

My Friend Paton

By Julian Hawthorne

Mathew Morriss, my father, was a cotton merchant in Liverpool twenty-five years ago—a steady, laborious, clear-headed man, very affectionate and genial in his private intercourse. He was wealthy, and we lived in a sumptuous house in the upper part of the city. This was when I was about ten years old. My father was twice married; I was the child of the first wife, who died when I was very young; my stepmother came five years later. She was the elder of two sisters, both beautiful women. The sister often came to visit us. I remember I liked her better than I liked my stepmother; in fact, I regarded her with that sort of romantic attachment that often is developed in lads of my age. She had golden brown hair and a remarkably sweet voice, and she sang and played in a manner that transported me with delight; for I was already devoted to music. She was of a gentle yet impulsive temperament, easily moved to smiles and tears; she seemed to me the perfection of woman-kind, and I made no secret of my determination to marry her when I grew up. She used to caress me, and look at me in a dreamy way, and tell me I was the nicest and handsomest boy in the world. “And as soon as you are a year older than I am, John,” she would say, “you shall marry me, if you like.”

Another frequent visitor at our house at this time was not nearly so much a favorite of mine. This was a German, Adolf Körner by name, who had been a clerk in my father’s concern for a number of years, and had just been admitted junior partner. My father placed every confidence in him, and often declared that he had the best idea of business he had ever met with. This may very likely have been the fact; but to me he appeared simply a tall, grave, taciturn man, of cold manners, speaking with a slight German accent, which I disliked. I suppose he was about thirty-seven years of age, but I always thought of him as older than my father, who was fifty. Another and more valid reason for my disliking Körner was that he was in the habit of paying a great deal of attention to my ladylove, Miss Juliet Tretherne. I used to upbraid Juliet about encouraging his advances, and I expressed my opinion of him in the plainest language, at which she would smile in a preoccupied way, and would sometimes draw me to her and kiss me on the forehead. Once she said, “Mr. Körner is a very noble gentleman; you must not dislike him.” This had the effect of making me hate him all the more.

One day I noticed an unusual commotion in the house, and Juliet came down-stairs attired in a lovely white dress, with a long veil, and fragrant flowers in her hair. She got into a carriage with my father and stepmother, and drove away. I did not understand what it meant, and no one told me. After they were gone I went into the drawing-room, and, greatly to my surprise, saw there a long table covered with a white cloth and laid out with a profusion of good things to eat and drink in sparkling dishes and decanters. In the middle of the table was a great cake covered with white frosting; the butler was arranging some flowers round it.

“What is that cake for, Curtis?” I asked.

“For the bride, to be sure,” said Curtis, without looking up.

“The bride! who is she?” I demanded in astonishment.

“Your aunt Juliet, to be sure!” said Curtis, composedly, stepping back and contemplating his floral arrangement with his head on one side.

I asked no more, but betook myself with all speed to my room, locked the door, flung myself on the bed, and cried to heartbreaking with grief, indignation, and mortification. After a very

long time some one tried the door, and a voice—the voice of Juliet—called to me. I made no answer. She began to plead with me; I resisted as long as I could, but finally my affection got the better of my resentment, and I arose and opened the door, hiding my tear-stained face behind my arm. Juliet caught me in her arms and kissed me; tears were running down her own cheeks. how lovely she looked! My heart melted, and I was just on the point of forgiving her when the voice of Körner became audible from below, calling out “Mrs. Körner!” I tore myself away from her, and cried passionately, “You don’t love me! you love him! go to him!” She looked at me for a moment with a pained expression; then she put her hand in the pocket of her dress and drew out something done up in white paper. “See what I have brought you, you unkind boy,” said she. “What is it?” I demanded. “A piece of my wedding-cake,” she replied. “Give it me!” said I. She put it in my hand; I ran forward to the head of the stairs, which Körner was just ascending, dashed the cake in his face, and then rushed back to my own room, whence neither threats nor coaxing availed to draw me forth for the rest of the day.

I never saw Juliet again. She and her husband departed on their wedding-trip that afternoon; it was to take them as far as Germany, for Körner said that he wished to visit his father and mother, who were still alive, before settling down permanently in Liverpool. Whether they really did so was never discovered. But, about a fortnight later, a dreadful fact came to light. Körner—the grave and reticent Körner, whom everybody trusted and thought so highly of—was a thief, and he had gone off with more than half my father’s property in his pocket. The blow almost destroyed my father, and my stepmother, too, for that matter, for at first it seemed as though Juliet must have been privy to the crime. This, however, turned out not to have been the case. Her fate must have been all the more terrible on that account; but no news of either of them ever came back to us, and my father would never take any measures to bring Körner to justice. It was several months before he recovered from the shock sufficiently to take up business again; and then the American Civil War came and completed his ruin. He died, a poor and broken-down man, a year later. My stepmother, who was really an admirable woman, realized whatever property remained to us, took a small house, and sent me to an excellent school, where I was educated for Cambridge. Meanwhile I had been devoting all possible time to music; for I had determined to become a composer, and I was looking forward, after taking my degree, to completing my musical education abroad; but my mother’s health was precarious, and, when the time came, she found herself unequal to making the journey, and the change of habits and surroundings that it implied. We lived very quietly in Liverpool for three or four years; then she died, and, after I had settled our affairs, I found myself in possession of a small income and alone in the world. Without loss of time I set out for the Continent.

I went to a German city, where the best musical training was to be had, and made my arrangements to pass several years there. At the banker’s, when I went to provide for the regular receipt of my remittances, I met a young American, by name Paton Jeffries. He was from New England, and, I think, a native of the State of Connecticut; his father, he told me, was a distinguished inventor, who had made and lost a considerable fortune in devising a means of promoting sleep by electricity. Paton was studying to be an architect, which, he said, was the coming profession in his country; and it was evident, on a short acquaintance, that he was a fellow of unusual talents—one of those men of whom you say that, come what may, they are always sure to fall on their feet. For my part, I have certainly never met with so active and versatile a spirit. He was a year or so older than I, rather tall than short, lightly but strongly built, with a keen, smiling, subtle face, a finely-developed forehead, light wavy hair, and gray eyes, very penetrating and bright. There was a pleasing kind of eagerness and volubility in his manner

of talking, and a slight imperfection, not amounting to a lisp, in his utterance, which imparted a naïve charm to his speech. He used expressive and rapid gestures with his hands and arms, and there was a magnetism, a fascination, about the whole man that strongly impressed me. I was at that period much more susceptible of impressions, and prone to yield to them, than I am now. Paton's rattling vivacity, his knowledge of the world, his entertaining talk and stories, his curiosity, enterprise, and audacity, took me by storm; he was my opposite in temperament and character, and it seemed to me that he had most of the advantages on his side. Nevertheless, he professed, and I still believe he felt, a great liking for me, and we speedily came to an agreement to seek a lodging together. On the second day of our search, we found just what we wanted.

It was an old house, on the outskirts of the town, standing by itself, with a small garden behind it. It had formerly been occupied by an Austrian baron, and it was probably not less than two hundred years old. The baron's family had died out, or been dispersed, and now the venerable edifice was let, in the German fashion, in separate floors or *étages*, communicating with a central staircase. Some alterations rendered necessary by this modification had been made, but substantially the house was unchanged. Our apartment comprised four or five rooms on the left of the landing and at the top of the house, which consisted of three stories. The chief room was the parlor, which looked down through a square bow-window on the street. This room was of irregular shape, one end being narrower than the other, and nearly fitting the space at this end was a kind of projecting shelf or mantelpiece (only, of course, there was no fireplace under it, open fireplaces being unknown in Germany), upon which rested an old cracked looking-glass, made in two compartments, the frame of which, black with age and fly-spots, was fastened against the wall. The shelf was supported by two pilasters; but the object of the whole structure was a mystery; so far as appeared, it served no purpose but to support the looking-glass, which might just as well have been suspended from a nail in the wall. Paton, I remember, betrayed a great deal of curiosity about it; and since the consideration of the problem was more in his line of business than in mine, I left it to him. At the opposite end of the room stood a tall earthenware stove. The walls were wainscoted five feet up from the dark polished floor, and were hung with several smoky old paintings, of no great artistic value. The chairs and tables were plain, but very heavy and solid, and of a dark hue like the room. The window was nearly as wide as it was high, and opened laterally from the center on hinges. The other rooms were of the same general appearance, but smaller. We both liked the place, and soon made ourselves very comfortable in it. I hired a piano, and had it conveyed upstairs to the parlor; while Paton disposed his architectural paraphernalia on and in the massive writing-table near the window. Our cooking and other household duties were done for us by the wife of the *portier*, the official corresponding to the French *concierge*, who, in all German houses, attends at the common door, and who, in this case, lived in a couple of musty little closets opening into the lower hall, and eked out his official salary by cobbling shoes. He was an odd, grotesque humorist, of most ungainly exterior, black haired and bearded, with a squint, a squab nose, and a short but very powerful figure. Dirty he was beyond belief, and he was abominably fragrant of vile tobacco. For my part, I could not endure this fellow; but Paton, who had much more of what he called human nature in him than I had, established friendly relations with him at once, and reported that he found him very amusing. It was characteristic of Paton that, though he knew much less about the German language than I did, he could understand and make himself understood in it much better; and, when we were in company, it was always he who did the talking.

It would never have occurred to me to wonder, much less to inquire, who might be the occupants of the other *étages*; but Paton was more enterprising, and before we had been settled

three days in our new quarters, he had gathered from his friend the portier, and from other sources, all the obtainable information on the subject. The information was of no particular interest, however, except as regarded the persons who dwelt on the floor immediately below us. They were two—an old man and a young woman, supposed to be his daughter. They had been living here several years—from before the time, indeed, that the portier had occupied his present position. In all these years the old man was known to have been out of his room only twice. He was certainly an eccentric person, and was said to be a miser and extremely wealthy. The portier further averred that his property—except such small portion of it as was invested and on the income of which he lived—was realized in the form of diamonds and other precious stones, which, for greater security, he always carried, waking or sleeping, in a small leathern bag, fastened round his neck by a fine steel chain. His daughter was scarcely less a mystery than he, for, though she went out as often as twice or thrice a week, she was always closely veiled, and her figure was so disguised by the long cloak she wore that it was impossible to say whether she were graceful or deformed, beautiful or ugly. The balance of belief, however, was against her being attractive in any respect. The name by which the old miser was known was Kragendorf; but, as the portier sagaciously remarked, there was no knowing, in such cases, whether the name a man bore was his own or somebody's else.

This Kragendorf mystery was another source of apparently inexhaustible interest to Paton, who was fertile in suggestions as to how it might be explained or penetrated. I believe he and the portier talked it over at great length, but, so far as I am aware, without arriving at any solution. I took little heed of the matter, being now fully absorbed in my studies; and it is to be hoped that Herr Kragendorf was not of a nervous temperament, otherwise he must have inveighed profanely against the constant piano-practice that went on over his head. I also had a violin, on which I flattered myself I could perform with a good deal of expression, and by and by, in the long, still evenings—it was November, but the temperature was still mild—I got into the habit of strolling along the less frequented streets, with my violin under my shoulder, drawing from it whatever music my heart desired. Occasionally I would pause at some convenient spot, lean against a wall, and give myself up to improvisation. At such times a little cluster of auditors would gradually collect in front of me, listening for the most part silently, or occasionally giving vent to low grunts and interjections of approval. One evening, I remember, a young woman joined the group, though keeping somewhat in the background; she listened intently, and after a time gradually turned her face toward me, unconsciously as it were; and the light of a street-lamp at a little distance revealed a countenance youth-full, pale, sad, and exquisitely beautiful. It impressed me as with a vague reminiscence of something I had seen or imagined—some pictured face, perhaps, caught in a glance and never to be identified. Her eyes finally met mine; I stopped playing. She started, gave me an alarmed look, and, gliding swiftly away, disappeared. I could not forget this incident; it haunted me strangely and persistently. Many a time thereafter I revisited the same spot, and drew together other audiences, but the delicate girl with the dark-blue eyes and the tender, sensitive mouth, was never again among them.

It was at this epoch, I think, that the inexhaustible Paton made a discovery. From my point of view it was not a discovery of any moment; but, as usual, he took interest in it enough for both of us. It appeared that, in attempting to doctor the crack in the old looking-glass, a large piece of the plate had got loose, and come away in his hands; and in the space behind he had detected a paper, carefully folded and tied up with a piece of faded ribbon. Paton was never in the habit of hampering himself with fine-drawn scruples, and he had no hesitation in opening the folded paper and spreading it out on the table. Judging from the glance I gave it, it seemed to be a

confused and abstruse mixture of irregular geometrical figures and cramped German chirography. But Paton set to work upon it with as much concentration as if it had been a recipe for the Philosopher's Stone; he reproduced the lines and angles on fresh paper, and labored over the writing with a magnifying-glass and a dictionary. At times he would mutter indistinctly to himself, lift his eyebrows, nod or shake his head, bite his lips, and rub his forehead, and anon fall to work again with fresh vigor. At last he leaned back in his chair, thumped his hand on the table, and laughed.

"Got it!" he exclaimed. "Say, John, old boy, I've got it! and it's the most curious old thing ever you saw in your life!"

"Something in analytical geometry, isn't it?" said I, turning round on my piano-stool.

"Analytical pudding's end! It's a plan of a house, my boy, and, what's more, of this very house we're in! That's a find, and no mistake! These are the descriptions and explanations— these bits of writing. It's a perfect labyrinth of Crete! Udolpho was nothing to it!"

"Well, I suppose it isn't of much value except as a curiosity?"

"Don't be too sure of that, John, my boy! Who knows but there's a treasure concealed somewhere in this house? or a skeleton in a secret chamber! This old paper may make our fortune yet!"

"The treasure wouldn't belong to us if we found it; and, besides, we can't make explorations beyond our own premises, and we know what's in them already."

"Do we? Did we know what was behind the looking-glass? Did you never hear of sliding panels, and private passages, and concealed staircases? Where's your imagination, man? But you don't need imagination—here it is in black and white!"

As he spoke, he pointed to a part of the plan; but, as I was stooping to examine it, he seemed to change his mind.

"No matter," he exclaimed, suddenly folding up the paper and rising from his chair. "You're not an architect, and you can't be expected to go in for these things. No; there's no practical use in it, of course. But secret passages were always a hobby of mine. Well, what are you going to do this evening? Come over to the café and have a game of billiards!"

"No; I shall go to bed early to-night."

"You sleep too much," said Paton. "Everybody does. If my father, instead of inventing a way of promoting sleep, had invented a way of doing without it, he'd have been the richest man in America to-day. However, do as you like. I sha'n't be back till late."

He put on his hat and sallied forth with a cigar in his mouth. Paton was of rather a convivial turn; he liked to have a good time, as he called it; and, indeed, he seemed to think that the chief end of man was to get money enough to have a good time continually, a sort of good eternity. His head was strong, and he could stand a great deal of liquor; and I have seen him sip and savor a glass of raw brandy or whisky as another man would a glass of Madeira. In this, and the other phases of his life about town, I had no participation, being constitutionally as well as by training averse therefrom; and he, on the other hand, would never have listened to my sage advice to modify his loose habits. Our companionship was apart from these things; and, as I have said, I found in him a good deal that I could sympathize with, without approaching the moralities.

That night, after I had been for some time asleep, I awoke and found myself listening to a scratching and shoving noise that seemed quite unaccountable. By-and-by it made me uneasy. I got up and went toward the parlor, from which the noise proceeded. On reaching the doorway, I saw Paton on his knees before one of the pilasters in the narrow end of the room; a candle was on the floor beside him, and he was busily at work at something, though what it was I could not

make out. The creak of the threshold under my foot caused him to look round. He started violently, and sprang to his feet.

“Oh! it’s you, is it?” he said, after a moment. “Great Scott! how you scared me! I was—I dropped a bit of money hereabouts, and I was scraping about to find it. No matter—it wasn’t much! Sorry I disturbed you,. old boy.” And, laughing, he picked up his candle and went into his own room.

From this time there was a change vaguely perceptible in our mutual relations; we chatted together less than before, and did not see so much of each other. Paton was apt to be out when I was at home, and generally sat up after I was abed. He seemed to be busy about something—something connected with his profession, I judged; but, contrary to his former custom, he made no attempt to interest me in it. To tell the truth, I had begun to realize that our different tastes and pursuits must lead us further and further apart, and that our separation could be only a question of time. Paton was a materialist, and inclined to challenge all the laws and convictions that mankind has instituted and adopted; there was no limit to his radicalism. For example, on coming in one day, I found him with a curious antique poniard in his hands, which he had probably bought in some old curiosity shop. At first I fancied he meant to conceal it; but, if so, he changed his mind.

“What do you think of that?” he said, holding it out to me. “There’s a solution of continuity for you! Mind you don’t prick yourself! It’s poisoned up to the hilt!”

“What do you want of such a thing?” I asked.

“Well, killing began with Cain, and isn’t likely to go out of fashion in our day. I might find it convenient to give one of my friends— you, for instance—a reminder of his mortality some time. You’ll say murder is immoral. Bless you, man, we never could do without it! No man dies before his time, and some one dies every day that some one else may live.”

This was said in a jocular way, and, of course, Paton did not mean it. But it affected me unpleasantly nevertheless.

As I was washing my hands in my room, I happened to look out of my window, which commanded a view of the garden at the back of the house. It was an hour after sunset, and the garden was nearly dark; but I caught a movement of something below, and, looking more closely, I recognized the ugly figure of the portier. He seemed to be tying something to the end of a long slender pole, like a gigantic fishing-rod; and presently he advanced beneath my window, and raised the pole as high as it would go against the wall of the house. The point he touched was the sill of the window below mine—probably that of the bedroom of Herr Kragendorf. At this juncture the portier seemed to be startled at something—possibly he saw me at my window; at all events, he lowered his pole and disappeared in the house.

The next day Paton made an announcement that took me by surprise. He said he had made up his mind to quit Germany, and that very shortly. He mentioned having received letters from home, and declared he had got, or should soon have got, all he wanted out of this country. “I’m going to stop paying money for instruction,” he said, “and begin to earn it by work. I shall stay another week, but then I’m off. Too slow here for me! I want to be in the midst of things, using my time.”

I did not attempt to dissuade him; in fact, my first feeling was rather one of relief; and this Paton, with his quick preceptions, was probably aware of.

“Own up, old boy!” he said, laughing; “you’ll be able to endure my absence. And yet you needn’t think of me as worse than anybody else. If everybody were musicians and moralists, it would be nice, no doubt; but one might get tired of it in time, and then what would you do? You

must give the scamps and adventurers their innings, after all! They may not do much good, but they give the other fellows occupation. I was born without my leave being asked, and I may act as suits me without asking anybody's leave."

This was said on a certain bright morning after our first fall of snow; the tiled roofs of the houses were whitened with it, it cushioned the window-sills, and spread a sparkling blankness over the garden. In the streets it was already melting, and people were slipping and splashing on the wet and glistening pavements. After gazing out at this scene for a while, in a mood of unwonted thoughtfulness, Paton yawned, stretched himself, and declared his intention of taking a stroll before dinner. Accordingly he lit a cigar and went forth. I watched him go down the street and turn the corner.

An hour afterward, just when dinner was on the table, I heard an unusual noise and shuffling on the stairs, and a heavy knock on the door. I opened it, and saw four men bearing on a pallet the form of my friend Paton. A police officer accompanied them. They brought Paton in, and laid him on his bed. The officer told me briefly what had happened, gave me certain directions, and, saying that a surgeon would arrive immediately, he departed with the four men tramping behind him.

Paton had slipped in going across the street, and a tramway car had run over him. He was not dead, though almost speechless; but his injuries were such that it was impossible that he should recover. He kept his eyes upon me; they were as bright as ever, though his face was deadly pale. He seemed to be trying to read my thoughts—to find out my feeling about him, and my opinion of his condition. I was terribly shocked and grieved, and my face no doubt showed it. By-and-by I saw his lips move, and bent down to listen.

"Confounded nuisance!" he whispered faintly in my ear. "It's all right, though; I'm not going to die this time. I've got something to do, and I'm going to do it—devil take me if I don't!"

He was unable to say more, and soon after the surgeon came in. He made an examination, and it was evident that he had no hope. His shrug of the shoulders was not lost upon Paton, who frowned, and made a defiant movement of the lip. But presently he said to me, still in the same whisper, "John, if that old fool should be right—he won't be, but in case of accidents—you must take charge of my things—the papers, and all. I'll make you heir of my expectations! Write out a declaration to that effect: I can sign my name; and he'll be witness."

I did as he directed, and having explained to the surgeon the nature of the document, I put the pen in Paton's hand; but was obliged to guide his hand with my own in order to make an intelligible signature. The surgeon signed below, and Paton seemed satisfied. He closed his eyes; his sufferings appeared to be very slight. But, even while I was looking at him, a change came over his face—a deadly change. His eyes opened; they were no longer bright, but sunken and dull. He gave me a dusky look—whether of rage, of fear, or of entreaty, I could not tell. His lips parted, and a voice made itself audible; not like his own voice, but husky and discordant. "I'm going," it said. "But look out for me. . . . Do it yourself!"

"Der Herr ist todt" (the man is dead), said the surgeon the next minute.

It was true. Paton had gone out of this life at an hour's warning. What purpose or desire his last words indicated, there was nothing to show. He was dead; and yet I could hardly believe that it was so. He had been so much alive; so full of schemes and enterprises. Nothing now was left but that crushed and haggard figure, stiffening on the bed; nothing, at least, that mortal senses could take cognizance of. It was a strange thought.

Paton's funeral took place a few days afterward. I returned from the graveyard weary in body and mind. At the door of the house stood the portier, who nodded to me, and said,

“A very sad thing to happen, worthy sir; but so it is in the world. Of all the occupants of this house, one would have said the one least likely to be dead to-day was Herr Jeffries. Heh! If I had been the good Providence, I would have made away with the old gentleman of the *étage* below, who is of no use to anybody.”

This, for lack of a better, was Paton’s funeral oration. I climbed the three flights of stairs and let myself into our apartment—mine exclusively now. The place was terribly lonely; much more so than if Paton had been alive anywhere in the world. But he was dead; and, if his own philosophy were true, he was annihilated. But it was not true! How distinct and minute was my recollection of him—his look, his gestures, the tones of his voice. I could almost see him before me; my memory of him dead seemed clearer than when he was alive. In that invisible world of the mind was he not living still, and perhaps not far away?

I sat down at the table where he had been wont to work, and unlocked the drawers in which he kept his papers. These, or some of them, I took out and spread before me. But I found it impossible, as yet, to concentrate my attention upon them; I pushed back my chair, and, rising, went to the piano. Here I remained for perhaps a couple of hours, striking the vague chords that echo wandering thoughts. I was trying to banish this haunting image of Paton from my mind, and at length I partly succeeded.

All at once, however, the impression of him (as I may call it) came back with a force and vividness that startled me. I stopped playing, and sat for a minute perfectly still. I felt that Paton was in the room; that if I looked round I should see him. I however restrained myself from looking round with all the strength of my will—wherefore I know not. What I felt was not fear, but the conviction that I was on the brink of a fearful and unprecedented experience—an experience that would not leave me as it found me. This strange struggle with myself taxed all my powers; the sweat started out on my forehead. At last the moment came when I could struggle no longer. I laid my hand on the keyboard, and pushed myself round on the stool. There was a momentary dazzle before my eyes, and after that I saw plainly. My hand, striking the keys, had produced a jarring discord; and while this was yet tingling in my ears, Paton, who was sitting in his old place at the table, with his back toward me, faced about in his chair, and his eyes met mine. I thought he smiled.

My excitement was past, and was succeeded by a dead calm. I examined him critically. His appearance was much the same as when in life; nay, he was even more like himself than before. The subtle or crafty expression which had always been discernible in his features was now intensified, and there was something wild and covertly fierce in the shining of his gray eyes, something that his smile was unable to disguise. What was human and genial in my former friend had passed away, and what remained was evil—the kind of evil that I now perceived to have been at the base of his nature. It was a revelation of character terrible in its naked completeness. I knew at a glance that Paton must always have been a far more wicked man than I had ever imagined; and in his present state all the remains of goodness had been stripped away, and nothing but wickedness was left.

I felt impelled, by an impulse for which I could not account, to approach the table and examine the papers once more; and now it entered into my mind to perceive a certain method and meaning in them that had been hidden from me before. It was as though I were looking at them through Paton’s intelligence, and with his memory. He had in some way ceased to be visible to me; but I became aware that he wished me to sit down in his chair, and I did so. Under his guidance, and in obedience to a will that seemed to be my own, and yet was in direct opposition to my real will, I began a systematic study of the papers. Paton, meanwhile, remained close to

me, though I could no longer see him; but I felt the gaze of his fierce, shining eyes, and his crafty, evil smile. I soon obtained a tolerable insight into what the papers meant, and what was the scheme in which Paton had been so much absorbed at the time of his death, and which he had been so loath to abandon.

It was a wicked and cruel scheme, worked out to the smallest particular. But, though I understood its hideousness intellectually, it aroused in me no corresponding emotion; my sensitiveness to right and wrong seemed stupefied or inoperative. I could say, "This is wicked," but I could not awaken in myself a horror of committing the wickedness; and, moreover, I knew that, if the influence Paton was able to exercise over me continued, I must in due time commit it.

Presently I became aware, or, to speak more accurately, I seemed to remember, that there was something in Paton's room which it was incumbent on me to procure. I went thither, lifted up a corner of the rug between the bed and the stove, and beheld, in an aperture in the floor, of the existence of which I had till now known nothing, the antique poisoned dagger that Paton had showed me a few weeks before, and which I had not seen since then. I brought it back to the sitting-room, put it in a drawer of the table, and locked the drawer, at the same time making a mental note to the effect that I should reopen the drawer at a certain hour of the night and take the dagger out. All this while Paton was close at hand, though not visible to sight; but I had a sort of inner perception of his presence and movements. All at once, at about the hour of sunset, I saw him again; he moved toward the looking-glass at the narrow end of the room, laid his hand upon one of the pilasters, glanced at me over his shoulder, and immediately seemed to stoop down. As I sat, the edge of the table hid him from sight. I stood up and looked across. He was not there; and a kind of reaction of my nerves informed me that he was gone absolutely, for the time.

This reaction produced a lassitude impossible to describe; it was overpowering, and I had no choice but to yield to it. I dropped back in my chair, leaned forward on the table, and instantly fell into a heavy sleep, or stupor.

I awoke abruptly, with a sensation as if a hand had been laid on my shoulder. It was night, and I knew that the hour I had noted in my mind was at hand. I opened the drawer and took out the dagger, which I put in my pocket. The house was quite silent. A shiver passed through me. I was aware that Paton was standing at the narrow end of the room, waiting for me: Yes—there he was, or the impression of him in my brain—what did it matter? I arose mechanically and walked toward him. He had no need to direct me: I knew all there was to do, and how to do it. I knelt on the floor, laid my shoulder against the pilaster, and pushed it laterally. It moved aside on a pivot, disclosing an iron ring let into the floor. I laid hold of this ring, and lifted. A section of the floor came up, and I saw a sort of ladder descending perpendicularly into darkness. Down the ladder Paton went, and I followed him. Arrived at the bottom, I turned to the left, led by an instinct or a fascination; passed along a passage barely wide enough to admit me, until I came against a smooth, hard surface. I passed my hand over it until I touched a knob or catch, which I pressed, and the surface gave way before me like a door. I stumbled forward, and found myself in a room of what was doubtless Herr Kragendorf's apartment. A keen, cold air smote against my face; and with it came a sudden influx of strength and self-possession. I felt that, for a moment at least, the fatal influence of Paton upon me was broken. But what was that sound of a struggle—those cries and gasps, that seemed to come from an adjoining room?

I sprang forward, opened a door, and beheld a tall old man, with white hair and beard, in the grasp of a ruffian whom I at once recognized as the portier. A broken window showed how he had effected his entrance. One hand held the old man by the throat; in the other was a knife,

which he was prevented from using by a young woman, who had flung herself upon him in such a way as to trammel his movements. In another moment, however, he would have shaken her off.

But that moment was not allowed him. I seized him with a strength that amazed myself— a strength which never came upon me before or since. The conflict lasted but a breath or two; I hurled him to the floor, and, as he fell, his right arm was doubled under him, and the knife which he held entered his back beneath the left shoulder-blade. When I rose up from the whirl and fury of the struggle, I saw the old man reclining exhausted on the bosom of the girl. I knew him, despite his white hair and beard. And the face that bent so lovingly above him was the face that had looked into mine that night on the street—the face of the blue-eyed maiden—of a younger and a lovelier Juliet! As I gazed, there came a thundering summons at the door, and the police entered.

* * *

My poor uncle Körner had not prospered after his great stroke of roguery. His wife had died of a broken heart, after giving birth to a daughter, and his stolen riches had vanished almost as rapidly as they were acquired. He had at last settled down with his daughter in this old house. The treasure in the leathern bag, though a treasure to him, was not of a nature to excite general cupidity. It consisted, not of precious stones, but of relics of his dead wife—her rings, a lock of her hair, her letters, a miniature of her in a gold case. These poor keepsakes, and his daughter, had been the only solace of his lonely and remorseful life.

It was uncertain whether Paton and the portier had planned the robbery together, or separately, and in ignorance of each other's purpose. Nor can I tell whether my disembodied visitor came to me with good or with evil intent. Wicked spirits, even when they seem to have power to carry out their purposes, are perhaps only permitted to do so, so far as is consistent with an overruling good of which they know nothing. Certainly, if I had not descended the secret passage, Körner would have been killed, and perhaps my Juliet likewise—the mother of my children. But should I have been led on to stab him myself, with the poisoned dagger, had the portier not been there? Juliet smiles and says No, and I am glad to agree with her. But I have never since then found that anniversary upon me, without a shudder of awe, and a dark thought of Paton Jeffries.