

The Jewel of Seven Stars



Bram Stoker

Bram Stoker

The Jewel of Seven Stars

PUBLISHER NOTES:

Quality of Life, Freedom, More time with the ones you Love.

Visit our website: LYFREEDOM.COM

Chapter

1 A Summons in the Night

It all seemed so real that I could hardly imagine that it had ever occurred before; and yet each episode came, not as a fresh step in the logic of things, but as something expected. It is in such a wise that memory plays its pranks for good or ill; for pleasure or pain; for weal or woe. It is thus that life is bittersweet, and that which has been done becomes eternal.

Again, the light skiff, ceasing to shoot through the lazy water as when the oars flashed and dripped, glided out of the fierce July sunlight into the cool shade of the great drooping willow branches—I standing up in the swaying boat, she sitting still and with deft fingers guarding herself from stray twigs or the freedom of the resilience of moving boughs. Again, the water looked golden-brown under the canopy of translucent green; and the grassy bank was of emerald hue. Again, we sat in the cool shade, with the myriad noises of nature both without and within our bower merging into that drowsy hum in whose sufficing environment the great world with its disturbing trouble, and its more disturbing joys, can be effectually forgotten. Again, in that blissful solitude the young girl lost the convention of her prim, narrow upbringing, and told me in a natural, dreamy way of the loneliness of her new life. With an undertone of sadness she made me feel how in that spacious home each one of the household was isolated by the personal magnificence of her father and herself; that there confidence had no altar, and sympathy no shrine; and that there even her father's face was as distant as the old country life seemed now. Once more, the wisdom of my manhood and the experience of my years laid themselves at the girl's feet. It was seemingly their own doing; for the individual "I" had no say in the matter, but only just obeyed imperative orders. And once again the flying seconds multiplied themselves endlessly. For it is in the arcana of dreams that existences merge and renew themselves, change and yet keep the same—like the soul of a musician in a fugue. And so memory swooned, again and again, in sleep.

It seems that there is never to be any perfect rest. Even in Eden the snake rears its head among the laden boughs of the Tree of Knowledge. The silence of the dreamless night is broken by the roar of the avalanche; the hissing of sudden floods; the clanging of the engine bell marking its sweep through a sleeping American town; the clanking of distant paddles over the sea... . Whatever it is, it is breaking the charm of my Eden. The canopy of greenery above us, starred with diamond-

points of light, seems to quiver in the ceaseless beat of paddles; and the restless bell seems as though it would never cease... .

All at once the gates of Sleep were thrown wide open, and my waking ears took in the cause of the disturbing sounds. Waking existence is prosaic enough—there was somebody knocking and ringing at someone's street door.

I was pretty well accustomed in my Jermyn Street chambers to passing sounds; usually I did not concern myself, sleeping or waking, with the doings, however noisy, of my neighbours. But this noise was too continuous, too insistent, too imperative to be ignored. There was some active intelligence behind that ceaseless sound; and some stress or need behind the intelligence. I was not altogether selfish, and at the thought of someone's need I was, without premeditation, out of bed.

Instinctively I looked at my watch. It was just three o'clock; there was a faint edging of grey round the green blind which darkened my room. It was evident that the knocking and ringing were at the door of our own house; and it was evident, too, that there was no one awake to answer the call. I slipped on my dressing-gown and slippers, and went down to the hall door. When I opened it there stood a dapper groom, with one hand pressed unflinchingly on the electric bell whilst with the other he raised a ceaseless clangour with the knocker. The instant he saw me the noise ceased; one hand went up instinctively to the brim of his hat, and the other produced a letter from his pocket. A neat brougham was opposite the door, the horses were breathing heavily as though they had come fast. A policeman, with his night lantern still alight at his belt, stood by, attracted to the spot by the noise.

"Beg pardon, sir, I'm sorry for disturbing you, but my orders was imperative; I was not to lose a moment, but to knock and ring till someone came. May I ask you, sir, if Mr. Malcolm Ross lives here?"

"I am Mr. Malcolm Ross."

"Then this letter is for you, sir, and the bro'am is for you too, sir!"

I took, with a strange curiosity, the letter which he handed to me. As a barrister I had had, of course, odd experiences now and then, including sudden demands upon my time; but never anything like this. I stepped back into the hall, closing the door to, but leaving it ajar; then I switched on the electric light. The letter was directed in a strange hand, a woman's. It began at once without "dear sir" or any such address:

"You said you would like to help me if I needed it; and I believe you meant what you said. The time has come sooner than I expected. I am in dreadful trouble, and do not know where to turn, or to whom to apply. An attempt has, I fear, been made to murder my Father; though, thank God, he still lives. But he is quite unconscious. The doctors and police have been sent for; but there is no one here whom I can depend on. Come at once if you are able to; and forgive me if you can. I suppose I

shall realise later what I have done in asking such a favour; but at present I cannot think. Come! Come at once! MARGARET TRELAWNY."

Pain and exultation struggled in my mind as I read; but the mastering thought was that she was in trouble and had called on me—me! My dreaming of her, then, was not altogether without a cause. I called out to the groom:

"Wait! I shall be with you in a minute!" Then I flew upstairs.

A very few minutes sufficed to wash and dress; and we were soon driving through the streets as fast as the horses could go. It was market morning, and when we got out on Piccadilly there was an endless stream of carts coming from the west; but for the rest the roadway was clear, and we went quickly. I had told the groom to come into the brougham with me so that he could tell me what had happened as we went along. He sat awkwardly, with his hat on his knees as he spoke.

"Miss Trelawny, sir, sent a man to tell us to get out a carriage at once; and when we was ready she come herself and gave me the letter and told Morgan—the coachman, sir—to fly. She said as I was to lose not a second, but to keep knocking till someone come."

"Yes, I know, I know—you told me! What I want to know is, why she sent for me. What happened in the house?"

"I don't quite know myself, sir; except that master was found in his room senseless, with the sheets all bloody, and a wound on his head. He couldn't be waked nohow. Twas Miss Trelawny herself as found him."

"How did she come to find him at such an hour? It was late in the night, I suppose?"

"I don't know, sir; I didn't hear nothing at all of the details."

As he could tell me no more, I stopped the carriage for a moment to let him get out on the box; then I turned the matter over in my mind as I sat alone. There were many things which I could have asked the servant; and for a few moments after he had gone I was angry with myself for not having used my opportunity. On second thought, however, I was glad the temptation was gone. I felt that it would be more delicate to learn what I wanted to know of Miss Trelawny's surroundings from herself, rather than from her servants.

We bowled swiftly along Knightsbridge, the small noise of our well-appointed vehicle sounding hollowly in the morning air. We turned up the Kensington Palace Road and presently stopped opposite a great house on the left-hand side, nearer, so far as I could judge, the Notting Hill than the Kensington end of the avenue. It was a truly fine house, not only with regard to size but to architecture. Even in the dim grey light of the morning, which tends to diminish the size of things, it looked big.

Miss Trelawny met me in the hall. She was not in any way shy. She seemed to rule all around her with a sort of high-bred dominance, all the more remarkable as she was greatly agitated and as pale as snow. In the great hall were several servants, the men standing together near the

hall door, and the women clinging together in the further corners and doorways. A police superintendent had been talking to Miss Trelawny; two men in uniform and one plain-clothes man stood near him. As she took my hand impulsively there was a look of relief in her eyes, and she gave a gentle sigh of relief. Her salutation was simple.

"I knew you would come!"

The clasp of the hand can mean a great deal, even when it is not intended to mean anything especially. Miss Trelawny's hand somehow became lost in my own. It was not that it was a small hand; it was fine and flexible, with long delicate fingers—a rare and beautiful hand; it was the unconscious self-surrender. And though at the moment I could not dwell on the cause of the thrill which swept me, it came back to me later.

She turned and said to the police superintendent:

"This is Mr. Malcolm Ross." The police officer saluted as he answered:

"I know Mr. Malcolm Ross, miss. Perhaps he will remember I had the honour of working with him in the Brixton Coining case." I had not at first glance noticed who it was, my whole attention having been taken with Miss Trelawny.

"Of course, Superintendent Dolan, I remember very well!" I said as we shook hands. I could not but note that the acquaintanceship seemed a relief to Miss Trelawny. There was a certain vague uneasiness in her manner which took my attention; instinctively I felt that it would be less embarrassing for her to speak with me alone. So I said to the Superintendent:

"Perhaps it will be better if Miss Trelawny will see me alone for a few minutes. You, of course, have already heard all she knows; and I shall understand better how things are if I may ask some questions. I will then talk the matter over with you if I may."

"I shall be glad to be of what service I can, sir," he answered heartily.

Following Miss Trelawny, I moved over to a dainty room which opened from the hall and looked out on the garden at the back of the house. When we had entered and I had closed the door she said:

"I will thank you later for your goodness in coming to me in my trouble; but at present you can best help me when you know the facts."

"Go on," I said. "Tell me all you know and spare no detail, however trivial it may at the present time seem to be." She went on at once:

"I was awakened by some sound; I do not know what. I only know that it came through my sleep; for all at once I found myself awake, with my heart beating wildly, listening anxiously for some sound from my Father's room. My room is next Father's, and I can often hear him moving about before I fall asleep. He works late at night, sometimes very late indeed; so that when I wake early, as I do occasionally, or in the grey of the dawn, I hear him still moving. I tried once to remonstrate with him about staying up so late, as it cannot be good for him; but I

never ventured to repeat the experiment. You know how stern and cold he can be—at least you may remember what I told you about him; and when he is polite in this mood he is dreadful. When he is angry I can bear it much better; but when he is slow and deliberate, and the side of his mouth lifts up to show the sharp teeth, I think I feel—well, I don't know how! Last night I got up softly and stole to the door, for I really feared to disturb him. There was not any noise of moving, and no kind of cry at all; but there was a queer kind of dragging sound, and a slow, heavy breathing. Oh! it was dreadful, waiting there in the dark and the silence, and fearing—fearing I did not know what!

"At last I took my courage a deux mains, and turning the handle as softly as I could, I opened the door a tiny bit. It was quite dark within; I could just see the outline of the windows. But in the darkness the sound of breathing, becoming more distinct, was appalling. As I listened, this continued; but there was no other sound. I pushed the door open all at once. I was afraid to open it slowly; I felt as if there might be some dreadful thing behind it ready to pounce out on me! Then I switched on the electric light, and stepped into the room. I looked first at the bed. The sheets were all crumpled up, so that I knew Father had been in bed; but there was a great dark red patch in the centre of the bed, and spreading to the edge of it, that made my heart stand still. As I was gazing at it the sound of the breathing came across the room, and my eyes followed to it. There was Father on his right side with the other arm under him, just as if his dead body had been thrown there all in a heap. The track of blood went across the room up to the bed, and there was a pool all around him which looked terribly red and glittering as I bent over to examine him. The place where he lay was right in front of the big safe. He was in his pyjamas. The left sleeve was torn, showing his bare arm, and stretched out toward the safe. It looked—oh! so terrible, patched all with blood, and with the flesh torn or cut all around a gold chain bangle on his wrist. I did not know he wore such a thing, and it seemed to give me a new shock of surprise."

She paused a moment; and as I wished to relieve her by a moment's divergence of thought, I said:

"Oh, that need not surprise you. You will see the most unlikely men wearing bangles. I have seen a judge condemn a man to death, and the wrist of the hand he held up had a gold bangle." She did not seem to heed much the words or the idea; the pause, however, relieved her somewhat, and she went on in a steadier voice:

"I did not lose a moment in summoning aid, for I feared he might bleed to death. I rang the bell, and then went out and called for help as loudly as I could. In what must have been a very short time—though it seemed an incredibly long one to me—some of the servants came running up; and then others, till the room seemed full of staring eyes, and dishevelled hair, and night clothes of all sorts.

"We lifted Father on a sofa; and the housekeeper, Mrs. Grant, who seemed to have her wits about her more than any of us, began to look where the flow of blood came from. In a few seconds it became apparent that it came from the arm which was bare. There was a deep wound—not clean-cut as with a knife, but like a jagged rent or tear—close to the wrist, which seemed to have cut into the vein. Mrs. Grant tied a handkerchief round the cut, and screwed it up tight with a silver paper-cutter; and the flow of blood seemed to be checked at once. By this time I had come to my senses—or such of them as remained; and I sent off one man for the doctor and another for the police. When they had gone, I felt that, except for the servants, I was all alone in the house, and that I knew nothing—of my Father or anything else; and a great longing came to me to have someone with me who could help me. Then I thought of you and your kind offer in the boat under the willow-tree; and, without waiting to think, I told the men to get a carriage ready at once, and I scribbled a note and sent it on to you."

She paused. I did not like to say just then anything of how I felt. I looked at her; I think she understood, for her eyes were raised to mine for a moment and then fell, leaving her cheeks as red as peony roses. With a manifest effort she went on with her story:

"The Doctor was with us in an incredibly short time. The groom had met him letting himself into his house with his latchkey, and he came here running. He made a proper tourniquet for poor Father's arm, and then went home to get some appliances. I dare say he will be back almost immediately. Then a policeman came, and sent a message to the station; and very soon the Superintendent was here. Then you came."

There was a long pause, and I ventured to take her hand for an instant. Without a word more we opened the door, and joined the Superintendent in the hall. He hurried up to us, saying as he came:

"I have been examining everything myself, and have sent off a message to Scotland Yard. You see, Mr. Ross, there seemed so much that was odd about the case that I thought we had better have the best man of the Criminal Investigation Department that we could get. So I sent a note asking to have Sergeant Daw sent at once. You remember him, sir, in that American poisoning case at Hoxton."

"Oh yes," I said, "I remember him well; in that and other cases, for I have benefited several times by his skill and acumen. He has a mind that works as truly as any that I know. When I have been for the defence, and believed my man was innocent, I was glad to have him against us!"

"That is high praise, sir!" said the Superintendent gratified: "I am glad you approve of my choice; that I did well in sending for him."

I answered heartily:

"Could not be better. I do not doubt that between you we shall get at the facts—and what lies behind them!"

We ascended to Mr. Trelawny's room, where we found everything exactly as his daughter had described.

There came a ring at the house bell, and a minute later a man was shown into the room. A young man with aquiline features, keen grey eyes, and a forehead that stood out square and broad as that of a thinker. In his hand he had a black bag which he at once opened. Miss Trelawny introduced us: "Doctor Winchester, Mr. Ross, Superintendent Dolan." We bowed mutually, and he, without a moment's delay, began his work. We all waited, and eagerly watched him as he proceeded to dress the wound. As he went on he turned now and again to call the Superintendent's attention to some point about the wound, the latter proceeding to enter the fact at once in his notebook.

"See! several parallel cuts or scratches beginning on the left side of the wrist and in some places endangering the radial artery.

"These small wounds here, deep and jagged, seem as if made with a blunt instrument. This in particular would seem as if made with some kind of sharp wedge; the flesh round it seems torn as if with lateral pressure."

Turning to Miss Trelawny he said presently:

"Do you think we might remove this bangle? It is not absolutely necessary, as it will fall lower on the wrist where it can hang loosely; but it might add to the patient's comfort later on." The poor girl flushed deeply as she answered in a low voice:

"I do not know. I—I have only recently come to live with my Father; and I know so little of his life or his ideas that I fear I can hardly judge in such a matter. The Doctor, after a keen glance at her, said in a very kindly way:

"Forgive me! I did not know. But in any case you need not be distressed. It is not required at present to move it. Were it so I should do so at once on my own responsibility. If it be necessary later on, we can easily remove it with a file. Your Father doubtless has some object in keeping it as it is. See! there is a tiny key attached to it..." As he was speaking he stopped and bent lower, taking from my hand the candle which I held and lowering it till its light fell on the bangle. Then motioning me to hold the candle in the same position, he took from his pocket a magnifying-glass which he adjusted. When he had made a careful examination he stood up and handed the magnifying-glass to Dolan, saying as he did so:

"You had better examine it yourself. That is no ordinary bangle. The gold is wrought over triple steel links; see where it is worn away. It is manifestly not meant to be removed lightly; and it would need more than an ordinary file to do it."

The Superintendent bent his great body; but not getting close enough that way knelt down by the sofa as the Doctor had done. He examined the bangle minutely, turning it slowly round so that no particle of it

escaped observation. Then he stood up and handed the magnifying-glass to me. "When you have examined it yourself," he said, "let the lady look at it if she will," and he commenced to write at length in his notebook.

I made a simple alteration in his suggestion. I held out the glass toward Miss Trelawny, saying:

"Had you not better examine it first?" She drew back, slightly raising her hand in disclaimer, as she said impulsively:

"Oh no! Father would doubtless have shown it to me had he wished me to see it. I would not like to without his consent." Then she added, doubtless fearing lest her delicacy of view should give offence to the rest of us:

"Of course it is right that you should see it. You have to examine and consider everything; and indeed—indeed I am grateful to you... "

She turned away; I could see that she was crying quietly. It was evident to me that even in the midst of her trouble and anxiety there was a chagrin that she knew so little of her father; and that her ignorance had to be shown at such a time and amongst so many strangers. That they were all men did not make the shame more easy to bear, though there was a certain relief in it. Trying to interpret her feelings I could not but think that she must have been glad that no woman's eyes—of understanding greater than man's—were upon her in that hour.

When I stood up from my examination, which verified to me that of the Doctor, the latter resumed his place beside the couch and went on with his ministrations. Superintendent Dolan said to me in a whisper:

"I think we are fortunate in our doctor!" I nodded, and was about to add something in praise of his acumen, when there came a low tapping at the door.

Chapter

2 Strange Instructions

Superintendent Dolan went quietly to the door; by a sort of natural understanding he had taken possession of affairs in the room. The rest of us waited. He opened the door a little way; and then with a gesture of manifest relief threw it wide, and a young man stepped in. A young man clean-shaven, tall and slight; with an eagle face and bright, quick eyes that seemed to take in everything around him at a glance. As he came in, the Superintendent held out his hand; the two men shook hands warmly.

"I came at once, sir, the moment I got your message. I am glad I still have your confidence."

"That you'll always have," said the Superintendent heartily. "I have not forgotten our old Bow Street days, and I never shall!" Then, without a word of preliminary, he began to tell everything he knew up to the moment of the newcomer's entry. Sergeant Daw asked a few questions—a very few—when it was necessary for his understanding of circumstances or the relative positions of persons; but as a rule Dolan, who knew his work thoroughly, forestalled every query, and explained all necessary matters as he went on. Sergeant Daw threw occasionally swift glances round him; now at one of us; now at the room or some part of it; now at the wounded man lying senseless on the sofa.

When the Superintendent had finished, the Sergeant turned to me and said:

"Perhaps you remember me, sir. I was with you in that Hoxton case."

"I remember you very well," I said as I held out my hand. The Superintendent spoke again:

"You understand, Sergeant Daw, that you are put in full charge of this case."

"Under you I hope, sir," he interrupted. The other shook his head and smiled as he said:

"It seems to me that this is a case that will take all a man's time and his brains. I have other work to do; but I shall be more than interested, and if I can help in any possible way I shall be glad to do so!"

"All right, sir," said the other, accepting his responsibility with a sort of modified salute; straightway he began his investigation.

First he came over to the Doctor and, having learned his name and address, asked him to write a full report which he could use, and which he could refer to headquarters if necessary. Doctor Winchester bowed gravely as he promised. Then the Sergeant approached me and said sotto voce:

"I like the look of your doctor. I think we can work together!" Turning to Miss Trelawny he asked:

"Please let me know what you can of your Father; his ways of life, his history—in fact of anything of whatsoever kind which interests him, or in which he may be concerned." I was about to interrupt to tell him what she had already said of her ignorance in all matters of her father and his ways, but her warning hand was raised to me pointedly and she spoke herself.

"Alas! I know little or nothing. Superintendent Dolan and Mr. Ross know already all I can say."

"Well, ma'am, we must be content to do what we can," said the officer genially. "I'll begin by making a minute examination. You say that you were outside the door when you heard the noise?"

"I was in my room when I heard the queer sound—indeed it must have been the early part of whatever it was which woke me. I came out of my room at once. Father's door was shut, and I could see the whole landing and the upper slopes of the staircase. No one could have left by the door unknown to me, if that is what you mean!"

"That is just what I do mean, miss. If every one who knows anything will tell me as well as that, we shall soon get to the bottom of this."

He then went over to the bed, looked at it carefully, and asked:

"Has the bed been touched?"

"Not to my knowledge," said Miss Trelawny, "but I shall ask Mrs. Grant — the housekeeper," she added as she rang the bell. Mrs. Grant answered it in person. "Come in," said Miss Trelawny. "These gentlemen want to know, Mrs. Grant, if the bed has been touched."

"Not by me, ma'am."

"Then," said Miss Trelawny, turning to Sergeant Daw, "it cannot have been touched by any one. Either Mrs. Grant or I myself was here all the time, and I do not think any of the servants who came when I gave the alarm were near the bed at all. You see, Father lay here just under the great safe, and every one crowded round him. We sent them all away in a very short time." Daw, with a motion of his hand, asked us all to stay at the other side of the room whilst with a magnifying-glass he examined the bed, taking care as he moved each fold of the bed-clothes to replace it in exact position. Then he examined with his magnifying-glass the floor beside it, taking especial pains where the blood had trickled over the side of the bed, which was of heavy red wood handsomely carved. Inch by inch, down on his knees, carefully avoiding any touch with the stains on the floor, he followed the blood-marks over to the spot, close under the great safe, where the body had lain. All around and about this spot he went for a radius of some yards; but seemingly did not meet with anything to arrest special attention. Then he examined the front of the safe; round the lock, and along the bottom and top of the double doors, more especially at the places of their touching in front.

Next he went to the windows, which were fastened down with the hasps.

"Were the shutters closed?" he asked Miss Trelawny in a casual way as though he expected the negative answer, which came.

All this time Doctor Winchester was attending to his patient; now dressing the wounds in the wrist or making minute examination all over the head and throat, and over the heart. More than once he put his nose to the mouth of the senseless man and sniffed. Each time he did so he finished up by unconsciously looking round the room, as though in search of something.

Then we heard the deep strong voice of the Detective:

"So far as I can see, the object was to bring that key to the lock of the safe. There seems to be some secret in the mechanism that I am unable to guess at, though I served a year in Chubb's before I joined the police. It is a combination lock of seven letters; but there seems to be a way of locking even the combination. It is one of Chatwood's; I shall call at their place and find out something about it." Then turning to the Doctor, as though his own work were for the present done, he said:

"Have you anything you can tell me at once, Doctor, which will not interfere with your full report? If there is any doubt I can wait, but the sooner I know something definite the better." Doctor Winchester answered at once:

"For my own part I see no reason in waiting. I shall make a full report of course. But in the meantime I shall tell you all I know—which is after all not very much, and all I think—which is less definite. There is no wound on the head which could account for the state of stupor in which the patient continues. I must, therefore, take it that either he has been drugged or is under some hypnotic influence. So far as I can judge, he has not been drugged—at least by means of any drug of whose qualities I am aware. Of course, there is ordinarily in this room so much of a mummy smell that it is difficult to be certain about anything having a delicate aroma. I dare say that you have noticed the peculiar Egyptians scents, bitumen, nard, aromatic gums and spices, and so forth. It is quite possible that somewhere in this room, amongst the curios and hidden by stronger scents, is some substance or liquid which may have the effect we see. It is possible that the patient has taken some drug, and that he may in some sleeping phase have injured himself. I do not think this is likely; and circumstances, other than those which I have myself been investigating, may prove that this surmise is not correct. But in the meantime it is possible; and must, till it be disproved, be kept within our purview." Here Sergeant Daw interrupted:

"That may be, but if so, we should be able to find the instrument with which the wrist was injured. There would be marks of blood somewhere."

"Exactly so!" said the Doctor, fixing his glasses as though preparing for an argument. "But if it be that the patient has used some strange drug, it may be one that does not take effect at once. As we are as yet ignorant of its potentialities—if, indeed, the whole surmise is correct at all—we must be prepared at all points."

Here Miss Trelawny joined in the conversation:

"That would be quite right, so far as the action of the drug was concerned; but according to the second part of your surmise the wound may have been self-inflicted, and this after the drug had taken effect."

"True!" said the Detective and the Doctor simultaneously. She went on:

"As however, Doctor, your guess does not exhaust the possibilities, we must bear in mind that some other variant of the same root-idea may be correct. I take it, therefore, that our first search, to be made on this assumption, must be for the weapon with which the injury was done to my Father's wrist."

"Perhaps he put the weapon in the safe before he became quite unconscious," said I, giving voice foolishly to a half-formed thought.

"That could not be," said the Doctor quickly. "At least I think it could hardly be," he added cautiously, with a brief bow to me. "You see, the left hand is covered with blood; but there is no blood mark whatever on the safe."

"Quite right!" I said, and there was a long pause.

The first to break the silence was the Doctor.

"We shall want a nurse here as soon as possible; and I know the very one to suit. I shall go at once to get her if I can. I must ask that till I return some of you will remain constantly with the patient. It may be necessary to remove him to another room later on; but in the meantime he is best left here. Miss Trelawny, may I take it that either you or Mrs. Grant will remain here—not merely in the room, but close to the patient and watchful of him—till I return?"

She bowed in reply, and took a seat beside the sofa. The Doctor gave her some directions as to what she should do in case her father should become conscious before his return.

The next to move was Superintendent Dolan, who came close to Sergeant Daw as he said:

"I had better return now to the station—unless, of course, you should wish me to remain for a while."

He answered, "Is Johnny Wright still in your division?"

"Yes! Would you like him to be with you?" The other nodded reply. "Then I will send him on to you as soon as can be arranged. He shall then stay with you as long as you wish. I will tell him that he is to take his instructions entirely from you."

The Sergeant accompanied him to the door, saying as he went:

"Thank you, sir; you are always thoughtful for men who are working with you. It is a pleasure to me to be with you again. I shall go back to Scotland Yard and report to my chief. Then I shall call at Chatwood's; and I shall return here as soon as possible. I suppose I may take it, miss, that I may put up here for a day or two, if required. It may be some help, or possibly some comfort to you, if I am about, until we unravel this mystery."

"I shall be very grateful to you." He looked keenly at her for a few seconds before he spoke again.

"Before I go have I permission to look about your Father's table and desk? There might be something which would give us a clue—or a lead at all events." Her answer was so unequivocal as almost to surprise him.

"You have the fullest possible permission to do anything which may help us in this dreadful trouble—to discover what it is that is wrong with my Father, or which may shield him in the future!"

He began at once a systematic search of the dressing-table, and after that of the writing-table in the room. In one of the drawers he found a letter sealed; this he brought at once across the room and handed to Miss Trelawny.

"A letter—directed to me—and in my Father's hand!" she said as she eagerly opened it. I watched her face as she began to read; but seeing at once that Sergeant Daw kept his keen eyes on her face, unflinchingly watching every flitting expression, I kept my eyes henceforth fixed on his. When Miss Trelawny had read her letter through, I had in my mind a conviction, which, however, I kept locked in my own heart. Amongst the suspicions in the mind of the Detective was one, rather perhaps potential than definite, of Miss Trelawny herself.

For several minutes Miss Trelawny held the letter in her hand with her eyes downcast, thinking. Then she read it carefully again; this time the varying expressions were intensified, and I thought I could easily follow them. When she had finished the second reading, she paused again. Then, though with some reluctance, she handed the letter to the Detective. He read it eagerly but with unchanging face; read it a second time, and then handed it back with a bow. She paused a little again, and then handed it to me. As she did so she raised her eyes to mine for a single moment appealingly; a swift blush spread over her pale cheeks and forehead.

With mingled feelings I took it, but, all said, I was glad. She did not show any perturbation in giving the letter to the Detective—she might not have shown any to anyone else. But to me... I feared to follow the thought further; but read on, conscious that the eyes of both Miss Trelawny and the Detective were fixed on me.

"MY DEAR DAUGHTER, I want you to take this letter as an instruction—absolute and imperative, and admitting of no deviation whatever—in case anything untoward or unexpected by you or by others should

happen to me. If I should be suddenly and mysteriously stricken down—either by sickness, accident or attack—you must follow these directions implicitly. If I am not already in my bedroom when you are made cognisant of my state, I am to be brought there as quickly as possible. Even should I be dead, my body is to be brought there. Thenceforth, until I am either conscious and able to give instructions on my own account, or buried, I am never to be left alone—not for a single instant. From nightfall to sunrise at least two persons must remain in the room. It will be well that a trained nurse be in the room from time to time, and will note any symptoms, either permanent or changing, which may strike her. My solicitors, Marvin & Jewkes, of 27B Lincoln's Inn, have full instructions in case of my death; and Mr. Marvin has himself undertaken to see personally my wishes carried out. I should advise you, my dear Daughter, seeing that you have no relative to apply to, to get some friend whom you can trust to either remain within the house where instant communication can be made, or to come nightly to aid in the watching, or to be within call. Such friend may be either male or female; but, whichever it may be, there should be added one other watcher or attendant at hand of the opposite sex. Understand, that it is of the very essence of my wish that there should be, awake and exercising themselves to my purposes, both masculine and feminine intelligences. Once more, my dear Margaret, let me impress on you the need for observation and just reasoning to conclusions, howsoever strange. If I am taken ill or injured, this will be no ordinary occasion; and I wish to warn you, so that your guarding may be complete.

"Nothing in my room—I speak of the curios—must be removed or displaced in any way, or for any cause whatever. I have a special reason and a special purpose in the placing of each; so that any moving of them would thwart my plans.

"Should you want money or counsel in anything, Mr. Marvin will carry out your wishes; to the which he has my full instructions."

"ABEL TRELAWNY."

I read the letter a second time before speaking, for I feared to betray myself. The choice of a friend might be a momentous occasion for me. I had already ground for hope, that she had asked me to help her in the first throes of her trouble; but love makes its own doubtings, and I feared. My thoughts seemed to whirl with lightning rapidity, and in a few seconds a whole process of reasoning became formulated. I must not volunteer to be the friend that the father advised his daughter to have to aid her in her vigil; and yet that one glance had a lesson which I must not ignore. Also, did not she, when she wanted help, send to me—to me a stranger, except for one meeting at a dance and one brief afternoon of companionship on the river? Would it not humiliate her to make her ask me twice? Humiliate her! No! that pain I could at all events save her; it is not humiliation to refuse. So, as I handed her back the letter, I said:

"I know you will forgive me, Miss Trelawny, if I presume too much; but if you will permit me to aid in the watching I shall be proud. Though the occasion is a sad one, I shall be so far happy to be allowed the privilege."

Despite her manifest and painful effort at self-control, the red tide swept her face and neck. Even her eyes seemed suffused, and in stern contrast with her pale cheeks when the tide had rolled back. She answered in a low voice:

"I shall be very grateful for your help!" Then in an afterthought she added:

"But you must not let me be selfish in my need! I know you have many duties to engage you; and though I shall value your help highly—most highly—it would not be fair to monopolise your time."

"As to that," I answered at once, "my time is yours. I can for today easily arrange my work so that I can come here in the afternoon and stay till morning. After that, if the occasion still demands it, I can so arrange my work that I shall have more time still at my disposal."

She was much moved. I could see the tears gather in her eyes, and she turned away her head. The Detective spoke:

"I am glad you will be here, Mr. Ross. I shall be in the house myself, as Miss Trelawny will allow me, if my people in Scotland Yard will permit. That letter seems to put a different complexion on everything; though the mystery remains greater than ever. If you can wait here an hour or two I shall go to headquarters, and then to the safe-makers. After that I shall return; and you can go away easier in your mind, for I shall be here."

When he had gone, we two, Miss Trelawny and I, remained in silence. At last she raised her eyes and looked at me for a moment; after that I would not have exchanged places with a king. For a while she busied herself round the extemporised bedside of her father. Then, asking me to be sure not to take my eyes off him till she returned, she hurried out.

In a few minutes she came back with Mrs. Grant and two maids and a couple of men, who bore the entire frame and furniture of a light iron bed. This they proceeded to put together and to make. When the work was completed, and the servants had withdrawn, she said to me:

"It will be well to be all ready when the Doctor returns. He will surely want to have Father put to bed; and a proper bed will be better for him than the sofa." She then got a chair close beside her father, and sat down watching him.

I went about the room, taking accurate note of all I saw. And truly there were enough things in the room to evoke the curiosity of any man — even though the attendant circumstances were less strange. The whole place, excepting those articles of furniture necessary to a well-furnished bedroom, was filled with magnificent curios, chiefly Egyptian. As the room was of immense size there was opportunity for the placing