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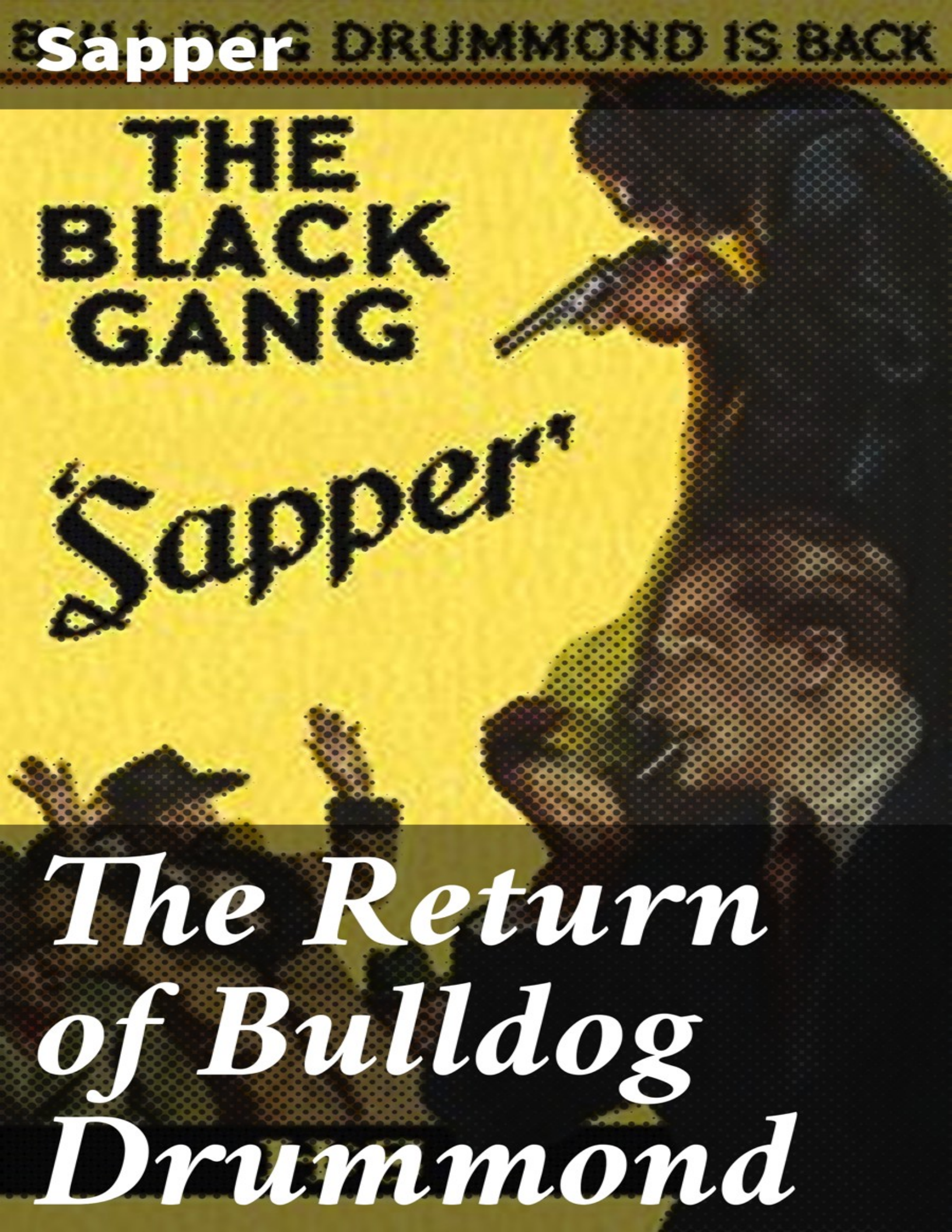

The Return of Bulldog Drummond

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CHAPTER I

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Slowly but relentlessly the mist was creeping over the moor. It moved in little eddies; then it would make a surge forward like a great silent wave breaking on the shore and not receding. One by one the landmarks were blotted out, until only some of the highest tors stuck up like rugged islands from a sea of white.

As yet it had not reached Merridale Hall, which stood on highish ground, some hundred yards from the main road to Yelverton, though already it was drifting sluggishly round the base of the little hill on which the house was built. Soon it would be covered: it would become a place cut off from the outside world, a temporary prison of stones and mortar whose occupants must perforce rely upon themselves. And it is possible that a dreamer standing at the smoking-room window, and gazing over the billowing landscape of cotton wool, might have pondered on the different dramas even then being enacted in all the other isolated dwellings. Strange stories of crime, of passion; tragedies of hate and love; queer figments of imagination would perhaps have passed in succession through his mind, always provided that the dreamer was deaf. For if possessed of normal hearing, the only possible idea that could have occupied his brain would have been how to preserve it.

Twice already had the butler entered, only to retire defeated from the scene. The cook, who had been trying to obtain a little well-earned rest herself, had then advanced into the hall and dropped a fusillade of saucepans one after

another on the tiled floor without the slightest success. And finally, in despair, the staff had barricaded itself in the pantry and turned on the gramophone.

There was something majestic about the mighty cadence. The higher note caused the window to rattle slightly: the lower one seemed to come from the deep places of the earth and dealt with the rest of the room. And ever and anon a half-strangled snort shook the performer with a dreadful convulsion. In short, Hugh Drummond was enjoying a post-prandial nap.

His hands were thrust deep in his trouser pockets, his legs were stretched out straight in front of him.

Between them, her head on one knee, sat Bess, his black cocker spaniel. Unperturbed by the devastating roars that came from above her, she, too, slept, trembling every now and then in an ecstasy of dream hunting. And the mist rolled slowly by outside, mounting nearer and nearer to the house.

Suddenly, so abruptly that it seemed as if a sound-proof door had been shut, the noise ceased.

And had the mystical dreamer by the window been really present, he would have seen a rather surprising sight. For the man who the fraction of a second before had been sound asleep was now sitting up in his chair with every sense alert. The dog, too, after one look at her master's face, was sitting rigid with her eyes fixed on the window. Volleys of saucepans might be of no avail, but the sound which had caused this instantaneous change was different. For from the direction of the main road had come the crack of a rifle.

Still with his hands in his pockets, the man got up and crossed to the window. The mist was not more than twenty yards away, and for a while he stared down the drive. Who could be firing on a day like that? And yet he knew that he had not imagined that shot.

Suddenly his eyes narrowed: the figure of a man running at top speed came looming out of the fog. He raced towards the house, and on his face was a look of abject terror. And the next moment he heard the front door open and shut, and the sound of footsteps in the hall outside.

"Down, girl!" he ordered quietly, as Bess began to growl. "It would seem that there are doings abroad."

Drummond strode to the door and stepped into the hall. Cowering in a corner was a young man, whose breath still came in great choking gasps, and whose trembling hands gave away the condition he was in. For a moment or two he stared at Drummond fearfully; then, getting up, he rushed over to him and seized his arm.

"For God's sake save me!" he stammered. "They're after me."

"Who are after you?" asked Drummond quietly, and even as he spoke there came a ring at the door, accompanied by an imperative tattoo on the knocker.

"Quick: tell me," he went on, but he spoke to empty air. For with a cry of terror, the youngster had darted into the smoking-room and shut himself in.

There came a further loud knocking, and with a shrug of his great shoulders Drummond crossed the hall and opened the front door. Outside stood two men in uniform, each with

a rifle slung over his back, and he recognised them at once as warders from Dartmoor.

"Good afternoon," he said affably. "What can I do for you?"

The senior touched his cap. "Do you mind if we search your outbuildings, sir?" he said. "A man we're after disappeared up your drive, and got away in the fog. But he must have come here: there ain't nowhere else he could have gone."

"Who is this fellow you're looking for?" asked Drummond.

"A mighty dangerous customer, sir," said the warder. "You look as if you could take care of yourself all right, but there are a good many people round here who won't sleep happy in their beds till we've got him under lock and key again. It's Morris, sir, the Sydenham murderer: escaped in the mist this morning. An a more brutal devil never breathed."

Drummond raised his eyebrows: anyone less like a brutal murderer than the frightened youngster who had taken sanctuary in the house it would have been hard to imagine.

"Very near killed a warder this morning," went on the officer. "And then dodged away across the moors. Of course, with a face like his he never had a chance from the beginning, but if he is here, sir, as we think, we'll take him along with us."

"What is the peculiarity about his face?" demanded Drummond.

"He's got a great red scar down one cheek," said the warder.

"I see," said Drummond. "Look here, officer, there has evidently been some error. It is perfectly true that a man dashed into this house just before you arrived and implored me to hide him. But it is equally true that from your description he is not Morris. So we will elucidate the matter. Come in."

He crossed the hall to the smoking-room, with the two warders at his heels.

"Now then, young feller," he cried, as he flung open the door, "what's all this song and dance about? I presume this is not the man you want."

He turned to the warders, who were staring in a bewildered way at the panic-stricken youth cowering behind a chair.

"Never seen the gentleman before in my life, sir," said one of them at length.

"Get up, man!" remarked Drummond contemptuously. "No one is going to hurt you. Now then," he continued, as the youth slowly straightened himself and came out into the room, "let's hear what happened."

"Well, sir," said the one who was obviously the senior of the two officers, "it was this way. My mate and I were patrolling the road just by where your drive runs into it. Suddenly behind the gate-post we saw someone move, someone who it seemed to me had been hiding there. In this fog one can't see much, and it wasn't possible to make out the face. But when he sprang to his feet and rushed away it naturally roused our suspicions. So I fired a shot wide, as a warning, and we followed him up here."

"But surely you could have seen he wasn't in convict's kit," said Drummond.

"The first thing an escaped man does, sir, is to steal a suit of civvies. He either lays out some bloke he meets and strips him, or he breaks into a house. And a man like Morris, who is as powerful as they make 'em, and is absolutely desperate into the bargain, wouldn't stick at either course. I'm sorry, sir," he continued to the youngster, "if I've given you a fright. But you must admit that your behaviour was hardly that of a man who had nothing to fear."

"I quite agree," said Drummond tersely. He was covertly examining the youngster as he spoke, and there were times when those somewhat lazy eyes of his could bore like gimlets. But his next remark gave no indication of his thoughts.

"A drink, my stouthearted sportsmen," he boomed cheerfully. "And good hunting to you. By the way," he went on, as he produced glasses and a tantalus, "you say this man is a murderer. Then why didn't they hang him?"

"Don't you remember the case, sir? About four years ago. An old man was found with his head bashed in, in some small street in Sydenham. They caught this fellow Morris and they found him guilty. And then at the last moment the Home Secretary reprieved him and he got a lifer. Some legal quibble, and he got the benefit of the doubt."

The warder smiled grimly. "It's not for the likes of me to criticise the decision," he went on, "but I'd willingly bet my chances of a pension that he did it."

"That's so," agreed his mate.

"A more callous brutal swine of a man never drew breath. Well, sir, we must be getting along. Here's your very good fortune." The two warders raised their glasses. "And if I might make so bold as to advise you, sir, I'd have a pretty sharp look round to-night. As I said before, from the looks of you Mister Morris would find he'd met his match. For all that, he's a desperate man, and he might get at you while you were asleep."

He put down his empty glass.

"And as for you, sir," he went on, turning to the youngster, into whose cheeks a little colour had returned, "all I can say is, once again, that I'm sorry. But it's a dangerous thing to run from an armed warder, in a fog, down these parts, when a convict has escaped that very day. Good afternoon, gentlemen: thanking you very much again."

The two men picked up their hats, and Drummond went with them to the front door. Then he returned to the smoking-room, and having lit a cigarette, he threw himself into an arm-chair, and signed to the youngster to do likewise.

"Now, young feller," he said quietly, "it strikes me that there is rather more in this affair than meets the eye. You wake me from a refreshing doze by dashing into the house with a remark that they are after you, and it then turns out to be a completely false alarm. Why should you think that two warders were after you?"

"In the mist I didn't realise they were warders," stammered the other.

And once again Drummond stared at him thoughtfully.

"I see," he remarked. "And who, may I ask, did you mean by 'they'?"

"I can't tell you," muttered the other. "I daren't."

"As you will," said Drummond casually. "I must confess, however, to a certain mild curiosity as to the identity of people who can reduce anyone to such a condition of pitiable funk as you were in. Also as to why you should anticipate meeting them on Dartmoor in a fog. Incidentally, my name is Drummond—Captain Drummond: what's yours?"

"Marton," said the other, fumbling in his pocket for his cigarette- case.

For a while Drummond looked at him in silence. The youngster was clearly a gentleman: his age he put down at about twenty-one or two. His face was good looking in a weak sort of way, and though he had the build and frame of a big man, he was obviously in rotten condition. In fact, it would have been impossible to produce a better specimen of the type that he utterly despised. If fit, Marton would have been big enough and strong enough for anything on two legs; as he was, one good punch and he would have split like a rotten apple.

Drummond watched him light a cigarette with a trembling hand, and then his glance travelled over his clothes. Well cut: evidently a West-End tailor, but equally evident West-End clothes. And why should a man go careering about Dartmoor dressed as he was and in fear of his life? Was it just some ordinary case of a youngster absconding with cash, whose nerves had brought him to the condition he was in? Or could it be that there was something

more in it than that? And at the bare thought of such a possibility his eyes began to glisten.

Life had been intolerably dull of late: in fact, since the affair with the masked hunchback on Romney Marsh nothing had happened to make it even bearable. He had shot, and fished, and consumed innumerable kippers in night clubs, but beyond that nothing—positively nothing. And now could it be possible that as the result of a sudden whim which had caused him to spend a week with Ted Jerningham something amusing was going to happen? The chances were small, he reflected sadly, as he again looked at Marton: still, it was worth trying. But the youngster would have to be handled carefully if anything was to be got out of him.

"Look here, Marton," he said, not unkindly, "it seems to me that you're in a condition when it will do you no harm to shoot your mouth to somebody. I'm considerably older than you, and I'm used to handling tough situations. In fact, I like 'em. Now what's all the trouble about?"

"There's no trouble," answered the other sullenly. "At least none where anyone else can help."

"Two statements that hardly tally," remarked Drummond. "And since the first is obviously a lie, we will confine ourselves to the second. Now, might I ask what you are doing in that rig down here, hiding behind the gate-post of this house?"

"I tell you I saw them looming out of the fog," cried the other wildly. "And I thought—I thought—"

"What did you think?"

"I just lost my head and bolted. And then when one of them fired—" He broke off and stared round the room.

"What is this house?"

"Merridale Hall," said Drummond quietly. "Now out with it, young feller. What—have you been up to? Pinching boodle or what?"

"I wish it was only that." He lit another cigarette feverishly, and Drummond waited in silence. If he was trying to bring himself up to the point of telling his story, it would be better to let him do it in his own way. "God! What a fool I've been."

"You're not the first person to say that," Drummond remarked. "But in what particular line have you been foolish?"

His curiosity was increasing now that any question of money was ruled out. However poor a specimen Marton might be, there must be something pretty seriously wrong to produce such a result on his nerves. So once again he waited, but after a while the other shook his head.

"I can't tell you," he muttered. "I daren't."

"You damned young fool," said Drummond contemptuously, losing his patience. "What on earth is there to be frightened of? Your affairs don't interest me in the slightest, but you've made a confounded nuisance of yourself this afternoon, and frankly I've had enough of you. So unless you can pull yourself together and cease quivering like a frightened jelly, you'd better push on to wherever you're going."

He had no intention whatever of turning him out of the house, but it struck him that the threat might produce some coherence in the other. And his surprise was all the greater at the unexpected answer he received. For the youngster for

the first time pulled himself together and spoke with a certain quiet dignity.

"I'm sorry. Captain Drummond," he said. "And I apologise for the exhibition I've made of myself. I know my nerves are all to hell, and though it was my fault in the beginning, it hasn't been entirely so since. And so, if I might ask you for a whisky and soda, I'll be getting on."

"Now," said Drummond cheerily, "you're beginning to talk. I was trying to get you into some semblance of coherence, that's all. There can be no question whatever of your leaving to-night: you'd be lost in this fog in half a minute. And I know that my pal Jerningham, whose house this is, will agree with me when he gets back—that is, if he gets back at all: with this weather he'll very likely stay the night in Plymouth. So here's a drink, young feller, and again I tell you candidly that if you're wise you won't bottle this thing up any more. Whatever it is, I won't give you away, and, unless it's something dirty, I may be able to help you."

Marton drained his glass, and into his eyes there came a look of dawning hope.

"Good Lord!" he cried, "If only you could. But I'm afraid it's beyond anyone: I've got to go through with it myself. Still, it will be an awful relief to get it off my chest. Do you go much to London?"

"I live there," said Drummond.

"And do you go about a good deal?"

"I trot round," remarked the other with a faint smile, "the same as most of us do."

"Have you ever run across a woman called Comtessa Bartelozzi?"

Drummond thought for a moment, and then shook his head.

"Not that I know of: she's a new one on me. Hold hard a minute: we'll have the other half-section before you go on."

He rose and crossed to the side table, carrying Marton's glass and his own. So there was a woman in the situation, was there? Name of Bartelozzi. Sounded a bit theatrical: might be real—might be false. And as for the title, Comtessas grew like worms in a damp lawn. In fact, he was so occupied with his thoughts and the mixing of two drinks, that he failed to see the hard hatchet face of a man that for one second was pressed against the window. And Marton, who had his back to it also, sat on in ignorance that, in that fleeting instant, every detail of the room had been taken in by the silent watcher outside.

"Now then," said Drummond, returning with the glasses, "we've got as far as the Comtessa Bartelozzi. Is she the nigger or rather negress in the wood pile?"

"If only I'd never met her!" said the other. "I was introduced to her one night at the Embassy, and....Great Scot! what's that?"

From outside had come the sound of a crash.

It was some distance away, but in the still air it was clearly audible. And it was followed almost immediately by a flood of vituperation and loud shouts of 'Hugh'. Drummond grinned gently, and going to the window opened it.

"Hullo! Peter," he shouted. "What has happened, little one?"

"That perishing, flat-footed idiot Ted has rammed the blinking gate- post," came an answering shout. "We've

taken two and a half hours to get here from Plymouth, most of the time in the ditch, and now the damned fool can't even get into his own drive."

The voice was getting nearer.

"What's Ted doing, Peter?" demanded Drummond.

"Sitting in the car drinking whisky out of my flask. Says that God doesn't love him, and that he won't play any more."

Peter Darrell loomed out of the fog and came up to the window.

"Hullo!" he muttered, "who is the boy friend?"

"We'll go into that after," said Drummond. "Does Ted propose to sit there the whole night?"

"He says he you are to come down and help," answered Darrell. "The car is half stuck, and you can barely see your hand in front of your face."

"All right, I'll come. You wait here, Marton, and carry on with your yarn later."

"Bring a torch, old boy," went on Darrell. "Not that it's much use, but it might help to pilot him up the drive."

"There's one in the hall," said Drummond. "I'll get it. And, Marton, you'll find cigarettes in the box there."

He got the torch and joined Darrell outside.

And as they disappeared into the mist, their feet crunching on the gravel, two dim figures crouching near the wall began to creep slowly towards the open window. Their footsteps were noiseless in the earth of the flower-bed that bordered the wall, and the youngster sat on in utter ignorance of the fate that was threatening him. A good sort, this Captain Drummond, he reflected: was it possible that he

would be able to help him? And even as the dawn of hope began in his mind there came a sound from behind him. He swung round in his chair: his jaw dropped: wild terror shone in his eyes. Not a yard away stood the man he had seen only once before—but that once had been enough.

He gave a hoarse, choking cry and tried to get up. And as he moved he felt his neck held in a vice-like grip. He struggled feebly, staring into the cruel, relentless eyes of his assailant. And then there came a roaring in his ears: the room spun round until at length everything grew black.

"Take his hat, Steve, and then give me a hand with the young swine. Those guys may be back at any moment."

"Have you killed him?" asked the second man.

"No. But we'll have to carry him. I guess it's the first time I've been thankful for this darned fog."

And a few moments later the only moving thing in the smoking-room was the mist that eddied in through the open window, whilst all unconscious of what had happened, Drummond and Darrell were groping their way down the drive.

"All sorts of excitement here, Peter," said Drummond. "There is an escaped murderer wandering about at large—"

"We heard in Plymouth that a convict had got away. Poor devil! I'd sooner be tucked up in my cell than wandering about this bit of the country on a night like this."

"And then the arrival of that youth."

"He seems a rather leprous-looking mess, old boy."

"Nothing to what he was when he first appeared. He's just beginning to tell me the scent of his young life. Evidently got into the deuce of a hole somehow, and

probably wants the seat of his pants kicked good and hearty. However, Ted will have to give him a shake-down: can't turn him out in this fog. And we'll hear what the worry is."

"Doesn't sound a particularly absorbing evening's entertainment," remarked Darrell dubiously.

"Probably not," agreed Drummond. "But there's just a bare possibility it might lead to some amusement. And, by Gad! Peter, anything would be welcome these days."

"A drink most emphatically would be," said the other. "Here is the car."

The side-lights suddenly showed up a yard in front of them, and Darrell demanded his flask.

"Finished, dear old lad," came Jerningham's voice happily. "Quite, quite finished. What an infernal time you've been! Now if you'll both push hard I'll get her into reverse, and we ought to do it!"

The wheels skidded on the greasy turf, but with Drummond's great strength to help they at length got her into the road.

"The gate is open, Ted," he said. "Wait a moment now until I mark the right-hand pillar with the torch."

He stood beside it, throwing the light down on the ground, and as he did so a piece of paper lying at his feet caught his eye. It was clean and looked like a letter, and almost mechanically he picked it up and put it in his pocket as the car went slowly past him. Then, leaving Darrell to shut the gate, he piloted Jerningham up the drive until they got to the house.

"Parker can put her away," remarked the owner, getting out. "Jove! old boy, we've had an infernal drive."

"I thought you'd probably stop in Plymouth, Ted," said Drummond.

"It wasn't too bad when we started," said the other, "was it, Peter? Let's get into the smoking-room, and I'll ring for someone to get your kit."

"Wait a moment, Ted," said Drummond. "There's a visitor."

"A visitor! Who the devil has rolled up on an evening like this?"

"Fellow by the name of Marton," went on Drummond, lowering his voice. "He's a pretty mangy piece of work, and he's in a state of mortal terror over something or other. He'd just begun telling me about it when you arrived. I'll tell you the beginning of the thing later on, but treat him easy now. He's as frightened as a cat with kittens."

He opened the smoking-room door.

"Now then, Marton, here's the owner—"

He broke off abruptly: the room was empty.

And for a while the three of them stared round in silence.

"Have you got 'em again, Hugh?" demanded Jerningham.

"No. I can vouch for the boy friend," said Darrell. "I saw him."

Drummond stepped into the hall, and shouted. And the only result was the arrival of the butler.

"Jennings, have you seen a young gentleman lying about anywhere?" he asked.

"No, sir," said the butler, looking slightly bewildered. "What sort of a young gentleman?"

"Any sort, you old fathead," said Jerningham, and once again Drummond shouted 'Marton' at the top of his voice.

They waited, and at length Jerningham spoke.

"Your young friend has apparently hopped it, old boy," he remarked. "And if, as you say, he's a bit of a mess I shouldn't think he's much loss. Get Mr. Darrel's kit out of the car, Jennings, and tell Parker to put her in the garage."

He led the way back into the smoking-room and Drummond followed slowly. To the other two the matter was a trifling one: a youngster whom neither of them had met had come and gone. But to him the thing was much more puzzling. Even if Marton's terror had finally proved groundless, it had been very real to him.

And so what had induced him to leave a place where he knew he was safe? And why had they not met him going down the drive?

"There's something damned funny about this, you chaps," he said thoughtfully. "I'll tell you the whole tale."

They listened in silence as he ran over the events of the afternoon, and when he'd finished, Jerningham shrugged his shoulders. "It seems pretty clear to me, old boy," he remarked. "When you left him and he began to think things over he came to the conclusion that he'd been talking out of his turn. He realised that, having once started, it would be difficult for him not to continue. Possibly, too, what he might have been prepared to tell to you alone he funked giving tongue to before a bunch of us. And so he decided to beat it while the going was good, which would get him out of his dilemma. And that answers your query about not meeting him as we came up the drive. Naturally he didn't want to be seen, so he just stood a couple of yards in on the grass as we went past. In this fog we'd never have spotted him."

"That answers it, Ted, I agree," said Drummond. "And yet I'm not satisfied. Don't know why, but there it is. By the same token, do either of you blokes know this Comtessa Bartelozzi?"

They both shook their heads.

"Not guilty," said Darrell. "Did he give any description of her?"

"No," answered Drummond. "He'd only just started to tell his little piece when you arrived."

"Anyway," said Jerningham, "I don't see that there is anything to be done. He's not here, and that's an end of it the point that now arises is what the deuce to do to-night. I'd ring up the doctor and ask him round for a rubber, but I doubt if he'd get here. What are you staring at, Hugh?"

Drummond had his eyes riveted on a spot on the carpet, and suddenly he bent down and touched it with his fingers. He gave a low whistle and straightened up.

"I knew I was right," he said quietly. "It's earth. And more there—and there. Somebody has been in through the window, Ted."

"By Jove! he's right," said Darrell, peering at the marks on the floor.

"And look at those two close by the chair Marton was sitting in. Whoever it was who came in stood by that chair."

"Come here," called out Darrell, who, with the electric torch in his hand, was leaning out of the window. "There are footmarks all along the flower- bed."

"Let's get this clear," said Jerningham. "You're certain those marks weren't there before?"

"Of course I'm not," cried Drummond. "I don't spend my time examining your bally carpet. But that mud is still damp. Well, I was asleep here after lunch until young Marton arrived, and all that time the window was shut. In fact, it was never opened till I heard Peter shouting."

"What about the two warders?"

"Neither of them ever went near the window. Nor did Marton. Lord! man, it's as clear as be damned. It's a definite trail from the window to the chair the youngster was sitting in."

"There's no sign of a struggle," said Darrell.

"Why should there have been one?" demanded Jerningham. "It may have been some bloke he knew with whom he toddled off all friendly like."

"Seems to me there are two pretty good objections to that," said Drummond. "In the first place, how did anyone know he was here? Secondly, if it was a pal who, by some extraordinary fluke, arrived at the window, why did he bother to come into the room? Why not just call out to him?" He shook his head gravely. "No, chaps: as I see it, there's only one solution that fits. The visitor was Morris—the escaped convict. He was lying hidden in the garden and seized his chance when he saw Marton alone."

"By Jove! that's possible," said Darrell thoughtfully.

"But, damn it—why should he go off with a bally convict?" demanded Jerningham.

"Probably Morris dotted him one over the head," said Drummond. "Then dragged him outside, and, hidden by the fog, stripped him. It's the very point the warders mentioned:

the first thing an escaped man does is to try to get civilian clothes."

"Then in that case the wretched bloke is probably lying naked in the shrubbery," cried Jerningham. "We'd better have a search-party; though our chances of finding him, unless we walk on top of him, are a bit remote."

"Doesn't matter: we must try," said Drummond. "Got any lanterns, Ted?"

"I expect Jennings can produce something," answered the other. "Though I'm afraid it's pretty hopeless."

He rang the bell, and as he did so there came from outside the sound of footsteps on the drive.

All three stared at the window expectantly: was this Marton coming back? But it was one of the warders who materialised out of the mist, to be followed a moment or two later by his mate.

"Beg your pardon, gentlemen," he said, "but as I was passing I thought I'd let you know that Morris was seen about a quarter of a mile from here an hour ago. So warn your servants to keep the windows shut and the doors bolted."

"I'm rather afraid it's a bit late, officer," said Drummond. "Unless I'm very much mistaken, Morris has been here within the last quarter of an hour. And those "—he pointed to the marks of mud—"are his tracks."

"But what were you doing, sir?"

"Helping Mr. Jerningham to get his car out of the ditch. You remember that youngster who was here? Well, I left him in this room, and when I came back he was gone. And the only possible solution that I can think of is that Morris laid

him out in order to get his clothes. We're just going to have a search through the grounds now."

"I've told Jennings to get lanterns," said Jerningham.

"Possibly you're right, sir," said the warder. "He'd seize a chance like that. But there is another thing that may have happened: the young gentlemen may have joined his friends."

"What friends?" demanded Drummond.

"Well, sir, just after me and my mate left you this afternoon and got into the main road we ran into two gentlemen walking along. So we stopped them and warned them about Morris. One of them, a great, big, powerful-looking man he was, began to laugh.

"'Thank you, officer,' he says. 'But if this guy Morris tries any funny stuff with me he won't know whether it was a steam hammer or a motor lorry that hit him.'

"'No, sir,' I answers, 'you look as if you could take care of yourself—same as another gent I've just been talking to.' Meaning you, sir, of course." He turned to Drummond. "Well, he seemed interested like," went on the warder, "and so I told him what had just happened—about the young gentleman being in such a panic and all that.

"'Can you describe him?" says he, and when I done so he turns to his friend. 'Quite obviously it's the boy we were expecting.' he says. 'The poor lad must have lost his way in the fog. Up there, is he, officer? And what is the name of the house?'

"'Merridale Hall,' I tells him. 'You can't miss it: you are only thirty yards from the entrance gate.'

"And with that he says good afternoon and walks on. So I should think, sir, that in this case that is what happened: the young gentleman went off with his friends. Not that you thought wasn't very probable: Morris would stick at nothing. And, of course, you didn't know any-thing about these two gents."

"No," said Drummond slowly. "I didn't. They did not, by any chance, say where they were stopping?"

"No, sir, they didn't. Well, good night, gentlemen: we must be getting along."

"The plot thickens," said Drummond, as the footsteps of the two warders died away. "And, boys, it seems to me it thickens in a rather promising manner."

"I don't see much ground for optimism at the moment, old lad," said Darrell.

"Don't you, Peter? I do. It seems to me that we have at any rate established the fact that Marton's story was not entirely a cock-and-bull one: nor was it mere groundless panic."

"I'm darned if I see why," said Jerningham. "Anyway, we shan't want those lanterns now, I take it." He went to the door and shouted the fact to Jennings: then he came back to his chair.

"Those warders," went on Drummond quietly, "met these two men just outside the gate. Now it would have taken them, at the most, two minutes to walk up the drive. At a conservative estimate it was at least twenty minutes after when you two rammed the gate-post. What do you suggest they were doing during the gap? Why, if they were friends of Marton, didn't they ring the front- door bell and inquire if he

was here? Why, when they finally did come in, did they come in through the window? No, my boy—it's a fiver to a dried orange pip that those two men are the 'they' he was so terrified of. And now, owing to the mere fluke of that warder meeting them, they've got him."

"I'll grant all that, old lad," said Jerningham. "But what I want to know is, what the deuce you propose to do about it. You don't know where these men are living: you don't know anything about 'em. All we do know is that your boy friend's name is Marton, which cannot be called a very uncommon one."

"Afraid I'm rather inclined to agree with Ted, old boy," said Darrell. "Doesn't seem to me that we've got anything to go on. True, we know about this female—Bartelozzi or whatever her name is—but as she is presumably in London, that doesn't help much."

Drummond gave a sudden exclamation, and pulled out of his pocket the piece of paper he had found on the drive. "I clean forgot—all about this," he said, opening it out. "Picked it up by the gate-post."

"Anything interesting?" cried Darrell, as he watched the other's face.

Without a word Drummond laid it on the table, and they all three stared at it. It was an ordinary piece of office notepaper with the name and address of the firm stamped at the top.

MARTON, PETERS & NEWALL, SOLICITORS

134, Norfolk Street, Strand WC2.

Underneath was written in pencil the two words:

'Glensham House'.

"At any rate that establishes something else." remarked Jerningham: "a point that does give us a foundation to work on. Glensham House is about half a mile down the road towards Yelverton."

"The deuce it is," said Drummond, his eyes beginning to gleam.

"It's a big house, and it's been empty for some years. They say it's haunted, but that is probably poppy cock. It has recently been let to a wealthy American, who has installed a housekeeper and is, I believe, shortly coming to live there himself."

"Things are marching," remarked Drummond. "It is, I take it, a fair assumption that Glensham House was Marton's objective."

The other two nodded.

"It is also, I take it, another fair assumption that the Marton who seems to be the senior member of the firm is this fellow's father or uncle."

"Go up top," murmured Darrell.

"Why, then, my stouthearted warriors, should the junior bottle-washer of a firm of respectable lawyers be wandering about Dartmoor in such a state of abject terror?

"Wait a moment," said Jerningham suddenly.

"Where have I heard or seen the name of that firm recently? By Jove! I believe I've got it."

He crossed the room and picked up the morning paper.

"Here it is," he cried excitedly. "I knew I wasn't mistaken."

TRAGEDY AT SURBITON

LONDON LAWYER'S DEATH

"A shocking tragedy occurred yesterday at 4, Minchampton Avenue, Surbiton, the residence of Mr. Edward Marton, senior partner of the well-known firm of Norfolk Street solicitors—Marton, Peters and Newall. Mr. Edward Marton, who was a very keen sportsman, went into his smoking-room after dinner with the intention of overhauling his guns. A few minutes later his wife and daughters, who were sitting in the drawing-room, were alarmed by the sound of a shot. They rushed into the smoking-room, and were horrified to find Mr. Marton lying on the carpet with a dreadful wound in his head. A gun was by his side, and some cleaning materials were on the table close by. A doctor was at once summoned, but the unfortunate gentleman was beyond aid. In fact, the medical opinion was that death had been instantaneous. It is thought that Mr. Marton, who frequently shot during the week-end, must have taken down his gun for the purpose of cleaning it. By some fatal mischance a cartridge had been left in one of the barrels, which went off killing Mr. Marton immediately. The deceased, who was a very popular member of Surbiton society, leaves one son and three daughters."

Drummond lit a cigarette thoughtfully.

"The Marton family don't appear to be in luck," he remarked. "Ted," he went on suddenly, "have you ever left a cartridge in a gun?"

"Can't say I have, old boy. Why?"

"Well-known sportsman,'" quoted Drummond. "Frequently shot over the week- end.' I wonder: I wonder very much. Confound it, you fellows, when you clean a gun you break it first, don't you? And when you break a gun you