

CLASSICS TO GO

FIVE TALES



JOHN GALSWORTHY

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John Galsworthy

THE FIRST AND LAST

“So the last shall be first, and the first last.”—HOLY WRIT.

It was a dark room at that hour of six in the evening, when just the single oil reading-lamp under its green shade let fall a dapple of light over the Turkey carpet; over the covers of books taken out of the bookshelves, and the open pages of the one selected; over the deep blue and gold of the coffee service on the little old stool with its Oriental embroidery. Very dark in the winter, with drawn curtains, many rows of leather-bound volumes, oak-panelled walls and ceiling. So large, too, that the lighted spot before the fire where he sat was just an oasis. But that was what Keith Darrant liked, after his day's work—the hard early morning study of his “cases,” the fret and strain of the day in court; it was his rest, these two hours before dinner, with books, coffee, a pipe, and sometimes a nap. In red Turkish slippers and his old brown velvet coat, he was well suited to that framing of glow and darkness. A painter would have seized avidly on his clear-cut, yellowish face, with its black eyebrows twisting up over eyes—grey or brown, one could hardly tell, and its dark grizzling hair still plentiful, in spite of those daily hours of wig. He seldom thought of his work while he sat there, throwing off with practised ease the strain of that long attention to the multiple threads of argument and evidence to be disentangled—work profoundly interesting, as a rule, to his clear intellect, trained to almost instinctive rejection of all but the essential, to selection of what was legally vital out of the mass of confused tactical and human detail presented to his scrutiny; yet sometimes tedious and wearing. As for instance to-day, when he had suspected his client of perjury, and was almost convinced that he must throw up his brief. He had disliked the weak-looking, white-

faced fellow from the first, and his nervous, shifty answers, his prominent startled eyes—a type too common in these days of canting tolerations and weak humanitarianism; no good, no good!

Of the three books he had taken down, a Volume of Voltaire—curious fascination that Frenchman had, for all his destructive irony!—a volume of Burton's travels, and Stevenson's "New Arabian Nights," he had pitched upon the last. He felt, that evening, the want of something sedative, a desire to rest from thought of any kind. The court had been crowded, stuffy; the air, as he walked home, soft, sou'-westerly, charged with coming moisture, no quality of vigour in it; he felt relaxed, tired, even nervy, and for once the loneliness of his house seemed strange and comfortless.

Lowering the lamp, he turned his face towards the fire. Perhaps he would get a sleep before that boring dinner at the Tellasson's. He wished it were vacation, and Maisie back from school. A widower for many years, he had lost the habit of a woman about him; yet to-night he had a positive yearning for the society of his young daughter, with her quick ways, and bright, dark eyes. Curious what perpetual need of a woman some men had! His brother Laurence—wasted—all through women—atrophy of willpower! A man on the edge of things; living from hand to mouth; his gifts all down at heel! One would have thought the Scottish strain might have saved him; and yet, when a Scotsman did begin to go downhill, who could go faster? Curious that their mother's blood should have worked so differently in her two sons. He himself had always felt he owed all his success to it.

His thoughts went off at a tangent to a certain issue troubling his legal conscience. He had not wavered in the usual assumption of omniscience, but he was by no means

sure that he had given right advice. Well! Without that power to decide and hold to decision in spite of misgiving, one would never have been fit for one's position at the Bar, never have been fit for anything. The longer he lived, the more certain he became of the prime necessity of virile and decisive action in all the affairs of life. A word and a blow—and the blow first! Doubts, hesitations, sentiment the muling and puking of this twilight age—! And there welled up on his handsome face a smile that was almost devilish—the tricks of firelight are so many! It faded again in sheer drowsiness; he slept....

He woke with a start, having a feeling of something out beyond the light, and without turning his head said: "What's that?" There came a sound as if somebody had caught his breath. He turned up the lamp.

"Who's there?"

A voice over by the door answered:

"Only I—Larry."

Something in the tone, or perhaps just being startled out of sleep like this, made him shiver. He said:

"I was asleep. Come in!"

It was noticeable that he did not get up, or even turn his head, now that he knew who it was, but waited, his half-closed eyes fixed on the fire, for his brother to come forward. A visit from Laurence was not an unmixed blessing. He could hear him breathing, and became conscious of a scent of whisky. Why could not the fellow at least abstain when he was coming here! It was so childish, so lacking in any sense of proportion or of decency! And he said sharply:

“Well, Larry, what is it?”

It was always something. He often wondered at the strength of that sense of trusteeship, which kept him still tolerant of the troubles, amenable to the petitions of this brother of his; or was it just “blood” feeling, a Highland sense of loyalty to kith and kin; an old-time quality which judgment and half his instincts told him was weakness but which, in spite of all, bound him to the distressful fellow? Was he drunk now, that he kept lurking out there by the door? And he said less sharply:

“Why don't you come and sit down?”

He was coming now, avoiding the light, skirting along the walls just beyond the radiance of the lamp, his feet and legs to the waist brightly lighted, but his face disintegrated in shadow, like the face of a dark ghost.

“Are you ill, man?”

Still no answer, save a shake of that head, and the passing up of a hand, out of the light, to the ghostly forehead under the dishevelled hair. The scent of whisky was stronger now; and Keith thought:

'He really is drunk. Nice thing for the new butler to see! If he can't behave—'

The figure against the wall heaved a sigh—so truly from an overburdened heart that Keith was conscious with a certain dismay of not having yet fathomed the cause of this uncanny silence. He got up, and, back to the fire, said with a brutality born of nerves rather than design:

“What is it, man? Have you committed a murder, that you stand there dumb as a fish?”

For a second no answer at all, not even of breathing; then, just the whisper:

“Yes.”

The sense of unreality which so helps one at moments of disaster enabled Keith to say vigorously:

“By Jove! You have been drinking!”

But it passed at once into deadly apprehension.

“What do you mean? Come here, where I can see you. What's the matter with you, Larry?”

With a sudden lurch and dive, his brother left the shelter of the shadow, and sank into a chair in the circle of light. And another long, broken sigh escaped him.

“There's nothing the matter with me, Keith! It's true!”

Keith stepped quickly forward, and stared down into his brother's face; and instantly he saw that it was true. No one could have simulated the look in those eyes—of horrified wonder, as if they would never again get on terms with the face to which they belonged. To see them squeezed the heart-only real misery could look like that. Then that sudden pity became angry bewilderment.

“What in God's name is this nonsense?”

But it was significant that he lowered his voice; went over to the door, too, to see if it were shut. Laurence had drawn his chair forward, huddling over the fire—a thin figure, a worn, high-cheekboned face with deep-sunk blue eyes, and wavy hair all ruffled, a face that still had a certain beauty. Putting a hand on that lean shoulder, Keith said:

“Come, Larry! Pull yourself together, and drop exaggeration.”

“It's true; I tell you; I've killed a man.”

The noisy violence of that outburst acted like a douche. What was the fellow about—shouting out such words! But suddenly Laurence lifted his hands and wrung them. The gesture was so utterly painful that it drew a quiver from Keith's face.

“Why did you come here,” he said, “and tell me this?”

Larry's face was really unearthly sometimes, such strange gleams passed up on to it!

“Whom else should I tell? I came to know what I'm to do, Keith? Give myself up, or what?”

At that sudden introduction of the practical Keith felt his heart twitch. Was it then as real as all that? But he said, very quietly:

“Just tell me—How did it come about, this—affair?”

That question linked the dark, gruesome, fantastic nightmare on to actuality.

“When did it happen?”

“Last night.”

In Larry's face there was—there had always been—something childishly truthful. He would never stand a chance in court! And Keith said:

“How? Where? You'd better tell me quietly from the beginning. Drink this coffee; it'll clear your head.”

Laurence took the little blue cup and drained it.

“Yes,” he said. “It's like this, Keith. There's a girl I've known for some months now—”

Women! And Keith said between his teeth: “Well?”

“Her father was a Pole who died over here when she was sixteen, and left her all alone. A man called Walenn, a mongrel American, living in the same house, married her, or pretended to—she's very pretty, Keith—he left her with a baby six months old, and another coming. That one died, and she did nearly. Then she starved till another fellow took her on. She lived with him two years; then Walenn turned up again, and made her go back to him. The brute used to beat her black and blue, all for nothing. Then he left her again. When I met her she'd lost her elder child, too, and was taking anybody who came along.”

He suddenly looked up into Keith's face.

“But I've never met a sweeter woman, nor a truer, that I swear. Woman! She's only twenty now! When I went to her last night, that brute—that Walenn—had found her out again; and when he came for me, swaggering and bullying—Look!”—he touched a dark mark on his forehead—“I took his throat in my hands, and when I let go—”

“Yes?”

“Dead. I never knew till afterwards that she was hanging on to him behind.”

Again he made that gesture-wringing his hands.

In a hard voice Keith said:

“What did you do then?”

“We sat by it a long time. Then I carried it on my back down the street, round a corner to an archway.”

“How far?”

“About fifty yards.”

“Was anyone—did anyone see?”

“No.”

“What time?”

“Three.”

“And then?”

“Went back to her.”

“Why—in Heaven's name?”

“She was lonely and afraid; so was I, Keith.”

“Where is this place?”

“Forty-two, Borrow Street, Soho.”

“And the archway?”

“Corner of Glove Lane.”

“Good God! Why—I saw it in the paper!”

And seizing the journal that lay on his bureau, Keith read again that paragraph: “The body of a man was found this morning under an archway in Glove Lane, Soho. From marks

about the throat grave suspicions of foul play are entertained. The body had apparently been robbed, and nothing was discovered leading to identification.”

It was real earnest, then. Murder! His own brother! He faced round and said:

“You saw this in the paper, and dreamed it. Understand—you dreamed it!”

The wistful answer came:

“If only I had, Keith—if only I had!”

In his turn, Keith very nearly wrung his hands.

“Did you take anything from the—body?”

“This dropped while we were struggling.”

It was an empty envelope with a South American post-mark addressed: “Patrick Walenn, Simon's Hotel, Farrier Street, London.” Again with that twitching in his heart, Keith said:

“Put it in the fire.”

Then suddenly he stooped to pluck it out. By that command—he had—identified himself with this—this—But he did not pluck it out. It blackened, writhed, and vanished. And once more he said:

“What in God's name made you come here and tell me?”

“You know about these things. I didn't mean to kill him. I love the girl. What shall I do, Keith?”

“Simple! How simple! To ask what he was to do! It was like Larry! And he said:

“You were not seen, you think?” “It's a dark street. There was no one about.”

“When did you leave this girl the second time?”

“About seven o'clock.”

“Where did you go?”

“To my rooms.”

“In Fitzroy Street?”

“Yes.”

“Did anyone see you come in?”

“No.”

“What have you done since?”

“Sat there.”

“Not been out?”

“No.”

“Not seen the girl?”

“No.”

“You don't know, then, what she's done since?”

“No.”

“Would she give you away?”

“Never.”

“Would she give herself away—hysteria?”

“No.”

“Who knows of your relations with her?”

“No one.”

“No one?”

“I don't know who should, Keith.”

“Did anyone see you going in last night, when you first went to her?”

“No. She lives on the ground floor. I've got keys.”

“Give them to me. What else have you that connects you with her?”

“Nothing.”

“In your rooms?”

“No.”

“No photographs. No letters?”

“No.”

“Be careful.”

“Nothing.”

“No one saw you going back to her the second time?”

“No.”

“No one saw you leave her in the morning?”

“No.”

“You were fortunate. Sit down again, man. I must think.”

Think! Think out this accursed thing—so beyond all thought, and all belief. But he could not think. Not a coherent thought would come. And he began again:

“Was it his first reappearance with her?”

“Yes.”

“She told you so?”

“Yes.”

“How did he find out where she was?”

“I don't know.”

“How drunk were you?”

“I was not drunk.”

“How much had you drunk?”

“About two bottles of claret—nothing.”

“You say you didn't mean to kill him?”

“No-God knows!”

“That's something.”

“What made you choose the arch?”

“It was the first dark place.”

“Did his face look as if he had been strangled?”

“Don't!”

“Did it?”

“Yes.”

“Very disfigured?”

“Yes.”

“Did you look to see if his clothes were marked?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Why not? My God! If you had done it!”

“You say he was disfigured. Would he be recognisable?”

“I don't know.”

“When she lived with him last—where was that?”

“I don't know for certain. Pimlico, I think.”

“Not Soho?”

“No.”

“How long has she been at the Soho place?”

“Nearly a year.”

“Always the same rooms?”

“Yes.”

“Is there anyone living in that house or street who would be likely to know her as his wife?”

“I don't think so.”

“What was he?”

“I should think he was a professional 'bully.'”

“I see. Spending most of his time abroad, then?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know if he was known to the police?”

“I haven't heard of it.”

“Now, listen, Larry. When you leave here go straight home, and don't go out till I come to you, to-morrow morning. Promise that!”

“I promise.”

“I've got a dinner engagement. I'll think this out. Don't drink. Don't talk! Pull yourself together.”

“Don't keep me longer than you can help, Keith!”

That white face, those eyes, that shaking hand! With a twinge of pity in the midst of all the turbulence of his revolt, and fear, and disgust Keith put his hand on his brother's shoulder, and said:

“Courage!”

And suddenly he thought: 'My God! Courage! I shall want it all myself!'



Laurence Darrant, leaving his brother's house in the Adelphi, walked northwards, rapidly, slowly, rapidly again. For, if there are men who by force of will do one thing only at a time, there are men who from lack of will do now one thing, now another; with equal intensity. To such natures, to be gripped by the Nemesis which attends the lack of self-control is no reason for being more self-controlled. Rather does it foster their pet feeling: "What matter? To-morrow we die!" The effort of will required to go to Keith had relieved, exhausted and exasperated him. In accordance with those three feelings was the progress of his walk. He started from the door with the fixed resolve to go home and stay there quietly till Keith came. He was in Keith's hands, Keith would know what was to be done. But he had not gone three hundred yards before he felt so utterly weary, body and soul, that if he had but had a pistol in his pocket he would have shot himself in the street. Not even the thought of the girl—this young unfortunate with her strange devotion, who had kept him straight these last five months, who had roused in him a depth of feeling he had never known before—would have availed against that sudden black defection. Why go on—a waif at the mercy of his own nature, a straw blown here and there by every gust which rose in him? Why not have done with it for ever, and take it out in sleep?

He was approaching the fatal street, where he and the girl, that early morning, had spent the hours clutched together, trying in the refuge of love to forget for a moment their horror and fear. Should he go in? He had promised Keith not to. Why had he promised? He caught sight of himself in a chemist's lighted window. Miserable, shadowy brute! And he

remembered suddenly a dog he had picked up once in the streets of Pera, a black-and-white creature—different from the other dogs, not one of their breed, a pariah of pariahs, who had strayed there somehow. He had taken it home to the house where he was staying, contrary to all custom of the country; had got fond of it; had shot it himself, sooner than leave it behind again to the mercies of its own kind in the streets. Twelve years ago! And those sleeve-links made of little Turkish coins he had brought back for the girl at the hairdresser's in Chancery Lane where he used to get shaved—pretty creature, like a wild rose. He had asked of her a kiss for payment. What queer emotion when she put her face forward to his lips—a sort of passionate tenderness and shame, at the softness and warmth of that flushed cheek, at her beauty and trustful gratitude. She would soon have given herself to him—that one! He had never gone there again! And to this day he did not know why he had abstained; to this day he did not know whether he were glad or sorry not to have plucked that rose. He must surely have been very different then! Queer business, life—queer, queer business!—to go through it never knowing what you would do next. Ah! to be like Keith, steady, buttoned-up in success; a brass pot, a pillar of society! Once, as a boy, he had been within an ace of killing Keith, for sneering at him. Once in Southern Italy he had been near killing a driver who was flogging his horse. And now, that dark-faced, swinish bully who had ruined the girl he had grown to love—he had done it! Killed him! Killed a man!

He who did not want to hurt a fly. The chemist's window comforted him with the sudden thought that he had at home that which made him safe, in case they should arrest him. He would never again go out without some of those little white tablets sewn into the lining of his coat. Restful, even exhilarating thought! They said a man should not take his own life. Let them taste horror—those glib citizens! Let

them live as that girl had lived, as millions lived all the world over, under their canting dogmas! A man might rather even take his life than watch their cursed inhumanities.

He went into the chemist's for a bromide; and, while the man was mixing it, stood resting one foot like a tired horse. The "life" he had squeezed out of that fellow! After all, a billion living creatures gave up life each day, had it squeezed out of them, mostly. And perhaps not one a day deserved death so much as that loathly fellow. Life! a breath—aflame! Nothing! Why, then, this icy clutching at his heart?

The chemist brought the draught.

"Not sleeping, sir?"

"No."

The man's eyes seemed to say: 'Yes! Burning the candle at both ends—I know!' Odd life, a chemist's; pills and powders all day long, to hold the machinery of men together! Devilish odd trade!

In going out he caught the reflection of his face in a mirror; it seemed too good altogether for a man who had committed murder. There was a sort of brightness underneath, an amiability lurking about its shadows; how—how could it be the face of a man who had done what he had done? His head felt lighter now, his feet lighter; he walked rapidly again.

Curious feeling of relief and oppression all at once! Frightful—to long for company, for talk, for distraction; and—to be afraid of it! The girl—the girl and Keith were now the only persons who would not give him that feeling of dread. And, of those two—Keith was not...! Who could consort with one

who was never wrong, a successful, righteous fellow; a chap built so that he knew nothing about himself, wanted to know nothing, a chap all solid actions? To be a quicksand swallowing up one's own resolutions was bad enough! But to be like Keith—all willpower, marching along, treading down his own feelings and weaknesses! No! One could not make a comrade of a man like Keith, even if he were one's brother? The only creature in all the world was the girl. She alone knew and felt what he was feeling; would put up with him and love him whatever he did, or was done to him. He stopped and took shelter in a doorway, to light a cigarette. He had suddenly a fearful wish to pass the archway where he had placed the body; a fearful wish that had no sense, no end in view, no anything; just an insensate craving to see the dark place again. He crossed Borrow Street to the little lane. There was only one person visible, a man on the far side with his shoulders hunched against the wind; a short, dark figure which crossed and came towards him in the flickering lamplight. What a face! Yellow, ravaged, clothed almost to the eyes in a stubbly greyish growth of beard, with blackish teeth, and haunting bloodshot eyes. And what a figure of rags—one shoulder higher than the other, one leg a little lame, and thin! A surge of feeling came up in Laurence for this creature, more unfortunate than himself. There were lower depths than his!

“Well, brother,” he said, “you don't look too prosperous!”

The smile which gleamed out on the man's face seemed as unlikely as a smile on a scarecrow.

“Prosperity doesn't come my way,” he said in a rusty voice. “I'm a failure—always been a failure. And yet you wouldn't think it, would you?—I was a minister of religion once.”

Laurence held out a shilling. But the man shook his head.

“Keep your money,” he said. “I've got more than you to-day, I daresay. But thank you for taking a little interest. That's worth more than money to a man that's down.”

“You're right.”

“Yes,” the rusty voice went on; “I'd as soon die as go on living as I do. And now I've lost my self-respect. Often wondered how long a starving man could go without losing his self-respect. Not so very long. You take my word for that.” And without the slightest change in the monotony of that creaking voice he added:

“Did you read of the murder? Just here. I've been looking at the place.”

The words: 'So have I!' leaped up to Laurence's lips; he choked them down with a sort of terror.

“I wish you better luck,” he said. “Goodnight!” and hurried away. A sort of ghastly laughter was forcing its way up in his throat. Was everyone talking of the murder he had committed? Even the very scarecrows?



There are some natures so constituted that, due to be hung at ten o'clock, they will play chess at eight. Such men invariably rise. They make especially good bishops, editors, judges, impresarios, Prime ministers, money-lenders, and generals; in fact, fill with exceptional credit any position of power over their fellow-men. They have spiritual cold storage, in which are preserved their nervous systems. In such men there is little or none of that fluid sense and continuity of feeling known under those vague terms, speculation, poetry, philosophy. Men of facts and of decision switching imagination on and off at will, subordinating sentiment to reason... one does not think of them when watching wind ripple over cornfields, or swallows flying.

Keith Darrant had need for being of that breed during his dinner at the Tellassons. It was just eleven when he issued from the big house in Portland Place and refrained from taking a cab. He wanted to walk that he might better think. What crude and wanton irony there was in his situation! To have been made father-confessor to a murderer, he—well on towards a judgeship! With his contempt for the kind of weakness which landed men in such abysses, he felt it all so sordid, so “impossible,” that he could hardly bring his mind to bear on it at all. And yet he must, because of two powerful instincts—self-preservation and blood-loyalty.

The wind had still the sapping softness of the afternoon, but rain had held off so far. It was warm, and he unbuttoned his fur overcoat. The nature of his thoughts deepened the dark austerity of his face, whose thin, well-cut lips were always pressing together, as if, by meeting, to dispose of each

thought as it came up. He moved along the crowded pavements glumly. That air of festive conspiracy which drops with the darkness on to lighted streets, galled him. He turned off on a darker route.

This ghastly business! Convinced of its reality, he yet could not see it. The thing existed in his mind, not as a picture, but as a piece of irrefutable evidence. Larry had not meant to do it, of course. But it was murder, all the same. Men like Larry—weak, impulsive, sentimental, introspective creatures—did they ever mean what they did? This man, this Walenn, was, by all accounts, better dead than alive; no need to waste a thought on him! But, crime—the ugliness—Justice unsatisfied! Crime concealed—and his own share in the concealment! And yet—brother to brother! Surely no one could demand action from him! It was only a question of what he was going to advise Larry to do. To keep silent, and disappear? Had that a chance of success? Perhaps if the answers to his questions had been correct. But this girl! Suppose the dead man's relationship to her were ferreted out, could she be relied on not to endanger Larry? These women were all the same, unstable as water, emotional, shiftless pests of society. Then, too, a crime untracked, dogging all his brother's after life; a secret following him wherever he might vanish to; hanging over him, watching for some drunken moment, to slip out of his lips. It was bad to think of. A clean breast of it? But his heart twitched within him. "Brother of Mr. Keith Darrant, the well-known King's Counsel"—visiting a woman of the town, strangling with his bare hands the woman's husband! No intention to murder, but—a dead man! A dead man carried out of the house, laid under a dark archway! Provocation! Recommended to mercy—penal servitude for life! Was that the advice he was going to give Larry to-morrow morning?

And he had a sudden vision of shaven men with clay-coloured features, run, as it were, to seed, as he had seen them once in Pentonville, when he had gone there to visit a prisoner. Larry! Whom, as a baby creature, he had watched straddling; whom, as a little fellow, he had fagged; whom he had seen through scrapes at college; to whom he had lent money time and again, and time and again admonished in his courses. Larry! Five years younger than himself; and committed to his charge by their mother when she died. To become for life one of those men with faces like diseased plants; with no hair but a bushy stubble; with arrows marked on their yellow clothes! Larry! One of those men herded like sheep; at the beck and call of common men! A gentleman, his own brother, to live that slave's life, to be ordered here and there, year after year, day in, day out. Something snapped within him. He could not give that advice. Impossible! But if not, he must make sure of his ground, must verify, must know. This Glove Lane—this arch way? It would not be far from where he was that very moment. He looked for someone of whom to make enquiry. A policeman was standing at the corner, his stolid face illumined by a lamp; capable and watchful—an excellent officer, no doubt; but, turning his head away, Keith passed him without a word. Strange to feel that cold, uneasy feeling in presence of the law! A grim little driving home of what it all meant! Then, suddenly, he saw that the turning to his left was Borrow Street itself. He walked up one side, crossed over, and returned. He passed Number Forty-two, a small house with business names printed on the lifeless windows of the first and second floors; with dark curtained windows on the ground floor, or was there just a slink of light in one corner? Which way had Larry turned? Which way under that grisly burden? Fifty paces of this squalid street-narrow, and dark, and empty, thank heaven! Glove Lane! Here it was! A tiny runlet of a street. And here—! He had run right on to the

arch, a brick bridge connecting two portions of a warehouse, and dark indeed.

“That's right, gov'nor! That's the place!” He needed all his self-control to turn leisurely to the speaker. “'Ere's where they found the body—very spot leanin' up 'ere. They ain't got 'im yet. Lytest—me lord!”

It was a ragged boy holding out a tattered yellowish journal. His lynx eyes peered up from under lanky wisps of hair, and his voice had the proprietary note of one making “a corner” in his news. Keith took the paper and gave him twopence. He even found a sort of comfort in the young ghoul's hanging about there; it meant that others besides himself had come morbidly to look. By the dim lamplight he read: “Glove Lane garrotting mystery. Nothing has yet been discovered of the murdered man's identity; from the cut of his clothes he is supposed to be a foreigner.” The boy had vanished, and Keith saw the figure of a policeman coming slowly down this gutter of a street. A second's hesitation, and he stood firm. Nothing obviously could have brought him here save this “mystery,” and he stayed quietly staring at the arch. The policeman moved up abreast. Keith saw that he was the one whom he had passed just now. He noted the cold offensive question die out of the man's eyes when they caught the gleam of white shirt-front under the opened fur collar. And holding up the paper, he said:

“Is this where the man was found?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Still a mystery, I see?”

“Well, we can't always go by the papers. But I don't fancy they do know much about it, yet.”

“Dark spot. Do fellows sleep under here?”

The policeman nodded. “There's not an arch in London where we don't get 'em sometimes.”

“Nothing found on him—I think I read?”

“Not a copper. Pockets inside out. There's some funny characters about this quarter. Greeks, Hitalians—all sorts.”

Queer sensation this, of being glad of a policeman's confidential tone!

“Well, good-night!”

“Good-night, sir. Good-night!”

He looked back from Borrow Street. The policeman was still standing there holding up his lantern, so that its light fell into the archway, as if trying to read its secret.

Now that he had seen this dark, deserted spot, the chances seemed to him much better. “Pockets inside out!” Either Larry had had presence of mind to do a very clever thing, or someone had been at the body before the police found it. That was the more likely. A dead backwater of a place. At three o'clock—loneliest of all hours—Larry's five minutes' grim excursion to and fro might well have passed unseen! Now, it all depended on the girl; on whether Laurence had been seen coming to her or going away; on whether, if the man's relationship to her were discovered, she could be relied on to say nothing. There was not a soul in Borrow Street now; hardly even a lighted window; and he took one of those rather desperate decisions only possible to men daily accustomed to the instant taking of responsibility. He would go to her, and see for himself. He came to the door of Forty-two, obviously one of those which are only shut at

night, and tried the larger key. It fitted, and he was in a gas-lighted passage, with an oil-clothed floor, and a single door to his left. He stood there undecided. She must be made to understand that he knew everything. She must not be told more than that he was a friend of Larry's. She must not be frightened, yet must be forced to give her very soul away. A hostile witness—not to be treated as hostile—a matter for delicate handling! But his knock was not answered.

Should he give up this nerve-racking, bizarre effort to come at a basis of judgment; go away, and just tell Laurence that he could not advise him? And then—what? Something must be done. He knocked again. Still no answer. And with that impatience of being thwarted, natural to him, and fostered to the full by the conditions of his life, he tried the other key. It worked, and he opened the door. Inside all was dark, but a voice from some way off, with a sort of breathless relief in its foreign tones, said:

“Oh! then it's you, Larry! Why did you knock? I was so frightened. Turn up the light, dear. Come in!”

Feeling by the door for a switch in the pitch blackness he was conscious of arms round his neck, a warm thinly clad body pressed to his own; then withdrawn as quickly, with a gasp, and the most awful terror-stricken whisper:

“Oh! Who is it?”

With a glacial shiver down his own spine, Keith answered

“A friend of Laurence. Don't be frightened!”

There was such silence that he could hear a clock ticking, and the sound of his own hand passing over the surface of the wall, trying to find the switch. He found it, and in the light which leaped up he saw, stiffened against a dark

curtain evidently screening off a bedroom, a girl standing, holding a long black coat together at her throat, so that her face with its pale brown hair, short and square-cut and curling up underneath, had an uncanny look of being detached from any body. Her face was so alabaster pale that the staring, startled eyes, dark blue or brown, and the faint rose of the parted lips, were like colour stainings on a white mask; and it had a strange delicacy, truth, and pathos, such as only suffering brings. Though not susceptible to aesthetic emotion, Keith was curiously affected. He said gently:

“You needn't be afraid. I haven't come to do you harm—quite the contrary. May I sit down and talk?” And, holding up the keys, he added: “Laurence wouldn't have given me these, would he, if he hadn't trusted me?”

Still she did not move, and he had the impression that he was looking at a spirit—a spirit startled out of its flesh. Nor at the moment did it seem in the least strange that he should conceive such an odd thought. He stared round the room—clean and tawdry, with its tarnished gilt mirror, marble-topped side-table, and plush-covered sofa. Twenty years and more since he had been in such a place. And he said:

“Won't you sit down? I'm sorry to have startled you.”

But still she did not move, whispering:

“Who are you, please?”

And, moved suddenly beyond the realm of caution by the terror in that whisper, he answered:

“Larry's brother.”

She uttered a little sigh of relief which went to Keith's heart, and, still holding the dark coat together at her throat, came forward and sat down on the sofa. He could see that her feet, thrust into slippers, were bare; with her short hair, and those candid startled eyes, she looked like a tall child. He drew up a chair and said:

“You must forgive me coming at such an hour; he's told me, you see.” He expected her to flinch and gasp; but she only clasped her hands together on her knees, and said:

“Yes?”

Then horror and discomfort rose up in him, afresh.

“An awful business!”

Her whisper echoed him:

“Yes, oh! yes! Awful—it is awful!”

And suddenly realising that the man must have fallen dead just where he was sitting, Keith became stock silent, staring at the floor.

“Yes,” she whispered; “Just there. I see him now always falling!”

How she said that! With what a strange gentle despair! In this girl of evil life, who had brought on them this tragedy, what was it which moved him to a sort of unwilling compassion?

“You look very young,” he said.

“I am twenty.”

“And you are fond of—my brother?”

“I would die for him.”

Impossible to mistake the tone of her voice, or the look in her eyes, true deep Slav eyes; dark brown, not blue as he had thought at first. It was a very pretty face—either her life had not eaten into it yet, or the suffering of these last hours had purged away those marks; or perhaps this devotion of hers to Larry. He felt strangely at sea, sitting there with this child of twenty; he, over forty, a man of the world, professionally used to every side of human nature. But he said, stammering a little:

“I—I have come to see how far you can save him. Listen, and just answer the questions I put to you.”

She raised her hands, squeezed them together, and murmured:

“Oh! I will answer anything.”

“This man, then—your—your husband—was he a bad man?”

“A dreadful man.”

“Before he came here last night, how long since you saw him?”

“Eighteen months.”

“Where did you live when you saw him last?”

“In Pimlico.”

“Does anybody about here know you as Mrs. Walenn?”

“No. When I came here, after my little girl died, I came to live a bad life. Nobody knows me at all. I am quite alone.”