

The Disappearance of Marie Severe

Ernest Bramah

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"I wonder if you might happen to be interested in this case of Marie Severe, Mr. Carrados?"

If Carrados's eyes had been in the habit of expressing emotion they would doubtless have twinkled as Inspector Beedel thus casually introduced the subject of the Swanstead on Thames schoolgirl whose inexplicable disappearance two weeks earlier had filled column upon column of every newspaper with excited speculation until the sheer impossibility of keeping the sensation going without a shred of actual fact had relegated Marie Severe to the obscurity of an occasional paragraph.

"If you are concerned with it, I am sure that I shall be interested, Inspector," said the blind man encouragingly. "It is still being followed, then?"

"Why, yes, sir, I have it in hand, but as for following it well, 'following' is perhaps scarcely the word now."

"Ah," commented Carrados. "There was very little to follow; I remember."

"I don't think that I've ever known a case of the kind with less, sir. For all the trace she left, the girl might have melted out of existence, and from that day to this, with the exception of that printed communication received by her mother—you remember that, Mr. Carrados? there hasn't been a clue worth wasting so much as shoe leather on."

"You have had plenty of hints all the same, I suppose?"

Inspector Beedel threw out a gesture of mild despair. It conveyed the patient exasperation of the conscientious and long-suffering man.

"I should say that the case 'took on' remarkably, Mr. Carrados. I doubt if there has been a more popular sensation of its kind for years. Mind you, I'm all in favour of publicity in the circumstances the photographs and description may bring important facts to light, but sometimes it's a bit trying for those who have to do the work at our end. 'Seen in Northampton,' 'seen in Ealing,' 'heard of in West Croydon,' 'girl answering to the description observed in the waiting-room at Charing Cross,' 'suspicious-looking man with likely girl noticed about the Victoria Dock, Hull,' 'seen and spoken to near Chorley, Lancs,' 'caught sight of apparently struggling in a luxurious motor car on the Portsmouth Road,' 'believed to have visited a Watford picture palace' they've all been gone into as carefully as though we believed that each one was the real thing at last."

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"And you haven't, eh?"

The Inspector looked round. He knew well enough that they were alone in the study at The Turrets, but the action had become something of a mannerism with him.

"I don't mind admitting to you, sir, that I've never had any other opinion than that the father of the little girl went down that day and got her away. Where she is now, and whether dead or alive, I can't pretend to say, but that he's at the bottom of it I'm firmly convinced. And what's more," he added with slow significance, "I hope so."

"Why in particular?" inquired the other.

Beedel felt in his breast-pocket, took out a formidable wallet, and from among its multitudinous contents selected a cabinet photograph sheathed in its protecting envelope of glazed transparent paper.

"If you could make out anything of what this portrait shows, you'd understand better what I mean, Mr. Carrados," he replied delicately.

Carrados shook his head but nevertheless held out his hand for the photograph.

"No good, I'm afraid," he confessed before he took it. "A print of this sort is one of the few things that afford no graduation to the sense of touch. No, no" as he passed his finger-tips over the paper "a gelatino-chloride surface of mathematical uniformity, Inspector, and nothing more. Now had it been the negative "

"I am sure that that could be procured if you wished to have it, Mr. Carrados. Anyway, I dare say that you've seen in some of the papers what this young girl is like. She is ten years old and big at least tall—for her age. This picture is the last taken some time this year and I am told that it is just like her."

"How should you describe it, Inspector?"

"I am not much good at that sort of thing," said the large man with a shy awkwardness, "but it makes as sweet a picture as ever I've seen. She is very straight-set, and yet with a sort of gracefulness such as a young wild animal might have. It's a full-faced position, and she is looking straight out at you with an expression that is partly serious and partly amused, and as noble and gracious with it all as a young princess might be. I have children of my own, Mr. Carrados, and of course I think they're very nice and pretty, but this this is quite a different thing. Her hair is curly without being in separate curls, and the description calls it black. Eyes dark brown with straight eyebrows, complexion a sort of glowing brown, small regular teeth. Of course we have a full description of what she was wearing and so forth."

"Yes, yes," assented Carrados idly. "The Van Brown Studio, Photographers, eh? These people are quite well off, then?"

"Oh yes; very nice house and good position—Mrs. Severe, that is to say. You will remember that she obtained a divorce from her husband four or five years ago. I've turned up the particulars and it wasn't what you'd call a bad case as things go, but the lady seemed determined, and in the end Severe didn't defend. She had five or six hundred a year of her own, but he had nothing beyond his salary, and he threw his position up then, and ever since he has been going steadily down. He's almost on the last rung now and picks up his living casual."

"What's the case against him?"

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"Well, it scarcely amounts to a case as yet because there is no evidence of his being seen with the child, nor is there anything to connect him with her after the disappearance. Still, it is a working hypothesis. If it was the act of a tramp or a maniac, experience goes to show that we should have found her, dead or alive, by now. Mrs. Severe is all for it being her husband. Of course the decree gave her the custody of Marie. Severe asked to be allowed to see her occasionally, and at first a servant took the child to have tea with him once a month. That was at his rooms. Then he asked to be met in one of the parks or at a gallery. He hadn't got so much as a room then, you see, sir. At last the servant reported that he had grown so shabby as to shame her that the child should be seen with him, though she did say that he was always sober and very kind to Marie, bringing her a little toy or something even when he didn't seem to have sixpence for himself. After that the visits were stopped altogether. Then about a month ago these two, husband and wife, met accidentally in the street. Severe said that he hoped to be doing a bit better soon, and asked for the visits to be continued. How it would have gone I cannot say, but Mrs. Severe happened to have a friend with her, an American lady called Miss Julp, who seems to be living with her now, and the middle-aged female she's a hard sister, that Cornelia Julp, I should say pushed her way into the conversation and gave her views on his conduct until Severe must have had some trouble with his hands. Finally Mrs. Severe had an unfortunate impulse to end the discussion by giving her husband a bank-note. She says she got the most awful look she ever saw on any face. Then Severe very deliberately tore up the note, dropped the pieces down a gutter grid that they were standing near, dusted his fingers on his handkerchief, raised his hat and walked away without another word. That was the last she saw of him, but she professes to have been afraid of something happening ever since."

"Then something happens, and so, of course, it must be Severe?" suggested Carrados.

"It does look a bit like that so far, I must admit, sir," assented the Inspector. "Still, Mrs. Severe's opinions aren't quite all. Severe's account of his movements on the afternoon in question say between twelve-thirty and four in particular—are not satisfactory. Latterly he has been occupying a miserable room off Red Lion Street. He went out at twelve and returned about five—that he doesn't deny. Says he spent the time walking about the streets and in the Holborn news-room, but can mention no one who saw him during those five hours. On the other hand, a porter at Swanstead station identifies him as a passenger who alighted there from the 1.17 that afternoon."

"From a newspaper likeness?"

"In the first instance, Mr. Carrados. Afterwards in person."

"Did they speak, or is it merely visual?"

"Only from what he saw of him."

"Struck, I suppose, by the remarkable fact that the passenger wore a hat and a tie—as shown in the picture, or inspired to notice him closely by something indescribably suggestive in the passenger's way of giving up his ticket? It may be all right, Beedel, I admit, but I heartily distrust the weight of importance that these casual identifications are being given on vital points nowadays. Are you satisfied with this yourself?"

"Only as corroborative, sir. Until we find the girl or some trace of her we're bound to make casts in the hope of picking up a line. Well, then there's the letter Mrs. Severe received."

"Have you that with you?"

The Inspector took up the wallet that he had not yet returned to his pocket and selected another enclosure.

"It's a very unusual form," he commented as he handed the envelope to Mr. Carrados and waited for his

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opinion.

The blind man passed his finger-tips across the paper and at once understood the point of singularity. The lines were printed, but not in consecutive form, every letter being on a little separate square of paper. It was evident that they had been cut out from some other sheet and then pasted on the envelope to form the address.

"London, E. C., 5.30 p.m., 15th May," read Carrados from the postmark.

"The day of the kidnapping. There is a train from Swanstead arriving at Lambeth Bridge at 4.47," remarked Beedel.

"What was your porter doing when that left?"

"He was off duty, sir."

Carrados took out the enclosure and read it off as he had already done the envelope, but with a more deliberative touch, for the print was smaller. The type and the paper were suggestive of a newspaper origin. In most cases whole words had been found available.

"Do not be alarmed," ran the patchwork message. "The girl is in good hands. Only risk lies in pressing search. Wait and she will return uninjured."

"You have identified the newspaper?"

"Yes; it is all cut from The Times of May the 13th. The printing on the back of the words fixes it absolutely. Premeditated, Mr. Carrados."

"The whole incident points to that. The date of the newspaper means little, but the deliberate selection of words, the careful way they have been cut out and aligned, taken in conjunction with the time the child disappeared and the time that this was posted yes, I think you may assume premeditation, Inspector."

"Stationery of the commonest description; immediate return to London, and the method of a man who used this print because he feared that under any disguise his handwriting might be recognised."

Carrados nodded.

"Severe cannot hope to retain the child, of course," he remarked casually. "What motive do you infer?"

"Mrs. Severe is convinced that it is to distress her, out of revenge."

"And this letter is to reassure her?"

The Inspector bit his lip as he smiled at the quiet thrust.

"It might also be to influence her towards suspending search," he suggested.

"At all events I dare say that it has reassured her?"

"In a certain way, yes, it has. It has enabled us to establish that the act is not one of casual lust or vagabondage. There is an alternative that we naturally did not suggest to her."

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"And that is?"

"Another Thelby Wood case, Mr. Carrados. The maniacal infatuation of someone who would be the last to be suspected. Some man of good position, a friend and neighbour possibly, who sees this beautiful young creature the school friend of his own daughters or sitting before him in church it may be and becomes the slave of his diseased imagination until he is prepared to risk everything for that one overpowering object. A primitive man for the time, one may say, or, even worse, a satyr or a gorilla."

"I wonder," observed Carrados thoughtfully, "if you also have ever felt that you would like to drop it and become a monk, Inspector. Or a sty~ite on a pole."

Beedel laughed softly and then rubbed his chin in the same contemplative spirit.

"I think I know what you mean, sir," he admitted. "It's a black page. But," he added with wholesome philosophy, "after all, it is only a page in a longish book. And if I was in a monastery there'd be one or two more things done that I've helped to keep undone."

"Including the cracking of my head, Inspector? Very true. We must take the world as we find it and ourselves as we are. And I wish that I could agree with you about Severe. It would be a more endurable outlook: spite and revenge are at least decent human motives. Unfortunately, the only hint I can offer is a negative one." He indicated the printed cuttings on the sheet that Beedel had submitted to him. "This photo~mountant costs about sixpence a pot, but you can buy a bottle of gum for a penny."

"Well, sir," said Beedel, "I did think of having that examined, but I waited for you to see the letter as it stood. After all, it didn't strike me as a point one could put much reliance on."

"Quite right," assented Mr. Carrados, "there is nothing personal or definite in it. It may suggest a photographer, amateur or professional, but it would be preposterous to assume so much from this alone. Severe, even, may have There are hundreds of chances. I should disregard it for the moment."

"There is nothing more to be got from the letter?"

"There may be, but it is rather elusive at present. What has been done with it?"

"I received it from Mrs. Severe and it has been in my possession ever since."

"You haven't submitted it to a chemist for any purpose?"

"No, sir. I gave a copy of the wording to some newspaper gentlemen, but no one but myself has handled it."

"Very good. Now if you care to leave it with me for a few days."

Inspector Beedel expressed his immediate willingness and would have added his tribute of obligation for Mr. Carrados's service, but the blind man cut him short.

"Don't rely on anything, Inspector," he warned him. "I am afraid that this resolves itself into a game of chance. Just one touch of luck may give us a winning point, or it may go the other way. In any case there is no reason why I should not motor round by Swanstead one of these days when I am out. If anything fresh turns up before you hear from me you had better telephone me. Now exactly where did this happen?"

The actual facts surrounding the disappearance of Marie Severe constituted the real mystery of the case.

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Arling Avenue, Swanstead, was one of those leisurely suburban roads where it is impossible to imagine anything happening hurriedly from the delivery of an occasional telegram to the activity of the local builder. Houses, detached houses each surrounded by its rood or more of garden, had been built here and there along its length at one time or another, but even the most modern one had now become matured, and the vacant plots between them had reverted from the condition of "eligible sites" into very passable fields of buttercups and daisies again, so that Arling Avenue remained a pleasant and exclusive thoroughfare. One side of the road was entirely unbuilt on and afforded the prospect of a level meadow where hay was made and real animals grazed in due season. The inhabitants of Arling Avenue never failed to point out to visitors this evidence of undeniable rurality. It even figured in the prospectus of Homewood, the Arling Avenue day school for girls and little boys which the Misses Chibwell had carried on with equal success and inconspicuousness until the Severe affair suddenly brought them into the glare of a terrifying publicity.

Mrs. Severe's house, The Hollies, was the first in the road, as the road was generally regarded that is to say, from the direction of the station. Bee del picked up a loose sheet of paper and scored it heavily with a plan of the neighbourhood as he explained the position with some minuteness. Next to The Hollies came Arling Lodge. After Arling Lodge there was one of the vacant plots of ground before the next house was reached, but between the Lodge and the vacant plot was a broad grassy opening, unfenced towards the road, and here the Inspector's pencil underlined the deepest significance, culminating in an ominous X about the centre of the space. Originally the opening had doubtless marked the projection of another road, but the scheme had come to nothing. Occasionally a little band of exploring children with the fictitious optimism of youth pecked among its rank and tangled growth in the affectation of hoping to find blackberries there; once in a while a passing chair-mender or travelling tinker regarded it favourably for the scene of his midday siesta, but its only legitimate use seemed to be that of affording access to the side door of Arling Lodge garden. The Inspector pencilled in the garden door as an afterthought, with the parenthesis that it was seldom used and always kept locked. Then he followed out the Avenue as far as the school, indicating all the houses and other features. The whole distance traversed did not exceed two hundred yards.

A few minutes before two o'clock on the afternoon of her disappearance Marie Severe set out as usual for Miss Chibwell's school. Since the incident of the unfortunate encounter with her former husband Mrs. Severe had considered it necessary to exercise a peculiar vigilance over her only child. Thenceforward Marie never went out alone; never, with the exception of the short walk to school and back, that is to say, for in that quiet straight road, in the full light of day, it was ridiculous to imagine that anything could happen. It was ridiculous, but all the same the vaguely uneasy woman generally walked to the garden gate with the little girl and watched her until the diminished figure passed, with a last gay wave of hand or satchel, out of her sight into the school yard.

"That's how it would have been on this occasion," narrated Beedel, "only just as they got to the garden gate a tradesman whom Mrs. Severe wanted to speak with drove up and passed in by the back way. The lady looked along the avenue, and as it happened at that moment Miss Chibwell was standing in the road by her gate. No one else was in sight, so it isn't to be wondered at that Mrs. Severe went back to the house immediately without another thought.

"That was the last that has been seen of Marie. As a matter of fact, Miss Chibwell turned back into her garden almost as soon as Mrs. Severe did. When the child did not appear for the afternoon school the mistress thought nothing of it. She is a little short-sighted and although she had seen the two at their gate she concluded that they were going out together somewhere. Consequently it was not until four o'clock, when Marie did not return home, that the alarm was raised."

Continuous narration was not congenial to Inspector Beedel's mental attitude. He made frequent pauses as though to invite cross-examination. Sometimes Carrados ignored the opening, at others he found it more convenient to comply.

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"The inference is that someone was waiting in this space just beyond Arling Lodge?" he now contributed.

"I think it is reasonable to assume that, sir. Premeditated, we both admit. Doubtless a favourable opportunity was being looked for and there it was. At all events there" he tapped the X as the paper lay beneath Carrados's hand—"there is the very last trace that we can rely on."

"The scent, you mean?"

"Yes, Mr. Carrados. We got one of our dogs down the next morning and put him on the trail. We gave him the scent of a boot and from the gate he brought us without a pause to where I have marked this X. There the line ended. There can be no doubt that from that point the girl had been picked up and carried. That is a very remarkable thing. It could scarcely have been done openly past the houses. The fences on all sides are of such a nature that it is incredible for any man to have got an unwilling or insensible burden of that sort over without at least laying it down in the process. If our dog is to be trusted, it wasn't laid down. Some sort of a vehicle remains. We find no recent wheel-marks and no one seems to have seen anything that would answer about at that time.

"You are determined to mystify me, Inspector," smiled Carrados.

"I'm that way myself, sir," said the detective.

"And I know you too well to ask if you have done this and that—"

"I've done everything," admitted Beedel modestly.

"Is this X spot commanded by any of the houses? Here is Arling Lodge "There is one window overlooking, but now the trees are too much out for anything to be seen. Besides, it's only a passage window. Dr. Ellerslie took me up there himself to settle the point."

"Ellerslie Dr. Ellerslie?"

"The gentleman who lives there. At least he doesn't live altogether there, as I understand that he has it for a week-end place. Boating, I believe, sir. His regula? practice is in town."

"Harley Street? Prescott Ellerslie, do you know?"

"That is the same, Mr. Carrados."

"Oh, a very well-known man. He has a great reputation as an operator for peritonitis. Nothing less than fifty guineas a time, Inspector." Perhaps the fee did not greatly impress Mr. Carrados, but doubtless he judged that it would interest Inspector Beedel. "And this house on the other side Lyncote?"

"A retired Indian army colonel lives there—Colonel Doige."

"I mean as regards overlooking the spot."

"No; it is quite cut off from there. It cannot be seen."

Carrados's interpreting finger stopped lightly over a detail of the plan that it was again exploring. The Inspector's pencil had now added a line of dots leading from The Hollies gate to the X.

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"The line the dog took," Beedel explained, following the other's movement. "You notice that the girl turned sharply out of the avenue into this opening at right angles."

"I was just considering that."

"Something took her attention suddenly or someone called her there — I wonder what, Mr. Carrados."

"I wonder," echoed the blind man, raising the anonymous letter to his face again.

Mr. Carrados frequently professed to find inspiration in the surroundings of light and brilliance to which his physical sense was dead, but when he wished to go about his work with everyone else at a notable disadvantage he not unnaturally chose the dark. It was therefore night when, in accordance with his promise to Beedel, he motored round by Swanstead, or, more exactly, it was morning, for the clock in the square ivied tower of the parish church struck two as the car switch-backed over the humped bridge from Middlesex into Surrey.

"This will do, Harris; wait here," he said a little later. He knew that there were trees above and wide open spaces on both sides. The station lay just beyond, and from the station to Arling Avenue was a negligible step. Even at that hour Arling Avenue might have been awake to the intrusion of an alien car of rather noticeable proportions. The adaptable Harris picked out Mr. Carrados's most substantial rug and went to sleep, to dream of a wayside cycle shop and tearooms where he could devote himself to pedigree Wyandottes. With Parkinson at his elbow Carrados walked slowly on to Arling Avenue. What was lacking on Beedel's plan Parkinson's eyes supplied; on a subtler plane, in the moist, warm night, full of quiet sounds and earthy odours, other details were filled in like the work of a lightning cartoonist before the blind man's understanding.

They walked the length of the avenue once and then returned to the grassy opening where the last trace of Marie Severe had evaporated.

"I will stay here. You walk on back to the highroad and wait for me. I may be some time. If I want you, you will hear the whistle."

"Very good, sir." Parkinson knew of old that there were times when his master would have no human eye upon him as he went about his work, and with a magnificent stolidity the man had not a particle of curiosity. It did not even occur to him to wonder. But for nearly half-an-hour the more inquiring creatures of the night looked down or up, according to their natures to observe the strange attitudes and quiet persistence of the disturber of the solitude as he crossed and recrossed their little domain, studied its boundaries, and explored every corner of its miniature thickets. A single petal picked up near the locked door to the garden of Arling Lodge seemed a small return for such perseverance, but it is to be presumed that the patient search had not been in vain, for it was immediately after the discovery that Carrados left the opening, and with the cool effrontery that marked his methods he opened the front gate of Dr. Ellerslie's garden and made his way with slow but unerring insight along the boundary wall.

"A blind man," he had once replied to Mr. Carlyle's nervous remonstrance "a blind man carries on his face a sufficient excuse for every indiscretion."

It was nearly three o'clock when, by the light of the street lamp at the corner of the avenue and the highroad, Parkinson saw his master approaching. But to the patient and excellent servitor's disappointment Carrados at that moment turned back and retraced his steps in the same leisurely manner. As a matter of fact, a new consideration had occurred to the blind man and he continued to pace up and down the footpath as he considered it.

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"Oh, sir!"

He stopped at once, but betraying no surprise, without the start which few can restrain when addressed suddenly in the dark. It was always dark to him, but was it ever sudden? Was he indeed ignorant of the obscure figure that had appeared at the gate during his perambulation?

"I have seen you walking up and down at this hour and I wondered I wondered whether you had any news."

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I am Mrs. Severe. My little girl Marie disappeared from here two weeks ago. You must surely know about it; everybody does."

"Yes, I know," he admitted. "Inspector Beedel told me."

"Oh, Inspector Beedel!" There was obvious disappointment in her voice. "He is very kind and promises but nothing comes of it, and the days go on, the days go on," she repeated tragically.

"Ida! Ida!" Someone was calling from one of the upper windows, but Carrados was speaking also and Mrs. Severe merely waved her hand back towards the house without responding.

"Your little girl was very fond of flowers?"

"Oh yes, indeed." The pleasant recollection dwarfed the poor lady's present sense of calamity and for a moment she was quite bright. "She loved them. She would bury her face in a bunch of flowers and drink their scent. She almost lived in the garden. They were more to her than toys or dolls, I am sure. But how do you know?"

"I only guessed."

"Ida! Ida!" The rather insistent, nasally querulous voice was raised again and this time Mrs. Severe replied.

"Yes, dear, immediately," she called back, still lingering, however, to discover whether she had anything to hope from this outlandish visitant.

"Had Marie been ill recently?" Carrados detained her with the question.

"Ill! Oh no." The reply was instant and emphatic. It was almost if one could credit a mother's pride in her child's health being carried to such a length—it was almost resentful.

"Nothing that required the services of a doctor?"

"Marie never requires the services of a doctor." The tone, distant and constrained, made it clear that Mrs. Severe had given up any expectations in this quarter. "My child, I am glad to say, does not know what illness means," she added deliberately.

"Ida! Oh, here you are." The very unromantically accoutred form of a keen-visaged, middle-aged female, padding heavily in bedroom slippers along the garden walk, gave its quietus to the situation.

"What a scare you gave me, deane. Why, whoever "

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"Good-night," said Mrs. Severe, turning from the gate.

Carrados raised his hat and resumed his interrupted stroll. He had not sought the interview and he made no effort to prolong it, for there was little to be got from that source.

"A strange flare of maternal pride," he remarked in his usual detached fashion as he rejoined Parkinson.

About five o'clock on the same day—five o'clock in the afternoon, let it be understood Inspector Beedel was called to the telephone.

"Oh, nothing fresh so far, Mr. Carrados," he reported when he identified his caller. "I shan't forget to let you know whenever there "

"But I think that possibly there is," replied Mr. Carrados. "Or at least there might be if you went down to Arling Lodge and insisted on seeing the child who slept there last night."

"Arling Lodge? Dr. Ellerslie's? You don't mean to say, sir "

"That is for you to satisfy yourself. Dr. Ellerslie is a widower with no children. Marie Severe was drugged by phronolal on some flowers which she was given. Phronolal is a new anaesthetic which is practically unknown outside medical circles. She was carried into the garden of Arling Lodge and into the house. The bunch of flowers was thrown down temporarily inside the wall, probably while the door was relocked. The girl's hair caught on a raspberry cane six yards from the back door along the path leading there. Ellerslie had previously sent away the two people who look after the place a housekeeper and her husband who sees to the garden. That letter, by the way, was associable with phronolal. Now you have all that I know, Inspector, and I hope to goodness that I am clear of it."

"But, good heavens, Mr. Carrados, this is really terrible!" protested Beedel, moved to emotion in spite of his rich experience of questionable humanity. "A man in his position! Is he a maniac?"

"I don't know. To tell you frankly, Inspector, I haven't gone an inch further than I was compelled to go in order to be sure. Make use of the information as you like, but I don't want to have anything more to do with the case. It isn't a pleasant thing to have pulled down a man like Ellerslie—a callous, exacting machine in the operating-room, one hears, but a man who was doing fine work—saving useful lives every day. I'm sick of it, Beedel, that's all."

"I understand, sir. Still, there's the other side, isn't there, after all? Of course I'll keep your name out of it as you wish, but I shall be given a good deal of credit that I oughtn't to accept. If you don't do anything for a few weeks the papers are always more complimentary when you do do it."

"I'm afraid that you will have to put up with that," replied Carrados drily.

There was an acquiescent laugh from the other end and a reference to the speaker's indebtedness. Then: "Well, I'll get the necessary authority and go down at once, sir."

"Yes. Good-bye," said Carrados. He hung up the receiver with the only satisfaction that he had experienced since he had fixed on Ellerslie satisfaction to have done with it. The thing was unpalatable enough in itself, and to add another element of distaste, through one or two circumstances that had come his way in the past, he had an actual regard for the surgeon whom some called brutal, but who was universally admitted to be splendidly efficient. It would have been a much more congenial business to the blind man to clear him than to implicate. He betook himself to a tray of Sicilian coins of the autonomous period to get the taste out of his

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mouth and swore that he would not read a word of any stage of the proceedings.

"A Mr. Severe wishes to see you, sir."

So it happened that about an hour after he had definitely shelved his interest in the case Max Carrados was again drawn into its complications. Had Severe been merely a well-to-do suppliant, perhaps ... but the blind man had enough of the vagabond spirit to ensure his sympathy towards one whom he knew, on the contrary, to be extremely ill-to-do. In a flash of imagination he saw the outcast walking from Red Lion Street to Richmond, and, denied admission, from Richmond back to Red Lion Street again, because he hadn't sixpence to squander, the man who always bought a little toy...

"It is nearly seven, isn't it, Parkinson? Mr. Severe will stay and dine with me," were almost the first words the visitor heard.

"Very well, sir."

"I? Dine?" interposed Severe quickly. "No, no. I really "

"If you will be so good as to keep me company," said Carrados with suave determination. Parkinson retired, knowing that the thing was settled. "I am quite alone, Mr. Severe, and my selfishness takes that form. If a man calls on me about breakfast-time he must stay to breakfast, at lunch-time to lunch, and so on."

"Your friends, doubtless," suggested Severe with latent bitterness. "Well, I am inclined to describe anyone who will lighten my darkness for an hour as a friend. You would yourself in the circumstances, you know." And then, quite unconsciously, under this treatment the years of degradation slipped from Severe and he found himself accepting the invitation in the conventional phrases and talking to his host just as though they were two men of the same world in the old times. Guessing what had brought him, and knowing that it mattered little or nothing then, Carrados kept his guest clear of the subject of the disappearance until they were alone again after dinner. Then, to be denied no longer, Severe tackled it with a blunt inquiry:

"Scotland Yard has been consulting you about Marie, Mr. Carrados?"

"Surely that is not in the papers?"

"I don't know," replied Severe, "but they aren't my authority. Among the people I have mostly to do with many shrewd bits of information circulate that never get into the Press. Sometimes they are mere beadwork, of course, but quite often they have ground. Just at present I am something of a celebrity in my usual haunts I am 'Jones' in town, by the way, but my identity has come out and everything to do with the notorious Severe affair comes round to me. I hear that Inspector Beedel, who has the case in hand, has just been to see you. Your co-operation is inferred."

"And if so?" queried Carrados.

"If so," continued his visitor, "I have a word to say. Beedel got it into his thick, unimaginative skull that I must be the kidnapper because, on the orthodox 'motive' lines, he couldn't fix on anyone else. As a matter of fact, Mr. Carrados, I have rather too much affection for my little daughter to have taken her out of a comfortable home. My unfortunate wife may have her faults I don't mind admitting that she has serious faults and a great many of them, but she would at least give Marie decent surroundings. When I heard of the child's disappearance—it was in the early evening papers the next morning I was distracted. I dreaded every edition to see a placard announcing that the body had been found and to read the usual horrible details of insane or bestial outrage. I searched my pockets and found a shilling and a few coppers. Without any clear

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idea of what I expected to do, I tore off to the station and spent my money on a third single to Swanstead."

"Oh," interposed Carrados, "the 1.17 arrival?"

Severe laughed contemptuously.

"The station porter, you mean?" he said. "Yes; that bright youth merely predated his experience by twenty-four hours when he saw that there was buncie in it a few days later. Oh, I dare say he really thought it then. As for me, before I had got to Swanstead I had realised my mistake. What could I do in any case? Nothing that the least efficient local bobby could not do much better. Least of all did I wish to meet Ida Mrs. Severe. No I walked out of the station, turned to the right instead of the left and padded back to town."

"And you have come now, a fortnight or more later, to tell me this, Mr. Severe?"

"Well, I have come to have small hopes of Beedel. At first I didn't care two straws what they thought, expecting every hour to hear the worst. But that may not have happened. Two weeks have passed without anything being found, so that the child may be alive somewhere. If you are taking it up there is a chance—provided only that you don't let them obsess you with the idea that I have had anything to do with it."

"I don't imagine that you have had anything to do with it, Mr. Severe, and I believe that Marie is still alive."

"Thank God for that," said Severe with sudden intensity. "I am very, very glad to hear you express that opinion, Mr. Carrados. I don't suppose that I shall see much of the girl as time goes on or that she will be taught to regard the Fifth Commandment very seriously. All the same, the relief of hearing that makes me your debtor for ever. . . . Anxious as I am, I will be content with that. I won't worry you for your clues or your ideas . . . but I will tell you one thing. It may amuse you. My notion, a few days ago, of what might have happened "

"Yes?" encouraged his host.

"It shows you the wild ideas one gets in such circumstances. My former wife is, if I may be permitted to say so, the most amiable and devoted creature in the world. Subject to that, I will readily concede that a more self-opinionated, credulous, dogmatically wrong-headed and crank-ridden woman does not exist. There isn't a silly fad that she hasn't taken up—and what's more tragic, absolutely believed in for the time from ozonised milk to rhythmic yawning. Some time ago she was swept into Christian Science. An atrocious harpy called Julp a professional 'healer'—fastened on her and has dominated her ever since. Well, fantastic as it seems now, I was actually prepared to believe that Marie had been ill and under their really sincere but grotesque 'healing' had died. Then to hide the failure of their creed or because they got panic-stricken "

Then Carrados interrupted, an incivility he rarely committed.

"Yes, yes, I see," he said quickly. "But your daughter never is ill?"

"Never ill? Marie? Oh, isn't she! In the past six months I've "

"But Mrs. Severe deliberately said—her words—that Marie 'does not know what illness means.'"

"That's their jargon. They hold that illness does not exist and so it has no meaning. But I should describe Marie as a delicate child on the whole—bilious attacks and so on."

"Christian Scientists . . . gastric trouble . . . Prescott Ellerslie? Good heavens! This comes of half doing a

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thing," muttered Carrados.

"Nothing wrong, I hope?" ventured the visitor.

"Wait." Severe wondered what the deuce turn the business was taking, but there being no incentive to do anything else, he waited. Coffee, rather more fragrant than that purveyed at the nocturnal stall, and fat Egyptian cigarettes of a subtle aroma somehow failed nevertheless to make the time pass quickly. Yet five minutes would have covered Carrados's absence.

"Nothing wrong, but an unfortunate oversight," he remarked when he returned. "I was too late to catch Beedel, so we must try to mend matters at the other end if we can. I shall have to ask you to go with me. I have ordered the car and I can tell you how we stand on the way."

"I shall be glad if you can make any use of me," said Severe.

"I hope that I may. And as for anything being wrong," added Carrados with deliberation, "so far as Marie is concerned I think we may find that the one thing necessary for her future welfare has been achieved."

"That's all I ask," said Severe.

"But it isn't all that I ask," retorted the blind man almost sharply; This time there was nothing clandestine about the visit to Arling Avenue. On the contrary, the pace they kept up made it necessary that the horn should give pretty continuous notice of their presence.

If it was a race, however, they had the satisfaction of being successful:

the manner—more suggestive of the trained nurse than the domestic servant of the maid who came to the door of Arling Lodge made it clear to Carrados, apart from any other indication, that the catastrophe of Beedel's arrival had not yet been launched. When the young person at the door began conscientiously, but with obvious inexperience, to prevaricate with the truth, the caller merely accepted her statements and wrote a few words on his card.

"When Dr. Ellerslie does return, will you please give him this at once?" he said. "I will wait."

It is to be inferred that the great specialist's return had been providentially timed, for Carrados was scarcely seated when Prescott Ellerslie hurried into the room with the visiting-card in his hand.

"Mr. Carrados?" he postulated. "Will you please explain this rather unusually worded request for an interview?"

"Certainly I will," replied Carrados. "The wording is prompted by the necessity of compelling your immediate attention. The interview is the outcome of my desire to be of use to you."

"Thank you," said Ellerslie with non-committal courtesy. "And the occasion?"

"The occasion is the impending visit of Inspector Beedel from Scotland Yard, not, this time, to look out of your landing window, but to demand the surrender of the missing Marie Severe and, if you deny any knowledge of her, armed with authority to search your house."

"Oh," replied the doctor with astonishing composure. "And if the situation develops on the lines which you have so pointedly indicated, how do you propose to help me?"

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"That depends a little on your explanation of the circumstances."

"Surely between Mr. Carrados and Scotland Yard there is nothing that remains to be explained!"

"Mr. Carrados can only speak for himself," replied the blind man with unmoved good humour. "And in his case there are several things to be explained. There is probably not a great deal of time before the Inspector's arrival, but there may be enough if you are disposed —"

"Very well," acquiesced Ellerslie. "You are quite right in assuming Marie Severe to be in this house. I had her brought here... out of revenge, to redress an old and very grievous injury. Perhaps you had guessed that?"

"Not in those terms," said Carrados mildly.

"Yet so it was. Ten years ago a very sweet and precious little child, my only daughter, was wantonly done to death by an ignorant and credulous woman who had charge of her, in the tenets of her faith. It is called Christian Science. The opportunity was put before me and to-day I stand convicted of having outraged every social and legal form by snatching Marie Severe from just that same fate."

Carrados nodded gravely.

"Yes," he assented. "That is the thing I missed."

"I used to see her on her way to school, whenever I was here," went on the doctor wistfully, "and soon I came to watch for her and to know the times at which she ought to pass. She was of all living creatures the gayest and the most vivid, glowing and vibrant with the compelling joy of life, a little being of wonderful grace, delicacy and charm. She has, I found when I came to know her somewhat, that distinction of manner which one is prone to associate unreasonably only with the children of the great and wealthy a young nobility. In much she reminded me constantly of my own lost child; in other ways she attracted me by her diversity. Such, Mr. Carrados, was the nature of my interest in Marie Severe.

"I don't know the Severes and I have never even spoken to the mother. I believe that she has only lived here about a year, and in any case I have no concern in the social life of Swanstead. But a few months ago my worthy old housekeeper struck up an acquaintance with one of Mrs. Severe's servants, a staid, middle-aged person who had gone into the family as Marie's nurse. The friendship begun down our respective gardens—they adjoin—developed to the stage of these two dames taking tea occasionally with one another. My Mrs. Glass is a garrulous old woman. Hitherto my difficulty had often been to keep her quiet. Now I let her talk and deftly steered the conversation. I learned that my neighbours were Christian Scientists and had a so-called 'healer' living with them. The information struck me with a sudden dread.

"I suppose they are never ill, then?" I inquired carelessly.

"Mrs. Severe had not been ill since she had embraced Christian Science, and Miss Julp was described in a phrase obviously of her own importing as being 'all salvage.' The servants were allowed to see a doctor if they wished, although they were strongly pressed to have done with such 'trickery' in dispelling a mere 'illusion.'

"And isn't there a child?" I asked.

"Marie, it appeared, had from time to time suffered from the 'illusion' that she had not felt well—had suffered pain. Under Miss Julp's spiritual treatment the 'hallucination' had been dispelled. Mrs. Glass had laughed, looked very knowing and then given her friend away in her appreciation of the joke. The faithful nurse had

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accepted the situation and as soon as her mistress's back was turned had doctored Marie according to her own simple notions. Under this double influence the child had always picked up again, but the two women had ominously speculated what would happen if she fell 'really ill.' I led her on to details of the sicknesses their symptoms, frequency and so on. It was a congenial topic between the motherly old creature and the nurse and I could not have had a better medium. I learned a good deal from her chatter. It did not reassure me.

"From that time, without allowing my interest to appear, I sought better opportunities to see the child. I inspired Mrs. Glass to suggest to the nurse that Miss Marie might come and explore the garden here it is a large and tangled place, such as an adventuring child would love to roam in, and this one, as I found, was passionately fond of flowers and growing things and birds and little animals. I got a pair of tame squirrels and turned them loose here. You can guess her enchantment when she discovered them. I went out with nuts for her to give them and we were friends at once. All the time I was examining her without her knowledge. I don't suppose it ever occurred to her that I might be a doctor. The result practically confirmed the growing suspicion that everything I had heard pointed to. And the tragic irony of the situation was that it had been appendicitis that my child my child had perished from!"

"Oh, so this was appendicitis, then?"

"Yes. It was appendicitis of that insidious and misleading type to which children are particularly liable. These apparently negligible turns at intervals of weeks were really inflammation of the appendix and the condition was inevitably passing into one of general suppurative peritonitis. Very soon there would come another 'illusion' according to the mother and Miss Julp, another 'bilious turn' according to the nurse, similar to those already experienced, but apparently more obstinate. The Christian Scientists would argue with it, Hannah would surreptitiously dose it. This time, however, it would hang on. Still there would be no really very alarming symptoms to wring the natural affection of the mother, nothing severe enough to have the nurse into mutiny. The pulse running at about 140 would be the last thing they would notice."

"And then?" Ellerslie was pacing the room in savage indignation, but Carrados had Beedel's impending visit continually before him.

"Then she would be dead. Quite suddenly and unceremoniously this fair young life, which in ten minutes I could render immune from this danger for all the future, would go clean out—extinguished to demonstrate that appendicitis does not exist and that Mind is All in All. If my diagnosis was correct there could be no appeal, no shockful realisation of the true position to give the mother a chance. It would be inevitable, but it would be quite unlooked for.

"What was I to do, should you say, Mr. Carrados, in this emergency? I had dealt with these fanatics before and I knew that if I took so unusual a course as to go to Mrs. Severe I should at the best be met by polite incredulity and a text from Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy's immortal work. And by doing that I should have made any other line of action risky, if not impossible. You, I believe, are a humane man. What was I to do?"

"What you did do," said his visitor, "was about the most dangerous thing that a doctor could be mixed up in."

"Oh; no," replied Ellerslie, "he does a much more dangerous thing whenever he operates on a septiferous subject, whenever he enters a fever-stricken house. To career and reputation, you would say; but believe me, Mr. Carrados, life is quite as important as livelihood, and every doctor does that sort of thing every day. Well, like many very ordinary men whom you may meet, I am something of a maniac and something of a mystic. Incredible as it will doubtless seem to the world to-morrow, I found that, at the risk of my professional career, at the risk, possibly, of a criminal conviction, the greatest thing that I should ever do would be to save this one exquisite young life. Elsewhere other men just as good could take my place, but here it was I and I alone."

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"Well, you did it?" prompted Carrados. "I must remind you that the time presses and I want to know the facts."

"Yes I did it. I won't delay with the precautions I had taken in securing the child or with the scheme that I had worked out for returning her. I believed that I had a very good chance of coming through undiscovered and I infer that I have to thank you that I did not. Marie has not the slightest idea where she is and when I go into the room I am sufficiently disguised. She thinks that she has had an accident."

"Of course you must have had assistance?"

"I have had the devoted help of an assistant and two nurses, but the whole responsibility is mine. I managed to send off Mrs. Glass and her husband for a holiday so as to keep them out of it. That was after I had decided upon the operation. To justify what I was about to do there had to be no mistake about the necessity. I contrived a final test.

"Less than three weeks ago I saw Hannah and the little girl come to the house one afternoon. Shortly afterwards Mrs. Glass knocked at my door. Could she ask Hannah to tea and, as Mrs. Severe and her friend were being out until late, might Miss Marie also stay? There was, as she knew, no need for her to ask me, but my housekeeper is primitive in her ideas of duty. Of course I readily assented, but I suggested that Marie should have tea with me; and so it was arranged.

"Before tea she amused herself about the garden. I told her to gather me a bunch of flowers and when she came in with them I noticed that she had scratched her arm with a thorn. I hurried through the meal, for I had then determined what to do. When we had finished, without ringing the bell, I gave her a chair in front of the fire and sat down opposite her. There was a true story about a clever goose that I had promised her;

"'But you are going to sleep, Marie,' I said, looking at her fixedly. 'It is the heat of the fire.'

'I think I must be,' she admitted drowsily. 'Oh, how silly. I can scarcely keep my eyes open.'

'You are going to sleep,' I repeated. 'You are very, very tired.' I raised my hand and moved it slowly before her face. 'You can hardly see my hand now. Your eyes are closed. When I stop speaking you will be asleep.' I dropped my hand and she was fast asleep.

"I had made my arrangements and had everything ready. From her arm, where the puncture of the needle was masked by the scratch, I secured a few drops of blood. Then I applied a simple styptic to the place and verified by a more leisurely examination some of the symptoms I had already looked for. When I woke her, a few minutes later, she had no inkling of what had passed.

"'Why,' I was saying as she awakened, 'I don't believe that you have heard a word about old Solomon!'

"I applied the various laboratory tests to the blood which I had obtained without delay. The result, taken in conjunction with the other symptoms, was conclusive. I was resolved upon my course from that moment. The operation itself was simple and completely successful. The condition demonstrated the pressing necessity for what I did. Marie Severe will probably outlive her mother now especially if the lady remains faithful to Christian Science. As for the sequel . . . I am sorry, but I don't regret."

* * * * *

"A surprise, eh, Inspector?"

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Inspector Beedel, accompanied by Mrs. Severe and if the comparative degree may be used to indicate her relative importance even more accompanied by Miss Julp, had arrived at Arling Lodge and been given immediate admission. It was Carrados who thus greeted him.

Beedel looked at his friend and then at Dr. Ellerslie. With unconscious habit he even noticed the proportions of the room, the position of the door and window, and the chief articles of furniture. His mind moved rather slowly, but always logically, and in cases where "sound intelligence" sufficed he was rarely unsuccessful. He had brought Mrs. Severe to identify Marie, whom he had never seen, and his men remained outside within whistle-call in case of any emergency. He now saw that he might have to shift his ground and he at once proceeded cautiously.

"Well, sir," he admitted, "I did not expect to see you here."

"Nor did I anticipate coming. Mrs. Severe"—he bowed to her "I think that we have already met informally. Your friend, Miss Julp, unless I am mistaken? It is a good thing that we are all here."

"That is my name, sir," struck in the recalcitrant Cornelia, "but I am not aware "

"At the gate early very early this morning, Miss Julp. I recognise your step. But accept my assurance, my dear lady" for Miss Julp had given a start of maidenly confusion at the recollection — "that although I heard, I did not see you. Well, Inspector, I have since found that I misled you. The mistake was mine—a fundamental error. You were right. Mrs. Severe was right. Dr. Ellerslie is unassailably right. I speak for him because it was I who fastened an unsupportable motive on his actions. Marie Severe is in this house, but she was received here by Dr. Ellerslie in his professional capacity and strictly in the relation of doctor and patient. . . . Mr. Severe has at length admitted that he alone is to blame. You see, you were right after all."

"Arthur! Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Severe, deeply moved.

"But why," demanded the other lady hostilely, "why should the man want her here?"

"Mr. Severe was apprehensive on account of his daughter's health," replied Carrados gravely. "His story is that, fearing something serious, he submitted her to this eminent specialist, who found a dangerous a critical condition that could only be removed by immediate operation. Dr. Ellerslie has saved your daughter's life, Mrs. Severe."

"Fiddlesticks!" shouted Miss Julp excitedly. "It's an outrage a criminal outrage. An operation! There was no danger—there couldn't be with me at hand. You've done it this time, Doctor Ellerslie. My gosh, but this will be a case!"

Mrs. Severe sank into a chair, pale and trembling.

"I can scarcely believe it," she managed to say. "It is a crime. Dr. Ellerslie no doctor had the right. Mr. Severe has no authority whatever. The court gave me sole control of Marie."

"Excuse me," put in Carrados with the blandness of perfect self-control and cognisance of his point, "excuse me, but have you ever informed Dr. Ellerslie of that ruling?"

"No," admitted Mrs. Severe with faint surprise. "No. Why should I?"

"Quite so. Why should you? But have you any knowledge that Dr. Ellerslie is acquainted with the details of your unhappy domestic differences?"

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"I do not know at all. What do these things matter?"

"Only this: Why should Dr. Ellerslie question the authority of a parent who brings his child? It shows at least that he is the one who is concerned about her welfare. For all Dr. Ellerslie knew, you might be the unauthorised one, Mrs. Severe. A doctor can scarcely be expected to withhold a critical operation while he investigates the family affairs of his patients."

"But all this time—this dreadful suspense. He must have known." Carrados shrugged his shoulders and seemed to glance across the room to where their host had so far stood immovable.

"I did know, Mrs. Severe. I could not help knowing. But I knew something else, and to a doctor the interests of his patient must overrule every ordinary consideration. Should the occasion arise, I shall be prepared at any time to justify my silence."

"Oh, the occasion will arise and pretty sharp, don't you fear," chimed in the irrepressible Miss Julp. "There's a sight more in this business, Ida, than we've got at yet. A mighty cute idea putting up Severe now. I never did believe that he was in it. He's a piece too mean-spirited to have the nerve. And where is Arthur Severe now? Gone, of course; quit the country and at someone else's expense."

"Not at all," said Carrados very obligingly. "Since you ask, Miss Julp" he raised his voice "Mr. Severe!"

The door opened and Severe strolled into the room with great sang-froid. He bowed distantly to his wife and nodded familiarly to the police official.

"Well, Inspector," he remarked, "you've cornered me at last, you see."

"I'm not so sure of that," retorted Beedel shortly.

"Oh, come now; you are too modest. My unconvincing alibi that you broke down. The printed letter so conclusively from my hand. And Grigson your irrefutable, steadfast witness from the station here, Inspector. There's no getting round Grigson now, you know."

Beedel rubbed his chin helpfully but made no answer. Things seemed to have reached a momentary impasse.

"Perhaps we may at least all sit down," suggested Ellerslie, to break the silence. "There are rather a lot of us, but I think the chairs will go round."

"If I wasn't just dead tired I would sooner drop than sit down in the house of a man calling himself a doctor," declared Miss Julp. Then she sat down rather heavily. Sharp on the action came a piercing yell, a deep-wrung "Yag!" of pain and alarm, and the lady was seen bounding to her feet, to turn and look suspiciously at the place she had just vacated.

"It was a needle, Cornelia," said Mrs. Severe, who sat next to her. "See, here it is;"

"Dear me, how unfortunate," exclaimed Ellerslie, following the action; "one of my surgical needles. I do hope that it has been properly sterilised since the last operation."

"What's that?" demanded Miss Julp sharply.

"Well," explained the doctor slowly, "I mean that there is such a thing as blood-poisoning. At least," he amended, "for me there is such a thing as blood-poisoning. For you, fortunately, it does not exist. Any more

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than pain does," he added thoughtfully.

"Do you mean," demanded Miss Julp with slow precision, "that through your carelessness, your criminal carelessness, I run any risk of blood-poisoning?"

"Cornelia!" exclaimed Mrs. Severe in pale incredulity.

"Of course not," retorted the surgeon. "How can you if such a thing does not exist?"

"I don't care whether it exists or not "

"Cornelia !" repeated her faithful disciple in horror.

"Be quiet, Ida. This is my business. It isn't like an ordinary illness. I've always had a horror of blood-poisoning. I have nightmares about it. My father died of it. He had to have glass tubes put in his veins, and the night he died. Oh, I tell you I can't stand the thought of it. There's nothing else I believe in, but blood-poisoning "

She shuddered. "I tell you, doctor," she declared with a sudden descent to the practical, "if I get laid up from this you'll have to stand the racket, and pretty considerable damages as well."

"But at the worst this is a very simple matter," protested Ellerslie. "If you will let me dress the place "

Miss Juip went as red as a swarthy-complexioned lady of forty-five could be expected to go.

"How can I let you dress the place?" she snapped. "It is "

"Oh, Cornelia, Cornelia!" exclaimed Mrs. Severe reproachfully, through her disillusioned tears, "would you really be so false to the great principles which you have taught me?"

"I have a trained nurse here," suggested the doctor. "She would do it as well as I could."

"Are you really going?" demanded Mrs. Severe, for there was no doubt that Miss Julp was going and going with alacrity.

"I don't abate one iota of my principles, Ida," she remarked. "But one has to discriminate. There are natural illnesses and there are unnatural illnesses. We say with truth that there can be no death, but no one will deny that Christian Scientists do, as a matter of fact, in the ordinary sense, die. Perhaps this is rather beyond you yet, dear, but I hope that some day you will see it in the light of its deeper mystery."

"Do you?" replied Mrs. Severe with cold disdain. "At present I only see that there is one law of indulgence for yourself and another for your dupes."

"After all," interposed Ellerslie, "this embarrassing discussion need never have arisen. I now see that the offending implement is only one of Mrs. Glass's darning needles. How careless of her! You need have no fear, Miss Julp."

"Oh, you coward!" exclaimed Miss Julp breathlessly. "You coward! I won't stay here a moment longer. I will go home."

"I won't detain you," said Mrs. Severe as Cornelia passed her. "Your home is in Chicago, I believe? Ann will

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help you to pack."

Carrados rose and touched Beedel on the arm.

"You and I are not wanted here, Inspector," he whispered. "The bottom's dropped out of the case," and they slipped away together.

Mrs. Severe looked across the room towards her late husband, hesitated and then slowly walked up to him.

"There is a great deal here that I do not understand," she said, "but is not this so, that you were willing to go to prison to shield this man who has been good to Marie?"

Severe flushed a little. Then he dropped his deliberate reply.

"I am willing to go to hell for this man for his goodness to Marie," he said curtly.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Severe with a little cry. "I wish You never said that you would go to hell for me!"

The outcast stared. Then a curious look, a twisted smile of tenderness and half-mocking humour crossed his features.

"My dear," he responded gravely, "perhaps not. But I often thought it!"

Dr. Ellerslie, who had followed out the last two of his departing guests, looked in at the door.

"Marie is awake, I hear," he said. "Will you go up now, Mrs, Severe ?"

With a shy smile the lady held out her hand towards the shabby man.

"You must go with me, Arthur," she stipulated.