



Arnold
Bennett

Buried Alive
The Old Wives' Tale

The Card

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Buried Alive + The Old Wives' Tale + The Card

(3 Classics by Arnold Bennett)

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Buried Alive

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Chapter 1

The Puce Dressing-gown

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The peculiar angle of the earth's axis to the plane of the ecliptic--that angle which is chiefly responsible for our geography and therefore for our history--had caused the phenomenon known in London as summer. The whizzing globe happened to have turned its most civilized face away from the sun, thus producing night in Selwood Terrace, South Kensington. In No. 91 Selwood Terrace two lights, on the ground-floor and on the first-floor, were silently proving that man's ingenuity can outwit nature's. No. 91 was one of about ten thousand similar houses between South Kensington Station and North End Road. With its grimy stucco front, its cellar kitchen, its hundred stairs and steps, its perfect inconvenience, and its conscience heavy with the doing to death of sundry general servants, it uplifted tin chimney-cowls to heaven and gloomily awaited the day of judgment for London houses, sublimely ignoring the axial and orbital velocities of the earth and even the reckless flight of the whole solar system through space. You felt that No. 91 was unhappy, and that it could only be rendered happy by a 'To let' standard in its front patch and a 'No bottles' card in its cellar-windows. It possessed neither of these specifics. Though of late generally empty, it was never untenanted. In the entire course of its genteel and commodious career it had never once been to let.

Go inside, and breathe its atmosphere of a bored house that is generally empty yet never untenanted. All its twelve rooms dark and forlorn, save two; its cellar kitchen dark and forlorn; just these two rooms, one on the top of the other

like boxes, pitifully struggling against the inveterate gloom of the remaining ten! Stand in the dark hall and get this atmosphere into your lungs.

The principal, the startling thing in the illuminated room on the ground-floor was a dressing-gown, of the colour, between heliotrope and purple, known to a previous generation as puce; a quilted garment stuffed with swansdown, light as hydrogen--nearly, and warm as the smile of a kind heart; old, perhaps, possibly worn in its outlying regions and allowing fluffs of feathery white to escape through its satin pores; but a dressing-gown to dream of. It dominated the unkempt, naked apartment, its voluptuous folds glittering crudely under the sun-replacing oil lamp which was set on a cigar-box on the stained deal table. The oil lamp had a glass reservoir, a chipped chimney, and a cardboard shade, and had probably cost less than a florin; five florins would have purchased the table; and all the rest of the furniture, including the arm-chair in which the dressing-gown reclined, a stool, an easel, three packets of cigarettes and a trouser-stretcher, might have been replaced for another ten florins. Up in the corners of the ceiling, obscure in the eclipse of the cardboard shade, was a complicated system of cobwebs to match the dust on the bare floor.

Within the dressing-gown there was a man. This man had reached the interesting age. I mean the age when you think you have shed all the illusions of infancy, when you think you understand life, and when you are often occupied in speculating upon the delicious surprises which existence may hold for you; the age, in sum, that is the most romantic and tender of all ages--for a male. I mean the age of fifty. An age absurdly misunderstood by all those who have not reached it! A thrilling age! Appearances are tragically deceptive.

The inhabitant of the puce dressing-gown had a short greying beard and moustache; his plenteous hair was

passing from pepper into salt; there were many minute wrinkles in the hollows between his eyes and the fresh crimson of his cheeks; and the eyes were sad; they were very sad. Had he stood erect and looked perpendicularly down, he would have perceived, not his slippers, but a protuberant button of the dressing-gown. Understand me: I conceal nothing; I admit the figures written in the measurement-book of his tailor. He was fifty. Yet, like most men of fifty, he was still very young, and, like most bachelors of fifty, he was rather helpless. He was quite sure that he had not had the best of luck. If he had excavated his soul he would have discovered somewhere in its deeps a wistful, appealing desire to be taken care of, to be sheltered from the inconveniences and harshness of the world. But he would not have admitted the discovery. A bachelor of fifty cannot be expected to admit that he resembles a girl of nineteen. Nevertheless it is a strange fact that the resemblance between the heart of an experienced, adventurous bachelor of fifty and the simple heart of a girl of nineteen is stronger than girls of nineteen imagine; especially when the bachelor of fifty is sitting solitary and unfriended at two o'clock in the night, in the forlorn atmosphere of a house that has outlived its hopes. Bachelors of fifty alone will comprehend me.

It has never been decided what young girls do meditate upon when they meditate; young girls themselves cannot decide. As a rule the lonely fancies of middle-aged bachelors are scarcely less amenable to definition. But the case of the inhabitant of the puce dressing-gown was an exception to the rule. He knew, and he could have said, precisely what he was thinking about. In that sad hour and place, his melancholy thoughts were centred upon the resplendent, unique success in life of a gifted and glorious being known to nations and newspapers as Priam Farll.

Riches and Renown

In the days when the New Gallery was new, a picture, signed by the unknown name of Priam Farll, was exhibited there, and aroused such terrific interest that for several months no conversation among cultured persons was regarded as complete without some reference to it. That the artist was a very great painter indeed was admitted by every one; the only question which cultured persons felt it their duty to settle was whether he was the greatest painter that ever lived or merely the greatest painter since Velasquez. Cultured persons might have continued to discuss that nice point to the present hour, had it not leaked out that the picture had been refused by the Royal Academy. The culture of London then at once healed up its strife and combined to fall on the Royal Academy as an institution which had no right to exist. The affair even got into Parliament and occupied three minutes of the imperial legislature. Useless for the Royal Academy to argue that it had overlooked the canvas, for its dimensions were seven feet by five; it represented a policeman, a simple policeman, life-size, and it was not merely the most striking portrait imaginable, but the first appearance of the policeman in great art; criminals, one heard, instinctively fled before it. No! The Royal Academy really could not argue that the work had been overlooked. And in truth the Royal Academy did not argue accidental negligence. It did not argue about its own right to exist. It did not argue at all. It blandly went on existing, and taking about a hundred and fifty pounds a day in shillings at its polished turnstiles. No details were obtainable concerning Priam Farll, whose address was Poste Restante, St. Martin's-le-Grand. Various collectors, animated by deep faith in their own judgment and a sincere desire to encourage British art, were anxious to purchase the picture for a few pounds, and these enthusiasts were astonished

and pained to learn that Priam Farll had marked a figure of £1,000--the price of a rare postage stamp.

In consequence the picture was not sold; and after an enterprising journal had unsuccessfully offered a reward for the identification of the portrayed policeman, the matter went gently to sleep while the public employed its annual holiday as usual in discussing the big gooseberry of matrimonial relations.

Every one naturally expected that in the following year the mysterious Priam Farll would, in accordance with the universal rule for a successful career in British art, contribute another portrait of another policeman to the New Gallery--and so on for about twenty years, at the end of which period England would have learnt to recognize him as its favourite painter of policemen. But Priam Farll contributed nothing to the New Gallery. He had apparently forgotten the New Gallery: which was considered to be ungracious, if not ungrateful, on his part. Instead, he adorned the Paris salon with a large seascape showing penguins in the foreground. Now these penguins became the penguins of the continental year; they made penguins the fashionable bird in Paris, and also (twelve months later) in London. The French Government offered to buy the picture on behalf of the Republic at its customary price of five hundred francs, but Priam Farll sold it to the American connoisseur Whitney C. Whitt for five thousand dollars. Shortly afterwards he sold the policeman, whom he had kept by him, to the same connoisseur for ten thousand dollars. Whitney C. Whitt was the expert who had paid two hundred thousand dollars for a Madonna and St. Joseph, with donor, of Raphael. The enterprising journal before mentioned calculated that, counting the space actually occupied on the canvas by the policeman, the daring connoisseur had expended two guineas per square inch on the policeman.

At which stage the vast newspaper public suddenly woke up and demanded with one voice:

"Who is this Priam Farll?"

Though the query remained unanswered, Priam Farll's reputation was henceforward absolutely assured, and this in spite of the fact that he omitted to comply with the regulations ordained by English society for the conduct of successful painters. He ought, first, to have taken the elementary precaution of being born in the United States. He ought, after having refused all interviews for months, to have ultimately granted a special one to a newspaper with the largest circulation. He ought to have returned to England, grown a mane and a tufted tail, and become the king of beasts; or at least to have made a speech at a banquet about the noble and purifying mission of art. Assuredly he ought to have painted the portrait of his father or grandfather as an artisan, to prove that he was not a snob. But no! Not content with making each of his pictures utterly different from all the others, he neglected all the above formalities--and yet managed to pile triumph on triumph. There are some men of whom it may be said that, like a punter on a good day, they can't do wrong. Priam Farll was one such. In a few years he had become a legend, a standing side-dish of a riddle. No one knew him; no one saw him; no one married him. Constantly abroad, he was ever the subject of conflicting rumours. Parfitts themselves, his London agents, knew naught of him but his handwriting--on the backs of cheques in four figures. They sold an average of five large and five small pictures for him every year. These pictures arrived out of the unknown and the cheques went into the unknown.

Young artists, mute in admiration before the masterpieces from his brush which enriched all the national galleries of Europe (save, of course, that in Trafalgar Square), dreamt of him, worshipped him, and quarrelled fiercely about him, as the very symbol of glory, luxury and

flawless accomplishment, never conceiving him as a man like themselves, with boots to lace up, a palette to clean, a beating heart, and an instinctive fear of solitude.

Finally there came to him the paramount distinction, the last proof that he was appreciated. The press actually fell into the habit of mentioning his name without explanatory comment. Exactly as it does not write "Mr. A.J. Balfour, the eminent statesman," or "Sarah Bernhardt, the renowned actress," or "Charles Peace, the historic murderer," but simply "Mr. A.J. Balfour," "Sarah Bernhardt" or "Charles Peace"; so it wrote simply "Mr. Priam Farll." And no occupant of a smoker in a morning train ever took his pipe out of his mouth to ask, "What is the johnny?" Greater honour in England hath no man. Priam Farll was the first English painter to enjoy this supreme social reward.

And now he was inhabiting the puce dressing-gown.

The Dreadful Secret

A bell startled the forlorn house; its loud old-fashioned jangle came echoing up the basement stairs and struck the ear of Priam Farll, who half rose and then sat down again. He knew that it was an urgent summons to the front door, and that none but he could answer it; and yet he hesitated.

Leaving Priam Farll, the great and wealthy artist, we return to that far more interesting person, Priam Farll the private human creature; and come at once to the dreadful secret of his character, the trait in him which explained the peculiar circumstances of his life.

As a private human creature, he happened to be shy.

He was quite different from you or me. We never feel secret qualms at the prospect of meeting strangers, or of taking quarters at a grand hotel, or of entering a large house for the first time, or of walking across a room full of

seated people, or of dismissing a servant, or of arguing with a haughty female aristocrat behind a post-office counter, or of passing a shop where we owe money. As for blushing or hanging back, or even looking awkward, when faced with any such simple, everyday acts, the idea of conduct so childish would not occur to us. We behave naturally under all circumstances--for why should a sane man behave otherwise? Priam Farll was different. To call the world's attention visually to the fact of his own existence was anguish to him. But in a letter he could be absolutely brazen. Give him a pen and he was fearless.

Now he knew that he would have to go and open the front door. Both humanity and self-interest urged him to go instantly. For the visitant was assuredly the doctor, come at last to see the sick man lying upstairs. The sick man was Henry Leek, and Henry Leek was Priam Farll's bad habit. While somewhat of a rascal (as his master guessed), Leek was a very perfect valet. Like you and me, he was never shy. He always did the natural thing naturally. He had become, little by little, indispensable to Priam Farll, the sole means of living communication between Priam Farll and the universe of men. The master's shyness, resembling a deer's, kept the pair almost entirely out of England, and, on their continuous travels, the servant invariably stood between that sensitive diffidence and the world. Leek saw every one who had to be seen, and did everything that involved personal contacts. And, being a bad habit, he had, of course, grown on Priam Farll, and thus, year after year, for a quarter of a century, Farll's shyness, with his riches and his glory, had increased. Happily Leek was never ill. That is to say, he never had been ill, until this day of their sudden incognito arrival in London for a brief sojourn. He could hardly have chosen a more inconvenient moment; for in London of all places, in that inherited house in Selwood Terrace which he so seldom used, Priam Farll could not carry on daily life without him. It really was unpleasant and

disturbing in the highest degree, this illness of Leek's. The fellow had apparently caught cold on the night-boat. He had fought the approaches of insidious disease for several hours, going forth to make purchases and incidentally consulting a doctor; and then, without warning, in the very act of making up Farll's couch, he had abandoned the struggle, and, since his own bed was not ready, he had taken to his master's. He always did the natural thing naturally. And Farll had been forced to help him to undress!

From this point onwards Priam Farll, opulent though he was and illustrious, had sunk to a tragic impotence. He could do nothing for himself; and he could do nothing for Leek, because Leek refused both brandy and sandwiches, and the larder consisted solely of brandy and sandwiches. The man lay upstairs there, comatose, still, silent, waiting for the doctor who had promised to pay an evening visit. And the summer day had darkened into the summer night.

The notion of issuing out into the world and personally obtaining food for himself or aid for Leek, did genuinely seem to Priam Farll an impossible notion; he had never done such things. For him a shop was an impregnable fort garrisoned by ogres. Besides, it would have been necessary to 'ask,' and 'asking' was the torture of tortures. So he had wandered, solicitous and helpless, up and down the stairs, until at length Leek, ceasing to be a valet and deteriorating into a mere human organism, had feebly yet curtly requested to be just let alone, asserting that he was right enough. Whereupon the envied of all painters, the symbol of artistic glory and triumph, had assumed the valet's notorious puce dressing-gown and established himself in a hard chair for a night of discomfort.

The bell rang once more, and there was a sharp impressive knock that reverberated through the forlorn house in a most portentous and terrifying manner. It might have been death knocking. It engendered the horrible

suspicion, "Suppose he's *seriously* ill?" Priam Farll sprang up nervously, braced to meet ringers and knockers.

Cure for Shyness

On the other side of the door, dressed in frock coat and silk hat, there stood hesitating a tall, thin, weary man who had been afoot for exactly twenty hours, in pursuit of his usual business of curing imaginary ailments by means of medicine and suggestion, and leaving real ailments to nature aided by coloured water. His attitude towards the medical profession was somewhat sardonic, partly because he was convinced that only the gluttony of South Kensington provided him with a livelihood, but more because his wife and two fully-developed daughters spent too much on their frocks. For years, losing sight of the fact that he was an immortal soul, they had been treating him as a breakfast-in-the-slot machine: they put a breakfast in the slot, pushed a button of his waistcoat, and drew out banknotes. For this, he had neither partner, nor assistant, nor carriage, nor holiday: his wife and daughters could not afford him these luxuries. He was able, conscientious, chronically tired, bald and fifty. He was also, strange as it may seem, shy; though indeed he had grown used to it, as a man gets used to a hollow tooth or an eel to skinning. No qualities of the young girl's heart about the heart of Dr. Cashmore! He really did know human nature, and he never dreamt of anything more paradisaical than a Sunday Pullman escapade to Brighton.

Priam Farll opened the door which divided these two hesitating men, and they saw each other by the light of the gas lamp (for the hall was in darkness).

"This Mr. Farll's?" asked Dr. Cashmore, with the unintentional asperity of shyness.

As for Priam, the revelation of his name by Leek shocked him almost into a sweat. Surely the number of the house should have sufficed.

"Yes," he admitted, half shy and half vexed. "Are you the doctor?"

"Yes."

Dr. Cashmore stepped into the obscurity of the hall.

"How's the invalid going on?"

"I can scarcely tell you," said Priam. "He's in bed, very quiet."

"That's right," said the doctor. "When he came to my surgery this morning I advised him to go to bed."

Then followed a brief awkward pause, during which Priam Farll coughed and the doctor rubbed his hands and hummed a fragment of melody.

"By Jove!" the thought flashed through the mind of Farll. "This chap's shy, I do believe!"

And through the mind of the doctor, "Here's another of 'em, all nerves!"

They both instantly, from sheer good-natured condescension the one to the other, became at ease. It was as if a spring had been loosed. Priam shut the door and shut out the ray of the street lamp.

"I'm afraid there's no light here," said he.

"I'll strike a match," said the doctor.

"Thanks very much," said Priam.

The flare of a wax vesta illumined the splendours of the puce dressing-gown. But Dr. Cashmore did not blench. He could flatter himself that in the matter of dressing-gowns he had nothing to learn.

"By the way, what's wrong with him, do you think?" Priam Farll inquired in his most boyish voice.

"Don't know. Chill! He had a loud cardiac murmur. Might be anything. That's why I said I'd call anyhow to-night. Couldn't come any sooner. Been on my feet since six o'clock this morning. You know what it is--G.P.'s day."

He smiled grimly in his fatigue.

"It's very good of you to come," said Priam Farll with warm, vivacious sympathy. He had an astonishing gift for imaginatively putting himself in the place of other people.

"Not at all!" the doctor muttered. He was quite touched. To hide the fact that he was touched he struck a second match. "Shall we go upstairs?"

In the bedroom a candle was burning on a dusty and empty dressing-table. Dr. Cashmore moved it to the vicinity of the bed, which was like an oasis of decent arrangement in the desert of comfortless chamber; then he stooped to examine the sick valet.

"He's shivering!" exclaimed the doctor softly.

Henry Leek's skin was indeed bluish, though, besides blankets, there was a considerable apparatus of rugs on the bed, and the night was warm. His ageing face (for he was the third man of fifty in that room) had an anxious look. But he made no movement, uttered no word, at sight of the doctor; just stared, dully. His own difficult breathing alone seemed to interest him.

"Any women up?"

The doctor turned suddenly and fiercely on Priam Farll, who started.

"There's only ourselves in the house," he replied.

A person less experienced than Dr. Cashmore in the secret strangenesses of genteel life in London might have been astonished by this information. But Dr. Cashmore no more blenched now than he had blenched at the puce garment.

"Well, hurry up and get some hot water," said he, in a tone dictatorial and savage. "Quick, now! And brandy! And more blankets! Now don't stand there, please! Here! I'll go with you to the kitchen. Show me!" He snatched up the candle, and the expression of his features said, "I can see you're no good in a crisis."

"It's all up with me, doctor," came a faint whisper from the bed.

"So it is, my boy!" said the doctor under his breath as he tumbled downstairs in the wake of Priam Farll. "Unless I get something hot into you!"

Master and Servant

"Will there have to be an inquest?" Priam Farll asked at 6 a.m.

He had collapsed in the hard chair on the ground-floor. The indispensable Henry Leek was lost to him for ever. He could not imagine what would happen to his existence in the future. He could not conceive himself without Leek. And, still worse, the immediate prospect of unknown horrors of publicity in connection with the death of Leek overwhelmed him.

"No!" said the doctor, cheerfully. "Oh no! I was present. Acute double pneumonia! Sometimes happens like that! I can give a certificate. But of course you will have to go to the registrar's and register the death."

Even without an inquest, he saw that the affair would be unthinkably distressing. He felt that it would kill him, and he put his hand to his face.

"Where are Mr. Farll's relatives to be found?" the doctor asked.

"Mr. Farll's relatives?" Priam Farll repeated without comprehending.

Then he understood. Dr. Cashmore thought that Henry Leek's name was Farll! And all the sensitive timidity in Priam Farll's character seized swiftly at the mad chance of escape from any kind of public appearance as Priam Farll. Why should he not let it be supposed that he, and not Henry Leek, had expired suddenly in Selwood Terrace at 5 a.m. He would be free, utterly free!

"Yes," said the doctor. "They must be informed, naturally."

Priam's mind ran rapidly over the catalogue of his family. He could think of no one nearer than a certain Duncan Farll, a second cousin.

"I don't think he had any," he replied in a voice that trembled with excitement at the capricious rashness of what he was doing. "Perhaps there were distant cousins. But Mr. Farll never talked of them."

Which was true.

He could scarcely articulate the words 'Mr Farll.' But when they were out of his mouth he felt that the deed was somehow definitely done.

The doctor gazed at Priam's hands, the rough, coarsened hands of a painter who is always messing in oils and dust.

"Pardon me," said the doctor. "I presume you are his valet--or--"

"Yes," said Priam Farll.

That set the seal.

"What was your master's full name?" the doctor demanded.

And Priam Farll shivered.

"Priam Farll," said he weakly.

"Not *the*--?" loudly exclaimed the doctor, whom the hazards of life in London had at last staggered.

Priam nodded.

"Well, well!" The doctor gave vent to his feelings. The truth was that this particular hazard of life in London pleased him, flattered him, made him feel important in the world, and caused him to forget his fatigue and his wrongs.

He saw that the puce dressing-gown contained a man who was at the end of his tether, and with that good nature of his which no hardships had been able to destroy, he offered to attend to the preliminary formalities. Then he went.

A Month's Wages

Priam Farll had no intention of falling asleep; his desire was to consider the position which he had so rashly created for himself; but he did fall asleep--and in the hard chair! He was awakened by a tremendous clatter, as if the house was being bombarded and there were bricks falling about his ears. When he regained all his senses this bombardment resolved itself into nothing but a loud and continued assault on the front door. He rose, and saw a frowsy, dishevelled, puce-coloured figure in the dirty mirror over the fireplace. And then, with stiff limbs, he directed his sleepy feet towards the door.

Dr. Cashmore was at the door, and still another man of fifty, a stern-set, blue-chinned, stoutish person in deep and perfect mourning, including black gloves.

This person gazed coldly at Priam Farll.

"Ah!" ejaculated the mourner.

And stepped in, followed by Dr. Cashmore.

In achieving the inner mat the mourner perceived a white square on the floor. He picked it up and carefully examined it, and then handed it to Priam Farll.

"I suppose this is for you," said he.

Priam, accepting the envelope, saw that it was addressed to "Henry Leek, Esq., 91 Selwood Terrace, S.W.," in a woman's hand.

"It *is* for you, isn't it?" pursued the mourner in an inflexible voice.

"Yes," said Priam.

"I am Mr. Duncan Farll, a solicitor, a cousin of your late employer," the metallic voice continued, coming through a set of large, fine, white teeth. "What arrangements have you made during the day?"

Priam stammered: "None. I've been asleep."

"You aren't very respectful," said Duncan Farll.

So this was his second cousin, whom he had met, once only, as a boy! Never would he have recognized Duncan. Evidently it did not occur to Duncan to recognize him. People are apt to grow unrecognizable in the course of forty years.

Duncan Farll strode about the ground-floor of the house, and on the threshold of each room ejaculated "Ah!" or "Ha!" Then he and the doctor went upstairs. Priam remained inert, and excessively disturbed, in the hall.

At length Duncan Farll descended.

"Come in here, Leek," said Duncan.

And Priam meekly stepped after him into the room where the hard chair was. Duncan Farll took the hard chair.

"What are your wages?"

Priam sought to remember how much he had paid Henry Leek.

"A hundred a year," said he.

"Ah! A good wage. When were you last paid?"

Priam remembered that he had paid Leek two days ago.

"The day before yesterday," said he.

"I must say again you are not very respectful," Duncan observed, drawing forth his pocket-book. "However, here is £8 7s., a month's wages in lieu of notice. Put your things together, and go. I shall have no further use for you. I will make no observations of any kind. But be good enough to *dress*--it is three o'clock--and leave the house at once. Let me see your box or boxes before you go."

When, an hour later, in the gloaming, Priam Farll stood on the wrong side of his own door, with Henry Leek's heavy kit-bag and Henry Leek's tin trunk flanking him on either hand, he saw that events in his career were moving with immense rapidity. He had wanted to be free, and free he was. Quite free! But it appeared to him very remarkable that so much could happen, in so short a time, as the result of a mere momentary impulsive prevarication.

Chapter 2

A Pail

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Sticking out of the pocket of Leek's light overcoat was a folded copy of the *Daily Telegraph*. Priam Farll was something of a dandy, and like all right-thinking dandies and all tailors, he objected to the suave line of a garment being spoilt by a free utilization of pockets. The overcoat itself, and the suit beneath, were quite good; for, though they were the property of the late Henry Leek, they perfectly fitted Priam Farll and had recently belonged to him, Leek having been accustomed to clothe himself entirely from his master's wardrobe. The dandy absently drew forth the *Telegraph*, and the first thing that caught his eye was this: "A beautiful private hotel of the highest class. Luxuriously furnished. Visitor's comfort studied. Finest position in London. Cuisine a speciality. Quiet. Suitable for persons of superior rank. Bathroom. Electric light. Separate tables. No irritating extras. Single rooms from 2-1/2 guineas, double from 4 guineas weekly. 250 Queen's Gate." And below this he saw another piece of news: "Not a boarding-house. A magnificent mansion. Forty bedrooms by Waring. Superb public saloons by Maple. Parisian chef. Separate tables. Four bathrooms. Card-room, billiard-room, vast lounge. Young, cheerful, musical society. Bridge (small). Special sanitation. Finest position in London. No irritating extras. Single rooms from 2-1/2 guineas, double from 4 guineas weekly. Phone 10,073 Western. Trefusis Mansion, W."

At that moment a hansom cab came ambling down Selwood Terrace.

Impulsively he hailed it.

"'Ere, guv'nor," said the cabman, seeing with an expert eye that Priam Farll was unaccustomed to the manipulation of luggage. "Give this 'ere Hackenschmidt a copper to lend ye a hand. You're only a light weight."

A small and emaciated boy, with the historic remains of a cigarette in his mouth, sprang like a monkey up the steps, and, not waiting to be asked, snatched the trunk from Priam's hands. Priam gave him one of Leek's sixpences for his feats of strength, and the boy spat generously on the coin, at the same time, by a strange skill, clinging to the cigarette with his lower lip. Then the driver lifted the reins with a noble gesture, and Priam had to be decisive and get into the cab.

"250 Queen's Gate," said he.

As, keeping his head to one side to avoid the reins, he gave the direction across the roof of the cab to the attentive cocked ear of the cabman, he felt suddenly that he had regained his nationality, that he was utterly English, in an atmosphere utterly English. The hansom was like home after the wilderness.

He had chosen 250 Queen's Gate because it appeared the abode of tranquillity and discretion. He felt that he might sink into 250 Queen's Gate as into a feather bed. The other palace intimidated him. It recalled the terrors of a continental hotel. In his wanderings he had suffered much from the young, cheerful and musical society of bright hotels, and bridge (small) had no attraction for him.

As the cab tinkled through canyons of familiar stucco, he looked further at the *Telegraph*. He was rather surprised to find more than a column of enticing palaces, each in the finest position in London; London, in fact, seemed to be one unique, glorious position. And it was so welcome, so receptive, so wishful to make a speciality of your comfort, your food, your bath, your sanitation! He remembered the old boarding-houses of the eighties. Now all was changed, for the better. The *Telegraph* was full of the better, crammed

and packed with tight columns of it. The better burst aspiringly from the tops of columns on the first page and outsoared the very title of the paper. He saw there, for instance, to the left of the title, a new, refined tea-house in Piccadilly Circus, owned and managed by gentlewomen, where you had real tea and real bread-and butter and real cakes in a real drawing-room. It was astounding.

The cab stopped.

"Is this it?" he asked the driver.

"This is 250, sir."

And it was. But it did not resemble even a private hotel. It exactly resembled a private house, narrow and tall and squeezed in between its sister and its brother. Priam Farll was puzzled, till the solution occurred to him. "Of course," he said to himself. "This is the quietude, the discretion. I shall like this." He jumped down.

"I'll keep you," he threw to the cabman, in the proper phrase (which he was proud to recall from his youth), as though the cabman had been something which he had ordered on approval.

There were two bell-knobs. He pulled one, and waited for the portals to open on discreet vistas of luxurious furniture. No response! Just as he was consulting the *Telegraph* to make sure of the number, the door silently swung back, and disclosed the figure of a middle-aged woman in black silk, who regarded him with a stern astonishment.

"Is this----?" he began, nervous and abashed by her formidable stare.

"Were you wanting rooms?" she asked.

"Yes," said he. "I was. If I could just see----"

"Will you come in?" she said. And her morose face, under stringent commands from her brain, began an imitation of a smile which, as an imitation, was wonderful. It made you wonder how she had ever taught her face to do it.

Priam Farll found himself blushing on a Turkey carpet, and a sort of cathedral gloom around him. He was

disconcerted, but the Turkey carpet assured him somewhat. As his eyes grew habituated to the light he saw that the cathedral was very narrow, and that instead of the choir was a staircase, also clothed in Turkey carpet. On the lowest step reposed an object whose nature he could not at first determine.

"Would it be for long?" the lips opposite him muttered cautiously.

His reply--the reply of an impulsive, shy nature--was to rush out of the palace. He had identified the object on the stairs. It was a slop-pail with a wrung cloth on its head.

He felt profoundly discouraged and pessimistic. All his energy had left him. London had become hard, hostile, cruel, impossible. He longed for Leek with a great longing.

Tea

An hour later, having at the kind suggestion of the cabman deposited Leek's goods at the cloak-room of South Kensington Station, he was wandering on foot out of old London into the central ring of new London, where people never do anything except take the air in parks, lounge in club-windows, roll to and fro in peculiar vehicles that have ventured out without horses and are making the best of it, buy flowers and Egyptian cigarettes, look at pictures, and eat and drink. Nearly all the buildings were higher than they used to be, and the street wider; and at intervals of a hundred yards or so cranes that rent the clouds and defied the law of gravity were continually swinging bricks and marble into the upper layers of the air. Violets were on sale at every corner, and the atmosphere was impregnated with an intoxicating perfume of methylated spirits. Presently he arrived at an immense arched façade bearing principally the legend 'Tea,' and he saw within hundreds of persons sipping tea; and next to that was another arched façade bearing

principally the word 'Tea,' and he saw within more hundreds sipping tea; and then another; and then another; and then suddenly he came to an open circular place that seemed vaguely familiar.

"By Jove!" he said. "This is Piccadilly Circus!"

And just at that moment, over a narrow doorway, he perceived the image of a green tree, and the words, 'The Elm Tree.' It was the entrance to the Elm Tree Tea Rooms, so well spoken of in the *Telegraph*. In certain ways he was a man of advanced and humane ideas, and the thought of delicately nurtured needy gentlewomen bravely battling with the world instead of starving as they used to starve in the past, appealed to his chivalry. He determined to assist them by taking tea in the advertised drawing-room. Gathering together his courage, he penetrated into a corridor lighted by pink electricity, and then up pink stairs. A pink door stopped him at last. It might have hid mysterious and questionable things, but it said laconically 'Push,' and he courageously pushed... He was in a kind of boudoir thickly populated with tables and chairs. The swift transmigration from the blatant street to a drawing-room had a startling effect on him: it caused him to whip off his hat as though his hat had been red hot. Except for two tall elegant creatures who stood together at the other end of the boudoir, the chairs and tables had the place to themselves. He was about to stammer an excuse and fly, when one of the gentlewomen turned her eye on him for a moment, and so he sat down. The gentlewomen then resumed their conversation. He glanced cautiously about him. Elm-trees, firmly rooted in a border of Indian matting, grew round all the walls in exotic profusion, and their topmost branches splashed over on to the ceiling. A card on the trunk of a tree, announcing curtly, "Dogs not allowed," seemed to enhearten him. After a pause one of the gentlewomen swam haughtily towards him and looked him

between the eyes. She spoke no word, but her firm, austere glance said:

"Now, out with it, and see you behave yourself!"

He had been ready to smile chivalrously. But the smile was put to sudden death.

"Some tea, please," he said faintly, and his intimidated tone said, "If it isn't troubling you too much."

"What do you want with it?" asked the gentlewoman abruptly, and as he was plainly at a loss she added, "Crumpets or tea-cake?"

"Tea-cake," he replied, though he hated tea-cake. But he was afraid.

"You've escaped this time," said the drapery of her muslins as she swam from his sight. "But no nonsense while I'm away!"

When she sternly and mutely thrust the refectory before him, he found that everything on the table except the tea-cakes and the spoon was growing elm-trees.

After one cup and one slice, when the tea had become stewed and undrinkable, and the tea-cake a material suitable for the manufacture of shooting boots, he resumed, at any rate partially, his presence of mind, and remembered that he had done nothing positively criminal in entering the boudoir or drawing-room and requesting food in return for money. Besides, the gentlewomen were now pretending to each other that he did not exist, and no other rash persons had been driven by hunger into the virgin forest of elm-trees. He began to meditate, and his meditations taking--for him--an unusual turn, caused him surreptitiously to examine Henry Leek's pocket-book (previously only known to him by sight). He had not for many years troubled himself concerning money, but the discovery that, when he had paid for the deposit of luggage at the cloak-room, a solitary sovereign rested in the pocket of Leek's trousers, had suggested to him that it would be advisable sooner or later to consider the financial aspect of existence.

There were two banknotes for ten pounds each in Leek's pocket-book; also five French banknotes of a thousand francs each, and a number of Italian banknotes of small denominations: the equivalent of two hundred and thirty pounds altogether, not counting a folded inch-rule, some postage stamps, and a photograph of a pleasant-faced woman of forty or so. This sum seemed neither vast nor insignificant to Priam Farll. It seemed to him merely a tangible something which would enable him to banish the fiscal question from his mind for an indefinite period. He scarcely even troubled to wonder what Leek was doing with over two years of Leek's income in his pocket-book. He knew, or at least he with certainty guessed, that Leek had been a rascal. Still, he had had a sort of grim, cynical affection for Leek. And the thought that Leek would never again shave him, nor tell him in accents that brooked no delay that his hair must be cut, nor register his luggage and secure his seat on long-distance expresses, filled him with very real melancholy. He did not feel sorry for Leek, nor say to himself "Poor Leek!" Nobody who had had the advantage of Leek's acquaintance would have said "Poor Leek!" For Leek's greatest speciality had always been the speciality of looking after Leek, and wherever Leek might be it was a surety that Leek's interests would not suffer. Therefore Priam Farll's pity was mainly self-centred.

And though his dignity had been considerably damaged during the final moments at Selwood Terrace, there was matter for congratulation. The doctor, for instance, had shaken hands with him at parting; had shaken hands openly, in the presence of Duncan Farll: a flattering tribute to his personality. But the chief of Priam Farll's satisfactions in that desolate hour was that he had suppressed himself, that for the world he existed no more. I shall admit frankly that this satisfaction nearly outweighed his grief. He sighed--and it was a sigh of tremendous relief. For now, by a miracle, he would be free from the menace of Lady Sophia

Entwistle. Looking back in calmness at the still recent Entwistle episode in Paris--the real originating cause of his sudden flight to London--he was staggered by his latent capacity for downright, impulsive foolishness. Like all shy people he had fits of amazing audacity--and his recklessness usually took the form of making himself agreeable to women whom he encountered in travel (he was much less shy with women than with men). But to propose marriage to a weather-beaten haunter of hotels like Lady Sophia Entwistle, and to reveal his identity to her, and to allow her to accept his proposal--the thing had been unimaginably inept!

And now he was free, for he was dead.

He was conscious of a chill in the spine as he dwelt on the awful fate which he had escaped. He, a man of fifty, a man of set habits, a man habituated to the liberty of the wild stag, to bow his proud neck under the solid footwear of Lady Sophia Entwistle!

Yes, there was most decidedly a silver lining to the dark cloud of Leek's translation to another sphere of activity.

In replacing the pocket-book his hand encountered the letter which had arrived for Leek in the morning. Arguing with himself whether he ought to open it, he opened it. It ran: "Dear Mr. Leek, I am so glad to have your letter, and I think the photograph is most gentlemanly. But I do wish you would not write with a typewriter. You don't know how this affects a woman, or you wouldn't do it. However, I shall be so glad to meet you now, as you suggest. Suppose we go to Maskelyne and Cook's together to-morrow afternoon (Saturday). You know it isn't the Egyptian Hall any more. It is in St. George's Hall, I think. But you will see it in the *Telegraph*; also the time. I will be there when the doors open. You will recognize me from my photograph; but I shall wear red roses in my hat. So *au revoir* for the present. Yours sincerely, Alice Challice. P.S.--There are always a lot of dark parts at Maskelyne and Cook's. I must ask you to behave as