!”

“Stop fooling,” she ordered, “and listen, though I am under a promise not to tell you anything really, I can explain your ‘faux pas,’ I care nothing for Joyce Wood’s touchiness, *that can be* explained later, but Miss Brown! that is another story!”

“We only got to know her through taking this house, it had belonged for generations to her people, and, although she didn’t live here herself, she would only consent to let it to people who would allow her to retain some link with the place, allowing her to stay in it in their absence or some arrangement of that kind. We were so taken with the place, its quaintness, its beauty, but above all its remoteness, that we rather hurriedly agreed to anything, so that we got possession of it.”

“The first time we came, we did not see Miss Brown, the second time, she was here when we arrived, quite at home looking as if the place belonged to her, I was, I confess, not too cordial, but she speedily disarmed me, telling me she was not filling up our space, because her quarters were in a part of the house little used, in fact, rather shunned by most people, but she preferred it, and had not any nerves, moreover at this time of the year (that was just this time last year) she really must be in her old home, there was nothing I could say, and she very soon won us all, so much so, that now, whenever we are here, so is Miss Brown—she is invaluable to me, she attends to so much in the house for me, leaving me free to rest or enjoy myself. I couldn’t do without her,” she added—“and there! you’ve ruffled the dear, like, oh like anything,”

“I’m still in a fog,” I murmured.

“I know you are,” she answered, “and am I not doing my best to get you to see through it.”

“Proceed,” I said, “I may see daylight before luncheon.”

“Peter, you’re impossible.” This with a stamp to emphasize it.

“The point is this,” she went on.

“So that there is a point!” I ventured.

“Don’t interrupt please, as I said the point is this—all of Miss Brown’s relations for ages have been Nurses!—one after another, great grands, grands, and so on, have all developed nursing tendencies; they don’t seem able to help it, and years ago, one of the grands or great grands—I forget which—murdered a patient by poisoning him in this very house; it was never quite known for what reason other than spite, or carelessness, the Jury said ‘*carelessness*’ but her family didn’t, and one or two of the family who subsequently became nurses, were obliged to give it up, because the stain had somehow stuck, and people feared them. Nothing was ever missed, belonging to the old man the woman murdered, except a ring he always wore, but, as there was never any proof to show he had not given it to her, as she said at the trial, it remained in her possession, and has been handed down.”

“The emerald jewel, I suppose,” I asked.

“Yes, the emerald jewel,” answered Mrs. Stuart, “but it has an uncanny reputation, and no one has ever worn it as long as Miss Brown has, and she says she will wear it in spite of the curse it seems to have attached to it.”

“What’s the curse?” I asked sceptically.

“You needn’t sneer,” she replied, “you know something of it by now, if I am not very much mistaken. I may not tell you more, Peter, but, to tell Miss Brown she would make a good nurse, was simply awful! The poor soul loathes the very word, yet the tragedy is, she can no more help nursing than she can keep from walking, it’s in her blood, and she’s *always* nursing someone. A headache!—there’s Miss Brown,—a sick animal!—there’s Miss Brown, she simply can’t keep off it, but, the horrible thing is, that just as he died, the old man cursed his nurse, and all her descendants, swearing that others should also be denounced as murderesses, whether they deserved it or not, and several of them got into trouble of sorts, one gave wrong medicine in the dark, and all but killed her patient, and so on, there are still one or two Nurse Browns about, but they have not an enviable reputation. Our Miss Brown swears she will never be a Nurse, and feels most acutely the disgrace of it all, and the very name ‘Nurse’ is like a red rag to a bull.”

“How on earth, Ella, was I to know?” I queried.

“Oh!” she answered me, “didn’t last night show you.”

“Lord, no,” I said, “how could it?”

“Well you are blinder than I thought,” she snapped, and then, as swiftly changing, she went on—in honey-sweet tones—“Tell me, Peter, are you too scared to go through to-night?”

“Not a bit,” I answered valiantly, “but you seem pretty sure I’ve got to go through it.”

“Miss Brown says so,” she answered demurely.

“Oh! d— Miss Brown,” I said, losing patience at last, “it’s some got-up tale, I don’t believe a word of it, and anyway what has Miss Brown got to do with me?”

“She gave up *her* room, that you might come—Room No. 10 you know—and she is doing all she knows, that you may not be disturbed, that is all,” she answered—“the Professor is helping her and we shall be thankful if you will go through it, and stay on, it will be over to-night, and you will have peace.”

“Try not to think about it, I may not tell you more, I should go to bed early, *in the little bed*, if I were you, and to-morrow, *not* to-day, you can apologise to Miss Brown, she may perhaps believe then that you did *not* make an intentionally cruel insinuation, but now, she believes you did, she can’t see how it could be otherwise.”

“Dear Lady,” I said, “the fog is thicker than at the beginning.”

“I know,” she answered, “and it will just *have to be* until to-morrow, then we shall see and all be free to talk, but until then the Professor insists on your being left in the fog, as you choose to call it. I must go now, Joyce and Miss Brown are spending the day together in my morning-room you will not see either of them, so get a good tramp with the other men, tire yourself out and keep as cheery as you can. See you at lunch,” and with airy wave she had gone, leaving me to my solitude and a good deal to occupy my thoughts. Thinking things out, I speedily found, was but to land myself deeper in the maze of perplexity. I had grasped the main idea, that a murder had been committed in the room I slept in, presumably by a long-since departed relative of Miss Brown, who, feeling the disgrace still clinging to her name and family, comes to sojourn here, where it all took place, to keep it ever fresh in her memory! How like a woman! A man would have shunned the spot, unless he could do any good. I wonder if our Miss Brown has some idea of laying the restless spirits, which—let me whisper to myself—most certainly do take

possession of Room No. 10! Why does the silly woman wear the emerald ring? Where is it, that she is not wearing it to-day, and not least, what is the programme for to-night? Ah! to-night—let me confess, in spite of fooling, my sarcasm, my bluffing with Mrs. Stuart, I am sick when I think of to-night, I am in a dead funk, and dread it unspeakably, but I'm going through with it, with my teeth clenched, it can't surely be worse than last night. Well, I can but wait for what transpires.

The day was not happy, nor could I shake off entirely the feeling of fear, any more than I could feel content, knowing I was in disgrace with two women of the party. Luncheon was soon over, the usual standing about with cigarettes after it, seemed by mutual consent to be abandoned, Mrs. Stuart and I alone remaining. A happy thought occurred to me.

"Mrs. Stuart," I began, "do you think the two fair ladies with whom I am in disgrace, would permit me to visit them in their seclusion?"

"No, Peter," she replied quickly, "no, they are both determined not to see you until to-morrow, I think they are right, you must do something else to pass your time."

"May I see the Professor then?"

"Better not," she answered, "I'm real sorry, Peter, but they all know and understand the position, and do not wish to speak of it. If you really funk the thing, I'll make up a bed on a sofa for you."

One instant I thought, feeling myself wavering, then—

"No thanks," I said, "I will see the thing through, don't bother about me. I was going to ask one of the men to share my vigil and have a talk by my fire, instead of going to bed, but I find they will be away until late, so there is nothing for it but just my lonesome. As a matter of fact, dear lady, I utterly disbelieve a third of the yarn, and the rest doesn't matter."

"That's a good view to take," she said, with a smile, "but now I must go. See you later." And once more I was left to my own devices. I would shelve the whole wretched affair, and go for a good tramp alone, I decided, so, without waiting for company I set off, and tramped steadily over moor and hills until nearly five, the country was at its best, or rather as I loved it best, except for a feeling of sadness the autumn always brings, I prefer the bracken, golden and bronze, rather than in spring when its tender green fronds run the risk of being cut and blackened by icy wind; I love the trees turning to crimson glories, the berries scarlet or purple banging from every hedge, best of all I love the vivid red of the mountain ash berries, those glorious clusters, which the wandering gipsies say bring luck to the wearer. There are not any tints even in the freshest of spring green and yellow, to compare in my mind with the glory and colour of waning summer. A thought of tea, however, hastened my footsteps, but no matter how belated one was, fresh tea at once appeared, nor were the toasted cakes all cold and sodden for late comers. It was as I expected, tea was almost over, but I was not by any means neglected.

"Now we'll be cosy," said our hostess, when the last scone had vanished, "Miriam, dear, play and sing to us; you come and sit by me, Peter, and you, Professor, you will stay for some music, won't you?"

"If Miss Miriam sings, Madam, I could not go," the old fellow answered, as I wondered what manner of voice was this I was to hear, for the first time—I had been too absorbed in other things to have paid much attention hitherto—to the slim fair haired girl—who now moved quietly to the Piano, in a dim corner of the Hall—

"Shall I light the candles, Miss Langdale?" I asked.

"Not unless you wish, Mr. Maxton," she answered in a soft low voice, "I like best to sing or play in the firelight."

Silence fell upon our chatter, as the first soft notes of her choice reached us. I do not know the name of anything she played; I am a mere man, whose busy life had neither time for music nor romance in it, but there was both in this girl's music, her soul was in her playing, and memories long called dead were awakened, sad memories, sweet ones, all came, as if at the call of a Pied Piper, memories I had relegated to the dust-heap of forgotten things, now stood before me, as if to say, "you may relegate us to the dust-heap, but memories that have once lived, never die, sooner or later something recalls us, maybe a perfume of a flower, or perhaps music—sooner or later something brings us back."

Presently, but without a pause the music altered, a few soft chords floated softly through the firelit hall, and a soft deep voice, clear, resonant, full, yet without a trace of strain, or effort, took up the air, every word, every syllable reached us—old as the song was, often as I had heard it, its beauty and charm as sung by Miriam Langdale that evening, in the silence and warmth in that old hall, I shall never forget.

"The hours I spent with thee, dear heart,
Are as a string of pearls to me,
I count them over, every one apart,
My Rosary, my Rosary."

Softly, thrilling, the words came—

"Each hour, a pearl, each pearl, a prayer,
To still a heart in absence wrung,
I tell each bead unto the end,
And there, a cross is hung."

Fuller, deeper, rang the lovely voice, there were tears in it now—

"Oh, memories that bless and burn,
Oh! barren gain and bitter loss,
I kiss each bead, and strive at last to learn
To kiss the cross, Sweetheart,
To kiss the cross."

The last line rang out—"To kiss the cross, Sweetheart," and died away in a sob of anguish—"To kiss the cross."

Unmoving, silent, we sat, each one wrapt deeply in their own memories, and surely those hours spent with one beloved, were truly likened to a string of pearls, as surely as there are very very few who have not known the "bitter loss" or who do not, agonised by sorrow, strive to "kiss the cross."

The Professor was the first to move, but he only went to the Piano, laying his hand for an instant on the bright hair of the singer—he attempted no thanks. Miss Langdale rose from the piano, and kneeling by Mrs. Stuart said—

"I have saddened you, but I wanted to sing your favourite."

"I am not sad, dear, I loved it," answered Mrs. Stuart, "but those words always arrest me, however the tune has been maltreated, but let us light up now," she added, "it is time we dressed—matches please, somebody, not all of you," he went on smiling, "only one box," turning as she spoke to light up the 3-standard lamps, dispelling in a few seconds the mystery of

firelight and music, landing us suddenly in a matter-of-fact world, in place of our separate dream-worlds.

“By jove, we haven’t much time,” I remarked, glancing at my watch as I turned to make my way upstairs.

The room, as I entered it, looked cheery, candles had been lit, fire newly made up—I noticed there were more candles than before—I suppose with the idea of banishing all idea of gloom or creepiness, yet, in spite of it the room did not feel normal, I couldn’t explain it, but the feeling was there, a feeling I could not give a name to, possibly the music had made me unduly sensitive, at any rate it had not soothed me, and I did not care to linger over my dressing, feeling glad that some slight hustle on my part was really necessary, if I was to be ready when the dinner-gong sounded. With an idea of keeping my illumination until later, I blew out all the candles but one, as soon as I was ready, but that one I left on the extreme corner of the mantelpiece nearest to the door, as I reached the door, I remembered I had left my handkerchief on the dressing-table, I knew I was foolish, but I had not any desire to walk back to that now dim part of the room where the dressing-table stood, I mentally pulled myself together as I moved towards it. As I did so, a light as from a candle seemed to suddenly light it up, and I turned quickly—the candle was where I had left it, but was *not* a-light—the *only* light was seemingly poised in the air, close to the bed, about the exact height it would be if held in a person’s hand who was standing beside the bed. I made no further attempt to find my handkerchief, but, trembling in every limb, staggered to the door, nor did I turn then to see where the candle was.

The rest of that evening was neither more nor less than a ghastly nightmare to me—I believe I sat through a dinner, I know I drank a good deal of champagne, I know I talked and laughed, and later smoked, and played billiards, but like a wound-up toy not like a living being. Towards eleven it was no use anyone playing the game, the game was up, we all knew it, everyone present shared to some extent the feeling of foreboding that had me in its clutches.

“I am going to bed,” I announced, when I had come to the end of my grip on things—“Good-night, everybody, wish me luck, or at least, sleep.”

All answered me in a sort of chorus, all that is except the Professor, who had apparently slipped away in his usual manner.

I arrived at my room feeling that one straw more would send me flying from the house. As I opened the door the pungent aroma of a cigar met me, and my eyes fell on the figure of the old Professor, enveloped in a weird dressing gown of green and yellow, in which he had the appearance of a large caterpillar, his grey head was adorned by a scarlet skull cap, his feet encased in large red worsted slippers, and his whole attitude was one of benign, complacent restfulness. I felt my fears slip away, he looked so comfortable, so at home, so composed, as if quite unruffled by aught that could happen.

“You are surprised, dear lad,” he said, in his mellow tones, “I thought you would be, I admired your grit, in sticking to it, so thought, if you would permit me, I would keep you company.”

“I am overjoyed, sir,” I said, beaming on him, “I—I was rather dreading it, it is jolly good of you, I shall be glad of your company.”

We settled ourselves cosily beside the fire, first lighting up all candles, and chatted on every subject, until nearly 1 a.m., neither of us feeling like sleep, indeed it seemed to me the old man grew more alert as time passed.

“Are you cold, sir?” I asked suddenly.

“Yes, I am,” he replied, and together we heaped on more fuel, “there isn’t much warmth in these sir, is there?” I asked.

No," he replied, "one could almost think the fire was dying down."

"It is," I gasped, "look at it." And surely but slowly it dwindled, until its last remaining flicker died away, and sank as dead fires do, back into the grate in cold blankness.

I looked at the Professor, he was staring intently at the four-poster, which in the now cold gloomy room had taken on a new aspect. It appeared hung with white, a white sheet lay stiffly spread upon it, a rigid form was beneath it, and the unforgettable scent of funeral flowers filled the air.

I cowered down beside the Professor's knees, trembling, speechless, he held my hand in a tense grip and we waited, watching.

The door softly opened to admit the nurse, whom I had seen the night before—softly she seemed to slip-shod over the floor in her felt slippers, taking up her position beside the bed—she uncovered the,,

face of the old man, to whom I had seen her administer a dose, and raising the candle she had picked up from the table as she passed, she peered intently at the old man's face for an instant, turning away finally, with a slow, evil smile on her features—"Her" features! I called them, my heavens! in spite of the lank iron grey hair, tight lips, and death-like face, her features—nay, her very movements and expression were those *not* of a stranger, but—of— Miss Brown!

"Is it Miss Brown?" I gasped, in a hoarse whisper.

"Hush! no, it is *not*," whispered the Professor, "keep quiet."

Before our eyes men entered that ghastly room, placed that rigid figure in a coffin, raised it, and slowly shuffled out of the room. I shivered as the icy coldness of a wind swept by me, when they passed through the door. We heard them shuffling along the passage, their steps growing fainter and fainter, then silence—only the nurse remained, standing immovable, pale, shadowy, the dim light of the now flickering candles dimly lighting her, as she stood with a grim smile twisting her face, one hand outstretched towards us, as if triumphantly, and on her finger a single ring—an uncut emerald in a dull silver setting!

Slowly before our eyes she faded, and we were alone, but to my last hour, I shall smell the sickly perfume of funeral flowers, and feel the icy wind sweep by me whenever I see the white cap and apron of a nurse.

"Dare you follow?" whispered the Professor.

I nodded, unable to speak, as he rose leading me by the arm to the door. A sound as of faint music came wafting towards us, and everywhere there seemed the penetrating scent of funeral flowers.

As we reached the top of the stairs, there, just ahead of us, stood the figure of the nurse, as if watching with malignant eyes the slowly moving procession, as it went down the stairs; beside the nurse, almost touching her, stood—Miss Brown—gowned in a long trailing black robe, her head held defiantly, as if commanding this scene to cease. There was not any mistake now in the relationship of the two women, as they stood facing each other, for even I, in my terror-stricken state, was well aware, that, feature for feature, the nurse's face was identical with the face of Miss Brown, though older.

The Professor spoke to her, but she gazed at him, as if with unseeing eyes of a somnambulist.

Suddenly the nurse turned, and, with a swift movement, flashed the emerald ring before Miss Brown's face, then, smiling her evil smile, she, too, descended the stairs, fading away into nothingness, ere she reached the foot, in the same way as both coffin and bearers had faded.

The quiet of a house at 2 a.m. enveloped us, Miss Brown, without word or sign, went slowly back to her room. The Professor drew my arm quickly through his own, as he led me, half-

fainting as I was, to his own room. I think I must have fainted, for the next thing I remember was the smell of hot coffee! and opened my eyes to see Mrs. Stuart pouring it out, as if a coffee party at 2 a.m. in a guest's room was the most usual thing!

I finished the night on the Professor's sofa, though sleep was denied me; he nevertheless would not allow me to talk.

"Wait until daylight," was all he would say, as I obediently swallowed a dose he gave me.

Morning came at last, but I felt ill and shaken, though refusing to rest, I joined the breakfast party; after that, we gathered round the fire, and talked over the whole thing. I was allowed to tell my story of the three nights I had passed in No. 10, only to learn that I had witnessed every detail of the gruesome tale.

"Why didn't you warn me?" I naturally enquired.

"Peter," said Mrs. Stuart, "we one and all ought to ask pardon for that, but we all thought you would go right through it alone. There is a sort of tag to the curse, to the effect that someone seeing it all though *alone* will, in part, remove the curse. *No one* has solar done so. Miss Brown has tried and failed, the Professor would not attempt it alone, but seeing the state of tension you were in, last night, said he would not be responsible if you were allowed to go to your room alone."

"Now you know how you upset Miss Brown. She naturally thought you saw the likeness to herself in the gruesome nurse, and thought you were twitting her with it."

"But Miss Wood?" I questioned.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Stuart, with a smile, "she was nervy and wanted to warn you, only you treated her like an infant, she said, so she kept out of your way."

"One question more," I asked. "The emerald ring, why does Miss Brown wear it?"

"That is the horrible part of it all," said Mrs. Stuart, "the Brown family always felt that the ring ought to be put back in the old man's coffin, so, many years ago, the body of the nurse was exhumed, and the ring taken from her hand; but, as ill-luck would have it, the records, or whatever they are called, showing where the old man was buried, could not be found, so the Brown family have kept the ring. Miss Brown thought she would leave it outside the house last night, to see if it made any difference to the sequence of events, apparently it did not, and the Professor says it is not by any means the first time a curse has followed the stealing of a man's jewel, and he is doing his utmost, so far without success, to find the grave, and restore the ring, it may or may not cause the haunting of this house to cease, but meantime no one *can* see the thing through and keep sane, alone, and Miss Brown wears the stolen jewel until it can be restored to its dead owner. It is a horrible story, and one apparently impossible to clear up. You've been jolly plucky, Peter, but you shall not again sleep in Room No. 10."

Nor did I, but I spent some very happy weeks wandering about the country. No! not with Miss Wood, but with Miss Brown. I fulfilled Mrs. Stuart's prophecy, spoken in jest—and ended by adoring her.

We talked over the haunting of her house until it was threadbare, but knowing, as we both do, the ghastly three nights which takes place in that room every autumn, we have decided, or rather *I* have decided, that if she will tolerate a somewhat dry, old book-worm, we might make "High Craggs" a very cheery abode together; but we both say emphatically, we must find that grave, restore that jewel, or entirely pull down Room No. 10. Until that day comes, I confess to rather enjoying comparing Miss Brown's green eyes with the emerald stone stolen by her ancestress who first nursed, then murdered, her hapless patient, in the room she seems yet to consider her own, at a certain time of the year, so much her own, that such trifles as the stirring of a dead fire,

the shaking the pillow of an unsuspecting guest, are usual happenings, though only in autumn does one see the final act of the tragedy; but I, who saw it, shall never in my life forget, nor do I care who sneers, who laughs at what they are pleased to call my imagination, I saw—I know—as others will—until the emerald stone is restored—the horrible ghastly murder that took place in Room No. 10.