Sapper

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BASIL PENDER looked thoughtfully round his sitting-room. Everything was just as usual—the prints, the photographs in their silver frames on the piano, the books in the corner: they were all just as they had been for the last five years. To-morrow night also there would be no change. The same prints, the same books, the same cease.less rumble of London traffic coming through the open window.

To-morrow night it was true he would not be there himself. It was unfortunate but unavoid.able. He would have liked to have spent the first few hours after he had murdered Sinclair in the surroundings where he had so often murdered him in spirit. But it was impossible.

It was something at any rate to have been able to begin his scheme in this familiar atmosphere. It augured well for success. No undue hurry: nothing precipitate—just the quiet, orderly, working out of a carefully considered plan. And the first move in the game had already been taken.

Such a simple little move—and yet very important. It was in details of that sort where brain came in. Who would possibly attach any significance whatever to the fact that he had removed one of his two cars from the garage where he habitually kept them both, and placed it in another, where he was quite unknown? What had such a simple fact to do with murder?

He smiled gently, as ho helped himself to a whisky and soda. He was thinking of the conversation he had been listening to at the club only that very evening. Creswell, of the police, had been holding forth on crime; and an intolerable bore he was. And yet there had been a certain amount of truth in what he had said.

Undoubtedly the motive in a case of murder is the first thing for which the police look. No one but a madman commits murder without a motive. Passion, hatred, money—once the motive is established, it generally points with an unerring finger at someone. That was why Pender had left the club arm in arm with Sinclair, and walked with him part of the way to his house in Brook Street. A very normal proceeding on the part of one of Sinclair's best friends.

He'd been devilish clever about it. No one knew, no one had even the ghost of a suspicion of the deadly, black-hearted hatred he felt for the man he had just left. The world thought they were friends: even Sinclair himself thought so—damned fool that he was. It would come as a slight shock to him to-morrow when he realised the truth.

But no one else would ever know it. And in case his plan, thought out and perfected in every little detail since he had heard that Sinclair was going down alone to his empty house in Kent—just in case it miscarried, the question of motive would never indicate him with unerring finger. He was safe on that point.

Not that the matter was ever likely to arise in this case. Before people begin talking about motive it must look as if the cause of death was murder. And he had no intention of allowing Sinclair's death to look like murder. It was to be accidental: a shocking, ghastly accident. He pictured himself hurrying back from Scotland when he heard the terrible news: comforting Enid—Sinclair's wife.

Widow, rather—not wife: Sinclair's widow. Just his card to start with: his card and a little message of tender sympathy for her in her great sorrow. Perhaps some flowers. And then

after a week or so he would see her for a few minutes, and let her realise how his heart bled for her. Nothing precipitate, of course, he was far too old a stager with women for that. But in six months perhaps—or maybe a year—the time would be ripe.

Basil Pender's white teeth bared in a sudden ungovernable snarl. What waste of time! Six weeks, six minutes were too long to wait. How dared that swine Sinclair come between him and Enid? How dared he make her his wife?

The sweat glistened on his forehead, and he shook his fists in the air. Then with a great effort he controlled himself; this was a frame of mind in which he had forbidden himself to indulge. It destroyed the power of clear thought, and clear thought was essential for success. After all, the perpetration of a murder was very much like a game of chess. Move followed move, and provided no mistake was made the result was mate. And there would be no mistake in this case.

Nerve, brain, and money: given those three attributes and the thing was easy. But it was interesting—devilish interesting. The whole thing had a fascination about it which he would hardly have believed possible. Once again his thoughts drifted back to Creswell: what was it he had been saying? He could see him now with a fat cigar between his lips, lying back in his chair and emphasising his points with a podgy finger.

"It's those unexpected, unlooked for, unallowed for, isolated facts against which no criminal can guard, however skilfully he lays his plans. He may think that be has allowed

for everything—taken into account every possible contingency, then suddenly—out of the blue—comes one disconnected event, and the whole carefully-thought-out scheme goes wrong."

Well, of course, there was something in that. But the same might be said of anything in life: not only crime. And in this case he had reduced the risk of anything unexpected happening to a minimum. There was nothing difficult about his scheme, in fact, it was extraordinarily simple. It amused him now to recall the complicated plans be had evolved in the past for killing Sinclair. For years he had hated him: from the days they were at school together he had hated him. And then, to cap everything, he had married Enid. It was that which had definitely suggested murder to his mind.

At first he had hardly treated the matter seriously. Idly he had thought out different schemes—schemes of all sorts and descriptions which had, however, one common factor. Each one of them ended in the same way—with Sinclair's death. And gradually the matter had insisted upon being taken seriously. He found himself thinking of it at all hours of the day. If he woke in the night the picture of Sinclair with Enid by his side would come to him out of the darkness.

But it is one thing to think of murder: to do it is altogether different. Murderers who get caught suffer an unpleasant fate, and Fender had no intention whatever of being hanged. And since in all his schemes the risk of his suffering that fate had been pronounced, they had remained just schemes. And then suddenly three days ago had come the idea. He had been dining with the Sinclairs, and the conversation had turned on White Lodge, their house in

Kent. It had been in the hands of the builders; new bathrooms put in, fresh papers, all sorts of improvements. And now it was empty; the workmen had gone; the keys had been returned to Sinclair.

"A darned good job they have made of it, too," his host had said. "I've got to go down there on Thursday to get a gun of mine which I forgot to bring up with me. Why don't you come down with me, Basil? I know Enid can't: she's got some show on that day. We could take down some sandwiches, and feed in the hall; and we'll test the new broadcasting set."

It had been some power outside his own that had made him answer as he did. At that moment the devilish idea had not come to him; he was only conscious of a strong desire to make some excuse to avoid spending a day alone with Sinclair. If Enid had been going it would have been different. "Thanks very much," he had remarked; "but I shall probably be starting for Scotland on Thursday."

No more had been said: he usually did go to Scotland about that time: there was nothing strange or unusual in the fact. But when he returned to his rooms the idea had been born. He had not been going to Scotland on Thursday, but he had said so—said so in front of Enid. And Sinclair was going to White Lodge on Thursday—an empty house. He knew White Lodge well; he had stayed there in the past. It was a desolate sort of place, half a mile from the road and surrounded by trees. Enid had wanted her husband to sell it, but it had a sentimental attraction for him, and he had compromised by having it completely done up. And

suddenly there had recurred to his mind a remark he had heard her make when she first saw the house.

"It looks the sort of place where anything might happen—murder or ghosts."

Murder! Strange that she should have said that. Almost prophetic. Murder! For a moment or two he had recoiled from the thought: this was different to the fantastic schemes he had so often planned out in the past. This was the real thing: he knew that with a sort of blinding certainty even before he began to think out details. Well—what if it was? Step by step he had worked it out—discarding here, building up there. And after a while he became almost staggered with the simplicity of the thing. Surely murder must be a more complicated matter than this?

Coolly and logically he had examined every move, and could find no fault. And now once more on Wednesday night he strove to discover a flaw. It was not too late yet: he had done nothing incriminating so far. He had merely removed one of his two cars to a strange garage, and mentioned at the club that he was off to Scotland next morning. It was perfectly easy to return the car to its usual home and change his mind about Scotland.

And the other two things—the tiny phial filled with a colourless liquid, and the four short straps now reposing in the locked drawer of his desk. There was nothing suspicious about them. No question of poison—nothing so crude as that. Poison lingers in the system, and chemists ask questions if you ask them for poison. But a strong sleeping draught is quite a normal affair; and straps of all sorts and conditions are useful for motoring.

No; there was no flaw. And with a smile of satisfaction Pender turned out the light in his sitting-room and went to bed.

It was to his permanent garage that he repaired in the morning, and five minutes later he drove away in his touring Sunbeam. He left it in Waterloo Place, and getting into a taxi he gave the address of the second garage.

"Just starting for Scotland," he informed the manager, and having settled his bill he drove round to his rooms for luggage. It was early yet for much traffic, and half an hour saw him not far from his destination—Hitchin. And in Hitchin, strange and peculiar magneto trouble occurred—due doubtless to the use of a screwdriver in skilful hands on that delicate piece of mechanism. So pronounced was the trouble, however, that it became necessary to invoke the assistance of a local garage. And with becoming gravity Pender listened to the diagnosis.

"I see," he said, when the mechanic had finished. "Possibly some hours, you say. Then I think that I will go out and call on friends and return later. I might even stay the night with them. That will give you plenty of time to make a good job of it."

With which remark he left the garage, and made his way to the station where he took a first-class return ticket to London. The excellent train service was one of the reasons which had made him decide on Hitchin. It was not too close into London, but the journey did not take long. And it was essential that he should be at the White House before lunch time.

He ran over the car time-table as he sat in his Corner seat. He would take the Sunbeam from Waterloo Place, and motor down to White Lodge in it. He knew the exact spot where he would leave it—not too near the house, not too far away. A deserted spot where the chances of the car being seen were remote. And even if it was seen who would pay any attention?

Then after it was over he would return to London, and leave it in St. James's Square. Not Waterloo Place again; the man in charge there might recognise him. And then back to Hitchin by train. It would depend on the time whether he telephoned to his usual garage from there, or from some place farther north.

"Completely forgot the Sunbeam; send a man round to St. James's Square for it."

That would be the message; further proof that he was on his way to Scotland. But he couldn't have done it if both cars had been at the same place. It looks silly to get one car to start with and then go back a few minutes later to get the other.

Brain—that was it; that was the whole secret. Just like chess, only a thousand times more fascinating.

It was just half-past eleven as he drove past the Oval. He had an hour's run before him, and it struck him that he could not have timed it better. Sinclair was dining at Ranelagh that evening, so he wouldn't be remaining too late at White Lodge. And any way the sooner the thing was done the better. It would enable him to get farther on the Great North Road before calling up his garage.

He left the car in the place he had decided on. Not a soul was in sight; for the last two miles he had seen no one. The house was a hundred yards away, almost hidden in the trees, and he strolled towards it quite openly.

There was a possibility that Enid might have altered her mind at the last moment, or that Sinclair had brought someone else down with him.

If so, he was not committed to anything; therein lay the beauty—the simplicity of the scheme. He had merely changed his mind about Scotland, and having nothing better to do had run down to see the improvements at White Lodge as Sinclair had suggested.

At the front door shod Sinclair's car, and as Vender stepped on to the drive Sinclair himself appeared.

"Hullo I old man," he cried. "I thought you were on the road to Scotland."

"Changed my mind at the last moment," said Pender easily, "so I thought I'd come down and see the house."

"But where's your car?"

"I stupidly missed the turn out of the village, and got on to the track leading through the copse. It's up there now."

"Well, it's quite safe there, anyway. Let's have some lunch, and then I'll show you round."

"All alone?" asked Pender.

"Yes, Enid couldn't come."

He was rummaging in the car for sandwiches, and Pender turned away quickly. So it was the end after all, and at the moment he did not want Sinclair to it his face.

"Come on in. There is enough grub here for a regiment, and I'll search round and get another glass."

He led the way to the gun-room, leaving his flask on the table. Then he went out, and Pender heard him wandering round the back premises.

Now that the actual time had come he felt as cool as ice: it was all so simple and easy. From his pocket he took the little phial, and taking out the stopper he emptied the contents into the flask. Then slipping the empty phial back in his pocket he strolled over to the window.

"This is about the only room in the house they haven't touched," said Sinclair, as he came in with a glass a few moments later. "I left everything as it was in here—guns and all. Say when."

"I won't have any whisky, thanks. Just a little of that Perrier."

"Well, I've got a thirst on me like the devil," said the other, mixing himself a drink. "Get on with the sandwiches."

Sinclair drained his glass with a sigh of relief, and proceeded to mix himself another.

"They really have made a very good job of it. The extra bathrooms make the whole difference."

"Excellent," said Pender. "I shall look forward to having a go at your pheasants later on." His eyes, narrowed and expectant, had seen the sudden half-drunken lurch given by Sinclair.

"Good Lord, Pender," he cried, "I feel damned funny."

"Take another drink. It may be the heat or something."

"I feel—absolutely—blotto. It can't be anything—anything—matter—whisky."

He looked stupidly across the table, and then his eyes closed and his head fell forward. With a gigantic effort he

rose to his feet, only to fall back in his chair again. Sinclair slept.

With a faint smile Pender got up: the thing was done. There were one or two small points now to be attended to, but the main thing was done, and more successfully and easily than he had ever dared to hope.

First he took from his pocket a pair of wash-leather gloves, and picking up his glass he dried it carefully with a clean pocket handkerchief. Then leaving the room he returned it to its proper place in the pantry. Next he took up the flask, and Sinclair's tumbler, and emptied the contents of both down the sink, afterwards replacing them on the table beside the unconscious man. To give the impression that the flask had been emptied would make the accident seem more credible. Just a little too much to drink: just enough to make Sinclair a trifle careless....

Then from his pocket he removed four straps, and still retaining his gloves he fastened Sinclair's hands and feet to the arms and legs of the chair in which he was sprawling. He wasn't quite sure how long it would be before Sinclair recovered from the effect of the sleeping draught, and the binding process must be done before that happened.

And now remained only the final thing. From the glass-fronted cupboard in the corner he took a double-barrelled gun, and into one of the barrels he slipped a cartridge. Sinclair still slept.

For a moment or two Pender hesitated. It would be so easy to do it now. And it would be safer. Everything had gone so wonderfully that it seemed like tempting Fate to delay. There sat the man he hated, unconscious, and at his

mercy. He had only to press the trigger and the thing would be done. But where would be the satisfaction in that? He wanted Sinclair to understand—to realise what was going to happen to him. He wanted revenge, and to kill an unconscious man was no revenge. He wanted to see terror dawn in those keen blue eyes: above all, he wanted to speak about Enid.

Half an hour passed and Sinclair still lolled forward in his chair, while Pender sat opposite him—waiting. And then suddenly the sleeper awoke and stared dazedly across the table.

"Where am I?" he muttered, foolishly. "What's happened?"

"You are at White Lodge, Sinclair," said Pender quietly. "And I gave you a little drug to send you to sleep which seems to have acted admirably."

"But why am I bound like this?" He was struggling against the fog in his brain.

"Because, before I kill you, I want to have a talk with you, Sinclair. And I adopted that method to ensure your keeping still."

Sinclair blinked foolishly. Kill! What the devil was Pender thinking about? Kill! Was he mad? Were they both mad?

"Doubtless you feel a little surprised, Sinclair. You wonder if you are still dreaming. But I can assure you that you are not: you are very much awake."

"Is this some damned silly jest, Pender?" His mind was clearing rapidly. "If so, it's gone far enough. And what the devil is that gun doing on the table?"

"We will come to the gun in due course, my friend." Pender leaned across the table, and his teeth showed in a sudden snarl. "You swine; I can hardly believe that I've got you at last."

Sinclair said nothing; full realisation of his position had come to him. Of course the man had gone off his head; he was alone—bound and powerless—with a homicidal maniac.

"Please don't think that I'm mad, Sinclair," continued Pender, as if divining his thoughts. "I can assure you that I've never been saner in my life. This is merely the logical outcome of the intense hatred I've felt for you for years. It started at school, Sinclair. Do you remember on one occasion thrashing me till I was almost unconscious?"

"Because you came for me with a knife," answered the other quietly.

"I don't care why—but the fact remains that you thrashed me. That started it, Sinclair; I swore then that some day I'd get my own back."

"In spite of the fact that you shook hands the next day," said Sinclair scornfully. "You rotten Dago."

"So you always called me—all you fellows." Fender's voice shook with ungovernable rage. "Do you suppose I could help having South American blood in me? Anyway the rotten Dago has got the upper hand now."

He controlled himself and went on quietly. "As I say, that started it, Sinclair. And all through school it was the same. It was Sinclair, Captain of the Eleven; Sinclair, Captain of the Fifteen; Sinclair, Senior Prefect. And it was Sinclair who in his kindly benevolence accorded his divine protection to the rotten Dago. Do you think I liked you for it, you swine? I

loathed you all the more. There's no good straining at those straps. They're new and strong."

"You entrancing exhibition of beastliness," roared Sinclair. "Do you mean to tell me that after all these years—after having dined in my house, and eaten my salt—you propose to kill me, because I did better than you at school "

"Good heavens, no! I was merely starting at the beginning. I don't deny that frequently I have felt like murdering you. At country houses sometimes when it's been Sinclair who was shooting so wonderfully—and Sinclair who played polo so marvellously—and Sinclair this, and Sinclair that—I could have killed you willingly. But I don't think I should ever have done it but for one thing—Enid."

Sinclair sat very still; he understood at last. And though no sign of it showed on his face, fear was clutching at his heart. No maniac this, but a dangerous, revengeful man.

"Did you know I asked her to marry me, Sinclair? Of course you do. And she refused. But she might have accepted me in time if you hadn't come on the scene. Always you; always you. She is the only woman in the world, Sinclair, whom I have ever wished to make my wife. And she is yours."

"So that is why you propose to murder me," said Sinclair. "A nice method of disposing of a husband, but as a means of endearing yourself to the widow—a trifle crude."

He was talking for time—trying desperately to think.

"And do you really imagine, Sinclair, that I shall let Enid discover the truth? You must have a very poor opinion of ray intelligence. Your death will be entirely accidental, and when

I hear about it in Scotland I shall hurry back to attend the—er—obsequies. I am on my way to Scotland now, you know."

"You fool," said Sinclair, harshly. "They'll catch you for a certainty, and you'll hang."

"I think not," answered Pender. "I have devoted what brains I possess to this problem, and I venture to think—not unsuccessfully. You've no idea how fascinating it is—planning a murder. I won't weary you with the precautions I have taken to cover my tracks, but you can see for yourself two or three little things I have done in this room. My glass removed, for instance; a second glass would certainly give rise to comment. Your flask emptied, serving the double purpose of removing all traces of the drug and giving the impression that you had drunk a little too much. It will help to account for the accident that is shortly going to happen, Sinclair. A strange accident for such a careful shot as you—but these things will happen."

Sinclair moistened his lips.

"Cut fooling, Pender. This thing has gone far enough."

"I can promise you it is going considerably farther," sneered the other. "Right through to the end, in fact. That gun is loaded, and in a moment or two now I shall put the muzzle under your chin and blow your damned face off. An accident in cleaning will be the verdict, Sinclair, and I'll attend your funeral even as I attended your wedding. And then in time maybe Enid will do what she would have done it you hadn't come on the scene—marry me."

"You devil." The veins stood out like whipcord on Sinclair's forehead as he strained and tugged at the straps. And then of a sudden he sat very still: Pender had picked up

the gun in his gloved hands. The end was very near, and with his head thrown back and a look of utter contempt in his eyes he waited for it.

"The straps will be off when they find you, Sinclair: the gun on the floor at your feet. No unexpected, unlooked for event out of the blue, such as that fool Cresswell talked about, to save you: nothing to incriminate me."

The hatred in his eyes was maniacal: the cool scorn on the other's it seemed to drive him to a frenzy.

"You can sneer," screamed Pender, "but you won't when the muzzle is an inch from your chin and my finger is on the trigger. This is the position, Sinclair—just as I am now, only it will be your chin, not mine."

He sat there, the gun between his knees, his chin almost resting on the muzzle.

"Just like this," he repeated softly.

"Hullo!"

It came from the hall—a man's cheerful hail, and Pender gave a violent start.

"Hullo! Hullo!"

Then a pause.

"2 L O calling."

But there was no one to listen to the prominent politician's speech on the Near East which continued cheerfully for the next half-hour.

For Sinclair—well, Sinclair had fainted for the first time in his life.

And Pender—well, Pender had had his finger—that carefully gloved finger—near the trigger when he gave that

violent start. And his chin had been almost resting on the muzzle.

In fact, it was only by his clothes that a few hours later he was officially identified as Pender.

II — THE STRANGE PASSING OF PIERRE

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§ I

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"WHY so pensive?"

I paused on my way across the crowded restaurant and found myself looking into the grey, laughing eyes of Beryl Travers. She and her large, lazy-looking husband Billy were just finishing their dinner, and the smoke of their cigarettes drifted slowly up into the general blue haze of the room.

"Hallo, people!" I murmured. "You both of you look horribly overfed and pleased with yourselves. Billy—you're getting fat."

"So much warmer, old bean," he answered. "And with tailors what they are these days..."

"Sit down and have a cup of coffee, Peter." Beryl pointed to a third chair, and I did as she told me. What matter that my intention a few moments previously had been to join a pal at the other end of the room: I generally did what Beryl told me. The fact that in years gone by I had repeatedly asked her to consent—theoretically, at any rate—to do as I told her (obey seemed a ridiculously archaic word), and that she, as repeatedly, had declined with thanks, had never altered our friendship. And she still gave me orders with that calm assumption of authority which she reserved exclusively for the not very small but extremely select band who were in like case to myself.

"Wake up, Billy, you lazy blighter," she remarked to her husband, "and order the gentleman some brandy. Your manners get worse daily."

With a grunt he extended a long arm and seized a passing waiter, while Beryl turned to me again.

"Why haven't I seen you, Peter?" she demanded. "Where have you been?"

"I've been in Peru," I answered blandly, stirring my coffee. "I was under the impression that I had written you a letter from Lima, but doubtless the fact slipped your memory."

"I never got it, Peter," she said decidedly. "Then how the deuce did the youngster get that Peruvian stamp a few months ago?" asked her husband slyly. "That makes us all square, old thing. Don't you get gay with your husband's manners again."

"You are the most tactless man I ever met," said Beryl, laughing in spite of herself. "Of course, I remember now, Peter. Did you have a good time?"

"So so." I passed my open cigarette case to her across the table. "How is Jack?"

"Fit as a colt," answered Billy. "Bursting his skin with condition. And growing more like dear old John every day."

For a moment his eyes met Beryl's with a tender gleam in them, and I glanced away. Never having undertaken the proposition myself of marrying at all, much less a widow, I am not in a position to advance any opinion on the matter. But to the looker-on in such things it might seem as if there must be, at times, some slight feeling of constraint—a tendency, perhaps, to involuntary contrast, which only a

very real give and take on each side would smooth over. Especially when there is a youngster in the house "growing more like dear old John every day." Especially, too, when John Manley had been one of Billy Travers's greatest friends.... Personally, I can't help thinking that I should prefer not to have known the dear departed. And yet I know perfectly well that should anything happen to Billy—which Heaven forbid—my intimate friendship with him would not restrain me from yet another attempt.

But as I say, it's all theory in nay case—and probably wrong. Certain it is that it would be well-nigh impossible to conceive of two more ideal marriages than Beryl's. Before John Manley paid the big price in April, 1918, during the German drive on the Lys, Beryl and he were utterly happy. Jack was two years odd: everything was as perfect as things may be in a time when men are up and doing and women sit and wait. And then had come the news that had turned Heaven into Hell.... There were not very many details, though after a while Beryl had tried to find out a little more fully. She wrote to me, I remember, but I was down in the Somme area, and could find out nothing. Some months afterwards I met his battalion resting, and made inquiries, but only the Quartermaster remained of the crowd who had been with them when John was killed. And he had been with the transport somewhere up by the Mont des Cats when it happened....

"The C.O. was blown to pieces, sir," he said to "The battalion had a fearful time, and the C.O. was in some estaminet, I believe—his temporary headquarters. Down Meteren way...." I nodded; in earlier days I had known

Bailleul and Meteren well. "Apparently the shell burst in the room, and blew him and the adjutant and one of the company commanders to pieces.... In fact, the only thing in the room that wasn't blown to pieces was one of those penny-in-the-slot automatic pianos."

And with such meagre information, Beryl had had to be content. For many months it had been only the sad-eyed ghost of the Beryl I knew, who went about mechanically, living only for Jack then, because youth is youth and time is a merciful healer, Billy Travers got his reward. I had hoped that perhaps—well, nothing can stop a man hoping anyway—but when the hopes went west once more, I accompanied them—to Peru. Billy is a peerless fellow, one of the salt of the earth, and I'm not at all certain that I'm a marrying man—not really....

"What are you going to do now, Peter?" demanded Beryl, breaking the silence.

"You'll laugh when I tell you," I answered. "I frequently laugh myself. I'm taking the car over to France, and I'm going to have a solitary ramble over the battlefields."

"Ramble over the battlefields," Billy blinked at me speechlessly. "My dear old boy—my very dear old boy.... What under the sun are you going to do that for? Don't you know that that portion of the battle area which is not covered with vast dumps of mouldering sandbags and rusty traction engines, it completely obscured from view by hordes of personally conducted tourists?"

"It may be all you say, and more," I laughed. "Nevertheless, I'm going. And if the weather is not too utterly foul I shall sleep in the car."

Shaking his head sadly Billy rose.

"Excuse me a moment, darling. I see young Summers over there. Restore him to sanity if you can; and, anyway, get him to promise he won't go near that pub out by Doullens."

With a grin he sauntered away, leaving Beryl staring at me thoughtfully.

"I wish I could come, Peter," she said, at length.

"Why don't you?" I cried eagerly. "There's room in the car for all of us."

But she only shook her head with a ghost of a smile. "I meant with you alone, Peter. Somehow I couldn't go with Billy.... He's suggested it two or three times: he thought I'd like to see where John was killed.... But I couldn't—not with him. And since unkind people might say something if I went with you, I'm afraid I shan't be able to go at all."

Idly she traced a pattern on the cloth, and it being, as I said before, all theory on my part, I decided that silence was the wisest course.

"Will you be going near Meteren?" she asked presently.

"I expect so," I said. "I'll make a point of it if you like."

Again she gave the ghost of a smile.

"You might take a photograph, Peter, if you can find the house.... And perhaps you might discover something.... There were a few civilians still left there when it happened, you know."

"I'll see if I can," I said quickly.

Suddenly she leaned forward, her right fist clenched, rolling it round and round in the palm of her left hand.

"Do you remember that trick of his, Peter, whenever he was excited?" she asked me quickly. "Can't you see John doing it now?"

"I can," I answered, pressing out nay cigarette.

"Quite clearly. Dear old chap! But you're happy, Beryl—quite, quite happy, aren't you? Tell me that, my dear."

"Quite, quite happy, mon ami." She nodded her head slowly. "Quite, quite happy. Only... sometimes I feel, that—well, that I'd give anything in the world just to know how he died—how John died. My John.... "

With a smile she looked up as Billy came back. "Ready, old boy?"

"Ready, aye, ready! Have you cured him?"

"No," she answered. "Peter always was pigheaded."

Just for a moment our eyes met. "Always," I affirmed, as I followed them out of the restaurant.

§ II

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Billy was right—in spirit, at any rate. And but for my promise to Beryl I think I'd have gone back the first day. It would have been different if I'd had somebody with me, somebody who didn't know, save by hearsay, what it had been. Then, perhaps, one could have exerted oneself, and striven for their sake to paint the picture for their benefit—the picture that is stamped so indelibly on one's brain. And it's different for those who come out in parties, and wander over historic spots with guides to tell them briefly of the men who fought and died there. For them there is the glamour that comes to all of to when we stand by the cairn

on Culloden Moor or wander aimlessly over the fields of Waterloo. Imagination peoples those empty places: a totally erroneous picture probably—but what matter? Our mental picture satisfies us when we do not know the truth....

But when one does know it, there is only disappointment and emptiness in trying to refresh that knowledge. Let it be—for even the ghosts of those who played the game and passed over find it hard to keep on playing it to- day. Only the stunted, gaunt trees remain to remind them of what it used to look like when Mankind felt the great Madness, and even there the undergrowth grows thick where once no blade of grass could live. And so the ghosts are leaving, though, at times, they still whisper through the Woods, of Death. But upon the roads and in the open man has become sane again. You can obtain coffee where once it was death to show your head.... Which is quite as it should be: it's tiring and thirsty work wandering over battlefields.

And, as I say, but for my promise to Molly I should have gone home the first day. Instead of which I stopped three weeks.... And now that I am back again I ask myself in wondering amazement what it all means whether I am mad or dreaming, or whether, indeed, I have looked upon one of those mysteries of life and death which man has discussed half mockingly, half fearfully, for countless centuries. Only this afternoon at the club I put a similar case—as far as I could see it—to a man who dabbled in ancient lore. He spoke learnedly on the doctrine of metempsychosis, and since I didn't know what he meant, I left him as soon as possible. I left him to go into a secluded corner by myself, and once more study the few words written on a sheet of