Arthur Gask

The Silent Dead

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CHAPTER I.
THE CHILD OF THE SLUM.

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I HAVE just seen my babies put to bed and made cosy for the night. I know I could not have two better nurses looking after them, but my own childhood was so hard and lacking in affection that I am perhaps over-anxious to be sure that my own children do not want for love and tenderness. My dear husband laughs at me, but I know it pleases him that, with all my social duties, the children always come first.

Today is my twenty-eighth birthday and I know I shall never be able to take in as fully as I should what wonderful things have happened to me from my early teens onwards. Still, all my life has been wonderful, as it can be little short of a miracle that, with the truly dreadful promise of my early days, I should have come to my present very prosperous and happy position.

Certainly I am a most fortunate woman, as life could surely be giving me no greater happiness than it is giving now. I have a husband who loves and respects me as much as any husband could love and respect his wife, I have two lovely children, and we are happily situated, socially and financially. Last year I had the thrill of being presented at Court.

If, too, I am not by any means a beautiful woman, I am grateful for other qualities which are equally desirable. My husband declares that I possess the rare gift of charm, derived, he says, half seriously, half whimsically, from the

French family of the *ancien régime* from which I am supposed to be descended.

Yet—I was born in a London slum, my mother had been a general servant and my father was, and indeed still is, a keeper in one of the animal houses of Max's Menagerie.

My so humble origin is one of the two deeply buried secrets of my life, and my dear husband, least of all, must never learn them. Thank Heaven, he never will now, as all save one who could give me away are dead. Strangely enough, this one who still lives is my own father, but he has quite forgotten me and probably does not even imagine that I any longer exist.

For a long time, however, he was a great anxiety to me, as there was always the nagging fear at the back of my mind that one day we might meet somewhere, perhaps in the street, and he would stop me and call out, "Hullo, you're my daughter, Polly, aren't you?" Oh, how awful it would have been and in time the very thought of it so came to haunt me that at last I determined I would put it to the test.

I went to the Menagerie to see if he were still there and found that he was. Though all those years had passed and he was much altered, I recognised him at once. I did not dare then to approach him close, but kept well away. Still, I knew I should have no real peace of mind until I was sure he would not recognise me, and so, a few days later, made a little party of friends and we went to the Menagerie to see the big African lioness, whom we had read in the newspapers had just had twin cubs.

Going into the Lions' House, I saw my father standing in front of one of the cages and, with my heart beating

painfully and my legs shaking under me, forced myself to go up to him and ask if we could see the new cubs. He looked at me uninterestedly and, nodding curtly, took us round to the back of the cages and shewed them to us. After we had duly admired them, I gave him a half-crown as a tip and he thanked me with a blank look of no recognition. Oh, how relieved I was! Since then I have never given him another thought, and he doesn't deserve one either, as he was a bad father to me and an even worse husband to my mother.

Still I am quite sure that were everything known about me many would say that I have been both bad and wicked myself, but I do insist that with all my faults I have never wilfully brought pain or sorrow upon anyone. Wherever, too, I have sinned against the conventions of our times, it is I who have been the sufferer and no one else. Speaking there, however, it is not for nothing that woman has been always called the weaker sex. As long as time was she has been the natural prey of Man and if, in temptation, it has happened she has been strong enough to resist her inclinations—then to most people that very strength will have detracted not a little from those endearing qualities which are both the crown and glory of her sex.

My life-story is an unusual one.

I was born in Rocker Street, a dreadful squalid little street in Camden Town, upon July the tenth, nineteen hundred and three, and I was known as Polly Wiggs. Our house was the poorest and most mean-looking of all the miserable ones there, and as a child, I remember we had very little furniture, with what there was being so worn-out and

shabby that even in my very early years I was always ashamed for anyone to come inside.

Directly I was old enough to take notice of things I came to realise what a disgrace my father was to us. Upon his weekly 'off days' when he was not wearing his keeper's uniform he went about unshaven and unwashed and with no collar or tie. I don't think he ever washed anywhere except his hands or face; the smell of the animals he looked after at the Menagerie always clung to him. Upon entering our house I could always tell whether he was at home or not by the smell in the passage. He drank a lot and spent most of his wages in the public-house. As I grew up he took no interest in me except to slap me hard whenever he could make out that I had done something wrong, and I came to hate and avoid him as much as possible.

My poor mother was a most unhappy woman, always tired and always complaining. She had good cause for complaining, as with my father's drinking habits we were always short of money, always in debt and with the landlord continually threatening to turn us out.

Before her marriage she must have been pretty in a dolly sort of way, but worry, chronic ill-health and an almost annual child-bearing had aged her very early and, taking no pride in her appearance, at thirty she looked many years older than she really was. Happily, perhaps, for my little brothers and sisters, they never lived long, infantile diseases generally taking them off in the first year. Such mortality was not unusual in Rocker Street and was symptomatic of the conditions of life for so many of the poorer classes in the early years of this century.

So, when I was about twelve years old and my mother stopped having babies, I was the only child, and I remember so well what I looked like then. As I went to and from school every day I used always to take a glimpse at myself in the big mirror in the window of the barber's shop, and saw a pale-faced, skinny, weedy-looking little horror, with hollow cheeks and eyes seeming to occupy the greater part of her face.

Still, as I came to realise later, if I were indeed weedy-looking, there must yet have been something of the vitality of the strong unwanted weed about me, as I flourished while so many of the other children in the street sickened and died. Croup, measles, scarlet fever and other children's ailments passed me by and, ill-nourished as I undoubtedly was, diseases of malnutrition got no hold upon me. I remember, I was proud, too, that while so many of the other children had warped and crooked little bodies mine was as straight as a willow.

Certainly, no one would have called me pretty then, but the woman at the sweet-shop where I used to spend a very occasional 'halfpenny' told me once over a small wrapping of acid drops that, when I grew up and my face filled out, my eyes would be lovely. She said, too, the shape of my face would one day make a lot of girls envious. I came to be quite a favourite with her and sometimes, when I had nothing to spend and she saw me looking at the good things in her window, she would darkly beckon me inside and give me a farthing sugar-stick. Then I thought she was the kindest woman in all the world.

At the Board School I attended I didn't get on as well as I should have done, as I was generally not interested in much which they taught me. Still, with any effort, I could always beat all the other girls in poetry and reading. I remember one of the teachers saying once that when I like I could be as sharp as a weasel, but I was too what she called apathetic to bestir myself. She didn't take in that I was always hungry and my poor little stomach never more than half-filled. Often for breakfast, all I had was a slice of bread and a scrape of dripping on it, and a cup of almost milkless tea. Milk by itself was a very rare treat.

With the other girls at the school, I was very unpopular, as I kept myself as aloof as possible and made no friends. It was not that I would not have liked to have friends, but, with the cruelty of children, they were always jeering at me about my shabby clothes. Certainly my clothes were dreadful. Always of the cheapest and poorest quality they would become in time so patched and darned that it was a wonder they held together. Then, when at last as a matter of dire necessity I had to have something new or be unable to go to school, my father always quarrelled with my mother about it and would slap me angrily for having, as he insisted, played so roughly that no clothes would stand the resulting wear and tear.

Altogether, my school days were most unhappy ones and I slunk through them an unhappy, unwanted and ostracised little leper. Even now, I shudder when I think of my miserable childhood, and wonder its cruelty did not leave its mark upon me all my life. Looking back, I really think I was saved from that by my becoming so callous to the

wretchedness of my surroundings that I let it pass over me like the proverbial water on a duck's back.

At any rate, better times were coming to me and at fourteen, just half my number of years now, I started upon a new life, the turning-point, as I realise now. I left school and went out as a daily girl at, what was considered then a good wage, eighteen pence a day to a childless widow who ran a small newspaper business and 'tuppenny library' in the Camden Road.

From the beginning she was very kind to me and, out of pity I am sure, at once took a great interest in the gawky, awkward and uneducated girl whom she was now employing. She had been a school-teacher once and, with nice gentle manners, always spoke most grammatically and in refined and educated tones.

"But, my child," she said to me when I had only been with her a day or two, "why do you talk so horribly? There's no need to. You've got a nicely-modulated voice if you use it properly and from your face I can tell you are something of a little actress, too. So, try straightaway to improve yourself or you'll never get on in life."

Anxious to do everything she wanted, I did try, at first almost as a joke, but very soon I was taking a great pride in it and she became so very pleased with me. After a few weeks with her, to talk quietly and pronounce my words correctly without dropping any aitches became quite the natural thing. Even my father noticed it. "Play-acting now, are you?" he scowled. "Then the way we brought you up ain't good enough for you?" but my mother bade him be quiet and said that if I spoke nicely it would mean more

money coming in. That silenced him, as some of my weekly money always went his way for beer.

My employer became particular, too, about my hands and, telling me they were pretty ones and might easily belong to an artist, made me take care of them and see they never became rough and red. Also, making out it was a sort of uniform to serve in the tuppenny library, she bought me a new dress of, to me at all events, amazing quality. She accompanied it with the gift of a pair of shoes.

Making my father's acquaintance once when he called me to the shop door one evening to get some money off me, she was so shocked at his general appearance that the next day she suggested I should come to 'live in' with her. I was to have food and lodging and £26 a year. I jumped at her offer and, accordingly visited our squalid home only for a short time on Sunday afternoons.

By now everyone was noticing my so altered appearance and the girls who had been at school with me had taken to calling after me in the street as 'the duchess.' Sex was raw in Rocker Street and my mother said that some of them were even suggesting I was being kept by a man. Boys now tried to catch my eye, but thank Heaven I had no interest in them and my nature was to remain cold and unresponsive for many years after.

When I had been with the widow about eighteen months no one would have recognised in me the scraggy girl who had first come to her. With the so-much better food and the happy surroundings my face and figure had filled out and I was no longer thin and pale. Attending upon the customers,

too, had given me confidence and altogether I was feeling a very important young woman.

Again, the books I read, and my employer made me read every new one she bought so as to be able to advise the borrowers which one to choose, opened up a new world to me and I started day-dreaming and building castles in the air, situated very far away, however, from Camden Town.

Still, all this happiness was not to last, as my poor mother died suddenly from heart failure and my father said I must come back home and keep house for him. My mother's death came as a terrible shock to me, for though I had never loved her very much and there never had been any real confidences between us, of late years I had been feeling intensely sorry for her in the dull and dreary life she lived.

I should have fought hard against returning to Rocker Street except for two things. The first, my father insisted that as I was under sixteen I could not leave him without his permission, and threatened me with the police if I did not do as he ordered. I was very frightened of the police, always associating them in my mind with the struggling and shouting that ensued when they descended upon Rocker Street to arrest a fighting drunk.

The second thing, my grief at leaving the library was mitigated a lot by learning that in any case my benefactor and I would have had to part. She was selling the business to go to live with a brother of hers in Aberdeen who had just lost his wife. For a parting present she gave me five beautiful golden sovereigns, with the stern injunction that I was not on any account to let my father get hold of them.

A fortnight back in Rocker Street proved as much as I could put up with, and I made up my mind to run away. I told myself that, at any rate to begin with, I would take the first situation offered me and go anywhere where the police would not be able to find me.

So, one morning, leaving a note for my father to read when he came home at night, saying I had heard of a good place in Scotland, I took a train going almost in the very opposite direction and arrived at Torquay, in the West of England, the same afternoon. With my heart beating a little faster at the thought that for the first time in my life I was now alone, I walked boldly into a cheap temperance hotel and enquired the price of a room. I was told it would be half a crown including breakfast.

Out early the next morning to buy a newspaper, I saw an advertisement in the *Western Morning News* that a girl was wanted for general housework in the country and, to my great joy, application for the situation was to be made at an address in Torre, a suburb of Torquay. Within an hour I was being interviewed by the advertiser whom I found was a Colonel Jasper, an amiable and pleasant-looking old gentleman of a much better class than any I had up to then been brought in contact with.

He asked me a lot of questions and, it struck me he seemed pleased I had come from London only the previous day and knew no one in Torquay. I fibbed that both my parents were dead and I had no relations at all. Also, I put my age on two years and told him I was nearly eighteen. Asked what references I could give, I said none at all, as my

previous employer who had kept a small lending library had died just recently.

After staring at me for quite a long minute, he seemed satisfied and said he would give me a trial. "But I must tell you," he added, "that on Dartmoor where you will live it is very lonely. You will find no Town amusements there, no pictures or anything like that, and you won't see many people either. Still it is very healthy and the scenery is very wonderful. Your wages will be £18 a year." I was delighted. This was exactly what I wanted. However long the arm of the police, I thought it could hardly reach me there.

It was arranged I should meet him the next morning at nine o'clock upon the platform of Torre Railway Station and we were to take the train to Bovey Tracey, a small town about fourteen miles up the line close to where the road starts to climb up on to the moor. I found him waiting for me and took good stock of him again. He was wearing breeches and leggings which were anything but new, and a leather motoring overcoat which from the oil-stains upon it had evidently seen good service.

When the train drew in it was nearly full, with us having to occupy the last vacant seats in a carriage. Accordingly, no conversation took place between us on the journey and I was not sorry for it, as I was interested in a book he had bought for me at the station bookstall. It was all about Dartmoor and I was thrilled at learning to what a mysterious place I was going.

The book said the moor was all that remained now of a once mighty volcano which millions of years ago had heaved up great masses of molten rock to remain as the

tors of today. With a circumference of under fifty miles, it rose abruptly from the surrounding country to heights varying between two and three thousand feet above sea-level. It was studded nearly all over its wide expanse with these big tors whose clefts and crannies were the last home of the deadly viper, the one remaining poisonous snake of the British Isles. Less than two hundred years ago, too, wolves were to be seen roaming on its uplands.

The book went on to state that for many centuries the moor had had something of an evil reputation, as history recorded that human sacrifices had once been offered up upon the tors. Even today it was believed by many of the superstitious dwellers round the countryside that the ghosts of the violent dead still haunted the moor, and upon nights when the moon was full would creep out from their hiding-places under the tors and attack human beings who had been unwary enough to come their way.

In summer, it said the moor was well-favoured by picnic parties and tourists, but, even then straying far from the only two roads crossing it its many stretches of dangerous bog-land always constituted something of a menace to the unwary as they were deep and treacherous, with their surfaces easily mistaken for solid ground. From time to time wandering cattle and moorland ponies had been actually seen to disappear in them within the course of a very few minutes. The danger of walking into those bogs was all the greater because of sudden mists and fogs which, even upon a bright summer day, might sweep down, apparently from nowhere and quickly blot out all visibility beyond a few yards.

Such was what I had been reading and in a way, I was quite sorry when the train reached Bovey Tracey and I had to put the book down. Colonel Jasper said he wanted to go into the town to make a few purchases as well as pick up his car, but I was to wait for him in the small hotel near the railway station. He took me in there by the private door and I sat down in the hall to wait until he was ready. He went out again by the same door through which we had entered.

I was expecting to be very bored by the waiting, but, as it happened, the chair I had chosen was close to a door which was slightly ajar and hearing voices very near to me, I peered cautiously round to find I was looking straight into the hotel bar. Besides the barman, there were two customers, young fellows in the late twenties with all the appearance of returned soldiers about them, and I guessed that the motor-cycling outfit I had noticed standing outside the hotel belonged to them. They looked very different from the barman who was a round-faced simple-looking man of middle age.

All at once I heard Colonel Jasper's name mentioned. It was the barman speaking in his soft Devonshire drawl. "Yes, as you say, he looks," he remarked, "an eccentric character. For one thing he lives in a lonely old place in the very heart of the moor miles away from anywhere."

"You mean he's got a shack there," asked one of the young fellows, "a sort of holiday home?"

The barman guffawed. "Shack be damned! Why, it's a big stone house of two stories with a fenced-in yard and plenty of out-buildings. It was built by the Government some fifty to sixty years ago. They had some cracked idea of sinking

shafts all round to discover—well Heaven only knows exactly what. However, they soon dropped the idea and the house was shut up and left to go to wrack and ruin."

"Does he live there alone?" asked the other.

"No, he's got two Indian servants with him, an old man and his wife." The barman laughed. "All old codgers up there, and we call it the old folks home."

"But how on earth does he pass the time?" asked the motor-cyclist curiously.

"Writes books about old gold coins," replied the barman, "and we've heard tell he got one of the finest collections of them in the kingdom. Then he goes fishing a lot, and watches the stars. Oh, yes, he's got plenty of money. Last year he had a big telescope built into the roof of the house and three men came all the way from London to fix it."

"But isn't he afraid of being robbed?"

"Not he," laughed the barman. "He's been a big-game hunter all over the world and is afraid of nothing. He's a tough old guy. Besides, he's got a couple of big savage dogs up there with him, Alsatians, and they keep everybody away."

All the time I was seeing and hearing everything exactly as if I were in the bar itself. One of the motor-cyclists had changed his seat, so that while he was talking, he could keep his eye on his motor-cycle through the window. This had brought him so near to me that by stretching out my hand I could almost have touched him. However, the dim light in the little narrow hall made me feel quite safe and I was thrilled at learning anything about my employer. Of the conversation which followed, too, even after all these years I

can recall almost everything which was said, as it seemed so much like a fairy tale to me that it left its lasting impression upon my mind.

Suddenly I saw the other young fellow move up to the bar counter. "Here, Gov'nor," he said, "have a pint with me, and tell us more about those dogs and the old gentleman. I'm quite interested as I'm a newspaper man and might make a good story out of it."

The barman drew himself a pint, and filled the other's glass. They chin-chined together and the journalist asked, "Has the old chap been there long?"

"Four or five years," said the barman, "and before him there was an artist fellow, but he didn't last long. When he rented the place from the Government he told everyone all he wanted was peace and quiet." He banged his fist upon the table. "By hell, he got it, too, as one day he disappeared and not a blooming trace of him was found afterwards. Some think he slipped into Fowler's Bog, near by, but we round here believe the warlocks got him and, carried him away."

"Warlocks!" exclaimed the journalist, looking very puzzled. "What are they?"

The barman nodded darkly. "Evil spirits which haunt the moor, ghosts of those poor devils who were killed as sacrifices on the tors those hundreds and hundreds of years ago."

"But you don't mean to tell me," frowned the journalist, "that there are actually people who believe in such things now?"

"My oath, I do," exclaimed the barman emphatically. "There are lots of us round here who believe in them, just as our ancestors did long generations back. It's in the moorland blood and we can't drive it out of us." He laughed.

"Oh, yes, we may go to church on a Sunday and sing hymns and pray and say our prayers and all that, but you offer us a fiver to go to certain places on the moor when the moon is full and you just see how we'll look at you. You'll have to put your fiver back in your pocket every time."

"And you've got this moorland blood yourself," asked the journalist. "You wouldn't take the fiver if I offered it?"

The barman shook his head. "No, I just wouldn't." He flushed up a bit. "I know I've never seen one of those bad spirits myself, but my old grandfather did. He died a couple of years back at ninety-seven and I've many a time heard him tell how one of them nearly got him when he was a young chap."

"You mean he actually saw it?" asked the journalist.

"Actually saw it!" exclaimed the barman. "Why, man it almost seized hold of him and it was touch and go that he escaped. It had taken the form of a dark man, with a long white face and black hair right down on to his shoulders. My grand-dad says it glared at him and its eyes seemed to pierce right through him."

He spoke so earnestly that, although I thought it all nonsense, yet I could feel my legs shaking. I saw the journalist wink at his companion. "And where did all this happen?" he asked.

"On the main road right on top of the moor," said the barman, "just before you turn off to where this old colonel

lives. My grand-dad said it was all bad luck, as he was caught out late just as it had got dark and the moon rose. His pony had gone lame and he couldn't ride it. So he was walking beside it, when all of a sudden this dark man sprang out of the ground and stretched out his hands which my grand-dad says were like claws."

The barman seemed quite affected by his story and there was a catch in his breath as he went on. "Grand-dad knew what he was up against at once, and fortunately kept his head. He made the sign of the cross with his forefinger and ran for his life. He ran all the way until he got home and then it took half a bottle of old brandy to revive him."

"But couldn't this evil spirit run faster than he did?" asked the journalist, as if wanting to draw him on.

The barman pounded again with his fist upon the counter. "Yes, of course it could, but my grand-dad's pony saved him! The spirit stopped to drain his blood. My grand-dad heard the poor brute's dying screams. No one ever saw the pony again."

"But how is it?" asked the journalist sarcastically, "that this old colonel and his servants can live up there unharmed with these evil spirits haunting round so close to them as you say?"

"We think, for one thing," said the barman earnestly, "it's because these two servants of his may be something of bad spirits themselves. They're not Christians and keep to the heathen gods where they come from. One of these gods is a snake and called Siva, the Destroyer."

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed the journalist, looking very amused. "How did you find out that?"

"Jan Hedden, who used to live here," said the barman, "told us all about it. You see, he was a tradesman in this town, and one day just afore Christmas he went up to 'The Grey House'—that's the name of the colonel's place—to mend a leak they'd got in the roof. While he was having his dinner, a darned good one with plenty of cider, he said, the old woman started to talk to him and she talked to him a lot. She's a sorceress, right enough!"

"A sorceress!" exclaimed the journalist. "That's funny, isn't it?"

"It's more than funny," scowled the barman. "It's damned wicked. She read his future for him and told him he hadn't long to live. Jan laughed at her, as we all did when he told us, because he was as healthy as a trout and could down a gallon of cider in about ten minutes." He nodded very solemnly. "But Jan died three weeks later. He got pneumonia from digging out a fox one cold Monday afternoon and the parson buried him on the Sunday following."

"Dreadful, dreadful!" exclaimed the journalist. "And you think she made him die?"

"Certain of it," nodded the barman. "She did it to show her power." He shook his head savagely. "And if the law had allowed it we'd have gone up in a mob and burnt her as a witch. Jan was a fine fellow and well liked."

"But speaking quite seriously," said the journalist, "and not wanting to laugh because we Londoners don't understand such things, are there really many round the moorside who believe as you do? Now tell me straight."

"There are many," said the barman with the utmost seriousness, "but generally we don't talk about it, and I

oughtn't to have done so now. I tell you it's in our blood and we can't help it."

Evidently to keep things going, the journalist here suggested another pint of beer, but this time the barman said he'd prefer a double brandy, as talking about evil spirits had made his stomach queer. The brandy was downed in one gulp and the journalist went on with the conversation.

"You say these dogs the old man's got are very savage?" he asked.

"Yes, very," said the barman, "and we know they're sheep killers. All the farmers round here would just love to have the law put on the colonel and get a magistrate's order to have the dogs destroyed, but the devil of it is that, though so many of them have had sheep killed in the night, they've never yet managed to get the actual proof that his dogs were the killers. A couple of weeks ago Harry Baker was sure he had got it at last, but the evidence, once again, all fizzled out."

"And how was that?" asked the journalist. "It'll fit in well with my story."

"It was early on a Sunday morning," said the barman, "and, just as it was beginning to get light, Harry—he's a farmer up Lustleigh way just a couple of miles from here—was woke up by hearing his dog starting to bark like fury. He whipped on his trousers and boots and ran out to loose his animal off the chain. It was a misty morning and in the half light he couldn't see far, but he swears he caught sight of a big brute of a dog just vanishing out of sight. He unchained his own dog and it picked up the strange scent at once and was off like an arrow. Then to Harry's great uneasiness,

everything went quiet again and his dog didn't come back. Daylight came on in a few minutes and, the mist clearing a bit, what do you think he saw?"

"One thing, for sure," nodded the journalist, "his own dog was dead."

The barman nodded back. "With its throat almost torn out. Then, within a hundred yards or so, he saw five of his best ewes had been served in the same way. Now Harry's always a quick worker and, within ten minutes, he had routed out the local policeman, taken him to see the slaughtered sheep and, with him in his car, was racing like blazes up to 'The Grey House.'"

"And what happened?" asked the journalist, because the barman had tantalisingly stopped speaking.

"Nothing," he grinned, "except that they found both the Alsatians there with the colonel giving them their breakfast of bread and milk. Neither of them showed any signs of sweat or blood and it was certain they had not left the place all night."

The journalist laughed and, looking at his watch, rose up to go. "Thanks for the story, old chap," he said, "and here's half a dollar for it. We must be off. Goodbye."

I was disappointed to see them go but another customer immediately took their place. "Two journalists from London," remarked the barman to the newcomer, as the motor-cycle was being ridden away.

"Journalists, my eye!" commented the other. "They come from London right enough, but they're street bookies in Whitechapel Road, and I had a bet or two with them when I was up there last month. I recognised them at once. The

good-looking one with the moustache is called Tod Bellamy and his reputation's not too good. They say he's been in quod for burglary, only a little while ago."

I didn't hear any more of the conversation as at that moment the hall door opened and Colonel Jasper beckoned me out.

CHAPTER II.
THE HOUSE ON THE MOOR

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FOLLOWING upon my coming to the house on the moor, it was some weeks before I settled down into a contented frame of mind and felt happy in my surroundings. It was not that my employer and two fellow-servants from the very first did not do their best to make me comfortable, as it was obvious they were intending to be most kind to me. The work, too, was light and I had plenty of spare time to myself; the food was good and there was a cosy, homely atmosphere in the big kitchen where we three had our meals. Another thing, I had a nice comfortably furnished room in the upper story and, the weather being cold—it was November when I arrived—I could have as big a fire as I wanted in the huge old-fashioned grate.

Yet—I could not shake off the feeling that an evil spirit brooded over the place. There was something so gloomy and sinister in the great loneliness of our surroundings, and it seemed to suggest to me tragedy of a mysterious and unknown kind. As I expected from what I had heard at the hotel in Bovey Tracey, we were miles and miles from anywhere, with no other habitations in sight, no road near us and, week after week, no human beings passed by. We might, I thought, be the last people left alive in all the world, destined to live and die and meet no fellow creatures again.

The house was situated about halfway down a sort of big saucer in the moor and surrounded on all sides in the near distance by the huge grey tors. Though of anything but a

nervous disposition, I used sometimes to sit at my window at night and imagine there were hundreds of unfriendly eyes watching the house. When the moon was up I was quite sure I could see dim and ghostly figures flittering round among the rocks at the foot of the tors.

Amusingly enough, to some extent I had got upon a confidential footing with my master at once, almost indeed before I had been in the house a couple of hours. We had hardly finished the midday meal when he appeared at the door of the kitchen and beckoned me out.

"I want you to get accustomed to the dogs," he said, "and the sooner the better, because, seeing so few people, they are inclined to be unfriendly with strangers. I hope you are not afraid of dogs."

I told him I certainly was not, though up to then my acquaintance with dogs had been confined to the patting of the few mongrel strays that were always hanging about Rocker Street. He led me into the yard and two magnificent-looking Alsatians sidled up and eyed me suspiciously. "These are our children, mine and my servants," he said with his voice dropping to gentle and affectionate tones, "Jupiter and Juno, the much-loved children of three old people. We dread the time when one day we shall have to lose them. No, don't be afraid. They'll be quiet as long as I am here with them."

But I wasn't in the least bit afraid, and at once started to pat them. At first they just tolerated my attention, with their huge, fierce eyes fixed intently upon my face. Then, however, their tails began to wag ever so slightly which made my master seem rather surprised. "That's splendid!"

he exclaimed. "You've evidently got a way with animals. Some people have, but it's a gift born in them and can never be acquired. Yes, they'll soon be friends with you and, once they are, they'll be faithful unto death. Now I'll show you another dog, but he won't take to you so easily. He's of a wild breed and you must never go too near him. First, I'll chain these two up. They've never got over their jealousy of Sakao. That's the other dog's name."

He led the way across the yard to a big shed and, opening the door, I saw it contained a good-sized cage, heavily barred. The front of the cage faced away from us and looked out on to the open moor. I sniffed hard and an unpleasant chord of memory stirred in me. I was back in our horrible little house in Rocker Street again.

"But you've not got another dog here," I exclaimed. "I can smell the smell of a wolf."

My master turned on me with a start. "No, no," he said sharply. "It's an Indian dog. He came from near Tibet."

A dark blackish shape darted out from the shadows at the far end of the cage and, standing on its hind legs, thrust its muzzle against the bars, at the same time wagging its tail violently.

I laughed merrily. "But it *is* a wolf, sir," I said, "an Alaskan wolf, and it's only half-grown as yet. It'll be twice that size one day."

My master's pleasant face turned to one of great sternness. "What makes you think that?"

"Oh, I know for certain," I said confidently. "You see, you see—" I hesitated for a few moments to gain time, "I had an uncle once who was a keeper in Max's Menagerie and he

had charge of the wolves there. As a little girl, he used often to take me behind the cages and show me their cubs. That's how I recognise this wolf here."

His face was a study. He looked most embarrassed and uneasy, and, indeed almost angry. Then suddenly his whole expression altered and his face broke again into its usual pleasant lines. "Then I see it's going to be no good trying to deceive you," he said with a smile, "but I didn't want to frighten you. Yes, it is an Alaskan wolf and only half grown, as you said."

A sudden thought came to my mind. "And did he then get out and kill those sheep that Sunday morning," I asked, "those belonging to that farmer at a place called Lustleigh?" and a second later I could have kicked myself for being such a little fool to say I knew anything about what I heard had happened.

My master's face had become very stern again and he glared with angry suspicion at me. Still, he spoke very quietly, "And how, pray, do you come to know anything about it?" he asked.

Now as can be well understood, up to then I was only a very ill-educated young girl who had practically had no experience of the world, but I always take something of a pride in remembering how, after my so tactless and foolish admission that I was in possession of a secret he would certainly want no outsider to know, I yet collected my wits so quickly again and spoke quite as quietly and casually as he had done.

"Oh, I heard all about it this morning," I replied, "when I was waiting for you in the hotel," and I told him what the

barman had said, adding quickly, "But you needn't be afraid, sir, that, if you do not wish it known, I shall never tell anyone you have a wolf here. I'm not a girl who talks and know when to hold my tongue. You can quite trust me."

His face had cleared while I was speaking and he smiled quite nicely again. "Yes, I think I can," he said. He shrugged his shoulders. "You see this poor beast has become something of a worry to me. When only a few weeks old he was smuggled here to me by a sea-captain friend of mine who thought he was giving me a wonderful present. I didn't want him, but I've gradually grown quite fond of him. He's a terrible one for getting out of his cage. That's twice he's done it now and the farmers would murder me if they knew I'd got him here."

"But how did you get him back after he'd killed those sheep?" I asked wonderingly.

"He came back by himself and I found him whimpering outside his cage. The poor beast had become frightened and wanted to get back to his home."

I took a great liking for my master at once and, in return, he evinced quite a fatherly interest in me. I always think it might have been because he had never married and had no children of his own. So the fact of having someone young about him appealed to him now in a novel sort of way. Another thing, too. With all his many interests, his collection of gold coins, his books and his writing at times he must have been lonely and wanted someone to talk to. His man, Rahm, was rather deaf and, accordingly, difficult to carry on a conversation with, and between him and Mrs. Rahm—I learnt the two of them had been in his household for