

# A Dead Man's Evidence

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## I

The march of civilization, even over space so limited as this over-cultivated island of ours, has still left us a few spots where Man (nay, more, where Woman) may still meet Woman on a plane of common humanity. At a *table d'hôte* of a foreign spa, or of an English watering-place, she may restrict her address to strangers to requests for salt or a chilly remark upon the weather, but at 'The Crazy Kate' at Clovelly, to refuse the acquaintance of her neighbours right and left, of the lady who pours out the coffee at breakfast, and of the gentleman who has command of the bread at lunch, would be to deprive herself of the necessaries of life, and to occasion great inconvenience to the score of fellow-visitors who, except for the boatmen and their wives, two small donkeys, and a good many black-and-white cats, comprise the entire population of that remarkable village.

But for this fact, as she afterwards assured her friends, Mrs. Trevelyan would never have thought of making acquaintance with "those Australian people." She knew nothing about their position, and her own was a plant of such delicate growth, owing its existence to such tender and sleepless care, that it behoved her, in common charity, to deal gently with that of her neighbours'.

It was dinner-time, and Mr. Crediton, the Australian in question, being the senior guest, was rapidly distributing roast chicken, to which Adelaide, his daughter, named after the place of her birth, was adding bread-sauce and fried bacon. He was a man to be propitiated this evening, for it was rumoured that he owned a *Times* twelve hours old at most, and there was not another copy nearer than Bideford.

"You have been up to meet the coach tonight?" Mrs. Trevelyan questioned tentatively.

"Yes, yes; I met the coach. By the way, Adelaide, there is a letter for you in the pocket of my overcoat—a foreign letter, Switzerland, I think."

"Yes, papa," answered Adelaide with suppressed eagerness, watching anxiously as he searched his pockets. Mr. Crediton had certainly made money in Australia, which of course depreciated his social value; but he was nevertheless a younger son of a good old county family, and beyond the calling of her father "papa," and the possession of such physique as comes from an out-door life, Adelaide had nothing to stamp her as colonial.

"I've heard of a house at last," continued Mr. Crediton, "unless the agent is at his old tricks again. I threatened to put the business into other hands if he sent me after any more three-acre parks and fifty-foot lakes. But I fancy it's genuine this time. I fancy I've heard before of Strother Grange. It is in the West Riding of Yorkshire."

Adelaide started, and was about to speak, but checked herself. Mrs. Trevelyan uttered a meaning laugh, and turning to her husband, exclaimed—

"Think of an occupant for the Grange at last!"

Captain Trevelyan was in pursuit of the under-cut at the side-board, and only echoed his wife's laugh. Adelaide looked from one to the other. Mr. Crediton, who, rather from shyness than any intentional disregard for his fellow-creatures, never addressed any one if he could help it, for once forgot his reserve, and appealed eagerly for information.

“Oh, yes, it is a beautiful place,” said Mrs. Trevelyan; “no one could deny that. Of course it has not been lived in for a long time, three years at least; no one has been *near* the place. They say it begins quite to look its character,” and again the meaning laugh.

“You mean it is out of repair?” inquired Mr. Crediton.

“Oh *dear* no!” Mrs. Trevelyan became increasingly emphatic as she saw she was arousing general interest. “It was all *beautifully* done up when the late squire came into the property, all in the very best style, and it is still kept in *perfect* order. Why, you are just the very people to take it! The avenue won’t signify to you, will it? Colonists and Yankees don’t mind that sort of thing!”

“Well, a good avenue would be rather an attraction,” said the colonist, thinking of his ancestral beeches.

“Yes, but—— Oh, well, of course the agent wouldn’t tell you. Perhaps I oughtn’t——”

“Yes, you will tell anything you know—for or against the house,” said Adela, with her usual air of directness. She appeared to be making a statement rather than uttering a command.

“Well,” continued Mrs. Trevelyan, nothing loth, “it is very absurd of course, but (if you *really* think I ought to tell you, I wouldn’t injure the place for *worlds*) they say—it’s *haunted!*”

Adela smiled serenely, but her face expressed the interest which had faded out of her father’s. She waited in silence for Mrs. Trevelyan’s next ebullition.

“No one will live in the house except two or three old servants, and not a single villager will go up after dusk. It is such a pity, but of course, under the sad circumstances, Sir Claude could not live there, anyway.”

Mr. Crediton looked at his daughter and murmured “Sir Claude?” with raised eyebrows she nodded assent to the implied question, but did not interrupt Mrs. Trevelyan’s observations.

“I do hope he’ll let it. It is such a pity for a place like that to stand empty, and he can never return to the country now. They say he is abroad somewhere; he is quite young. It is a miserable state of affairs. They have been masters of the hounds, and county magistrates, and deputy-lieutenants for generations, and now—! No, thank you, no more cream, nor any blackberries, thank you.

“Then we’ll go outside,” said Adelaide decisively, “and you’ll tell me all about it.”

“Isn’t the drawing-room warmer?” said her companion, unwilling to lose her audience.

“It is a lovely night, and I’ll bring you a fur cloak,” and Mrs. Trevelyan was borne off, hardly conscious of her companion’s dominance, which indeed habitually exacted so ready a response, as to affect those about her with a sense of exercising their personal volition.

“They say the ghost is poor Bertie, and that he walks up to a certain tree and disappears, at dusk, every night,” chattered Mrs. Trevelyan.

“Sir Bertram was the brother who died?”

“Well, that is just where the mystery is, of course. The coroner’s jury were all farmers or tradesmen on the Strothers’ estate, and were obliged to bring it in accidental death, and of course he *might* have been killed on the spot by a blow from the branch of a tree, but it was a very odd thing that it should happen just when and how it did, and one cannot blame people for looking a little shy at Claude—it can’t be only the ghost that prevented any one from going near him during the three months he remained in the house after his brother’s death. He stood it as long as one could expect, but it is very awkward to be cut by the county, isn’t it? No one put anything into words, of course—the family has always been so much respected—but it was rather marked when no-body called, wasn’t it?”

Mrs. Trevelyan continued to dwell on this particular point, for the sake of eliciting a remark from her companion, who had turned away, and was gazing out to sea, her fingers knit tightly, her face pale.

“Wasn’t it?” she persevered.

“I beg your pardon—yes, very marked, of course. But you have not told me what happened, or was supposed to happen.”

“Bertie Strother was at his last sixpence when he came into the estate. He had waited for dead men’s shoes ever since he came of age, and it was said he was in a bad way. Claude was quite different—a very quiet sort of man, not nearly so popular as Bertie, and the two never got on together. People say that he used to lecture him, and of course an elder brother wouldn’t stand that. Claude ought to have been a parson—he was too good for everyday— Did you speak? I beg your pardon.”

“No—nothing, pray go on.”

“After the evening when Bertie’s horse came in riderless, and he was found in the avenue—dead, with a bruise on the forehead and a broken skull—people began to remember how the two had always quarrelled, and that Claude had gone out alone, about dusk, with a heavy walking-stick, and that he must have passed down the avenue within at least a few minutes of the time of Bertie’s return. The old woman at the lodge, not fifty yards away, declared she had heard quarrelling voices, and the butler remembered that some very angry words had passed between the brothers at lunch. He thought Claude had been asking for money, and that Bertie had refused him—and when the body was picked up, his pocket-book, known to contain several bank-notes, was missing.”

“How cruel! how abominable!” Adelaide cried, starting to her feet.

“Yes, it was a shocking thing if it was true,” said Mrs. Trevelyan, placidly. “All the worse that Claude had of course so much to gain by the murder. Thirty thousand a year and a fine estate are worth a crime in these days,” she added flippantly. “There was a wych-elni halfway up the avenue. Bertie had marked it to come down. It was a break in the uniformity of the lime-trees, and swept the path in a way that was dangerous at dusk. He was found near it, and his ghost is said still to haunt the spot. Several of the villagers say they have seen him walk up the avenue and disappear behind it, and others say they have seen and heard the branches move in a manner which the wind could not account for. No one will go there after dusk. The accident, or whatever it was, occurred in November, three years ago nearly, about five o’clock. Poor Claude!” and Mrs. Trevelyan sighed sentimentally.

“You knew him?” inquired Adelaide, watching her closely.

“Yes—in old days—well, too well.”

“You knew Claude Strother, and you believe he murdered his own flesh and blood?”

“Well, I don’t pretend to be wiser than other people!”

“You believe it?”

“Of course I can’t pretend to judge. The verdict was ‘accidental death,’ but don’t you see, Miss Crediton—”

But Miss Crediton was out of hearing. Only a rough flight of steps separates the few feet of terrace from the shingle below, and there, on an up-turned boat, Adelaide seated herself under the stars. The wash of the slowly-ebbing tide drowned all sounds from the quaint little village. Except for the companionship of the rough-haired Devonshire terrier, that nestled close beside her, she was as much alone as if she had been in truth in the far-away Alpine valley which was present to her fancy.

Only ten days ago she had wandered there with Claude Strother. To the motherless girl, accustomed to the free life of an up-country settlement in Australia, to whom chaperonage, as distinct from protection, was unknown, there had seemed no reason why her father's friend should not be hers too. And short as had been their acquaintance, he had become a friend even before that memorable walk up the Lauterbrunnen Valley. Then their friendship had taken definite shape. They would never forget each other. Unless Mr. Crediton took a house in England for the hunting-season they would meet again in Rome in a few months.

"And, Adela," Claude had said, taking her hand with brotherly tenderness, "some day, God helping me, I may dare to ask for more than your friendship—if you are still free. Not now, I may not now—I cannot even tell you why; I may not even ask you for a promise. I am yours utterly, but you"—releasing her hand—"you are free. When I see you again, if you should belong to some one else, I shall have no right to complain. You are free, remember, but trust me, if you can, whatever you hear—whatever happens."

And from that moment Adelaide knew that she was no more her own—that to Claude, or to the memory of Claude, her life was henceforth given in joyous service.

For more than an hour she sat there, the little dog asleep at her feet. The clouds cleared away, the stars shone out, the pebbles which the sea had left bare, gleamed white in the moonlight.

There are certain hours in life when time, past, present, and future, seems illumined, and each point stands out with a vividness which is self-revelation. One is gazing out no longer at a cloud, but at a light of lire. Such an hour had come to Adelaide, her life had become a thing of purpose. Ten days ago she had realized that the future held for her a definite hope—now, to hope was added work. As was characteristic, her meditation led to practical result. The west wind brought her the sound of the church clock. She counted ten strokes and rose promptly.

"Scamp," she cried, "we must go in, or we shall be too late to tell papa he must take Strother Grange!"

## II

Adelaide Crediton was not accustomed to having her wishes neglected. By the time that St. Luke's little summer had come to glorify the gold and crimson of the falling leaves, she had established herself as mistress of Strother Grange. The father had been in no-wise reluctant—the stables were good, the country promised sport not to be despised even by a man who had chased big game in forests primeval. He had already established his local reputation as a shot, and was not without resources even on wet days. The house boasted such a library as he had not fingered for thirty years, and he heard nothing of the stories with which Adelaide's mind was unceasingly occupied. He was not what in the tongue of the neighbourhood would be described as "a free gentleman"; his servants obeyed his orders silently, and with the respect that his wage-paying capacity exacted, though, with the prejudice of the old country, they were only by degrees brought to admit that after all he might not really be "the Australian Convict" they had from the first supposed. Miss Adelaide, they allowed, was "right well reared—very haughty and that." She had been at some trouble to make friends with the people about her, but their proud independence had seemed to her unfriendly, and had added to the shyness consequent on her novel sensations. At home she had been familiar with every face within twenty miles, and so she misunderstood the villagers, and in some degree they—her.

Adelaide, in her determination to establish Claude's absolute innocence, had carefully devised a theory of action which had at least the benefit of originality. It seemed on inquiry that his

friends (and there were many, in spite of Mrs. Trevelyan's insinuations) had forestalled every idea upon the subject which occurred even to her. No possibility of arriving at evidence or explanation had been neglected. Adelaide, however, had still one hope, one possible source of help still remained untried, and it was for her to make the trial, for her, she firmly believed, to win the victory. That hope was—the ghost!

The story of the haunted avenue had never, from the first, seemed to her absurd, as to Mrs. Trevelyan, or trivial, as to her father. Like so many among our colonists she had come frequently under the influence of the disciples of Swedenborg. Many of what seemed to her the best and wisest among her friends were members of the community, and in spite of the scornful amusement which was all that their doctrines produced in the mind of her father, the mystical and spiritual element in their belief excited her interest and sympathy.

The notion of receiving a visitor from the spirit-world was not therefore new to her, or startling. She was not only prepared to admit the existence of the ghost, but was herself determined to meet it, and, if possible, to receive its message. She believed that such visitants, if permitted to linger in their old haunts, did so with some definite end in view, that their restlessness was not punitive, but intended to serve some useful purpose. Since she left Clovelly, Adelaide had devoted much time to the consideration of the question. While in London, during part of October, she had read such literature as the subject offered. She had been discouraged to find that the proportion of well-authenticated stories of return at any long period after death was very small, that evidence was not in favour of the appearance of any person at more than a few minutes' interval after his decease, and that the best accredited cases largely related, not to continuous hauntings, but to impressions of the moment of death, or within but a very short period before or after.

Nevertheless, Adelaide clung to her faith in the ghost. Tradition invariably required that such a visitant should be addressed, and so well entitled to demand from Bertie Strother the secret of his death, as she herself; she, whose whole happiness, whose life even, was bound up with that of the brother who had been so cruelly and wrongfully accused.

Its appearance, according to the villagers, was somewhat capricious, but once in the year, on the anniversary of his death—the evening of All Souls' day—the ghost, they said, had never failed to walk slowly from a spot near the lodge-gate, and to disappear behind the wych-elm.

The day had come, and Adelaide was determined that it should not pass without every effort on her part to fathom its secret.

As soon as it became dusk, she wrapped herself in a fur cloak, and prepared for an hour's pacing of the lime-tree avenue. The trees grew thickly, and though their branches were almost bare, she was conscious of an added darkness and gloom as she passed beneath their shade. No human being, she assured herself, would interrupt her watch—the kitchen entrance was by another road—they had had as yet few visitors, and her father was safe shut up in the library with his books. She could see the gleam of his lamps as she turned for a moment towards the house. If anything were to happen it would be possible to arouse his attention, provided she were at the upper end of the avenue. But nothing would happen that need be anything but occasion for satisfaction, and, anyway, no human aid could serve her! For that—she was herself tall and strong, five foot eight, and broad in proportion; her out-door life, riding, swimming, hunting, had fitted her to be the match of any ordinary assailant.

She had hesitated whether or not to bring her faithful companion, Scamp, and had decided to be alone, but at the last moment he had entreated to be allowed to accompany her, with an earnestness that—perhaps from some slightly superstitious feeling—she dared not gainsay. As

she passed along the avenue with silent but rapid steps, Scamp followed her closely, though only a sunk fence, which he could easily jump, separated the avenue, on one side, from the park, where countless rabbits were frisking in and out of the yellowing bracken. Now and then he paused for a moment, and “pointed” silently, his ears cocked, his tail wagging vigorously, but it was only for a moment, temptation could not master him, Scamp had a duty to do, and he did it— like a dog.

A little further on, and the darkness seemed to increase; the branches closed overhead, the lights from the house were no longer visible, those of the lodge not yet in sight. There was a slight rustle among the fern, the white tails of the rabbits disappeared in an instant, there was absolute stillness, not a sound, not a motion.

Scamp paused, raised his head and listened, then without a sound came closer to his mistress while every hair on his spine became erect and every muscle seemed to stiffen. Adelaide checked his threatened growl, and stood gazing in the direction which the dog seemed to indicate. Her heart seemed for one moment to stop, and then to beat wildly as a man’s form came in sight, treading cautiously among the bracken. He moved slowly, examining the ground as he walked, apparently searching for something. Away from the shadow of the trees it was still light enough to distinguish his movements. He was tall and slight, and walked with the loose easy gait of a man accustomed to tread the heather and fern. He reached the ha-ha almost opposite to the spot where Adelaide was standing, but without showing any consciousness of her presence. There he paused, stooped, passed his hands along the stone coping as though still seeking for something, dropped silently into the ditch and walked a few paces, passing his hands along the ledge on either side of him. Adelaide watched his every movement, scarcely daring to draw breath; the dog continued silent, but shook with suppressed excitement. Another movement, and again the man had stopped, and seemed to feel among the grasses with his feet, then, with both hands on the nearer side of the sunk fence, he sprang lightly to the top and—disappeared.

Adelaide’s first sensation was one of keen disappointment. She had had her chance, and lost it. She never for a moment doubted that she had seen the ghost—but was its disappearance final? Scamp was still in extreme excitement and distress. Where were they? How far had they advanced in the avenue? Could this be the haunted spot?

A few steps brought her to the exact point at which the man had gained the avenue, the exact spot at which she had lost sight of him— the wych-elm!

How foolish, how cowardly, she had been! Should she ever cease to lament this, the lost opportunity of her life! The strain had been intense—a sharp physical pain seized upon her, she uttered a slight cry.

It was too much for the endurance and obedience even of a dog. With a furious growl Scamp sprang forward and dashed behind the tree. A string of curses and imprecations followed, and a yelp of pain showed that the poor little dog had received an angry kick. He came back limping, and barking with renewed fury.

For the moment Adelaide could think of nothing but the dog. She stooped and felt his limbs— no bones were broken. Even in this supreme moment she could not forget her gallant little defender—Claude’s one gift to her. She had felt the nearer to him, felt the better right to occupy his home, for this link between them. The dog had belonged to his dead brother, and had been his own companion ever since he left home.

Reassured as to the creature’s safety, Adelaide stood up and found herself confronted by the form she had been watching. “Human surely!” she realized, with mingled relief and disappointment. Surely horror and hatred such as that face expressed could never continue to exist beyond

the silence and quietude of death. The expression was but momentary, but it seemed to Adelaide strangely disproportionate with so small a cause as the attack of a little terrier.

In an instant everything seemed changed, the excitement of the moment was over, and she found herself saying "Good-evening," with what presence of mind she could collect, to her father's head-keeper. The man lived at some distance, and except when riding over the moor she had never seen him. He stood now, twisting his hat nervously, casting terrified glances at the dog, and obviously much disconcerted.

He was a handsome fellow—tall, lithe, dark as a gipsy, not without reason, it was said in the village. He lived alone in a little white cottage on the side of the moor, and was disliked by the villagers as a "foreigner." He was not one of themselves, but had been brought by Bertie Strother from a moor in Scotland, where it seemed he had acquired some reputation for his skill in the management of ground game.

"Good-evening, Maitland!" said Adelaide, not less disconcerted perhaps than he, but more careful to conceal her confusion. "What are you expecting to find?"

The question seemed to add to his distress. "To find, miss?" he gasped helplessly.

"Yes; are you looking for snares or setting man-traps?" she asked with an effort at lightness.

He attempted to mutter something, but with a renewed howl of rage, Scamp again flew at his enemy, entirely refusing to quit his hold in spite of Adelaide's commands. She feared for the safety of the dog rather than of the man, remembering Maitland's startled anger, but the keeper stood passive while Scamp held him by the leg of his trouser, both man and dog alike silently infuriated. After a minute, Adelaide removed the dog by main force, and held him, still growling, while Maitland hastily effected his escape.

Then she turned slowly back toward the house. The stable clock was striking seven; she seemed out of tune with her errand, indeed, she reluctantly admitted to herself there seemed a certain humiliating absurdity about the evening's expedition. She had felt so certain of success, and the climax had been a quarrel between a little terrier dog and a timid game-keeper! She felt as she entered the front door, and paused before the cheerful wood fire in the hall, as one does in the morning's sunlight after the alarms of a half-waking dream. Nothing that had happened seemed real, even the behaviour of the dog seemed to have in it something abnormal, something unexplained. Never before had she seen the gentle little creature in a state of such extreme fury, even now he was quivering and growling inwardly at the remembrance. She too had been deceived, for her the real and the fanciful had been incomprehensibly mingled. Even the gamekeeper, when fully revealed as such, seemed to have about him something weird and uncanny, to be somehow under the spell of the moment, to feel with her that the meeting was no ordinary chance encounter with his master's daughter.

Only one reality, it seemed to Adelaide, remained; while these creatures of flesh and blood had in them something doubtful, weird, mysterious, she was more than ever certain of the reality of the ghost. What had happened was not a failure but an interruption, not a disappointment but a *contre-temps*, of momentary significance only. To-morrow she would resume her quest. The looked-for anniversary was past, but all authorities agreed that the rehearsing ghost was not necessarily tied to date—he belonged to a world where time was no factor in the part he had to play. She would have faith, and victory would yet be hers.

### III

For many successive evenings Adelaide resumed her watch in the dreary November dusk. Mr. Crediton was at a loss to comprehend this new whim on the part of a daughter usually so reasonable. He would come in after a long day in the saddle or the stubble-field, and take his seat in a cosy corner of the great open fire-place in the hall, and Adelaide, sitting opposite at her wicker tea-table, would dispense the good things which the weary sportsman loved, the anchovy sandwiches, and dainty little pasties, and cup after cup of the strong brown tea which the Australian, alone among modern mankind, can swallow with entire impunity.

On one evening, towards the end of the month, they were sitting thus beside a roaring fire of oak logs and fir-cones, while the wind howled and wailed among the trees in the avenue, and the rain dashed in noisy gusts against the great hall window. Mr. Crediton had but lately come in, and with a hardihood which, except in a colonist, would have been consummate folly, was allowing his damp garments to steam in the cheerful blaze. Adelaide, looking all the fresher by contrast with his weariness, was ministering to his needs, but uneasily glancing the while at the great clock, which was almost on the stroke of five.

Presently she rose, and took from an oak chest a thick cloak and hood in which she carefully enveloped herself. As she came once more into the circle of warm light, her father started on seeing her thus prepared to brave the elements.

“Adela, what are you thinking of?” he cried. “Don’t you know it is raining cats and dogs and blowing fit to bring the house down? If it is some errand to the village, can’t you send one of the grooms? Or if it is your ponies you are worrying over, I assure you they have been well rubbed down since you brought them in. I was in the stable just now and saw them myself.”

“No, papa dear, it is nothing but that I want little fresh air before dinner. I’ll just run as far as the lodge and back. I generally do, you know, about this time.”

Her father made no effort to oppose her. He looked upon this freak as another evidence of that superfluous energy which he supposed was her Australian birthright. “Rather you than I,” he muttered, as he stretched out a pair of smoking gaiters, and Skirrow the butler shivered visibly as he held open the front door, which, despite his best intentions, was violently blown out of his grasp and shut-to with a bang, leaving Adela and Scamp on the outside. The poor little dog was quite of the same opinion as others of his mistress’s friends, and resented the evening walks as unnecessary self-mortification.

His two inches of tail strained to efface itself between his legs, and with drooping ears and half-closed eyes he slunk along in the lee of Adelaide’s decided motion. She was rather later than usual, and the avenue was quite dark except where an opening in the trees admitted, here and there, a gleam of twilight. She was well shod, and held her skirts high, as she splashed along through pools of water, or stumbled against fallen boughs which the wind had scattered in its fury. The rain beat against her face, the wind wailed and moaned in the leafless boughs, but she stepped dauntlessly on.

Presently a new sound was heard at intervals amid the tumult, the harsh hoarse note of the passing bell. The little church stood huddled in its crowded graveyard on the other side the valley, and the sound seemed to struggle with the wind as it was blown upward across the intervening river. Its slow note paused among the cottages with their closed doors and gleaming lights, and in its irregular utterance one might fancy a cumulative human pain, its weary persistence conquering the inarticulate sobbing of nature—the fitful wail of rain and wind.

Adelaide paused to listen. Uncertain of the sound, she waited a minute for its next utterance. Yes, there was no mistake; some soul newly released was on the wing through storm and darkness. Who could it be? The little population was already known to her; cases of sickness and want were not slow in declaring themselves at the rich man's gate. She waited under the shadow of a great tree, and counted. Slowly, slowly, came the strokes. The dog crept closer to her side and whined. He was impatient of delay—why could they not hasten on and return to light and warmth?

Twenty-five—twenty-six—twenty-seven—and the tolling stopped. Adelaide waited; the wind dropped suddenly—the silence was intense, a twig fell with a rattling flutter to her feet. Who that had been ill was twenty-seven years of age? she wondered almost idly. She seemed incapable of movement; the question—to which she could give no reply—seemed to occupy her wholly. She looked across the drive towards the park, where, in the open ground, she saw, or fancied, the whisk of white furry tails as on that first night when she had watched the rabbits playing in the twilight.

How the terror of that night had possessed her! Even now, though its alarm had ended in so common-place a way, she shuddered as she recognized the spot on which she now stood as the exact scene of her former encounter. Straight across the open ground now facing her the figure had come, furtively looking about for some object which apparently was not forthcoming. Adelaide drew her cloak together as the chill of the night air seemed to gather about her, freezing her very breath. She walked on a few steps, and then paused again, as she came within a few feet of the wych-elm. Again that current of cold air as though something had passed her, moving swiftly on the night wind. The wych-elm stretched its bare branches towards her, and they swayed and moved as though parted by some invisible hand.

Something stirred at her feet. It was Scamp—Scamp with hair erect and eyes starting, his head stretched forward, his teeth exposed, as if about to fly at some immediate enemy, and yet motionless, silent, as if rooted to the spot.

She followed the direction of his eyes; yes, there was something stirring under the shadow of the wych-elm, something which, as she gazed, to become clearer and more definite, visible with what seemed an inherent radiance, finally standing self-revealed in the gathering darkness.

It was the figure of Duncan Maitland the gamekeeper, thus startling and alarming her for the second time. The recollection of the details of the earlier occasion returned to Adelaide's mind, and it seemed to her that, as before, the dog must be the first to break the silence. For herself she could only look into the man's face. His gaze fascinated her. His great dark eyes, shadowed by long lashes, riveted hers with a sensation of horror. The man did not stir, but his whole aspect seemed charged with a pleading pain—half remorse, half fear—an agony of torture.

How long Adelaide looked she never knew. She had no power to move, she seemed frozen with a chill that was both bodily and mental. She heard the sound of approaching footsteps, and the dog drew himself together and wagged his tail. She had no power to act or think, but only waited. Still those tortured eyes met hers; slowly the arms were raised, the hands outstretched towards her. Then the figure turned, pointed towards the sunk fence behind the tree, and disappeared.

Then, once more, Adelaide felt the rushing current of cold air in rapid movement; involuntarily she stepped back, as a riderless horse, with starting nostrils and ears erect, dashed past her up the avenue.

She turned to gaze after it, and the footsteps which had been slowly approaching paused behind her. Scamp uttered a joyous bark, and Adelaide looked round to find the old woman from the lodge, known to the villagers as "Gammer," dropping rapid curtseys in the middle of the path.

"Did I start thee, miss? thee looks fair scared," she asked, suspending her bobs and scanning Adelaide's startled countenance.

"All right, Gammer," said Adelaide with an attempt at cheerfulness. "How are you this evening?"

"I'm nobbut poorly—nobbut poorly. In the midst of life we are in death, and he that laffeth hath sorrow at the heart, Miss Adelaide. It's a fearsome thing to be tåaken i' t' prime o' life—nobbut seven-and-twenty and never åailin'. It's but a poor sort o' pilgrimage, is yon."

"What is it? Who is dead?" Adelaide's voice sounded harsh and loud, as it seemed to her, in the silence of the gloom.

"It's t' yoong Maitland. Gipsy Duncan, the folks call him. Here to-day and gone tomorrow. All flesh is as grass, and niver so much as a turn o' rheumatiz. Just a fever—nowt o' no account; an' they left word at t' lodge to let squire know, and perhaps thee'd sääave me t' extry bit o' röad, Miss Adelaide, and tell him theesen. I mun goa back to Bob, poor natural, he's tooken wi' some o' his fancies—cooms back fair skeered, and says t' owd squire's black mare were flying oop t' avenue. T' black 'un Sir Bertram were ridin' t' neet he were killed. And now he dussn't go out for t' sake o' t' ghost, and he's skeered to be by hissen;" and with another shower of curtseys the old lady turned about breathless, and retreated towards the lodge.

Adelaide made no effort to reply. A strange feeling took possession of her—a sense of exaltation, achievement, anticipation. She forgot her fears, forgot that in seeking to solve one mystery she had come face to face with another, full of strange conflicting elements. She had had faith, not only in the existence, but in the accessibility of another world, and now it was open to her. That her knowledge was in some sense shared by Bob, the village idiot, and by him alone, struck her in no sense as ironical—in nowise lessened her confidence in the reality of her experience. In the new continent to which she belonged there was still something left of infancy to its people, and, as among earlier nations, the simplicity which removed a being from human fellowship did not, to their thinking, exclude him from the divine, or at least the superhuman. Bob was "God's fool."

When Adelaide reached the house she found that her news had preceded her. A groom, returning from the village, had heard of Maitland's sudden death. He had fallen ill in his lonely cottage on the moor-side, and the discomforts of his solitary condition had aggravated the disease. When he was at last discovered by a shepherd, who called at the cottage for shelter from the storm, Maitland was delirious, and the old woman who had been sent to nurse him, and the doctor whom she summoned, could do little for his relief. There was no more to be done now—to-morrow Mr. Crediton would make arrangements for the funeral, and for conveying the news to any friends whose address might be known.

Adelaide heard all, and then hastened to her room to remove her dripping garments. The Vicar of Strother was to dine with her father, and she felt relieved that but little would be required of her. The two men had many common literary interests, and would spend the evening in the library, so that she would be free to pursue her own thoughts. To speak of what had happened would be at present impossible—the thing was too mysterious, too sacred for discussion. Her task at present was—to wait.

#### IV

Adelaide, always practical, lost no time in conceiving a plan of action. When, the next morning, Mr. Crediton announced his intention of visiting Maitland's cottage, and of calling for Mr. Margerison the village lawyer on the way, she begged that the dog-cart might be sent for him and that she herself might accompany her father.

The hills were wrapped in their autumn mantle of white mist, and the moor was sodden with continuous rain. The wind had changed to the south-west, and promised further downfall. The birds flew low, and the dark moorland sheep, scarcely distinguishable from the grey, sand-stone rocks, cowered under the shelter of the gorse and bracken, starting to their feet with a startled bleat as Scamp suddenly faced them in the fog.

After about two miles of moorland road Adelaide and her father turned aside into a dark ghyll, and followed a sheep-track to the further end, where the solitary cottage glimmered whitely. A few pine-trees, battered and distorted by north and north-east wind, lent it such shelter as its position allowed. Within, the lower room bore signs of rough comfort. A golden collie with wise, fox-like face, hailed in the chances of a fight with Scamp, his first distraction from grief and idleness.

An old woman, her head tied up in a red cotton handkerchief, was cowering over the fire stirring "rice-milk," a compound precious in the sight of the Yorkshire Gammer. She hailed the coming of her visitors with that ghastly self-importance which belongs to her class when invested with the guardianship of a "body." She discussed her charge with the admiration of proprietorship, and was sorely disappointed that Adelaide declined her invitation to "step aloft."

In a few minutes the lawyer arrived, and proceeded to seal up the gamekeeper's few articles of portable property, and to examine such papers as were to be found. Nothing was discovered to reveal the whereabouts of his friends, and old Sabina knew nothing of his belongings, though she had now and then spent a day or two in giving the cottage "a thorough clean."

Maitland had been delirious when she arrived; "he wer' never ower gi'en to talk. How he fared, year in, year out, wi nobbut a dog to talk to, fair caps me," she averred. "Three year next back-end it wer' sin Sir Bertram browt him fro' Scotland, an' he'd never taken bit nor sup i' t' village sin' here he coom. Nöan knew owt o' him nor his folk—not even her as he called on when he wer' light-headed."

At this point the lawyer took out his notebook and proceeded to question her, in terms which showed that the West-Riding dialect was his own vernacular, although he addressed his clients in the English he had acquired in his school-days at Giggleswick.

Thus encouraged Sabina continued. "He wer' main daft afore I fettled him oop, an' the doctor he gie'd him a soop o' brandy. He tossed an' turned an' cried on Jessie! Jessie! 'Is thee never coomm', Jessie?' says he. 'Sitha, Jess,' he says, 'I'se gotten t' brass; what's to stop wer gettin' wed?' he says. Then he falls asleep, and doesn't wakken oop not till t' dark were a-coomin'. A bit after five it were, and he starts oop i' bed, an' he says for all the world as if he were talkin' to a body i' room, 'Thee'rt a d—d liar,' he says, 'but that's t' last on 'em thee'll tell.' Then after a bit, 'Where's t' beuk? I want yon pocket-beuk. There's brass i' you'—he didn't saay brass tho', mooney he called it,—'but it ain't t' brass I want, Jess, it's your bit o' handwriting. I've leuked an' leuked, but it's no manner o' use. Happen Miss Adelaide's gotten it—I seen her a-leukin' round, an' she seemed fair skeered o' t' seeät o' me'"

Mr. Crediton glanced interrogatively at his daughter, who motioned an entreaty for silence, and Sabina continued.

“Then he heaved hissen oop i’ bed and I thowt he wer’ mad, an’ I hollered out for Shepherd Ezekiel, as wer’ sittin’ i’ you chair, and he cooms, an’ he says, ‘Whatten is it, Duncan?’ ‘Leuk you,’ says Duncan. ‘Sitha! there goes t’ mare! I’ve done for him,’ hesays—‘he’s dead.’ An’ dead he were, an’ Ezekiel he went sträat down an’ towld t’ ringer an’ gotten t’ passin’ bell agate i’ twenty minutes. Nubbut twenty minutes it wer’.”

She dwelt on the point with pride.

“Yo’ see t’ church is i’ this side t’ valley, an’ I says to Ezekiel, ‘Mak’ häaste,’ I says, ‘thee’ll do it afore t’ clock strikes, an’ I’ll hear t’ bell afore I’ve finished what I gotten i’ hand,’ an’ shio struck out afore the häaf-hour, sho did. It were nobbut twenty minutes.”

“Have you any more to tell us?” asked Adelaide gently.

“Nowt else,” the old woman answered in evident satisfaction; “an if thee can mak’ owt o’ thaten thee’rt ower canny for mäa. Thee can step aloft if thee’s gotten a mind to it. It’s a rare fine corpse, it is so. Choose how.”

“Then I think I’ll go on home, papa, and leave you and Mr. Margerison to follow when you have finished.”

“Won’t you wait, dear? The mist is very thick.”

“You don’t suppose I’m going to lose my way, do you?” she answered, smiling. “Scamp and I shall like the walk. Good-bye. Goodbye, Sabina, I won’t forget your message to your daughter as I go through the village.”

## V

Adelaide Crediton had never been her father’s companion in the degree to which many girls attain what is perhaps a daughter’s greatest privilege. Each was a type of a civilization which to the other was somewhat foreign and uncongenial. That she had become what she was, to a great extent under her father’s training, did not affect the result so far as their relations were concerned.

In the present instance Adelaide felt herself absolutely alone. She could not go to her father and tell him, in so many words, that she hoped to arrive at the bottom of a mystery—which had already been probed in vain—with the assistance of the ghost of a man who had been dead three years. Nor to Mr. Crediton would the absurdity be diminished by the Confession of a change in her tactics. She was well aware that, to many students of the so-called “supernatural,” there was a wide distinction between an event which involved the interference of a being from another world, with all the problems of continuous existence and individuality which such an appearance would involve, and a visual hallucination which thought-transference might possibly explain. But to Mr. Crediton such distinction would be without any point of difference. Dead men don’t get up and walk about, he would say, however recent their departure may be, or however useful their errand, and there is no more to be said about it. If Adelaide thought differently—well, the moral of it was, she must have a chaperon, take to art-needlework, and attend a daily service.

She knew this line of argument by heart, as one brought into play on a variety of occasions—when she wanted to walk in Regent Street alone, to go outside an omnibus, or to travel third-class—and so she kept her own counsel, and trusted that something might come of the announcement of Duncan’s death, which Mr. Margerison had inserted in various Scotch and north-country papers.

The lawyer did not fail to question her as to the allusion to herself in Duncan’s dying words, and she explained briefly, and with her characteristic air of remoteness from anything in which

she did not choose to show an interest, that she had met the gamekeeper in the avenue some weeks ago at dusk, and that he had then given her the impression that he was looking for something—the signs of the presence of poachers perhaps, she could not tell. His appearance had been sudden and had certainly startled her, her dog had been angry and she had got him away with some difficulty. She often walked in the avenue at dusk.

“Do you know,” asked Mr. Margerison, “that the village people begin to think you are no canny? It is more than they dare do, any of them.”

“I dare say,” said Adelaide with some contempt.

“But then they believe the avenue is haunted,” continued the lawyer. “And the story is improving now! Silly Bob, as they call him, saw the horse that carried the squire the night he was killed, rush up the avenue the very minute that Maitland died.”

“About twenty or twenty-five minutes later, wasn’t it?”

“Very likely—or a couple of hours perhaps; it is a pity to spoil a good story. But how do you know?”

“I met Gammer coming up to the house with the news just after the passing bell had ceased, and she mentioned Bob’s alarm as having just occurred. What did become of Sir Bertram’s horse? Do you know?”

“Yes, poor brute. She came in the afternoon of his death, as you know, riderless, and evidently terrified and upset. They couldn’t quiet her, and she contrived to hurt herself in the night, and had to be shot next morning. Handsome mare she was—black, with white points.”

“And why,” inquired Mr. Crediton ironically, “should her ghost return at this particular juncture?”

“That is more than I can say. I know of no connection between Sir Bertram’s death and Duncan Maitland’s. Stay though, what was that about a pocket-book? Duncan said he was looking for a pocket-book. And the disappearance of the pocket-book was the very point which, to some people’s thinking, incriminated the younger brother. I wonder if Maitland could have known anything beyond what was public property?”

This was precisely the question with which Adelaide was ceaselessly occupied. The events of the evening of Maitland’s death seemed to her the more mysterious, the more she thought about them. It seemed as if the apparition she had seen were something very different from that which she had expected to see. She had been on the watch for a denizen of another world—vaguely, meaninglessly, returning to the scenes of his earthly life. Instead, she had been confronted with one so lately removed from life that—so little do we know of life and death—it would have been difficult to say of him with absolute certainty—“he is gone.”

Among the many Scotch folks who had surrounded her childhood, she had become familiar with the idea of doubles, wraiths, and fetches, but as a result of her recent reading on the subject, which was now her chief interest in life, she had conceived a different theory.

Suppose, she said to herself, that Maitland did know something, perhaps had been a spectator of Bertie Strother’s death, what more likely than such a scene to recur to him in his last moments? He had spoken of the pocketbook; possibly he had pictured to himself the horse, perhaps even in fancy had re-visited the scene of the occurrence. The reference to an earlier visit seemed to point to this. His thoughts, in so supreme a moment, were, especially if he had some message to deliver, some confession to make, likely to be intense, vivid to the utmost. She had heard of thought-transference. For whom was the picture in the mind of the dying man so likely to assume the proportions of reality as for her, who, under specially favourable circumstances, was with her bodily eyes gazing at its actual background? She knew from her reading how

imperfect, how capricious such revelations, as recorded, appeared to be. The important fact was concealed from her; the accessory—the terrified horse, which probably had been so startling a feature to any actual spectator—was revealed, not only to herself, but to Bob.

She did not find it necessary to suppose that her communication from Maitland—if such it were—implied any after-death activity on his part. In spite of our phrase “quick as thought,” we know little of the pace at which thought travels, nor of the delays to which it may be subject. Perhaps Maitland’s message was already in her consciousness, and only waited for the stimulus of suitable surroundings to reveal itself. She had heard of facts forgotten, or unconsciously known, being brought to the surface under the concentration of crystal-gazing, or the automatism of “planchette.” Perhaps something of the kind had occurred in the present instance. Possibly—as his more familiar self, his ordinary consciousness, lay delirious in the lonely cottage on the moor, while the old woman noted its wandering utterance—some sub-conscious self may indeed have visited a scene which apparently had for him some special significance, and have become externalized for Adelaide, just as his mental picture of the mare was externalized.

It was all very perplexing, but Adelaide would not allow herself to dwell on any but the practical side. What was to be her next step? She had so far changed her views as to cease to expect anything from the conventional avenue ghost, and Duncan, who, it seemed likely, might have revealed much, was gone. She still clung to one hope—Jessie. Who or where Jessie might be, no one seemed to know, but that she was concerned in the scene present to Maitland’s dying eyes, Adelaide could not doubt. The pocket-book for which he had been seeking on the night of their first meeting contained handwriting of Jessie’s—handwriting which, even to his last moments, he was anxious to recover. It was possible that Claude might know something of this girl. Mr. Crediton had of course written to tell him of the gamekeeper’s death, and to consult him as to his successor, and possibly something might be discovered as to Maitland’s history and antecedents. No answer had as yet arrived, and Mr. Margerison conjectured that he was travelling in Egypt, as his last letter had mentioned some such intention.

Duncan was buried in the little graveyard across the river, and none was there to mourn his loss, though the funeral was largely attended—“a buryin” being one of the many forms of recreation whereby the Yorkshire moorlander subtracts from the working hours of the year—at his employer’s expense, naturally.

A day or two later, as Adelaide was walking to the village, she passed in the avenue a girl of the class known as a “young person.” She was neatly dressed in black—very becoming to her fair hair and clear complexion—and a passing curiosity made Adelaide observe her somewhat closely. She did not belong to the neighbourhood, of that Adelaide felt sure, her beauty was of so different a type, so much more delicate than that of the broad-shouldered lassies of Strothdale, with their elaborately-dressed hair, concealed under the shawl which constituted their out-door dress. Possibly a lady’s-maid bringing a note from some house near, Adelaide conjectured, and passed on.

“Scamp! Scamp!” called his mistress, when she reached the lodge, and found herself alone. Repeated calling produced no effect, an unaccountable fact in connection with so obedient a dog. Nothing less than a rabbit could prompt such persistent misconduct, and with some irritation Adelaide retraced her steps. Half-way up the drive she was surprised to see Scamp the unsociable, Scamp the eclectic, in the arms of the young person, licking her face and expressing extreme delight.

At sight of Adelaide she released the dog, and said, apologetically, “Scamp and I are old friends, miss.”

“Indeed,” said Adelaide, “how is that?” Something in the girl’s tone and manner interested her—she belonged to a type with which Adelaide was unfamiliar. She spoke with a slight Scotch accent, but with a delicacy and precision which among lowland Scots is the only alternative to the coarsest and roughest dialect on earth.

“Seven years I’ve known him, miss. Mr. Strother—Sir Bertram, that is—brought him to my father’s place in Scotland, and afterwards, when I was maid to Lady Asquith, and we came to stay here when old Mrs. Strother was at the Grange, Scamp and I were always companions.”

Any glimpse into the past—Claude’s past—was interesting to Adelaide, but she little expected that her next question—put solely to encourage conversation—would prove so momentous as it did.

“I have heard of Lady Asquith—Sir Claude has told me of her—but we have never met. Perhaps I may have heard of you too. What is your name?”

“Jessie Miller.”

Adelaide started; but after all Jessie is a sufficiently common name, and she restrained her eagerness.

“Jessie,” she repeated, “I have heard the name Jessie lately. A man—a Scot like yourself—died here the other day talking of ‘Jessie.’ ”

“Oh, Duncan, Duncan!” moaned the girl in a sudden paroxysm of grief and despair, throwing herself against the trunk of a tree—the wych-elm. Adelaide, with her free-and-easy colonial training, was quite the last to be surprised at the sight of feeling in a “young person”; but even she was startled at the accession of womanhood, of humanity, in the orthodox lady’s-maid. This was a woman, a sister, who wept before her, who loved as she. Adelaide loved Claude, and, like her, was alone—with how far more poignant a loneliness!

“Yes, it was Duncan,” she said gently, laying her hand on the girl’s shoulder. She was a slight, fragile creature, and her frame shook with the violence of her tears. “It was Duncan. Shall I tell you about him? You shall hear all I know; but come with me to the house, it is cold here. We will go to my morning-room. No one shall disturb us.”

“Oh, no, no!” moaned the girl. “I could not set foot in that house. How I wish I had flever seen it!”

“You shall do as you like. Take my arm, and we will walk up and down; it is too cold to stand.” And as they passed slowly under the shadow of the lime-trees Adelaide told all the sad story, at first thinking only of the other’s sorrow, but soon realizing with a thrill, all that this interview might mean to herself.

When the first shock and struggle of grief was over, Jessie’s strength returned, she dried her eyes, and showed by intelligent questioning, and absence of self-consciousness, the real gratitude which she felt for Adelaide’s kindness.

It was Adelaide’s way to win the confidence of all about her. She was so practical, so ready with help and counsel, so sympathetic without curiosity, that friends and dependents alike, habitually came to her in sorrow or difficulty. She felt no surprise therefore that this girl— of whom she knew nothing only a quarter of an hour ago—should say to her—

“It’s an awful trouble, miss. I hardly know what to do for the best. It isn’t altogether the losing Duncan—I lost him in one way three ago—perhaps that’s all best as it is, poor lad; but it’s what I ought to do next that’s the trouble, and that I’m sure I don’t know.”

“Perhaps you can tell me about it?” suggested Adelaide gently. “I would try to help you.”

“Well, miss, I’ve come here to-day on purpose to tell some one about it, and yet when I was down in the churchyard just now, and realized for the first time that he was gone—that I should

never see him again—I felt that I could not do it. It seems so terrible to say ill of the poor lad when he is gone, and yet when he was here, I never had a peaceful hour, nor, I believe, had he, for the sin that was unconfessed. And when I have heard Lady Asquith and Mrs. Trevelyan hinting things about Sir Claude, poor gentleman, I have hardly known how to bear my life.”

Adelaide was very pale, and she stopped in her walk for a moment as she said hoarsely, “Is it about Sir Bertram’s murder?”

“Murder! “ the girl shrieked. “Murder! Ah, you’ve said it! Murder it was, and I’ve got to tell about it; but how can I? how can I?”

Adelaide resumed her walk, still supporting Jessie’s arm in hers.

“Listen, Jessie,” she said. “I will tell you a secret before you tell me yours. Perhaps it will help you,” and in few words, but omitting nothing of importance, she told the history of the last few months—her love for Claude, her anxiety to see him righted, her encounter with Duncan on All Souls’ night, her vision on the night of his death.

## VI

Jessie listened with the utmost attention, and with no doubt as to the reality of Adelaide’s story. She was, in point of culture, above the scepticism and materialism of ignorance, below that of science. She doubted neither the experience nor the interpretation. It was for her a message from Duncan, an indication of his wishes and intentions, which she received, not with the mere obedience she would have shown to him living, but with the added reverence which death and regret inspired.

They paced the avenue slowly, arm-in-arm, forgetful in the wide union of sympathy in common sorrow, aspiration, duty, of the narrow differences of station, habit, and conventionality; Adelaide leading and inspiring by virtue of her stronger nature and wider experience alone.

“My father,” Jessie began, “is now Lady Asquith’s butler, but seven years ago he used to keep an inn in Scotland that was a great favourite with the gentlemen; and Sir Bertram—Mr. Strother he was then—used to be there as often as any of them. He was a careless gentleman and very free, and my lady and he had been lovers in old days, and were then, some folks said. I dare say it was only because he had nothing to do, and I was a silly girl and knew no better—I was only eighteen—but I used to meet him and let him talk to me, and I believed that he was courting me for his wife. I never thought of being ashamed or making any mystery about it, and the neighbours got talking, and my father sent me away into service with Lady Asquith.

“After I had been at Asquith Park about three years, Sir Bertram came into the neighbourhood, and wanted to begin again where we had left off. But I hadn’t been a lady’s-maid three years for nothing. I understood gentlemen and their ways better now, and till he asked me to marry him and go back with him to New Zealand, where he had been all this time, I wouldn’t have anything to say to him.

“Then it was arranged that I was to marry him and go out to him in the spring, and in the meanwhile stay on at Asquith Park. However, a few weeks later he came in for the title, and of course that changed everything.

“He wanted me to believe that our wedding was only put off, but when I came here in the summer with my lady (there was a large house-party) I found he had quite different ideas, and I refused to have anything more to do with him. Before I left here I was promised to Duncan. You

don't know what a fine, noble-looking young man he was, miss, before all the trouble came! We had been play-fellows as children in the village where I was born.

"I never told him about Sir Bertram, as I thought he would only be very angry, and it would do no good. He very likely would not have believed that the master did really mean to marry me, and would have done if he had not come into the title and estates just when he did, and there was no one here likely to know anything.

"We came back into the neighbourhood in October, my lady and me, and we were staying at Captain Trevelyan's, just five miles off. There was a shooting-party one day, the last day in October—"

Jessie became breathless—flushed, and put her hand to her side. Adelaide led her to the seat beneath the wych-elm, and passed her arm round the girl's waist.

"Lean again at me, Jessie," she said, "and try to go on; it is difficult, I know, but you will soon have finished. You are very brave, try to tell me the rest."

Jessie took breath and continued in tones so faint and hurried that Adelaide had to strain her attention to the utmost—every word was precious to her.

"There was a shooting-party, and Sir Bertram was there, and Duncan with him, and my lady and Mrs. Trevelyan and some other ladies joined the gentlemen at lunch. My lady sent me here for some books—there was fresh talk about her and Sir Bertram by this time—it was about five o'clock when I got here, and I stayed to tea with the housekeeper.

"The butler and the young men had got back from helping with the lunch. I never would have anything to say to any of them, and the butler he bore me a bit of a grudge.

" 'Well, Miss Miller,' he says, with a nasty kind of laugh, 'you've been honoured to-day—they was talking of you at lunch. Mrs. Trevelyan says to Sir Bertram, 'Now, if you'll come to lunch with us at home you can have a peep—only a peep, mind you—of Lady Asquith's pretty maid, and we all know that's an inducement.'"

" ' "Thanks," says he, "but I've given up bachelor ways. Not even Lady Asquith's pretty maid interests me now, except for her proximity to Lady Asquith; besides, I'm out of the running—we are all steadying down—and I'm going to marry her to my keeper there, and say 'Bless you, my children,' and give them a tea-kettle or whatever is proper; I was telling Claude all about it this morning.' "

"Well, miss, you may believe I didn't stay to hear any more of that. I was very angry, and a little frightened too. I expected almost to hear that Duncan had assaulted him, for I knew he would be furious—he had a very high temper, and wasn't particular when he was angry; some said his father was a gipsy. I left directly, I was too much upset to say good-bye, and I came down the avenue, thinking if I went out the back way some of them might follow me to persuade me back. The road curves sharp round here as you see, and I did not hear voices till I was close upon the speakers. They did not see me, it was nearly dark, and I stepped back into the bushes, not liking to pass.

"Sir Bertram was one of the speakers, as I could see; he was on his black mare—and being high up was less in the shadow of the trees, and I could see his face, with a mocking smile upon it that I knew well. He was stooping towards a man on the near side, and was slowly unclasping a pocket-book, and holding it so as to catch all the light there was.

" 'While I have the honour to be your employer,' he was saying, 'I'll thank you to address me with more respect—and accuracy; for when you say I am a damned liar you really exaggerate, I assure you. I will make you a present of all these letters to prove it—you will know her writing?—and you'll find besides a trifle to begin housekeeping on.' Oh, miss, it was cruel! I

heard every word distinct—the night was as still as death; I saw Duncan raise his arm and pitch something over there—beyond the fence—among the ferns. Then there was a fearful crash and fall, and Black Joan, the mare, flew up the avenue like a wild thing, and her master lay on the ground—dead.”

For some minutes Jessie was unable to continue, and the two women rose and paced the avenue once more together; Scamp, who had been off on business of his own, rejoining them with great effusion, but somewhat dejected by Adelaide’s repressive gestures.

“I hurried Duncan away instantly. He wanted to stop and find the pocket-book because of my letters to Sir Bertram being in it, but I would not let him, and it was well we didn’t stop, for as we were crossing the park—we crossed the sunk fence for fear of meeting any one at the lodge—I saw a man away to our right coming towards the avenue. Duncan thought it was only ‘silly Bob,’ but there is never any saying how wise those idiots are going to be.

“I left Lady Asquith as soon as I could, for I could not bear to hear the talk about Sir Bertram and Sir Claude, and I took a situation at a milliner’s in Bradford; but I couldn’t make up my mind to marry Duncan. I could forgive him for what he had done—he had had plenty to make him angry, and he never meant to kill Sir Bertram—but coward that I was, I dared not risk the consequences. I always feared the finding of that pocket-book; I felt my letters would be a clue, and might get Duncan into trouble. I have seen him now and again, and he has told me how, night after night, he has come back to this spot hoping to find what he threw away in his anger. He has searched every inch of ground; sometimes I think that people have seen him creeping about near here, and that that is how the story of the ghost got about; but he has never found the book. I used to tell him I would marry him when he did, for I have sometimes wondered if the butler had got it, and was perhaps waiting to do us an ill turn. That is my story, Miss Crediton; I know you are my friend, you will know what is right to do. I must catch my train back to Bradford to-night, to-morrow I will give up my situation, and then I can give my time to helping you to right Sir Claude, and real glad. I’d be, miss, if all this sad trouble was to end in your happiness!”

“I will go to the station with you, Jessie. But I cannot let you go without food. We will stop at the lodge and ask Gammer to make us a cup of tea, and Bob can run up to the house for some sandwiches. They will only think I want them to take to some one who is ill. What is the matter with Scamp?”

Scamp was round the other side of the wych-elm, standing on his hind-legs and barking furiously at a cat on a branch over his head. As a rule he was as respectful to cats as became their sense of his inferior position; but this was Gammer’s tortoiseshell, an aged lady whose physique and temper alike were impaired by the excessive frequency of her maternal responsibilities. At this moment she was jeering at him, her eyes starting, her spine arched, her scant tail stiffened like a bottle-brush. Her language, by good fortune, though loud was inarticulate; with a final malediction she jerked herself from the branch under her feet, to one at an incredible distance higher up. That jerk was the justification of her existence, and worth all her efforts in the cause of population. Something which had been lodged between the branch and the trunk was loosened, and fell heavily to the ground.

Scamp snatched it with an indefinite sense of triumph, and bore it off in his mouth to where the two girls stood, watching his ineffective indignation. Some retrospective intelligence made him hesitate for a moment before Jessie, but a glance at his mistress’s eager face, her quicker mind leaping to livelier anticipation, decided him; and he sat up, stiff with importance and the weight

of his discovery, while Adelaide gently took from him a large pocket-book with silver clasps bearing the initials B. S.

## VII

Jessie's statement was, as soon as possible, made in due form before a magistrate, and received corroboration from an unexpected quarter. "Silly Bob," hearing of the pocketbook, expressed, in the few words at his command, his great pleasure at its discovery. Bob had a very strong sense of the value of property, and the rights of *meum* and *tuum*, and he explained that when he was walking across the park at night, the night of the squire's death, some one had "chucked" the book at his feet, and he had, to the best of his ability, returned it in the direction whence it came, but had been frightened to follow it up, for, as he neared the avenue, he had seen the squire's mare tear past him in a fashion which hastened his own departure in an opposite direction.

The sad tragedy of the keeper's life was overlooked in the general rejoicing over Sir Claude's return. He had always been the more respected of the two brothers, though a certain freedom and open-handedness had made Sir Bertram popular in certain quarters, just as his good looks and lively manner had made him a favourite among women.

Sir Claude came back without loss of time, as the guest of Mr. Crediton, who had the place on lease, but after a short stay at the Grange he took possession for the time of Strothdale Lodge, which he rented of Captain Trevelyan, who was travelling abroad with his wife.

Early in the year, Sir Claude and Adelaide were married, and after passing their honeymoon at Clovelly, went abroad, leaving Mr. Crediton to finish his hunting before they took possession of the Grange.

Jessie Miller accompanied Lady Strother to Italy, where, under the happy influences of change of scene and surroundings, she began to look again the bonnie Scotch lassie whom Sir Claude had almost forgotten in the pale and sad woman to whom he owed so much. To one other friend also he acknowledged his obligations, and in the beautiful portrait of Adelaide which was exhibited in last year's Royal Academy Exhibition, all dog-lovers noted with admiration the wise, wistful face of the little "Jack Russell" terrier who sits at her feet under the wych-elm.