

The Door of the Unreal

By Gerald Biss

Part I

THE BRICHTON ROAD

My name is Lincoln Osgood, my age thirty, my nationality American, my means—well, such as never to cause me a moment's anxiety or the negation of any fad; my hobbies have always been travel and science, the latter more particularly in its human than in its mechanical aspects. I am not, if I may say so, in any way the "Yankee millionaire" of popular fiction or even of fact. I both write and talk the King's English, I trust; and to tell the truth, I was educated up at Christ Church, Oxford, which is my first link with these extraordinary incidents, which it has now fallen to my lot to chronicle.

It was up at Oxford ten years ago that I first met Burgess Clymping, with whom, from the first night we sat next to each other in the wonderful old hall of the House with its centuries of historical portraits, I struck up the great friendship of my life. He was a year younger than I, the owner of a nice property in Sussex and had seen but little of life in those days, whereas I had travelled a lot even then for my age. It is the accident of this long friendship and my travels in obscure and unfrequented parts that brought me into the circle of the strange doings I am about to relate—to which, by good luck, I held the key.

I am in no way the hero of the piece—if hero, in the conventional sense, there be at all—not even the protagonist, as the Greeks used to call it. I am merely the "handy man" of the play, so to speak, who chanced into the middle of this unconventional drama at its height, and helped to see it through to a conclusion as strange as anything which has ever occurred in the whole annals of this country; and I have been asked by the other actors in this bizarre play in very real life to collate the facts and document them for themselves and such others as may be interested in these things beyond the door of the unreal, though, for reasons which will become obvious, they can hardly be released for general indiscriminate publication.

To the ordinary stay-at-home person of both sexes, who does not travel, eats eggs and bacon for breakfast every day, and does not realize a yard outside "Little England," they will seem merely absurd, the imaginings of an ill-balanced mind. Yet none the less they happened actually on and within a very few miles of the Brighton Road in the second decade of this modern age of motoring.

I am no expert at telling an extraordinary story and making it convincing; but I have an instinctive feeling that, in trying to do so, one has a better chance of carrying conviction by telling it as far as possible in the first person without too much underlining of the capital "I's" or seeking the limelight for oneself, filling up the inevitable gaps and interstices with actual documents and statements by such other immediate actors in the drama as can tell their part of the story firsthand. So, when this story ceases to be direct and straightforward, it will be documented, vouched for and, as far as possible, dated. This is my apology for obtruding myself—at the express desire of the others concerned in these extraordinary happenings.

DOCUMENT

From *The Sussex Daily Times*, February 4, 19—

THE MYSTERY OF THE BRIGHTON ROAD

During the early hours of yesterday morning, too late to be reported in our issue of yesterday, a two-seated car was discovered apparently abandoned nearly half-way up Handcross Hill. It was in the ditch on the left-hand side of the road and had wedged itself securely. The tail-lamp and off-side lamps were still burning; but the engine had stopped. It was discovered by a Mr. Holmes, who was motoring back to London from Brighton. He stopped and called out; but, getting no reply, he concluded that the occupants had run into the ditch and, being unable to get the car out again, had gone in search of help.

It was full moon and a very clear night: and, as there was no sign of anything wrong or anybody hurt, Mr. Holmes, being late, drove on. He stopped, however, at the police-station at Handcross and notified the officer in charge.

A constable was dispatched upon a bicycle, and returned in due course to report that apparently there was nothing wrong. He had found the rug lying a short distance from the car and had replaced it on the seat. He saw no sign of anybody, though he had cooeed and blown his whistle several times. He was sent back to take charge; and, as the necessary lamps were burning and the car was on its own side of the road, he apparently made himself as comfortable as possible with the rug wrapped round him, and dozed off and on in the car.

As soon as it grew light enough a breakdown party was dispatched, and the car was extricated from the ditch. It proved not to have been much damaged and was taken to the station, where the first sign of anything seriously wrong became evident.

On the cord upholstery of the seat there was a large stain of congealed blood frozen hard. This placed a totally different complexion upon the matter: and steps were immediately taken to inform the higher authorities.

The car, which was a 12-h.p. Rover, bore the identification number "B.P. 318726," showing that it was a local one, "B.P." being the identification letters for West Sussex: and in the course of the morning it was discovered to be the property of Mr. George Bolsover, a young gentleman farmer, of Heighbury Farm, near Crawley.

Inquiries elicited that he had gone out the evening before, about 5.80, in his car with his wife to spend the evening with a friend at Hassocks—Mr. Glentyre of Orchard Place. He had arrived at Orchard Place with Mrs. Bolsover shortly after six o'clock, and had played billiards with his host until dinner-time. After dinner Mr. and Mrs. Bolsover and Mr. and Mrs. Glentyre had played bridge until just upon midnight.

The Bolsovers had left in the highest of spirits in the car; and Mr. Glentyre himself had tucked the rug found by the car, which he identified, round Mrs. Bolsover. From that time up to going to press nothing has been seen or heard of either Mr. or Mrs. Bolsover, who appear to have vanished completely.

The whole country round is being scoured by the police: but the hard frost of the last ten days precludes any material assistance, such as footprints or similar traces, which would help to guide the police or give any clue as to what happened either before or after the car was ditched.

All railway stations and ports are being closely watched: and all reports of strangers are being immediately followed up.

So far there is not the slightest clue and the whole affair of the Brighton Road is wrapt in the deepest mystery.

Sonic strange scratches have been found upon the paint-work of the car, according to the hater's message by telephone from our chief reporter, who has been on the spot all day.

The police, who are very reticent, have a theory, and anticipate shortly to be in a position to throw light upon the extraordinary disappearance of Mr. and Mrs. Bolsover, which is complicated by the bloodstain upon the upholstery of the car.

The case is in the eminently efficient hands of Chief Inspector Mutton.

II

DOCUMENT

MEMORANDUM BY LINCOLN OSGOOD

It would be hopeless to try to convey the sensation, the rumours, and the columns in the press with reference to "The Mystery of the Brighton Road," which immediately captivated the imagination of the public. A volume of Hansard would not contain a tithe of what was written round the disappearance of the Bolsovers, the false reports, the theories, the letters to the papers from indignant public and assiduous amateur detectives alike, and so forth. The mystery gripped and fascinated the public as happens from time to time and there was a strange undercurrent of nervousness behind much of the indignation. It seemed so impossible that in well-administered, twentieth-century England a man and his wife could disappear without a trace out of their own car on the most motored road in the country.

Murder, highway robbery, kidnapping were all put forward; but nothing was discovered to justify in the least any of the theories. A deliberately planned and cleverly executed double disappearance was favoured by many: but there was the bloodstain to be accounted for. Again, there was no motive, no incentive for any such disappearance. The Bolsovers were a most devoted couple and had only been married a few months. They had no monetary troubles—in fact, were in "affluent circumstances," as the reporters put it, They were leading the ideal life of their own choice in a nice old house, farming sufficiently without making a burden of it, hunting a couple of days a week, shooting, motoring into Brighton to shop, and generally putting in a good time with plenty of friends.

There never was an affair so motiveless and therefore so sensational.

But, do what the authorities could, never a trace nor a clue turned up that led to anything or even afforded a shadow of a solution. Within a few weeks the sensation burnt itself out by its own intensity and died a natural death; and other happenings, in their turn, ousted this "Mystery of the Brighton Road" from a foremost place in the papers and the public mind.

At Scotland Yard it was duly collated and docketed: and the dossier was filed in the limbo of undiscovered crimes. Yet at the same time, apart from the ominous bloodstain, there was nothing tangible to point to the fact that it was actually a crime at all.

And that was the last of the poor devoted young Bolsovers—a dear little woman and a genial good fellow without an enemy in the world.

III

From *Town Tit Bits*, March 20, 19—.

QUERIES PERTINENT AND IMPERTINENT

- . . . Whether the Upper Chamber and the Footlights are once more about to unite forces?
- . . . Whether Wuffies and Tony are taking the situation as seriously as some other less interested folk?
- . . . Whether Manager King of the “Castle” regards the latest *Town Tit Bit* as a good “ad” or a lost star?

IV

DOCUMENT

CONTRIBUTED BY WILLIAM WELLINGHAM, 2nd LIEUT., COLDSTREAM GUARDS

I never was much of a hand at writing, and am a bit nervous about trying to tell my portion of this weird story: but Lincoln Osgood says that I have got to, and that’s all there is to it. It is up to either Harry Verjoyce or me, and Harry says he is worse at it even than I am; and Osgood has promised to put my statement shipshape. But he wants it told direct and in my own words, as I was on the spot throughout this particular bit of this incredible tale, which frankly I wouldn’t believe myself if I hadn’t been through it: and old Harry is ready to swear to it as gospel.

My name is William Wellingham, commonly called “Bill,” aged twenty-one, and a subaltern in the Coldstream. So are Tony Bullingdon and Harry Verjoyce, and the same age as myself. We were in the same house at Eton, and pals from the very start: and we went on to Sandhurst together, and from there were all gazetted into the Coldstream. Tony is what they call in novelettes a “belted earl” and “the catch of the season,” as he owns three big places and a substantial slab of London property, which he inherited from a whole line of rigidly pious ancestors, who never did anything to cause him a moment’s anxiety by gambling or mortgaging as much as a single acre. Moreover, the whole lot had the additional advantage of accumulating for years “during the minority of the young Earl of Bullingdon,” as the society papers said when he came of age last year, and we celebrated it by the big theatrical dance at the Savoy, which made all the uninvited people in London green with envy: but that’s another story, as one of the minor prophets or minor poets once said. But it is really not altogether outside the radius of this statement of mine, as it was at his own coming-of-age dance that Tony first met poor old Wuffles, as Miss Yvette St. Clair, the leading lady in the “Castle” revue, was always called amongst her pals and the people who wanted to pretend to be smart.

It was a sort of what people call an infatuation on both sides—more on his than on hers perhaps; and there was no end of talk about it in town during the winter, and lots of people thought he was going to marry her, and some of the impertinent rags began to get quite rottenly personal about it before the end. Tony is a good-looking chap—not too big, but very smart and full of life. So was Wuffles, who was as pretty as they make ’em, off as well as on, which you can’t say for every girl on the stage, and a jolly good sort into the bargain, as straight as a die and

no nonsense of that sort about her. That's what makes a lot of these theatrical marriages nowadays, and set inquisitive people guessing in this particular case: but that's none of my business. Poor Wuffles has gone—and it makes me sick to think of it—and poor old Tony almost went too: and now that he is fit and about again and there are other things in the air, I would not have referred to the matter, if it hadn't been what the lawyers call relevant. Anyhow, it was the talk of the town, and things were stoking up that Sunday, April 1 (this is no April fool yarn, I give you my word!) when we went on that fatal run to Brighton and ended up with a top-hole jolly dinner at the Royal York before returning to town by moonlight.

Tony was driving Wuffles in his 90-h.p. Napier, the one he used to race at Brooklands, and I always used to think she must have been jolly uncomfortable in it on the road, as it was hardly the most suitable machine for a girl: but it was his favourite, and she always pretended to like it. The rest of the party—that is, Harry and myself with Cissie Saxon and Clemence Rayne, also of the "Castle"—were in Harry's new Daimler, a topper, the latest model just delivered; and, if we had to take his dust on the road, we were at any rate a jolly sight more comfortable. People may think, by the way, that I am a bit indiscreet in mentioning names, and so on; but, though it may seem a trifle off and a bit embarrassing, there are no two ways to it, and that little party, all said and done, has been well enough advertised in every quarter of the uncivilized world a hundred thousand times by now.

As I have said, we had a top-hole jolly dinner with plenty of "boy," though not enough to make any difference to the driving. Tony was always jolly particular when he was driving the big Napier, as she was a bit of a handful on the road. But we were all very merry and bright, and chipped Tony and Wuffles quite a hot about the paragraphs in *Town Tit Bits*; and there is no saying what it mightn't have led to, if it hadn't been for the ghastly sequel.

Closing-time came all too soon, but with one thing and another it was eleven o'clock before we were all tucked in and ready to start. I heard the clock strike as we waved and shouted good night to a few kindred souls, who had come out to see us off. It was a ripping night, cold and frosty and almost as clear as daylight in the full moon. Harry, of course, was driving his own 'bus with Clemence up in front beside him; and Cissie and I were in the back, well wrapped up, and all as jolly as sand-boys.

There was a bit of a delay while Tony got his big engine going—a beast to start when it was cold; and we got off ahead of him, thinking how riled he would be if we reached town first. But we hadn't got more than four or five miles out, when we heard him roaring up behind us: so we slowed down and drew to the side to let him pass. As they flashed by Wuffles waved her hand triumphantly, and shouted something we could not catch because of the noise of his engine with its open exhaust. That was the last ever seen of Wuffles, poor girl; and who is to say what might not have happened to us if Tony had been delayed a bit longer, and we had kept in front as far as Handcross Hill?

We slowed down almost to a walking pace for a mile or two to avoid their dust, just jogging along till it got a bit clear: and Cissie and I not unnaturally got talking about the extraordinary disappearance of the Bolsovers, as I suppose everyone else motoring on the Brighton Road had done for the past two months. We had both of us passed the spot a dozen times since the event; but somehow the place and the subject had a curious fascination of its own. And it was hardly surprising considering how full the papers had been of it: but that was nothing to what was to come, when they fairly got their glut of it.

After a bit the fog of dust began to clear, and we could see our way almost like day by the light of the full moon: so we began to put the pace on a bit not to get left too far behind. It was a

topping night for speeding up, with a clear road; and Harry soon let the car right out, impatient after having had to hang about so long. The Daimler, though not a racing machine, was pretty fast too; and it did not seem long before we found ourselves beginning to climb Handcross Hill.

“Funny light ahead,” called out Harry from the wheel.

“Looks like a fire,” I shouted back. “Hope it’s not the old Napier!”

But sure enough it was; and there the tragedy began.

In a moment we were right up to it—not in the road or in the ditch, but blazing in a field the other side of the hedge within a few yards of the Bolsover business. It was for all the world as though something had gone wrong with the steering-gear; and it was not till later in the development of the story that we learnt the whole horrible truth.

“Good God,” Harry ejaculated, putting on his brakes pretty hard and nearly taking a dry skid.

The girls began to scream, and I thought Cissie was going to faint: but I hadn’t much time for that sort of truck just then, and was out of my side of the car almost before we had stopped. Harry was only a second after me, as he had to disentangle himself from the wheel and Clemence, who clutched hold of him in her fright and horror. There was a great gash torn in the hedge, through which we jumped: and on the other side in the ploughed field, which was frozen hard, lay what was left of the Napier—on its side blazing for all it was worth. It was obviously impossible to save the car or do anything to it, and we dashed forward to see if we could rescue Tony and Wuffles, or whether they had been thrown clear.

A glance showed that there was no sign of either of them in or under the car. The holocaust had not gone far enough to leave any doubt of that, although some of the wooden-headed police tried to insist first go off that they had been burnt but both Harry and I were firm on the point.

“Thank God,” we both exclaimed at the thought that they had at least escaped such an awful death: and then we started to draw the ground round to see where they had been thrown. A few feet from the car I trod on Tony’s cap; but, strange to say, there was no sign of them anywhere within reasonable radius.

They had both disappeared as totally and absolutely as the Bolsovers!

There was no lack of light between the moon and the blazing car; and there was no doubt about it.

“You take this side of the hedge,” I called out to Harry, as I dashed back through the gap, “and I’ll take the other.”

The girls, white as death and sobbing hysterically, were hanging on to each other against the side of the car.

“No sign of either of them,” I shouted, trying to buck them up. “At any rate they aren’t burnt.”

And no sign of them there was either. Harry and I drew the hedge on both sides, the road, the ditches, and again the field, making wider and wider detours, till we felt that it was pretty hopeless and made our way hack to the blazing car, which was getting red-hot and beginning to buckle about the frame.

We looked into each other’s faces.

All he said was, “Good God, Bill”; and all I said was, “Good God, Harry”—both feeling that there was something deeper behind it, something intangible and uncanny, something beyond our crude ken. And we made our way slowly back to the girls: and in the minds of both of us was the memory of the Bolsover mystery.

* * *

As we got back to the old Daimler, we heard the sound of another car hooting as it came tearing up the hill; and Harry and I jumped out into the road and yelled to it to stop. The driver was already slowing down at the sight of the blaze on the other side of the hedge; and he turned out to be an awfully good chap—Fitzroy Manders by name, as I found out afterwards. He had a pal with him called Greville: and there were two ladies in the back of the car.

I explained to him as shortly as I could what had happened, though in rather disjointed fashion, I'm afraid; and I saw his face grow pretty grave in the white light.

"It looks devilish fishy," was all he remarked; and he went back to his own car and said a few words to the ladies. The one on the near side got out; and he beckoned me to join them and introduced me.

"My wife, Mr. Wellingham," he said without any frills, as I raised my cap.

"My wife and her sister will look after the girls with you," he added. "Naturally they must be frightfully upset by this extraordinary business. They had better get into my car, and Greville will drive them up to Handcross and leave the ladies at the Red Lion; and then he can bring the police back with him."

He had a strong, managing way about him which was very welcome after the shock, which I don't mind admitting had knocked me out a bit—and old Harry, too—while the girls were a jolly sight worse, and on the verge of hysterics. Mrs. Manders proved a topper, and took them in hand with a few kind words, and had them in her car before you could say knife, tucked in securely between her sister and herself to give them a nice sense of companionship and protection

Greville jumped into the driver's seat, while Manders cranked the engine.

"Drive like the devil," I overheard him say to Greville. "There is no saying what may not be out on this ill-omened hill to-night."

And off they went as though there were no hill at all.

"Now," said Manders curtly, "draw your car well in on its own side; and then we'll have another search."

There was little left by that time of the famous old racing Napier save red hot iron and distorted metal. So that did not delay us long, and under Manders' direction we started a methodical search: but all to no purpose, and not a trace of anything, except poor old Tony's cap, could we discover.

We found ourselves back on the road again and searched it up and down once more without the faintest result.

Manders lit a cigarette and passed us his case; and I noticed Harry's hand was a bit shaky, as though he had had a late night. So was mine, I don't mind confessing.

"There is something damned funny at work somewhere," said Manders, in a detached sort of way, as though he were thinking hard, "especially coming on top of the Bolsover case. Hullo! there's the car"—and we heard it hooting down the hill, hell for leather.

Two minutes later it was alongside of us; and out jumped a sergeant and a couple of policemen almost before Greville had drawn up.

"I have telephoned Chief Inspector Mutton, sir," said the sergeant, saluting Manders, "and have left orders to advise Scotland Yard immediately: and I have telephoned to Crawley to send assistance by car without a moment's delay."

"Excellent," said Manders, and he explained the whole situation to the sergeant in as few words as possible; and I couldn't help marvelling at the clear concise way he put things. But then it turned out afterwards that he is a barrister, you see; so I could hardly be expected to compete.

“It looks on all fours with the Bolsover case,” said the sergeant, when Manders had finished. “I had a good deal to do with that business myself, and know the ground pretty well. If you don’t mind, sir, I think we had better have another search.”

And after he had examined the car, which had nearly burnt itself out, he organized the seven of us, and we drew every inch methodically in an ever-widening circle.

Help was not long in arriving from Crawley, and in little over an hour Chief Inspector Mutton was on the spot and had taken over from Sergeant Handcock. And by daybreak the whole place was alive with all sorts of people.

* * *

Lincoln Osgood says that I can now hand over to him and retire, as I have shot my bolt, and I am jolly glad, as not only do I hate writing, but it is particularly hard to write about that awful night, which will always remain a nightmare in my mind.

V

DOCUMENT

CONTRIBUTED BY SIR HENRY VERJOYCE, PART.,
2nd LIEUT., COLDSTREAM GUARDS

I am a worse hand even than Bill Wellingham at writing; and Lincoln Osgood says that there is no need for me to go over the ground again, as Bill has already covered fully the only part I could deal with first hand. So all I have got to do is to testify that every word of his statement is gospel truth; and to this I herewith append my signature for what it is worth by way of corroboration.

(Signed) HARRY VERJOYCE

MEMORANDUM

By LINCOLN OSGOOD

I do not enter the story of these strange events directly at this point, but I feel that a memorandum collated by myself will, at this juncture, save the publication of a burdensome number of documents from the press and other sources, and help to state the position concisely and put things in perspective.

This naïve, but convincing statement, contributed from direct participation and observation by young Wellingham, brings the evolution of this chronicle to a point infinitely more sensational than the disappearance of the comparatively obscure Bolsovers; and it is hard even to suggest the enormous and unparalleled excitement, not only in Great Britain, but all over the world. It may almost be said that even the more sober section of the press thoroughly let themselves go over it, while the “yellow” oracles fairly went mad over such a sensation as the disappearance of the richest and most eligible *parti* in the peerage and the most popular leading lady in revue, whose names had been coupled together by gossip under such romantic circumstances—especially under such inexplicable and extraordinary conditions following so close upon the heels of the

Bolsover mystery. The very familiarity of the spot at which these tragedies had occurred added fuel to the flames of excitement: and, moreover, a new element of fear had entered the realms of commonplace everyday life and gripped the public imagination.

The sub-editors of the halfpenny papers ran riot over the new mystery of the Brighton Road, and “featured” it with headlines suggestive of some of the organs of my native country: and no Wild or fatuous rumour was considered too impossible or foolish to find a place. The reporters made high holiday all over the country, especially between London and Brighton, and Sussex was obsessed day and night by “specials” and space-men in search of copy. Even the leader-writers, locked in their sanctums in Fleet Street, were busy evolving theories without availing anything.

But to revert to the point at which Willingham’s statement left off, all the searching of the police proved unavailing; and though they looked wise and hinted at clues in response to the importunities of the legion of pressmen, Chief Inspector Mutton and the cracks of the detective force from Scotland Yard had glumly to admit amongst themselves that they had found not a single thing to help them, and did not see a single ray of light through the utter darkness any more than in the case of the Bolsovers, who had retreated right into the background as a minor and subsidiary issue in view of the later and far greater sensation.

It must be frankly admitted that everything was against them, especially the state of the ground, which was as hard as iron, and had been frozen on the night of April 1 and the early hours of the morning of April 2; and, to crown all, with daylight it had begun to rain, and settled down into a regular downpour as the day went on. This not only precluded the use of bloodhounds, which had actually been telephoned for, but soon reduced the ploughed land and the vicinity to a sludgy condition, which in a short time became pock-marked with the footprints of the many searchers to the exclusion of any possible traces which might have escaped observation.

Photographs of Lord Bullingdon and Miss Yvette St. Clair, already familiar enough to the public were circulated immediately throughout the country; and every port, station, and all other such possible places were closely watched. In fact, every member of the public might have been said to have constituted himself or herself into a private detective—all without the least result. Moreover, there was not the slightest object in any such voluntary disappearance, especially when preceded by the dangerous feat of wrecking a fifteen-hundred-pound racing-car—less object in fact, I may say, than there could have been even in the case of the Bolsovers.

Town Tit Bits, in its usual impertinent way, hinted at an elopement engineered upon original lines, or, at least, a big theatrical advertisement for Miss Yvette St. Clair of a fashion that left the imaginative efforts of any American press-agent cold stiff, and a million miles behind.

A certain section stuck to the theory that the bodies had been burnt in the holocaust of the car; but, apart from the direct and unshakable evidence of Willingham and Verjoyce, expert examination absolutely negated the possibility. In fact, no one familiar with the history of the disposal of bodies by burning and the interesting cases on the subject in the annals of criminology gave it a moment’s serious consideration in the circumstances. Besides, there was the Bolsover parallel; and their joint disappearance under circumstances identical, save for the wrecking and burning of the car, was directly against the theory of incineration.

The theory of motor bandits and the victims being held up for ransom was the most popular one of all, and had, on the face of it, more logic and possibility behind it: but here again rose the Bolsover parallel to question it. If ransom were the object and kidnapping the solution, why had two whole months passed without any word or attempt to reap the benefits of such a hold

criminal stroke? Of course it was possible, dealing admittedly with a criminal gang of very exceptional ability and organization, that the victims might be held for a considerable time or until a sufficiently large “bag” had been accumulated: and, of course, if so, in Lord Bullingdon and Miss Yvette St. Chair they had indeed, consciously or unconsciously, dropped upon a haul as rich as any in Great Britain, which would, properly handled, assure such affluence as to render minor business in the future superfluous.

These are the impressions on my own mind, when I landed in England after some months of travel through the remoter parts of Austria, Poland, and the Balkans on the evening of Monday, April 2, and read the first accounts of the whole business in the evening papers, which were full of it. And from that moment I never lost touch with the whole horrible, yet fascinating business until a tiny clue—a thing that would have meant nothing save to one person in a million, which I had chanced upon by accident in my travels—placed in my hands the key to the solution of this apparently impenetrable mystery. I claim no great perspicacity or credit in the matter for myself—far from it. I see in it rather the hand of Providence bringing me with the specialized and requisite piece of recondite knowledge on the spot at the psychological moment, in time to prevent further similar tragedies and to prove instrumental in eradicating the foul curse, which had fallen upon Sussex out of the mysterious realms of the real, yet the unreal at the same time.

I had promised Burgess Clymping that I would go straight down to stay with him as soon as I reached England; and what I read in the papers of the “Mystery of the Brighton Road” fascinated me, and made me all the more eager not to delay a moment more than absolutely necessary in making good my promise, as his place Clymping Manor, is less than three miles off the Brighton Road and the scene of the two remarkable dual disappearances. Crime and mystery have always held my interest closely; and I have studied the subject most carefully from the scientific, the analytic, the human, and every other point of view. In fact, I may say that even now there are few places in which I can spend a more interesting afternoon than the Chamber of Horrors (so called) at Madame Tussaud’s, reconstructing the famous crimes of the past, and interviewing, in wax, the greater and lesser exponents of murder “as a fine art.”

I was too late to go down to Clymping Manor that same night; and, in addition, I had certain business to transact the next morning in London in view of my long absence abroad. So I wired to Burgess that I would be with him the next day by the 3.50, when I stepped, personally and directly, right into the thick of it. Meanwhile, he will fill the gap with a most interesting and sensational happening, which I just missed personally by this delay.

VI

DOCUMENT

CONTRIBUTED BY BURGESS CLYMPING, OF CLYMPING MANOR, NEAR HANDCROSS, IN THE COUNTY OF SUSSEX

I must frankly confess to having been obsessed from the very first by the Bolsover affair on the Brighton Road, and it is perhaps only natural, as it happened so near to the boundaries of my own estate: but I never dreamt what a part I should find myself called upon to play in the elucidation and clearing up of the whole ghastly affair.

Within three miles of my own home, and less than half the distance from the family Dower House, lay the scene of the two mysterious disappearances which had convulsed the whole

country: and, great as had been the sensation over the Bolsover business, it was child's play compared with that which followed the affair of Tony Bullingdon and Miss Yvette St. Chair.

I had naturally worked with the police and rendered what personal assistance I could in the former case, all to no result. The local part of the business had proved itself utterly hopeless and entirely barren of any clue long before the police 'would admit it even with the utmost reservation to the public. If the earth had opened and swallowed the Bolsovers, like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, their disappearance could not have been more complete.

My name is Burgess Clymping; and Lincoln Osgood, my dearest and closest friend, who at the immediate request of myself and all the others concerned, has consented to act as chronicler and collator of the events surrounding and explaining this extraordinary mystery, certainly the strangest of modern times in its *dénouement* and all that lay behind it, has in my opinion, in his preliminary covering memorandum, said sufficient about me personally for the purposes of this record.

I live at Clymping Manor, which has been in the possession of my family in direct and unbroken succession since the fourteenth century: and I have often felt it my duty to marry as the last of the line for this reason alone, but hitherto I have never had any real inclination—or rather *the* real inclination. I am not particularly wealthy, but the estate, which runs to some six thousand acres, renders me very comfortable and well-to-do as country squires go, and affords excellent shooting, which is my particular hobby. I farm nearly a thousand acres of it myself in a rather practical way; and that keeps me pretty busy, and my time fairly occupied.

My constant companion is my only sister, Ann, a beautiful girl of just upon twenty-one, who keeps house for me and looks after my guests and myself in a most delightfully capable, yet unobtrusive fashion: and it is this, perhaps, which has kept me from ever contemplating marriage seriously, save as an absolute or academic duty to the House of Clymping. Our mother died when Ann was a child of three and I a boy of thirteen, and my father five years later: so it will easily be understood that she has meant very much to me all her life and has always been my special care.

Now that she is grown up and, as I have already said, is a very lovely girl—tall, active, and wonderfully fair, a rare thing in these days, with remarkable grey eyes with long black lashes and arched black brow, and a magnificent lithe figure (I could write lots about Ann's beauty and good points as but this is hardly the place to let myself go) feel that it will not be long before love claims and then, perhaps, marriage will assume a different personal perspective in my eyes. This, at any rate, is how I felt on Monday, April 2, but much has happened since then which will come out in the evolution of this story: and I must frankly admit that certain vague ideas had already been chasing themselves through my mind more or less inconsequently without taking any very definite shape. But I am wandering from my brief and anticipating unduly.

Clymping Manor is a commodious, if unpretentious, early Georgian house of mellow red brick and large windows, panelled throughout, and above everything comfortable. The head of the family had in 1742 deserted the original old manor house, a small but perfect piece of Elizabethan architecture, which lay buried in a hollow a mile and a half away, and built a more spacious and healthy family mansion upon the highest point of the estate, with terraced gardens sloping down to the woods; and there is no question that he did well by subsequent generations of Clympings. The old manor house has since been used as the Dower House, as it is now generally called: but, there having been no family claimant to its use since the death of my grandmother four years ago, it is let at present to an eminent German scientist, Professor Lycurgus Wolff, who took an extraordinary fancy to it last summer when he struck it by

chance—trespassing, I may say, with all a foreigner's disregard of our insular sanctities—upon an entomological expedition, whilst staying in Brighton.

I did not like the idea of letting it, I must frankly admit; and it was not the rent that attracted me so much as the fact that it had been standing empty, apart from the occupation of the kitchen quarters by one of the under-keepers and his wife as caretakers, for close on four years, and was getting into a somewhat damp and musty condition, as it must be admitted it is a bit dank down in the hollow amongst the trees. However, as there appeared no likelihood of it being required again for family purposes for many years to come, and as the Professor was importunate and produced unimpeachable references, in the end I consented to let it to him furnished for a year. It was a bit of a wrench sentimentally, as from a boy I have always been particularly attached to this beautiful little Tudor manor in miniature, a perfect gem in its way from an architectural point of view, as the old home of the Clymping family—the actual original house on its site having disappeared centuries before, save for part of an old stone barn attached to the Dower House.

Thus it came to pass that Professor Wolff took up his residence in the Dower House last autumn. He was a very striking-looking man of sixty, with shaggy grey hair and beard, a pair of remarkably piercing black eyes under long, straight, slanting brows, which met in a point over his nose, and distinctly pointed ears set low and far back on his head, half-hidden by his long hair. His mouth under his straggling, unkempt mustache was full and red-lipped, and he had a very fine set of even, white teeth, especially considering his age. His hands were long and pointed, projecting curiously far at the third finger, and noticeably hairy, with red almond-shaped, curving nails. He was tall and rather lean, with a slight stoop, and walked with a peculiar long, swinging stride—altogether a strange and rather bizarre personality in the surroundings of sleepy Sussex, especially as in winter he always wore a Russian cap of grey fur and a heavy grey fur coat.

However, he proved an interesting and intellectual companion, widely travelled and widely read; and though I did not see very much of him, from time to time we interchanged visits and met by chance about the place. Three times during the winter he and his daughter dined with us.

He lived a very simple sort of life with his books, his writing, and his collection of strange insects, alone save for his daughter, Dorothy, and one middle-aged serving woman, Anna Brunnolf by name, a rather sinister person with grey glinting eyes who had been Dorothy's nurse and was, whatever her appearance, obviously an industrious and capable servant. Dorothy—well, it is difficult to give my first impressions of her, except that she was as unlike the Professor as anyone could well be, and without the least trace of the Teutonic type but that is another tale, and again I must not let my pen outrun my story.

Suffice to say, she struck me as beautiful—beautiful in a way totally different from my Ann, but possessing a rare beauty that grows on one—her hair, brown and waving, with a strong red light in it, and a wonderfully clear complexion; small delicate features and two great solemn blue eyes that looked on life as though they had not fathomed it; considerably shorter than Ann, but beautifully built, a fact that her rather rough-and-ready clothes could not altogether conceal, and the daintiest hands and feet I ever saw on any woman. The matter of first impressions is always difficult, especially when the question of dress enters into them: and Ann, in due course, helped to change or, at least, to modify that to the revelation of a beauty of form, which was hidden under the dowdiness of garments dictated by an elderly German professor, absorbed in other things, and a distinctly autocratic nurse of the type of Anna Brunnolf, who had no taste in such matters, and had been accustomed more or less to rule Dorothy almost from the cradle in the persistent fashion it is hard for a girl to shake off even at two-and-twenty.

A great friendship sprang up between Ann and Dorothy almost from the first, though neither the Professor nor Anna seemed to encourage any particular intimacy; and the result was that Dorothy was far more in our house off and on than Ann, who could not bear the Professor, ever was at the Dower House, with the distinctly repellent personality of Anna Brunnolf, in a funny brown fur cape which she habitually wore, ever appearing dour and uncompromising at the massive oaken front door studded with old nails—one of the original and most picturesque features of the old Tudor house—which was habitually kept shut instead of open in English country-house fashion. No one else in the neighbourhood took the trouble to cultivate my new tenants particularly; nor were they encouraged to do so, the Professor giving it to be understood that he was deeply immersed in a great work on entomology, the *magnum opus* of his scientific career, which was to make his name famous not only throughout the world, but to posterity for all time.

On reading over what I have written I am afraid that I have, after all, let my pen run away with me in these preliminaries; but, as a matter of fact, I really ask no pardon, as they are all more or less relevant to the story in hand, and will help those interested to grasp more clearly local surroundings and those connected with and instrumental in unravelling the mystery, which, for a while, looked like proving a blind alley. Nevertheless, it is high time that I got back to Monday, April 2, the point in the action of the story from which I am detailed to start my personal contribution.

* * *

I was awakened that morning at a quarter to seven by Jevons, my faithful butler and valet, who had practically grown up with me on the estate, and in many ways was almost a foster-brother; and I saw at once from his pale, scared face that there was something wrong.

“What’s up, Jevons?” I asked before he could speak, sitting up in bed.

“More trouble on the Brighton Road, sir,” he answered; speaking with suppressed excitement. “Another couple have disappeared out of their motor and vanished—just like the Bolsovers. Hedges has just been up from the lodge, as he thought you would wish to be informed as soon as possible.”

Quite right,” I replied, jumping straight out of bed. “Tell him to wait, and put out my old shooting-suit. I’ll have my bath when I get back. Don’t tell Miss Ann until she is dressed, and ask her not to wait breakfast. Make me a sandwich while Wilson brings round the two-seater.”

I was hardly five minutes slipping on my clothes and ate my precautionary breakfast in the car, as we hurried along, with Hedges (who is my head-keeper) on the dicky-seat behind.

It was a beastly raw morning; and a cold, uncompromising drizzle had set in, which turned into heavy persistent rain, as the morning went on, removing any possible traces which might have been left to aid the police.

We were soon on the spot and found it fairly alive with police summoned from all parts, including detectives from Scotland Yard, who had arrived by car. There was also already quite a gathering of local sightseers standing open-mouthed, and several reporters had got wind of things and turned up by car or bicycle; but the police had formed a cordon round the immediate vicinity to keep everyone back. However, recognizing me, they let the car pass; and I approached a little group standing round Chief Inspector Mutton.

He saluted me and told me everything in a few words, adding in a low voice, for my private benefit, "It's an exact repetition of the Bolsover business, except for the burning of the car, sir, and looks equally hopeless."

Then he introduced me to Fitzroy Manders, whom I knew by name as a rising barrister who had been up at Balliol two or three years before my time; and he in turn introduced me to Verjoyce and Bellingharn, who between them told me their story firsthand and gave me details of the fruitless searching which had already taken place. Then we strolled across to the car, which was nothing but a charred and twisted heap of scrap-iron.

"This rain puts the lid on it," said Manders, with a slight shiver; and I noticed that he and the two younger men looked white and starved with cold.

"You had better come up to my place with me and get a hot bath and some breakfast, if Mutton doesn't think we can do any good," I said, learning that Greville had gone to Handcross an hour before to drive the women-folk hack to London.

They readily assented, and I sent them on ahead in the Daimler with Wilson and a message to Ann, while I returned to Mutton, who was arranging for a fresh search with the C.J.D. man from Scotland Yard.

I placed Hedges and Reece, the underkeeper, at their disposal, and threw myself into it heart and soul; but at the end of an hour and a half we forgathered again with nothing to report. It was raining hard by then; so I left them for a while and drove myself back in the two-seater to the house, where I found the three others bathed and breakfasted, and looking little the worse for their night out, though the two youngsters had a curious strained look on their faces.

Ann was busy entertaining them and had heard the whole weird story in every detail; and it spoke well for her nerve that she had not turned a hair.

"What news?" they all asked at once.

I shook my head.

"None," I answered. "It looks pretty hopeless, especially with the rain setting in heavily for the day. We'll go back after I have changed and breakfasted."

I went up to my dressing-room, leaving them to smoke, and got off my wet clothes, bathed and shaved, and was soon down again, eating a hearty breakfast with a real country appetite which no sensations could put off.

Soon after eleven we drove back to the spot again and spent a fruitless morning in the soaking rain. A large crowd had collected, and was kept back with the utmost difficulty by the reinforced police; and there seemed to be importunate reporters at every turn—but no news.

Mutton was disgruntled and rather morose.

"It's a bad job," he said disconsolately, "and we shall have the whole press and the country in its wake down upon the incompetence of the police force. Major Blenkinsopp from the Yard is down—he's the second-in-command at headquarters—and he frankly does not see what more can be done."

I was introduced to Major Blenkinsopp and had a short talk with him, for which I was glad, as it put me into direct touch with him, which proved immensely useful later on, as will be seen; but he would not come back with us to lunch, as he was anxious to get back to town.

So we returned to the house shortly after one and were back again soon after two, only to find things just as they were, and the rain falling more heavily than ever.

At four o'clock, realizing the futility of hanging about any longer, Manders and the two youngsters decided to return to town in the Daimler; and I went back home a little later, leaving

instructions for word to be sent to me if anything turned up unexpectedly. But of this there seemed little hope.

I was thoroughly tired by the excitement of the day and the long hanging about, which I often think takes more out of one than any amount of honest exercise and really doing something; and so was Ann. But we were both mightily cheered up in the middle of dinner by a telegram from Lincoln Osgood to say that he had arrived in London and would be with us the following afternoon. No news could have been more welcome at any time, but it was more than ever so at such a juncture, when I felt the need of a friend to talk things over with; and I knew what a profound interest he would take in the extraordinary mystery, though I did not then imagine that it would be he who would hold the key to it, and put his finger with bold, unerring instinct upon the unthinkable clue which was baffling the cleverest detective brains in the whole country.

After dinner I smoked a large, soothing cigar in front of the blazing wood fire in the hall, glad to be cosy and indoors with the outside elements shut out; and naturally we talked over the strange events of the day and the mysterious fate of Tony Bullingdon and Miss Yvette St. Chair, whom we had seen in the revue at the "Castle" only a month previously, little dreaming what the morrow was going to bring forth to link us both up so much more closely with the weird affair.

"Anyhow the Brighton Road will be well patrolled to-night," I said, as I kissed Ann good night soon after ten, when we both felt quite ready for bed; and, sensation or no sensation, I must confess to having dropped off to sleep almost at once and slept soundly all night.

* * *

I was up again at six the next morning thoroughly refreshed, and was on the spot again by seven, after an early breakfast. Fortunately, it was a lovely morning, bright and warm, with the sun shining and it seemed to infuse a spirit of optimism, which had been sadly damped by the weather and lack of success the day before, into Inspector Mutton and his now considerable army of policemen and officials, both in uniform and in plain clothes.

Nothing, I learnt, had transpired in the night; and we were doomed to another futile morning which led to nothing, kicking our heels and reading the sensational articles in the London and Brighton papers, which ran to columns in each, mainly imaginative journalese culminating in the trite assurance that the police had the matter well in hand, but were not in a position at the moment to issue any statement.

Fed up with doing nothing, I returned to the house about noon for an early lunch, hungry after my six-thirty breakfast and long morning in the open air. When I had finished I tried to settle down, but somehow I could not; and something seemed to draw me back to the spot irresistibly. So, whistling to my wire-haired terrier, Whiskers, who is ever my constant companion in my perambulations round the estate, I decided to walk down through the woods, putting a flask and plenty of tobacco in my pockets, mindful of the discomforts of the previous afternoon, and leaving orders for Wilson to pick me up with the car in good time to meet Lincoln Osgood at Crawley.

Ann volunteered to accompany me part of the way; and I was only too delighted to have her company. We walked through the gardens, examining the progress of the bulbs as we went, and let ourselves out into the park by the little gate at the corner, striking across diagonally to the left through the woods.

About half-way, where they are thickest, under half a mile to the left of the Dower House, Ann suddenly stopped.

“I don’t think I will come any farther with you, dear,” she said. “I don’t want to get amongst the crowd or go to the place itself.”

I agreed with her thoroughly, and nodded my approval.

“I think I’ll go across to the Dower House and fetch Dorothy back to spend the afternoon with me. It won’t be so lonely with you away.”

“Quite a good idea,” I assented heartily. “I’ll take you across to the bridle-path and go that way. Ut’s not much out of my way.”

Somehow I had a dislike of the idea of leaving her there alone in the thickest of the wood with the mystery of such strange things hanging over our heads and tragedy in the very air: so we took a half-turn to the right with the instinct born of familiarity with our own woods, in which a stranger, once off the path, would have run a risk of losing himself irretrievably and wandering in a circle.

Whiskers was trotting to heel according to habit; but about a hundred yards further on he stopped suddenly and began to whimper excitedly, his ears pricked and his right paw off the ground—a way he had got if anything unusual interested him.

“What’s wrong, old chap?” I asked, stopping and turning round to him.

He made as though to cast to the left and ran a few steps, and then halted, whimpering again.

“Good dog,” I said, little thinking of what was about to happen. “Find it.”

Off he darted, and ten yards away he stopped and looked back at me as though wanting me to follow.

Then he began to dig furiously.

Ann, full of curiosity, was after him instantly; and I was not far behind.

And there we found Tony Bullingdon!

He was practically hidden from sight in a short, deep gully between two big trees, half covered with last year’s leaves, which the winds of the winter had swirled and collected into this small hole, little bigger than himself, into which he had fallen. What between the dead leaves, dank with rain, and the colour of his great motor coat, he was practically invisible a few feet away: and that is, I suppose, how it had happened that he had been overlooked in the search, which had, of course, been very difficult in the thickest part of the woods.

He was lying on his right side, and only the left portion of his face was visible, white and bloodless, and his left arm lay unnaturally limp, half behind him. His coat was torn on the shoulder, which was badly lacerated, with the blood congealed. His forehead, too, was badly cut, and upon closer examination he appeared to have been roughly handled or dragged along time ground and abandoned: but it was impossible to say how much was due to having been thrown from the car, though, as has often been proved, the steering-wheel, which had unmistakably marked his chest, had probably broken the fall. His heavy coat, which had also probably protected him considerably, was all torn and filthy: and he proved to be a mass of bruises from head to foot when we got him home.

Ann gave a little involuntary scream; and Whiskers continued digging at the leaves furiously until I called him off.

I bent down and examined him. He was icy cold and absolutely unconscious, but his heart was beating faintly; and I thanked God that I had slipped my flask into my pocket. I tried to raise him gently and forced a little whiskey between his clenched teeth; but he moaned painfully, and I realized that his collar-bone was broken, if not his whole shoulder-blade shattered. However, I managed to get my arm underneath to lift him a little. Then I ran my hands gently over him,

opening his motor-coat, and found to my satisfaction that, owing to the leather lining, he was not so saturated underneath as one would have expected.

“Bar his left-shoulder and collar-bone, I don’t think there is anything broken, though I am not sure of a couple of ribs on his right side, as I daren’t turn him over alone,” I said to Ann, who was standing by, pale but self-possessed. “His right ankle is badly sprained, too. I can’t move him by myself in case I do any damage.”

“I’ll wait here while you go for help,” she said calmly; and, nervous and unhappy as I felt at the idea of leaving her alone, I saw at once that there was no other way out of it.

“The nearest policeman keeping people off is only just over half a mile away,” I said, assenting. “I won’t be more than a few minutes. I’ll send him on to Mutton for a bearer-party and the doctor, and come straight back to you. Rub his hands gently with some whisky from my flask,” I added, loosening the laces of his brogues and pouring some spirit into them as I spoke. “I will leave Whiskers to guard you.”

Then, without another word I made off, as fast as the trees permitted, in the direction of the bridle-path.

I found the man without difficulty and dispatched him hotfoot to Inspector Mutton; and it was not much more than a quarter of an hour before I was back again.

* * *

To my surprise I found that Ann was not alone, and recognized through the trees, as I drew near, the strange figure of the Professor in his grey fur cap and coat.

Ann was seated on the ground with young Bullingdon’s head in her lap; and the Professor was busy doing his best to bind up the shoulder and collar-bone with strips of what I recognized as Ann’s petticoat. His large sharp pocketknife lay on the ground; and he had cut off the clothing in the way, and was working skilfully and deftly with his curious long fingers, which had always fascinated me.

“The poor young man!” he exclaimed, looking up for an instant, as I approached. “I was taking a ramble through your woods—” (“ Trespassing as usual,” I could not help but thinking, a trifle grimly)—“when I heard your dog bark and then growl; so I came in this direction, and it was all Miss Clymping could do to keep him quiet.”

Frankly I did not care a damn about his explanation, as I saw he knew his job and was the right man in the right place at the moment.

“His collar-bone is broken, and the shoulder has been put out and possibly broken,” he went on, as he worked; “but it is so swollen that I can hardly tell. Two right ribs fractured.” Then he began endeavouring gently to restore the circulation. “Give him some more whisky out of your flask.” Then he slipped off his fur coat and wrapped it round the poor unconscious, white-faced boy, for which I could have blessed him.

“Miss Ann had better go back to the house, and get a bed aired and ready and a big fire lit,” he continued, speaking as one accustomed to give orders; “and you can roll your jacket up and make a pillow for his head in place of her lap.”

“Yes,” I said, speaking for the first time, as I helped Ann up, shifting his head as little as possible. “Run home, Ann dear, and get everything ready. Telephone to Handcross and Crawley for doctors immediately, and send Jevons and Wilson and anyone else handy along as fast as possible with brandy, blankets, pillows, and the big luggage barrow with a mattress on it; and don’t forget my first-aid case.”

Ann was as pale as the lad on the ground, but quite calm, as I pressed her arm encouragingly.

"I won't be long," was all she said, as she started off in her quick, athletic way; and I knew instinctively that everything would be ready.

"It will be touch-and-go," said the Professor, not stopping in his work, as he talked, "especially if pneumonia supervenes; but he is young, and the exposure was not so great as it might have been owing to his heavy leather-lined coat. His head is a bit bruised, but the cut on the forehead is not as serious as it looks."

I could not but feel grateful to him for his psychological appearance and all that he was doing; and I thanked him perhaps a little inconsequently.

He only shrugged his shoulders.

"It is lucky my afternoon walk took me this way," he said as calmly as though it were an everyday occurrence. "The police called at the Dower House on their search yesterday; and that was the first I had heard of this extraordinary event. Of course I could not help them at all; but this afternoon I thought I would go down to the scene of the accident, or whatever it was, and see if they had found anything. Yes, it was fortunate. Chafe his left foot, please."

He spoke perfect English, but with a strong guttural accent; and I obeyed him instinctively, feeling that he knew what he was about.

It was less than half an hour before Inspector Mutton arrived with four policemen and a couple of C.I.D. men; and I told them exactly what had happened, explaining also the lucky accident of the Professor's presence.

Mutton was obviously in a state of suppressed excitement, but distinctly disgruntled that the discovery had not been made by the police; and he said very little. He stooped down and picked up the pieces of Bullingdon's motor-coat, jacket, and underclothes, which the Professor had cut to bits with his sharp knife in slitting them off the body.

"You say the cloth was all torn and lacerated, sir?" he asked, turning to me.

I nodded.

"They will afford us precious little clue now," he said ungraciously, as he examined them. "They have all been hacked to pieces; and no one could draw any deductions from them in the state they are."

"It was necessary," intervened the Professor sharply, showing his white teeth a little angrily. "There are occasions when you cannot wait for the police, when you are doing their work."

It was put rather brutally, and Mutton took the rebuke with obvious bad grace and turned on his heel busying himself with orders to his men and a consultation with the detectives from Scotland Yard in an undertone; and I felt that, if ever he could do the Professor a bad turn and get his own back for the snub in front of his own men and the more important representatives from London, it would be done with his whole heart.

It was nearly an hour after Ann had left us that I heard Jevons calling through the wood, and the waiting seemed interminable; and after that it was frightfully slow and difficult work carrying Bullingdon through the close trees to the luggage-barrow. Several times the poor chap groaned; but the Professor, who, unasked, had undertaken the direction of operations to the chagrin of Mutton, took little notice.

"A good sign," was all he said.

At last we got him as comfortable as possible on the barrow; and, hearing from Jevons that the doctors were on their way, the Professor turned to me and bade me good afternoon without taking the slightest notice of anyone else.

“Then I can be of no further service,” he said as coolly as though he were leaving a tea-party; “so there is no need for me to accompany you. I will resume my fur coat, if I may, as the patient is now wrapped in blankets, and I am rather susceptible to chills. I only trust that I have not got one myself.”

I helped him on with his treasured coat and thanked him again, not, however, without a certain reaction at his apparent callousness and readiness to shift further responsibility; but I really had no particular desire for his presence at the house, with my own doctors available.

He waved his hand to me, turned on his heel, and swung off with his peculiar long stride as our little cavalcade started on its slow and weary progress.

It took what seemed an interminable time to get back to the house in our endeavour not to shake or jolt Bullingdon more than was unfortunately unavoidable; and, when we got there, we had to get him upstairs—fortunately a wide staircase—and into bed.

Everything was ready, and two doctors waiting and Ann instinctively fell into the role of head nurse, for which she was well fitted not only by nature, but by a course of “first-aid” which she had insisted upon after leaving school.

So it was a quarter past five before I found my self down in the hall again; and, as I rang for Jevons to bring me a large whiskey and soda, I remembered for the first time that I had forgotten all about Lincoln Osgood and meeting his train.

MEMORANDUM

By Lincoln Osgood (*continued*)

At this point I enter the action of this strange narrative directly, and henceforth the writing of it will be quite straightforward and falls altogether, or practically altogether, to my pen. The preceding documents have gathered together first-hand all the threads of the story, which I was loth in the peculiar circumstances to deal with second-hand, as, when this manuscript is complete, each of the extraordinary happenings will then stand vouched for by eye-witnesses and direct participators, leaving no room for doubt or allegations of imagination, such as is part and parcel of mere fiction.

* * *

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Now to the story, as I entered it at 4.30 P.M. on Tuesday, April 3, upon my arrival at Crawley Station.

I must admit that I was surprised not to find the car waiting to meet me, as it was so unlike methodical and hospitable old Burgess, who had never once before failed to be on the platform in person.

Naturally I was disappointed not to see his familiar form; but I guessed there must be some good reason. After waiting about expectantly for a quarter of an hour I cast round for a conveyance, but found considerable difficulty in finding one, as, what between police, reporters, and morbid sightseers, everything seemed to have been engaged.

At last, just as I had made up my mind to foot the seven miles to Clymping Manor, I managed to commandeer at an extortionate price a ramshackle old fly, which drove up and deposited a load of excited visitors from Brighton, full of the latest gossip.

“There’s a rumour that they’ve found some-thing in the Clymping Woods,” one of them volunteered in his self-importance; “but nobody knows what yet.”

“It may only be another rumour,” interjected one of the others pessimistically.

So this was the reason of Burgess’s absence, I thought to myself; and I bade my bottle-nosed old charioteer make his overworked horse put the best of its four doubtful legs foremost.

“This gentleman’s for Clymping Manor,” the porter vouchsafed, claiming importance in his turn: and I immediately became the cynosure of all eyes—a figure of mystery, the latest importation from Scotland Yard, an unofficial Sherlock Holmes or what not!

I sat back in the rickety old conveyance and lit a cigar, making myself as comfortable as possible in view of my prospective hour and more of jolting: and it was no small relief when, a little over halfway, a car approached at something considerably over the futile English speed-limit and drew up with a scrunch, the chauffeur calling out something to my driver.

I put my head out and recognized Wilson; and it was not long before I had transferred myself and my baggage to the car, much to the relief of my charioteer, who pocketed his ample fare at the saving of half his long double journey.

In the car Wilson told me what had happened, explaining fully how it was that Burgess had overlooked the time and could not come himself: and I was naturally all agog to get to the house.

At the entrance of the drive I found a constable on duty, who let us pass at once on recognizing the car; and there was another policeman at the front door—a strange sort of reception.

Burgess was out on the step before the car had stopped, and wrung my hand between his.

“Forgive me, old chap,” he began

“It’s all right,” I answered, interrupting; “I quite understand. Wilson explained to me as we came along. But are you sure I shan’t be in the way?”

“Quite the reverse,” he replied, with decided emphasis, as he led the way in. “I have never looked forward to your arrival more or wanted a pal so badly—or Ann either. You are the one man I can really talk to; and God knows I badly want someone to whom I can unburden myself.”

He helped me off with my heavy coat with his own hands: and I felt it was good to be welcomed so warmly.

Then we went into the old panelled hall, which I had always thought just the jolliest place in the world and looked upon as the real embodiment of home on my distant travels.

“It is good to be home, old man,” I said, warming myself in front of the big log fire as he poured me out a drink, which I needed badly after my journey. “Somehow, as a roving bachelor, I always look upon Clymping Manor as home, and make for it the moment I arrive in England.”

“That’s good hearing. You know we have found young Bullingdon?”

I nodded.

“Yes; and I hope it’s the first step towards unravelling this extraordinary mystery. It struck me right in the face when I landed yesterday; and nobody seems able to talk about anything else.

“It was all new to me, but I’ve lost no time in reading it up: and you must tell me all about it. How is Lord Bullingdon?”

Burgess shook his head.

“Devilish bad: but he is young and strong. The doctors are with him now; and I have telephoned to town for Sir Humphrey Bedell who, by luck, turns out to have attended his family for years. He is bringing down Sir Bryan O’Callaghan in case an operation is needed, and a couple of nurses. At present Ann is in charge. We shan’t get much chance of a yarn to-night, I fear, between doctors, nurses, and detectives.”

* * *

And so it turned out. It seemed one long procession, all one after another, coming to Burgess for this thing and that. First there was Inspector Mutton and the C.I.D. men, who announced that Major Blenkinsopp was on his way; and then the local doctors, looking very grave and rather important.

They confirmed what Professor Wolff had said, but agreed that he had done very well with the limited means to hand. They had set the fractures and dressed the wounds, and incidentally spoke very warmly of Ann's help. Of the shock and concussion they could say very little; and they could not directly account for the torn shoulder, which had looked very angry, but appeared to be settling down wonderfully.

"As to the question of exposure, he would probably not have lasted through another night, and it was really only his greatcoat that saved him as it is," said Dr. Drake: "and I hope that with his youth and constitution we may stave off pneumonia. With any luck he may pull through; but it is impossible to say anything much at present."

At Burgess's suggestion the doctors agreed to stay on until the specialists arrived from London; and he went off to see the housekeeper about dinner at some indefinite hour for the four doctors, Major Blenkinsopp, and anyone else who might turn up. So, despite the quiet that prevailed, it was a very busy house, every few minutes one or other of the doctors going up to have a look at the unconscious patient; but I did not catch even a glimpse of Ann, who would not leave the room for an instant.

It was not long, either, before Major Blenkinsopp arrived on a fast car which had wasted no time; and later he told us, with a cynical laugh, that he had been twice held up by the police on the way down for exceeding the legal limit. I was very glad to meet him; and he proved a most interesting, capable man, of great coolness and sound judgment, tall and soldierly in appearance, with a lithe, active figure, somewhere approaching fifty, with a rather sallow skin suggestive of India, and a grizzled moustache.

After hearing the doctors' report he went up to the sick-room for a few minutes in order to identify Lord Bullingdon, whom he happened to know slightly personally and very well by sight—the first actual personal identification—just to make certain that there could be no mistake.

Then he took Burgess off to the library, which had been handed over to the police as headquarters; and, after carefully going into his personal story, he interviewed Inspector Mutton and the Scotland Yard men, and heard all that they had to report.

A little over an hour later the London doctors arrived, with two nurses in a second car; and, after a few words with the local doctors, they all went up to the sick-room.

Watching it there in the hall, and occasionally entering into a bit here and there, it seemed to me for all the world like a scene upon the stage out of a well-mounted melodrama: but I had to possess my soul in patience so far as Burgess was concerned, as I did not like to ask questions of anyone else, feeling the anomaly of my own position.

"What about his relatives?" I asked Burgess, during an interval.

"Curiously enough he has very few near relatives," he answered. "I spoke to Sir Humphrey upon the subject over the telephone, and he told me that he would get into touch with Colonel Gorleston, his uncle and until recently his guardian, who also happens incidentally to be his heir. He turns out to be in Ireland on the Curragh with his regiment, the 10th Lancers: and Sir Humphrey has telegraphed to him. It may be a day or two before he is over, if he happens to be

at Gorleston Castle, which is right out in the wilds and does not get letters or papers till two days late. It looks as though he is; or the news yesterday would have brought him over by the first boat. But we shall see."

Blenkinsopp joined us; and over a drink we discussed the case while we waited for the doctors.

"By the way," I asked, "what about this maim Manders, whom you speak of? Is he Fitzroy Manders, the barrister?"

"Yes, that's the man," answered Burgess, "a very interesting and clever chap—at least, that's how he struck me. Do you know him?"

"Yes, funnily enough, I do, though not as a conventional London acquaintance. We ran up against each other in Rumania last year in an out-of-the-way corner and knocked about together for nearly a week. I promised to look him up in the Temple some time when I got back, and intend to do so. This will lend an additional interest to our meeting."

"Fitzroy Manders," said Blenkinsopp, "is rapidly coming right to the top and will go far. He is, as probably you discovered, a very keen criminologist and we often see him unofficially at the Yard. He is a man I have a great liking and respect for."

"So have I," I said. "It is funny that chance should have butted him right into the middle of this business. Had he any kind of theory?"

"No, no more than any of the rest of us, to be quite candid," answered Blenkinsopp, shrugging his shoulders a bit impatiently; "and even this finding of young Bullingdon promises so far to throw precious little light upon it as far as I can see. It looks as though Scotland Yard, which the public always expect to be omniscient and infallible, will come in for a lot of the usual criticism and find itself in very bad odour—unless, of course, some Sherlock Holmes is sent from Heaven to expose our follies and futilities, and unravel amiably the whole mystery in that peculiar lucid fashion that always suggests that the story was written backwards. Our end is the brick-wall one, and a damned thick one, too, in this case, so far as one can judge."

"The more unusual and bizarre a crime," I ventured, "the easier it is of solution, as a rule: but here, so far as I can judge, unusual and bizarre enough, as it is in all conscience, no thing yet seems to stand out that gives even the most subtle imagination a pointer to build from. Hallo, here are the doctors."

The four doctors came down the wide oak staircase, speaking in low tones; and I noticed the old Chippendale grandfather clock struck nine as they reached the bottom.

We all three rose from our seats, standing expectantly and waiting for Sir Humphrey Bedell to speak.

"We can't say very much at present," he said in his quiet, well-modulated voice, born of forty years of sick-rooms and death-beds. "Sir Bryan O'Callaghan and I have been over Lord Bullingdon most carefully, and Sir Bryan has done a couple of very minor operations: but otherwise Dr. Drake and Dr. Forbes had done everything that could be possible. Now all we can do is to wait upon events and see how he goes on. He is badly knocked about, but he has, to my personal knowledge, a splendid constitution, and was in the very best of health; and this should give him every chance. The one thing that puzzles us is the wounded shoulder and the lacerations through his clothes, thick as they were. Owing to that fact they are not, however, very deep or necessarily serious; but their origin is obscure. They look as though they had been done by some instrument with a double set of teeth. He could not by any chance have been worried by some dog or other animal, whilst he lay unconscious, could he?"

Burgess shook his head.

“Most improbable,” he answered. “If so, the dog would probably have been found there or attracted someone to the spot, or gone on with the job. There was no trace or sign of any such thing, though that does not go for much under the circumstances and weather conditions.”

“That German professor,” interjected Blenkinsopp rather acridly, “seems, in his eagerness to get at Lord Bullingdon’s injuries, to have destroyed any chance of a clue from the clothes by hacking them off the shoulder in small pieces with a sharp knife. Otherwise we might have had something to go on.”

The doctor from town nodded; and Burgess made Major Blenkinsopp known to them.

“It is unfortunate, of course,” said Sir Bryan O’Callighan: “but he did it for the best. In fact, I hardly see how he could have done otherwise.”

“Well, anyhow, I shall go down to interview him in the morning,” said Blenkinsopp, “and see if he can help in any way or put forward any suggestions.”

“I have arranged, Mr. Clymping,” went on Sir Humphrey, “with your kind permission, for Dr. Drake to spend the night on the spot; and Dr. Forbes will relieve him in the morning. There is nothing that either Sir Bryan or I can do immediately by staying on ourselves, and we must both get back to town later on. Dr. Drake and Dr. Forbes have agreed to work it so that one or other is on the spot for the present, and I will run down again to-morrow immediately after I have got through my morning’s work; and, of course, I am always available by telephone, and will return at a moment’s notice if anything urgent should arise. That, however, there is no reason to anticipate.”

Burgess nodded.

“You and Sir Bryan will stay and have some dinner?” he asked.

“Thank you,” answered Sir Humphrey, “we shall be very glad to do so; and then we can have another look at Lord Bullingdon before we go.”

Burgess left us once more to give his orders about dinner, and then went upstairs to see Ann, who sent down a message begging to be excused, as she was having something to eat upstairs with the nurses. Burgess told me privately that she was bearing up marvellously, but was very tired; and he had advised her to go to bed.

Blenkinsopp, who had accepted Burgess’s invitation to stay the night, had in the meantime put a call through to Scotland Yard, giving them the latest report, and announcing his intention to remain on the spot till the next afternoon at any rate.

Then followed dinner at half-past nine, a strange meal in its unexpected assortment of guests—the four doctors and Blenkinsopp, with Burgess at the head and myself at the foot of the table. We were all old campaigners with level heads and good appetites which it took a great deal to upset; and despite the exciting events of the afternoon and the lateness of the hour, we all managed to do full justice to the excellent dinner, which, in the face of difficulties, Mrs. Morrison, Ann’s excellent housekeeper, had arranged for us.

Conversation was general, and by consent in front of the servants we avoided the obvious topic which was uppermost in the mind of each one of us: and I can recall that it was very interesting and touched upon a variety of subjects, which I should have liked to have followed up further, had circumstances permitted.

Over the port Burgess, half at my suggestion, half at Sir Humphrey’s, gave us an admirable first-hand synopsis of the whole business from the disappearance of the Bolsovers; and Blenkinsopp added certain facts and criticisms, which placed us all directly in touch with everything. To me it was invaluable, on account of its preciseness and lucidity, in helping me to

collate the whole story and all the persons of the drama, great and small, in my mind in proper perspective; and it served as a sound basis for subsequent deductions.

Soon after eleven, however, the doctors adjourned once more to the sick-chamber, and came down again a few minutes later with nothing fresh to report beyond the fact that all was quiet and apparently going on as well as possible. So we armed them with long cigars and packed them into their car and dispatched them to town, Sir Humphrey promising to be down about three the next afternoon.

Shortly after, Dr. Forbes left; and the four of us sat round the fire for a final smoke before going to bed. The talk was very interesting, turning principally upon crime, especially mysteries undiscovered and those supposed by the public to have been undiscovered because unrevealed in the papers. So I got no chance of any private personal talk with Burgess.

At one o'clock, after a final report on Lord Bullingdon's condition, we all went off to bed pretty well tired out. Burgess showed us each to our rooms, myself last of all.

"I won't stop for a yarn to-night, old man," he said, turning on the light. "I'm dead fagged; and we should probably sit up till cock-crow. In the morning I'll take you all over the ground and show you everything first-hand."

So we just said good night, and, like an old traveller, I was asleep as soon as I was between the sheets, glad to be "home" again.

* * *

(Continued)

The next morning broke fine and warm, the best type of spring morning with a real promise of summer in it, a complete contrast to the hard frost of the early part of the year, which had apparently broken up with the heavy rain of Monday.

My room was next to Burgess's: and he arrived in his dressing-gown as Jevons brought my tea at half-past seven, and planted himself on the end of my bed, lighting a cigarette.

"No news to count," he said, as I sat up and stretched comfortably after a splendid night. "Bullingdon's had a quiet night—still comatose, but doing as well as expected. Drake appears satisfied, and the nurses seem to think everything is going as well as possible 'considering,' as they say. Blenkinsopp is dressed and is closeted officially with Mutton and the C.I.D.'s in the library. So you and I had better get bathed and dressed, as they will all be wanting breakfast: and then I will take you round. Ann seems wonderfully well, despite the shock and strain of yesterday, and is looking forward eagerly to seeing you."

"Not so much as I am to seeing her," I said, jumping out of bed, thinking of my special little girl pal of the last dozen years, who had grown up into such a beautiful woman. "So off to your bath, and I'll follow when I've shaved."

Half an hour later I was downstairs and found Ann waiting on the terrace, looking a trifle pale, but very delightful in white serge. She knew I liked to see women in white: and I think she put it on specially to greet both the promise of summer and her old friend.

She came forward with both hands outstretched. "Oh, Line," she said, "it is good to see von again. You'll forgive me for not coming down last night: but I wasn't up to it, especially facing all those strange men at dinner after all that had happened."

"Quite so," I agreed taking her hands and looking into her face, "I thoroughly understood, poor old girl. But am I getting too old to be kissed—or is it you?"

“Don’t be silly,” she said, putting up her lips and giving me a frank sisterly hug with no nonsense in it.

“That’s more like old times,” I said, laughing. “By Jove, Ann, you seem to have grown every time I see you—quite a large-size, serious young lady instead of my tomboy in short frocks.”

“The gnawing tooth of time, Line, old dear. Why, I swear you’re beginning to get bald like all good young Americans who roll in dollars. Hallo, here’s Burgess to chaperon the grown-up young lady, and keep her from saying pert things to his respected guests.”

And then, as we three strolled up and down the terrace, she told me about her patient, as she instinctively dubbed Tony Bullingdon, with quite a proprietorial air.

“It is awful, Line,” she said, squeezing my arm, “to see the poor boy—he’s so nice-looking, too—there white and unconscious, all bandaged up, and giving just an occasional little groan or a moan—don’t really know which you would call it. He is awfully battered about by—well, whatever happened: and I honestly thought he would die in my arms with his head in my lap, while the Professor was cutting away his clothes and doing what he could to bind him up—with my petticoat, too, of all the funny things! He seems very clever, Professor; and I never saw such long, funny pointed fingers, but so quick and capable. He is so strange, too, when he is at work, so engrossed and abrupt, not saying a word except to rap out orders to me as though I were a lay figure; and I could not help being fascinated with his peculiar habit, which I had noticed once or twice before, of moistening—almost licking his lips with his long, pointed red tongue. It seemed almost automatic as he worked, and was certainly unconscious. It made me feel a little sick—I don’t know why—but he is certainly awfully neat and clever with his hands, and knows a lot about surgery and first aid.”

“So all the four doctors cordially agreed,” I said, watching her eager face, as we let her babble on, obviously relieving herself of much that had been pent up under the strain of necessity the night before. “But Major Blenkinsopp won’t forgive him for having sliced up the clothes round the shoulder past all recognition or hope of clue.”

“Oh, well, he really had to. They were all congealed and stuck into the wound in places,” rejoined Ann, with a shudder. “Don’t let us talk of it.”

“No, poor old kid,” said Burgess, bending and kissing her in the peculiarly nice affectionate way he has towards her, which has often made me think that one day he will make some lucky woman a particularly delightful husband. “I see Blenkinsopp and Drake kicking their heels: so let’s go in and find out if breakfast is ready.”

Blenkinsopp had nothing to report of interest, except that they told him on the ‘phone from Scotland Yard that the papers, great and small, serious and sensational, had one and all spread themselves more than ever, and had run positively wild over the discovery of Lord Bullingdon, hinting at great disclosures impending.

“And so much the worse for us if we disappoint them,” he concluded grimly; “and God knows it looks rather like as though we shall!”

Dr. Drake had nothing to add to Burgess’s first report of his patient’s condition: and before breakfast was over Dr. Forbes arrived to relieve him. So, after having seen Bullingdon together, Drake telephoned through to town to Sir Humphrey Bedell that all was well; and he confirmed his promise to be down round about three o’clock. Then Drake left; and for half an hour we scanned the bundle of daily papers, which Forbes had thoughtfully brought with him. In the normal way they are not due at Clymping till later in the forenoon: but Burgess gave orders for Wilson, for the time being, to fetch them each evening and first thing in the morning on his motor bicycle.

“Nothing but gas and journalese,” exclaimed Blenkinsopp disgustedly, throwing down the last of them. “Later on, after I have seen Mutton again, I’ll go down and interview this professor of yours at the Dower House and see if he can help with any idea or suggestion.”

“I’ll give you a note to him,” volunteered Burgess. “He is a queer misanthropic sort of creature and resents intrusion: so it may make him more easy of access and inclined to be helpful—if he can be. I’ll hang it on the peg of thanking him for what he did yesterday, and giving him news of the patient.”

So they left me smoking and thinking idly. The word “misanthropic” had started a train of thought in my mind, illogical and indefensible; but I allowed my imagination to toy with it, as one often will, till Ann returned from the kitchen-quarters and claimed my attention.

“Men are such a nuisance to feed,” she said, sitting on the arm of the chair next to mine “they do eat such a lot. Yesterday was a great and unexpected raid upon the larder; and this morning, in consequence, Mrs. Morrison and I have to restock and plan in advance for few or many without any clear knowledge of how many there are likely to be. I wonder if Lord Bullingdon’s uncle, Colonel Gorleston, will turn up? Thank goodness he is a bachelor, under the circumstances! I should hate to have to entertain an anxious aunt-by-marriage of Lord Bullingdon, twice my age and more, and full of a sense of her own great importance.”

“You know you would do it very nicely, Ann, my child,” I remarked banteringly. “You have all the makings of a great and most expert hostess, in that you give people exactly what they like and don’t worry them too much. But I, too, must confess to a feeling of relief, as it would make everything so infernally formal, and put us all upon our best ‘boiled-shirt’ behaviour. We shall probably hear about the gallant colonel, as people still term them in these perfectly peaceable days, from Sir Humphrey when he arrives after lunch. Hallo, there’s the ‘phone.’”

Jevons appeared from nowhere, as usual, and answered it.

“It’s Mr. Wellingham and Sir Henry Verjoyce, miss,” he announced to Ann. “They want to know if they can come down.”

So Burgess had to be fetched; and he told them they could come to lunch, though it was doubtful whether they could see Tony.

Then he was ready; and we set off with Blenkinsopp through the grounds, taking the way Burgess had taken with Ann the afternoon before, which, as he said, seemed weeks ago. We struck through the wood; and we found the place where the body had been discovered, roped off and covered with tarpaulins—“not that there is much to preserve in the way of clues,” as Blenkinsopp remarked cynically: “but Mutton is nothing if not thorough his desperation.”

Then we put him on the bridle-path for the Dower House, and made across to the left to the scene of the disappearances. Burgess took me all over the ground minutely, up and down the road and in and out of the fields: but I must frankly admit it conveyed or suggested nothing fresh to me, interesting only as the actual spot of these strange happenings. The remains of the big Napier, which had been most carefully searched through without revealing anything of importance, lay in a heap where it had burnt itself out, also covered with a tarpaulin.

There was a greater crowd than ever, kept back by a cordon of police; and several reporters, who had been refused by Jevons at the door the night before and again in the morning, tried to fasten on to Burgess, whom they did not find very communicative, though the next day we found that they had managed to spin him out to a whole imaginative column and a half, much to his disgust.

“I’m getting fed up, Line,” he said, calling me by the old familiar abbreviation, almost a nickname, coined, in fact, in response to my having christened him “Burge” in what he had

termed my Yankee fashion: and “Line” and “Burge” it had always been between ourselves throughout the twelve years of our friendship. “Let’s get off home; and be dammed to the lot of them.”

But at that moment Blenkinsopp put in an appearance; and he asked us to wait a few minutes for him while he saw Mutton and the C.I.D.’s, got their latest reports, and gave some orders.

“All right, Mutton,” we heard him say, as he rejoined us, “I’ll leave after Sir Humphrey Bedell has seen Lord Bullingdon: so be up to report not later than three o’clock. Nothing fresh either here or from town,” he added, as he reached us; “and it looks like a blind alley, the whole thing. Everything we do or try to do simply turns out to be wasted energy apparently, as so often the case in these matters. You would not believe how many men we have working upon the case all over the country.

Then, as he walked back through the woods, he told us about his interview with the Professor. At first he had been disinclined to see him, saying that he was tired of being interrupted by the police when he could do nothing to help them. Then he seemed to think better of it after reading Burgess’s letter, and eventually was quite affable to him over a pernicious German cigar, which Blenkinsopp, who has a very particular taste in tobacco, had felt himself bound to smoke for diplomatic reasons.

“A very remarkable-looking man and a most unusual type,” he said, describing him so vividly that I registered a little mental note I must meet him personally, “and undoubtedly very clever and well-read. He was more prepared to be expansive upon entomology and botany, his two hobbies, than to talk about the business in hand; but by judiciously taking an interest in his bugs and plants, and smoking hard at his horrible cabbagio, I led him gently round, and in the end he answered all my questions promptly and lucidly, showing a well-ordered, logical brain. He described the finding of Miss Clymping and Lord Bullingdon and all he had done in the way of first aid, detailing the injuries as though entering up a case-book. He professed himself at a loss to account for the torn shoulder; knew of no dog locally likely to have found the body and tried to drag it to safety; certainly did not keep one, or for the matter any animals, himself—disliked them, in fact; had been forced to cut away the garments in small pieces from the wounded shoulder, as any other doctor would have done. He added that he had treated the wound with a wonderful ointment he always carried for use in case of bites or stings or other wounds— “not one you will find in your renowned B.P., as you call it,” he had added, with a laugh, but he would guarantee that there would be no blood-poisoning now, whatever the cause of the wounds. He was affable enough, but seemed quite glad when I rose to go, and showed me out himself: so I fear there is not much to be learnt in that quarter—one more blind alley. He is evidently a very clever man,” he concluded; “but frankly I did not cotton on to him somehow. There was something indefinable about him that repelled me—perhaps the insular Briton’s dislike of that type of foreign savant outside his own particular circles.”

However, what he had said about Professor Wolff had caught my cosmopolitan imagination; and I determined to meet this interesting, if not attractive, personality quite apart from the case in hand, which was obsessing us all so completely for the moment.

“But what a delightful little Tudor place you have got down there hidden in that damp hollow, Mr. Clymping,” continued Blenkinsopp, “a regular architectural gem and a most paradoxical setting for our friend, the Herr Professor! That great studded oak door alone is worth going a good way to see, though I was not much impressed with the dour female with the brown fur tippet, who opened it to me.”

And Burgess, drawn on one of his pet hobbies, held forth enthusiastically upon the beauties and history of the Dower House till we got back to the old Georgian mansion, which, with its greater size superiority of position, had supplanted it everywhere except in the atavism of its owner's heart.

* * *

We found that Verjoyce and Wellingham had just arrived; and after lunch, when Ann left us, Burgess and Blenkinsopp told them about the finding of Tony Bullingdon in full detail.

"But what about Wuffles?" asked Bill Wellingham. "Tony would never have left her."

Blenkinsopp shook his head.

"Not a sign or a clue of the remotest description. She has, as far as can be ascertained, vanished as completely as the Bolsovers."

And for a few minutes we all smoked in silence without looking at each other.

Soon after half-past two Dr. Drake arrived, and a minute or two after three Sir Humphrey's car drove up; and the doctors all went up together to see Lord Bullingdon.

There was no variation in their report, which was satisfactory so far as it went, especially as regarded the tears on the shoulder, which were doing very well: and Blenkinsopp told Sir Humphrey about the Professor's ointment, and he was obviously interested.

"But why was this not mentioned to Sir Bryan and myself last night?" he asked in his most professional manner, raising his eyebrows and turning to the other doctors.

"Because it was not then known to any of us," answered Burgess, intervening; "that is the reason why. Professor Wolff did not mention the matter either to my sister or myself; and she did not notice him put on any ointment. It may have been done when she was taking off her petticoat."

"Well, anyhow, the wounds are making wonderfully satisfactory progress," admitted the big man from London, apparently disinclined to probe the matter more deeply under such satisfactory conditions, which could only react favourably upon himself and his colleagues. "Colonel Gorleston has wired from Gorleston Castle that he will cross tonight; and I expect he will be down with you to-morrow night, but I will telephone you. I shall probably drive him down myself."

As Lord Bullingdon was still unconscious, he allowed Wellingham and Verjoyce to peep into the room for a moment, and then left, offering Blenkinsopp a lift up to town in his car, which was gladly accepted.

The two youngsters left a little later, giving me my first quiet time with Burgess and Ann.

The next evening Sir Humphrey arrived, bringing down Colonel Gorleston, who stopped till the following afternoon, when, feeling that he could do no good by staying on, he left with Sir Humphrey.

Meanwhile Lord Bullingdon continued comatose, but otherwise there was no change: but towards Friday evening he began to grow feverish and restless, and the next morning he was delirious, a phase which lasted several days, causing the doctors and all of us the greatest anxiety. All the time it was touch-and-go; and several times it seemed as though the thin flame of life had burnt itself out.

And his delirium was as strange as the rest of the strange case. He was continuously dying out "Wuffles," not in tones of love so much as those of horror, repeating over and over again the

strange disconnected words: "Big dog . . . jumped over moon . . . green eyes . . . big dog . . . jumped over moon . . . green eyes.

It was his incessant cry day and night when not lying still in a stupor of exhaustion.

The words were so ridiculous and bizarre in themselves, part and parcel of the bizarre character of the whole thing, that I must confess that in their very nonsense, reminiscent of the old nursery rhyme, they fascinated me and echoed through and through my head by the hour, to the exclusion of everything else, as I sat and smoked and pondered, trying occasionally to read, but without success. At times he babbled less boisterously of things having no possible connexion with or bearing upon the case: and then with redoubled excitement and horror he would take up the old cry of "Wuffles," followed by the same insistent words: "Big dog . . . jumped over moon . . . green eyes."

It was a very absorbed and concentrated house within, with the shadow of tragedy and death hanging over it, doctors and relatives and police officials coming and going all the time: and from outside neither Blenkinsopp nor Mutton had any developments or hopeful clues to report. They were frankly in despair and very down in the mouth; and everything looked hopeless.

* * *

On Monday afternoon, when Burgess and I returned from a walk, taken in the interests of exercise rather than anything else, we were surprised—and I was delighted—to hear that the Professor and his daughter had called to inquire after the invalid, and were at tea in the drawing-room with Ann, awaiting our return. I had intended to make Burgess take me down to call at the first opportunity: but one thing and another had prevented me from urging the point.

The daughter, Dorothy—a lovely girl, as Burgess has already described her in his "Document"—was dressed in white ermine with a cap of the same fur, which set off her beauty remarkably well—still in her winter things, perhaps not unwisely, as it had set in cold again on Sunday with the treacherousness of spring in England. She bowed rather shyly to me, when introduced: but the Professor held out his hairy hand with its long pointed fingers and almond-shaped nails, and, as I took it, a queer feeling of repulsion, both psychological and physical, came over me—a strange, unaccountable aversion to the touch.

Him, too, Burgess has described in detail, with strange slanting eye-brows that met over eye-brows, and his piercing black eyes, his low-set pointed ears, and his full red-lipped mouth with its conspicuous white teeth; and above all, I noticed, with a strange sensation, his peculiar swinging gait as he crossed the room towards me. He was apparently in his most affable and approachable mood, and deprecated any assistance he had been able to give.

"Ah, my magic ointment!" he said, with a guttural laugh. "The medical profession would give their noses to learn the secret of my famous concoction of herbs; but I will not divulge it, though I am no patent medicine-monger with a desire to make a large fortune by advertising it. Moreover, the ingredients are rare and unobtainable in this highly civilized country."

And he licked his lips with his long, facile red tongue in the way already described to me: and I found that I could not take my eyes off the man. He fascinated me and set all sorts of strange, weird ideas coursing through my usually cool and well-controlled brain.

He made his inquiries into Bullingdon's condition, and appeared only passingly interested in the strange cry of his delirium, turning the subject with a shrug of his sloping shoulders.

“I am not a psycho-analyst,” he said, turning to me. “I am absorbed in entomology and botany, and am writing a great master-work at present. Hence my presence in your quiet Sussex away from the many calls and distractions which surround me in my beloved Fatherland.”

“I must admit to being fascinated myself, as an amateur, with this new science of psycho-analysis,” I answered, trying to size him up and draw him out. “But I think of all subjects botany is the one to which I have given the most consistent attention in my travels.”

I had struck the right note; and soon we were traversing Europe together—the Black Forest, the Austrian Tyrol, Poland, the Balkans, and the whole of the Near East, of which he showed an intimate first-hand knowledge. All the time we talked I watched him with a curious fascination which grew upon me every moment; and I was intensely disappointed when suddenly he rose quite abruptly to take his departure.

Burgess accompanied Miss Wolff to the door, and I, following with her father, could not help noticing his manner towards her, something indefinable and, perhaps, more an instinct on my part than anything else: but that, too, gave me much food for thought during the succeeding weeks. Had Burgess, hitherto apparently impervious, succumbed at last?

I helped the Professor into his grey fur coat, which I had already learnt was a characteristic of his appearance; and, as he put on his Russian cap of the same fur, he looked a most unexpected and strange figure in the old panelled Georgian hall.

“May I come down with Mr. Clymping one afternoon and see some of your specimens, Professor?” I asked, boldly forcing the invitation which had not been offered.

“I do not . . .” he began; and then he seemed reconsider the question. “By all means, if they will interest you, as I fancy they will. So few people know anything outside the commonplace in these matters: but you seem to do so. It is so rare to meet a widely travelled man in this self-satisfied island.”

And with these strange uncouth words, not too graciously spoken with a strong guttural accent, he turned on his heel without even the formality of shaking hands, preceding his daughter.

She turned and held out her hand, which I noticed was particularly small and dainty—quite unlike her father’s, except as to the pointing of the fingers.

“My father, like so many other geniuses,” she said apologetically, “is very absorbed and absentminded.”

She spoke in a soft well-modulated voice, free from accent; and for the first time I became fully aware of her charm. I had been so unpleasantly fascinated with the father that I had not had a moment up till then to pay any attention to the daughter, and I felt a guilty twinge at my unintentional rudeness: but, at the same time, I registered a mental vow to follow up his ungracious consent to my visit.

* * *

One thing and another had set up a wild train of thought in my head, and my brain was pounding hard like a big engine, as I sat smoking in the old hall after Ann had gone to bed: and Burgess, with the affinity of old friendship, seemed to realize it as he settled himself down to read the evening papers without comment.

At the end of half an hour I got up and helped myself to a drink.

“I am sorry, Burge, old man,” I said; “but I must run up to town to-morrow.”

“Why?” he asked, looking up, with obvious disappointment in his voice.

“An idea has been working in my brain which I cannot discuss,” I answered frankly. “It contains the germ of a theory too bizarre to put into words: and please do not press me upon the subject. I want to consult someone in town,” I added “and Manders will do—if he be willing to take on the job I want. He is the very man to help, and I will approach him first: but not a word to Ann or Blenkinsopp or any living soul. I don’t want to an egregious ass of myself by flying too high, or too wide of human probability. I must probe and if possible, test my wild idea first.”

“Why not me?” asked Burgess in rather a hurt tone.

“Because, my dear old chap, in the first place are absolutely essential in Sussex; and, secondly, you might be out of your depth elsewhere.”

Burgess nodded his characteristic nod of understanding.

“Will you take the car?”

“No, thanks, I’ll go by train, as I shall probably have to stay at least one night,” I replied.

“But you will return? Promise me. God knows I should be lost without you at present. I grudge you even one night’s absence.”

“I will return,” I answered, giving him my hand,” whatever happens. I promise you to see this matter through to the bitter end.”

And God knows, when I spoke those words by no means lightly, I never dreamt how bitter the end was destined to be.