THE YELLOW HOLLY

Fergus Hume

The Yellow Holly

The Yellow Holly

Fergus Hume

CHAPTER I

"MRS. JERSEY RECEIVES"

She did not put the sacramental phrase on her cards, as no invitations were sent out. These were delivered verbally by boarders desirous of seeing their friends present on Friday evening. Mrs. Jersey dignified her gatherings with the name of "At Homes," but in truth the term was too majestic for the very mild entertainment she provided weekly.

It was really a scratch party of nobodies, and they assembled as usual in the drawing-room on this especial evening, to play and not to work. Mrs. Taine laid aside her eternal knitting; Miss Bull dispensed with her game of "Patience;" Mr. Granger sang his one song of the early Victorian Epoch--sometimes twice when singers were scarce; and Mr. Harmer wore his antiquated dress-suit. On these festive occasions it was tacitly understood that all were to be more or less "dressy," as Mrs. Jersey put it, and her appearance in "the diamonds" signalized the need of unusual adornment. These jewels were the smallest and most inferior of stones; but diamonds they undeniably were, and the boarders alluded to them as they would have done to the Kohinoor.

In her black silk gown, her lace cap, and "the diamonds" Mrs. Jersey looked--so they assured her--quite the lady. Was he a lady? No one ever asked that leading question, as it would have provoked an untruth or a most unpleasant reply. She admitted in expansive moments to having seen "better days," but what her actual past had been--and from her looks she had one--none ever discovered. The usual

story, produced by an extra glass of negus, varied so greatly in the telling that the most innocent boarder doubted. But Mrs. Jersey was always treated with respect, and the boarders called her "Madame" in quite a French way. Why they should do so, no one ever knew, and Mrs. Jersey herself could not have explained. But the term had become traditional, and in that conservative mansion tradition was all-powerful.

Few friends presented themselves on this particular Friday evening, for it was extremely foggy, and none of them could afford cabs. Even those who patronized the nearest bus line, had some distance to walk before they knocked at the Jersey door, and thus ran a chance of losing their way. Either in light or darkness the house was hard to find, for it occupied the corner of a particularly private square far removed from the Oxford Street traffic. As a kind of haven or back-water, it received into its peace those who found the current of the River of Life running too strong. Decayed ladies, disappointed spinsters, superannuated clerks, retired army officers, bankrupt dreamers--these were the derelicts which had drifted hither. Mrs. Jersey called these social and commercial failures "paying guests," which flattered their pride and cost nothing. She was something of a humbug, and always ready with the small change of politeness.

It was quite an asylum for old age. None of the guests were under fifty, save a newcomer who had arrived the previous week, and they wondered why he came amongst them. He was young, though plain-looking; he was fashionably dressed, though stout, and he chatted a West-End jargon, curiously flippant when contrasted with their prim conversation. This was the first time he had been present at Madame's reception, and he was explaining his reasons for coming to Bloomsbury. Mrs. Jersey introduced him as "Leonard Train, the distinguished novelist," although he had published only one book at his own cost, and even that

production was unknown to the boarders. They read *Thackeray* and his contemporaries, and manifested a proper scorn for the up-to-date novelist and his analytical methods.

Mr. Train, with a complacency which showed that he entertained the highest opinion of his own powers, stood on the hearth-rug, and delivered himself of his errand to Bloomsbury.

"Fashionable novelists," said he, in a still, small voice, which contrasted curiously with his massive proportions, "have overdone the business of society and epigrams. We must revert to the Dickens style. I have therefore taken up my residence here for a brief period to study Old-World types." Here he looked round with a beaming smile. "I am glad to find so rich a field to glean."

This doubtful compliment provoked weak smiles. The boarders did not wish to be rude, but they felt it was impossible to approve of the young man. Not being sufficiently modern to court notoriety, one and all disliked the idea of being "put in a book." Mrs. Taine, conscious of her weak grammar, looked uneasily at Miss Bull, who smiled grimly and then glared at Train. Granger drew himself up and pulled his gray mustache; he was the buck of the establishment, and Harmer nodded, saying, "Well, well!" his usual remark when he did not understand what was going on. Only Madame spoke. Train had taken a sitting-room as well as a bedroom, therefore he must be rich, and as he had not haggled over terms it was necessary that he should be flattered. Mrs. Jersey saw a chance of making money out of him.

"How delightful," she said in her motherly manner; "I hope you will say nice things about us, Mr. Train."

"I shall tell the truth, Madame. The truth does not flatter."

Mrs. Jersey became still more motherly and paid a compliment. "That depends, Mr. Train. If the truth were spoken about you, for instance."

It was really a very nice compliment; but Miss Bull, with malice aforethought, spoilt it in the utterance by laughing pointedly. Train, who had already set his face for a smile, grew red, and Madame darted a look at Miss Bull quite out of keeping with her motherly manner. More than this, she spoke her mind. "I hope, Mr. Train, that you will speak the whole truth of *some* of us."

Miss Bull shrugged her thin shoulders, and in direct contradiction to the traditions of the evening produced her pack of cards. She played a complicated game called "The Demon," and never went to bed until she had achieved success at least thrice. Even when driven from the drawing-room she would finish the game in her bedroom, and sometimes sat up half the night when her luck was bad. To abstain on this society evening always annoyed her, and since Madame had been rude Miss Bull seized the opportunity to show her indifference, and enjoy, by doing so, her favorite pastime. She was a small, thin, dry old maid, with a pallid face and bright black eyes. Her mouth was hard, and smiled treacherously. No one liked her save Margery, the niece of Mrs. Jersey. But Margery was supposed to be queer, so her approval of Miss Bull mattered little.

"Perhaps Mr. Granger will oblige us with a song," suggested Madame, smoothing her face, but still inwardly furious.

Mr. Granger, who had been waiting for this moment, was only too happy. He knew but one song, and had sung it dozens of times in that very room. It was natural to suppose that he knew it by heart. All the same he produced his music, and read the words as he sang. Margery played his accompaniment without looking at the notes. She was as familiar with them as she was with the moment when Mr. Granger's voice would crack. This night he cracked as usual, apologized as usual, and his hearers accepted the apology as usual, so it was all very pleasant. "'The Death of

Nelson,'" said Granger, "is a difficult song to sing when the singer is not in voice. The fog, you know----"
"Quite so," murmured Train, politely. "Do you know 'Will-o-the-Wisp,' Mr. Granger?"
Mr. Granger did not, much to his regret, and Mr. Harmer joined in the conversation. "Now there's a song," said he--"'Will-o-the-Wisp.' I knew a man who could bring the roof down with that song. Such lungs!"
"I don't love that loud shouting, myself," said Mrs. Taine in her fat voice. "Give me something soft and low, like 'My Pretty Jane!'"
"Ah! you should have heard Sims Reeves sing it," said Harmer.
"I have heard him," said Leonard, to whom the remark was addressed.
Harmer was annoyed. "Perhaps you have heard Grisi and Mario also?"
"No, sir. But my grandfather did."
"Probably," said Harmer, glancing at his fresh face and bald head in a near mirror. "I was a mere child myself when I heard them. Do you know much about music, Mr. Train?"
"I have heard it a good deal talked about," replied Leonard, with the air of saying something clever.
"And great rubbish they talk," put in Mrs. Taine, smoothing one hand over the other. "In my young days we talked of Wagner and Weber. Now it is all Vagner and Veber--such affectation."
"Ah! manners are not what they used to be," sighed another old lady, who prided herself on her straight back and clear eyesight.
"Nor singers," said Mr. Granger. "There are no voices nowadays, none."
"What about Calve and Melba?" asked Leonard.
"Those are foreigners," said Mr. Granger, getting out of the difficulty. "I speak of our native talent, sir."
"Melba comes from Australia."

"She is not English--a foreigner, I tell you. Don't talk to me, sir."
Mr. Granger was becoming restive at being thus contradicted, and privately thought Leonard an impertinent young man. Madame, seeing that the old gentleman was ruffled, hastily intervened. "If Mrs. Taine will play us the 'Canary Bird Quadrilles' how pleased we shall be."
Mrs. Taine obliged, and Harmer hung over the piano, quite enraptured at these airs which recalled his hot youth. Afterward he begged for the "Mabel Waltz." Meantime Margery was sitting in the corner with Miss Bull, and both were engrossed with "Patience." Madame, under cover of the music, talked with Train.
"You mustn't mind the guests," she said; "they are old and require to be humored."
"It's most amusing, Madame. I shall stop here three weeks to pick up types."
"Oh! you must stay longer than that," said Madame, smiling and patting his hand, still in a motherly way; "now, that you have found us out, we cannot lose you. By the way--" here Mrs. Jersey's eyes became very searching--"how did you find us out?"
"It was a friend of mine, Madame. He knew that I wanted to get into the Dickens world, and suggested this house. I am not disappointed--oh, not at all--" and Leonard glanced at Margery, who was fat, dull and stupid in her looks. She certainly resembled one of Dickens's characters, but he could not recollect which at the moment.
"Do I know the gentleman?" asked Madame, who seemed anxious.
"I don't think so. But he is coming to see me to-night."
"You must ask him in here and introduce him. I should like to thank him for having recommended my house."
"We were going to have a conversation in my room," said Train, dubiously; "he's such a shy fellow that I don't think he'll come in."

"Oh! but, he must; I love young people." Madame looked round and shrugged. "It is rather dreary here at times, Mr. Train."
"I can quite believe that," replied Leonard, who already was beginning to find the Dickens types rather boring. "Who is that tall old man with the long hair?"
"Hush! He may hear you. His name is Rasper. A great inventor, a most distinguished man."
"What has he invented?"
"Oh, all sorts of things," replied Mrs. Jersey, vaguely. "His name is quite a household word in Clapham. See, he's inventing something now." Mr. Rasper, who had rather a haggard appearance, as though he used his brains too much, was glooming over the back of an envelope and the stump of a pencil. He frowned as he chewed this latter, and seemed bent upon working out an abstruse problem. "But it will really will not do, Mr. Train," said Madame, shaking her head till "the diamonds" twinkled; "this is our evening of relaxation. But Miss Bull, against all precedent, is playing 'Patience,' and here is Mr. Rasper inventing." She rose to interrupt Mr. Rasper, but remained to ask Leonard if his friend was stopping the night.
"He will if he comes at all," replied Leonard, looking at his watch; "but if the fog is very thick I don't know if he'll turn up. It is now nine o'clock."
"We usually disperse at eleven," said Madame, "but on this night I must break up at ten, as I have--" she hesitated--"I have business to do."
"I won't trouble you, Madame," said Train; "my friend and I can have supper in my room."
"That's just it," said Madame, and her voice became rather hard. "I beg, Mr. Train, that you and your friend will not sit up late."
"Why not? We both wish to smoke and talk."
"You can do that in the daytime, Mr. Train. But my house is most respectable, and I hope you will be in bed before

eleven."
Leonard would have protested, as he objected to this sort of maternal government, but Mrs. Jersey rustled away, and he was left to make the best of it. Before he could collect his wits a message came that he was wanted. "By Jove! it's George," he said and hurried out of the room. Mrs. Jersey overheard the name.
"I suppose his friend is called George," she thought, and frowned. Her recollections of that name were not pleasant. However, she thought no more about the matter, but rebuked Mr. Rasper for his inattention to the 'Mabel Waltz.'
"It is so sweet of Mrs. Taine to play it."
"I beg pardon--beg pardon," stuttered Rasper, putting away his envelope and looking up with a dreamy eye. "I was inventing a new bootjack. I hope to make my fortune out of it."
Madame smiled pityingly. She had heard that prophecy before, but poor Rasper's inventions had never succeeded in getting him the house in Park Lane he was always dreaming about. But she patted his shoulder and then sailed across to Miss Bull. "The music doesn't please you, Miss Bull," she said in rather an acid tone.
"It's very nice," replied the old maid, dealing the cards, "but I have heard the 'Mabel Waltz' before."
"You may not have the chance of hearing it again," said Madame.
Miss Bull shrugged her shoulders to signify that it did not matter.
"I suppose that means Mrs. Taine is about to leave us, she said.
"There may be changes in the establishment soon, Miss Bull."
"It's a world of change," replied Miss Bull, in her sharp voice. "Margery, was that a heart?"
Margery pointed a fat finger to the card in question, and Miss Bull muttered something about her eyesight getting

worse. Madame knew that this was just done to annoy her, as Miss Bull's sight was excellent. To revenge herself she took Margery away. "Go and tell the servants to send up the negus and sandwiches," she said sharply.

Margery rose heavily. She was a huge girl of twenty years of age, and apparently very stupid. Why sharp little Miss Bull, who loved no one, had taken to her no one knew; but the two were inseparable. Seeing this, Madame usually kept Margery hard at work in other quarters so as to part her from the old maid. But with the cunning of an animal--and Margery was very much of that type--the girl managed to see a great deal of her one friend. Madame had an idea of the reason for this, but at the present moment did not think it was necessary to interfere. She was quite capable of crushing Miss Bull when the need arose. Meantime she vented her temper by sending Margery away. The girl departed with a scowl and an angry look at her aunt. But Miss Bull never raised her eyes, though she was well aware of what was going on.

Madame was not to be beaten. "I tell you what, dear Miss Bull," she said, smiling graciously, "since you have broken through our rule, and have produced the cards, you shall tell all our fortunes."

"Yours?" asked Miss Bull, looking up for the first time.

Madame shook her head. "I know mine. Tell Mr. Rasper if his invention will succeed. Or, perhaps, Mr. Granger?"

"I am at Miss Bull's service," said the polite old gentleman bowing.

Miss Bull swept the cards into a heap. "I'm quite willing," she said in a voice almost pleasant for her. "Anything to oblige dear Madame."

Mrs. Jersey smiled still more graciously and sailed away to send Mr. Harmer to the cards. But she wondered inwardly why Miss Bull had given way so suddenly. There was some reason for it, as Miss Bull never did anything without a reason. But Mrs. Jersey kept her own counsel, and still

continued to smile. She had quite made up her mind how to act.
"Ladies and gentlemen," she said, standing in the middle of the drawing-room, "we must disperse to-night at ten. I have some business to attend to, so I request you will all retire at that hour. In the mean time, Miss Bull has kindly consented to tell your fortunes."
It was extraordinary to see how those withered old people crowded round the table. Their several fates had long since been settled, so what they could expect the cards to tell them, save that they would one and all die soon, it is difficult to say. Yet so ineradicable is the wish to know the future in the human breast that they were as eager as youth to hear what would befall them. And Miss Bull, wholly unmoved by their senile excitement, dealt the cards with the air of a sphinx.
Madame meantime retired to her throne, and saw that the servants arranged the tray properly. She had a gigantic chair, which was jokingly called her throne, and here she received strangers in quite a majestic way. It was a sort of Lady Blessington reception on a small scale, as Mr. Harmer assured her, and, as he had been to Gore House in his youth, he knew what he was talking about. Knowing his courtly manners, and being greedy of compliments, Mrs. Jersey always tried to make him say that she resembled Lady Blessington. But this Mr. Harmer refused to do. Not that Mrs. Jersey was bad-looking. She had a fresh-colored face, bright black eyes, and plenty of white hair like spun silk. Her figure was stout, but she yet retained a certain comeliness which showed that she must have been a handsome woman in her youth. Her manners were motherly, but she showed a stern face toward Margery, and did not treat the girl so kindly as she might have done. As a rule, she had great self-command, but sometimes gave way to paroxysms of passion, which were really terrifying. But Margery alone had been witness of these, and Mrs. Jersey

passed for a dear, gentle old lady.
"Mr. Harmer is to be married," announced Mrs. Taine, leaving the circle round the card-table; "how extraordinary!"
"So extraordinary that it can't possibly be true," said Mr. Harmer, dryly; "unless Madame will accept me," he added, bowing.
"I should recommend Miss Bull," replied Madame very sweetly, but with a venomous note in her voice. She might as well have thought to rouse the dead, for Miss Bull paid not the slightest attention. In many ways the self-composed old maid was a match for Madame.
At this moment Train entered, and after him came a tall young man, fair-haired and stalwart. He was handsome, but seemed to be ill at ease, and pulled his yellow mustache nervously as Train led him to the throne.
"This is my friend," said Leonard, presenting him. "He just managed to get here, for the fog is so thick----"
Here he was interrupted. "Madame!" cried Mrs. Taine, "what is the matter? Mr. Harmer, the water--wine--quick."
There was need of it. Mrs. Jersey had fallen back on the throne with a white face and twitching lips. She appeared as though about to faint, but restraining herself with a powerful effort she waved her hand to intimate that she needed nothing. At the same time her eyes were fastened, not so much on the face of the stranger as on a piece of yellow holly he wore in his coat. "I am perfectly well," said Mrs. Jersey. "This is only one of my turns. I am glad to see you, Mr.----"
"Brendon," said the stranger, who seemed astonished at this reception.
"George Brendan," interpolated Train, who was alive with curiosity; "have you seen him before, Madame?"
Mrs. Jersey laughed artificially. "Certainly not," she replied calmly, "and yours is not a face I should forget, Mr.---- Brendon."

She uttered the name with a certain amount of hesitation as though she was not sure it was the right one. George nodded.
"My name is Brendan," he said rather unnecessarily, and Mrs. Jersey nodded in her most gracious manner.
"I bid you welcome sir; any friend of Mr. Train's is also my friend. If there is anything to amuse you here?" She waved her hand. "We are simple people. Fortune-telling--a little music and the company of my guests. Mrs. Taine, Mr. Harmer!" She introduced them, but every now and then her eyes were on the yellow holly. Brendan remarked it.
"You are noticing my flower, Mrs. Jersey," he said. "It is rather rare."
"Most extraordinary," replied Mrs. Jersey, coolly. "I have seen holly with red berries before, but this yellow----"
"There was a great bush of it in my father's garden," said Mr. Harmer, "but I have not seen any for years."
"Perhaps you would like it, Mrs. Jersey," said Brendan, taking it from his coat.
She hastily waved her hand. "No! no! I am too old for flowers. Keep it, Mr. Brendan. It suits better with your youth," she looked at his face keenly. "I have seen a face like yours before."
Brendan laughed. "I am of a commonplace type, I fear," he said.
"No; not so very common. Fair hair and dark eyes do not usually go together. Perhaps I have met your father?"
"Perhaps," replied George, phlegmatically.
"Or your mother," persisted Mrs. Jersey.
"I dare say!" Then he turned the conversation. "What a delightful old house you have here!"
Mrs. Jersey bit her lip on finding her inquiries thus baffled, but taking her cue expanded on the subject of the house. "It was a fashionable mansion in the time of the Georges," she said. "Some of the ceilings are wonderfully painted, and there are all kinds of queer rooms and cupboards and

corners in it. And so quiet. I dare say," she went on, "this room was filled with beaux and belles in powder and patches. What a sight, Mr. Brendon--what a sight! Will you have some negus? Port-wine negus, Mr. Brendan."
She was evidently talking at random, and offered him a glass of negus with a trembling hand. Brendan; evidently more and more astonished at her manner, drank off the wine. He made few remarks, being a man who spoke little in general company. Train had long ago gone to hear Miss Bull tell fortunes and, from the laughter, it was evident that his future was being prophesied.
"No! no!" cried Train, "I shall never marry. A literary man should keep himself away from the fascinations of female society."
"Do you agree with that, Mr. Brendan?" asked Mrs. Jersey, curiously.
He shook his head and laughed. "I am not a hermit, Mrs. Jersey."
"Then Miss Bull must prophesy about your marriage. Come!"
At first Brendon was unwilling to go, but after some persuasion he submitted to be led to the table. Miss Bull was quite willing to do what was asked of her, and spread out the cards. Brendon waited beside Mrs. Jersey with a most indifferent air. She was far more anxious to hear the fortune than he was.
"You are in trouble," announced Miss Bull in a sepulchral tone, "and the trouble will grow worse. But in the end all will be well. She will aid you to get free and will bestow her hand on you."
"She?" asked Brendon, looking puzzled.
Miss Bull did not raise her eyes. "The lady you are thinking of."
Brendon was rather taken aback, but seeing Mrs. Jersey's curious look he crushed down his emotion. "At my age we are always thinking of ladies," he said, laughing.

Train touched his arm. "It is----" he began, but Brendon frowned, and Leonard was quick enough to take the hint. Miss Bull went on telling the fortune. There were the usual dark and fair people, the widow, the journey, the money, and all the rest of the general events and happenings which are usually foretold. But there was always trouble, trouble, and again trouble. "But you will come out right in the end," said Miss Bull. "Keep a brave heart."

"I am sure Mr. Brendon will do that," said Madame, graciously.

While George bowed to the compliment, Miss Bull again shuffled the cards and fastened her keen black eyes on Madame. "Will you have your fortune told?" she asked coldly.

"Oh, certainly!" said Mrs. Jersey in a most gushing manner; "anything to amuse. But my fortune has been told so often, and has never come true--never," and she sighed in an effective manner.

Miss Bull continued her mystic counting. She told Madame a lot of things about the house which were known to most present. Mrs. Jersey laughed and sneered. Suddenly Miss Bull turned up a black card, "You will meet with a violent death," she said, and every one shuddered.

CHAPTER II

BRENDON'S STORY

If Miss Bull wished to make Madame uncomfortable she certainly succeeded. From being voluble, Mrs. Jersey became silent, the fresh color died out of her face, and her lips moved nervously. Twice did she make an effort to overcome her emotion, but each time failed. Afterward she took a seat by the fire, and stared into the flames with an anxious look, as though she saw therein a fulfillment of the dismal prophecy. Her depression communicated itself to the rest of the company, and shortly before ten the friends took their departure. The idea of being alone seemed to cheer Mrs. Jersey, and she accompanied her departing guests to the front door.

It was a comparatively thick fog, yet not so bad but that the visitors might hope to reach their homes. For some time Mrs. Jersey stood in the doorway at the top of the steps, and shook hands with those who were going. The boarders, who were old and chilly, were too wise to venture outside on such a dreary night, so Mrs. Jersey had the door-step all to herself. "If you lose your ways," she called out to the visitors "come back. You can tell the house by the red light." She pointed to the fanlight Of crimson glass behind which gas was burning. "I will keep that alight for another hour."

The voices of thanks came back muffled by the fog, but Leonard and George waited to hear no more. They walked upstairs to Train's sitting-room, which was on the first floor. The windows looked out on to a back garden, wherein grew a few scrubby trees, so that the prospect was not cheering. But on this night the faded crimson curtains were drawn, the fire was lighted, and a round table in the middle of the apartment was spread for supper. On one side a door led to

Leonard's bedroom, on the other side was the room wherein George was to sleep. As the fire-light played on the old-fashioned furniture and on the mellow colors of curtains and carpet, Leonard rubbed his hands. "It is rather quaint," he said cheerfully, and lighted the lamp.
"Not such a palace as your diggings in Duke Street," said Brendon, stretching his long legs on the chintz-covered sofa.
"One must suffer in the cause of art," said Train, putting the shade on the lamp. "I am picking up excellent types here. What do you think?"
"There's plenty of material," growled Brendon, getting out his pipe.
"Don't smoke yet, George," interposed Train, glancing at the clock. "We must have supper first. After that, we can smoke till eleven, and then we must go to bed."
"You keep early hours here, Leonard."
"I don't. Mrs. Jersey asked me particularly to be in bed at eleven."
"Why?" Brendon started, and looked hard at his friend.
"I don't know, but she did."
"Is it an understood thing that you retire at that hour?"
Train shook his head and drew in his chair. "By no means. I have sat up till two before now. But on this night Mrs. Jersey wants the house to be considered respectable, and therefore asked me to retire early. Perhaps it's on account of you, old man." Here he smiled in an amused manner. "She hopes to get you as a boarder."
"I wouldn't come here for the world," retorted Brendon, with quite unnecessary violence.
"Why not? Have some tongue!"
"Thanks," responded George, passing his plate. "Because I don't like the house, and I don't care for Mrs. Jersey."
"Why did you advise me to come here, then?" asked Train, pouring out a glass of claret.

"Well, you wanted something in the style of Dickens, and this was the only place I knew."
"How did you know about it?"
George deliberated for a moment, and then fastened his eyes on his plate. "I lived here once," he said in a low voice.
"Dear me," gasped Train, "what an extraordinary thing."
"Why so? One must live somewhere."
"But you didn't like Mrs. Jersey."
"She was not here then."
"Who was here?"
"My grandfather on the mother's side. That's fifteen years ago."
Leonard looked at the handsome, moody face of his friend, musingly. "I never knew you had a grandfather," he said at last.
"Do you know anything at all about me?" asked Brendon.
"No. Now I come to think of it, I don't. I met you three years ago at Mrs. Ward's house, and we have been friends ever since."
"Acquaintances, rather. Men are not friends until they become confidential with one another. Well, Train," George pushed back his chair and wiped his mouth, "to-night I intend to turn you from a mere acquaintance into a friend."
"I shall be delighted," said Train, rather bewildered. "Won't you have more supper?"
Brendon shook his head, lighted his pipe, and again stretched himself on the sofa. Train, being curious to know what he had to say, was on the point of joining him. But he was yet hungry, so could not bring himself to leave the table. He therefore continued his supper, and, as Brendon seemed disinclined to talk, held his peace.
Train's parents were dead, and had left him a snug little income of five thousand a year. Not being very strong-minded, and being more than a trifle conceited as to his literary abilities, his money speedily attracted round him a number of needy hangers-on, who flattered him to the top

of his bent. They praised him to his face, sneered at him behind his back; ate his meat, borrowed his money, and kept him in a fools' paradise regarding human nature. Poor Leonard thought that all women were angels, and all men good fellows with a harmless tendency to borrow. Such a Simple Simon could not but be the prey of every scoundrel in London, and it said much for his moral nature that he touched all this pitch without being defiled. He was called a fool by those he fed, but none could call him a rogue.

It was this simplicity which inspired Brendon with a pitying friendship; and Brendon had done much to save him from the harpies who preyed on this innocent. In several cases he had opened Train's eyes, at the cost of quarreling with those who lost by the opening. But George was well able to hold his own, and none could say that he benefited pecuniarily by the trust and confidence which Leonard reposed in him. To avert all suspicion of this sort he had refused to become Train's secretary and companion at an excellent salary. Brendon was poor and wanted that salary; but he valued his independence, and so preferred to fight for his own hand. However, he continued his services to Leonard as a kind of unofficial mentor.

Now that Train came to think of it, Brendon was rather a mysterious person. He lived by writing articles for the papers, and was always well dressed. His rooms were in Kensington, and he seemed to know many people whom he did not cultivate. Train would have given his ears to enter the houses at which Brendon was a welcome guest. But for the most part George preferred to live alone with his pipe and his books. He was writing a novel, and hoped to make a successful career as a literary man. But as he was barely thirty years of age, and had been settled only five years in London, his scheme of life was rather in embryo. He appeared to have some secret trouble, but what it was Train never knew, as Brendon was a particularly reticent man. Why he should propose to be frank on this especial

night Leonard could not understand. After supper he put the question to him.
"Well," said Brendon, without moving or taking his eyes from the fire, "it's this way, Train. I know you are a kind-hearted man, and although you talk very freely about your own affairs, yet I know you can keep the secret of a friend."
"You can depend upon that, George. Anything you tell me will never be repeated."
Brendon nodded his thanks. "Also," he continued, "I wish you to lend me three hundred pounds."
"A thousand if you will."
"Three hundred will be sufficient. I'll repay you when I come into my property."
Train opened his eyes. "Are you coming into money?" he asked.
"That I can't say. It all depends! Do you know why I suggested this house to you, Leonard?" he asked suddenly.
"To help me in my literary work."
"That was one reason certainly, but I had another and more selfish one, connected--" George sat up to finish the sentence--"connected with Mrs. Jersey," he said quietly.
This remark was so unexpected that Leonard did not know what to say for the moment. "I thought you did not know her," he gasped out.
"Nor do I."
"Does she know you?"
"Not as George Brendon, or as I am now."
"What do you mean?" Train was more puzzled than ever.
"It's a long story. I don't know that I can tell you the whole."
Train looked annoyed. "Trust me----"
"All in all, or not at all," finished Brendon; "quite so." He paused and drew hard at his pipe. "Since I want money I must trust you."
"Is it only for that reason that you consider me worthy of your confidence?" asked Leonard, much mortified.

George leaned forward and patted him on the knee. "No, old man. I wish you to help me also."
"In what way?"
"With Dorothy Ward," replied George, looking closely at his pipe.
"Was she in your mind to-night when that old maid was telling the cards?" asked Train, sitting up with a look of interest.
Brendon nodded. "But I do not wish you to mention her name. That was why----"
"I know. I was foolish. Well, she's a pretty girl, and as good as she is pretty."
"Which is marvelous," said Brendon, "considering the fashionable mother she has."
Train smiled. "Mrs. Ward is certainly a leader of fashion."
"And as heartless as any woman I know," observed Brendon. He glanced affectionately at the yellow holly. "Dorothy gave me this to-night."
"Did you see her before you came here?"
"Yes. I went to afternoon tea. We--" Brendon examined his pipe again--"we understand one another," he said.
Leonard sprang to his feet. "My dear chap, I congratulate you."
"Thanks! but it's too early for congratulation as yet. Mrs. Ward wants her daughter to make a good marriage. George Brendon will not be the husband of her choice, but Lord Derrington!"
"Does she want her daughter to marry that old thing?"
"You don't understand, Leonard. I mean that if I become Lord Derrington when the old man dies Mrs. Ward will consent."
Train sat down helplessly and stared. "I don't understand," he said.
"I'll put the thing in a nutshell," explained Brendon. "Lord Derrington is my grandfather."
"Your--but he never lived here?"

"No. The grandfather who lived here, and with whom I stayed, was my mother's father. He was called Lockwood. Derrington is my father's father. Now do you understand?"
"Not quite! How can you become Lord Derrington when he has a grandson--that young rip Walter Vane!"
"Walter Vane is the son of my father's brother, and my father was the elder and the heir to the title."
"Then, if Lord Derrington dies you become----"
"Exactly. But the difficulty is that I have to establish my birth."
Leonard jumped up and clutched his hair. "Here's a mystery," he said, staring at his friend. "What does it all mean?"
"Sit down and I'll tell you!"
Leonard resumed his seat and glanced at the clock. "We have a quarter of an hour," he said, "but I think we'll defy Mrs. Jersey and sit up this night."
"No," said Brendon, hastily; "we may as well do what she wants. I wish to conciliate her. She is the only person who can help to prove my mother's marriage."
"Humph! I thought there was something queer about her. Who was she?"
"My mother's maid! But I had better tell you from the beginning."
Train sat down and produced a cigarette. "Go on," he said; "no, wait! I want to know before you begin why Mrs. Jersey was so struck with that yellow holly?"
This time it was Brendon who looked puzzled. "I can't say, Leonard."
"Do you think she connected it with some disaster?" asked Train.
"From her looks, when she set eyes on it, I should think so!"
"Does Miss Ward know Mrs. Jersey?"
"No. She knows nothing about her."
"And it was Miss Ward who gave you the yellow holly?"

"Yes. When I was at afternoon tea."
"Then I can't see why Mrs. Jersey should have made such a spectacle of herself," said Leonard, lighting his cigarette. "Tell your story."
"I'll do so as concisely as possible," said Brendon, staring into the fire. "My mother was the daughter of Anthony Lockwood, who was a teacher of singing, and lived here. She--I am talking of my mother--was very beautiful, and also became famous as a singer at concerts. The son of Lord Derrington, Percy Vane, saw her and loved her. He subsequently eloped with her. She died in Paris two years later, shortly after I was born."
"And you came to live here?"
"Not immediately. I was but an infant in arms, but my father would not part with me. He kept Mrs. Jersey--she was my mother's maid, remember--as my nurse, and we went to Monte Carlo. I am afraid my poor father was a bit of a scamp. He was at all events a gambler, and lost all his money at the tables. He became poor, and his father, Lord Derrington, refused to help him."
"He was angry at the marriage, I suppose?"
"That's the point. Was there a marriage? But to make things clear I had better go on as I started. My father went to San Remo, and from that place he sent me home to my grandfather Lockwood."
"With Mrs. Jersey?"
"No. By that time Mrs. Jersey had left; I had another nurse, and it was she who took me to this house. My grandfather was delighted to have me, as he always insisted that there was a marriage. I grew up here, and went to school, afterward to college. My grandfather died, but there was just enough money to finish my education. The house was sold, and by a curious coincidence Mrs. Jersey took it as a boarding establishment. Where she got the money I don't know. But I passed out of her life as a mere infant, and I don't suppose she thought anything more about me.

Perhaps she recognized me to-night from my likeness to my father, as she mentioned that she had seen my face before. But I can't say."
"What became of your father?"
"That is the tragic part of the story. He was murdered at a masked ball at San Remo. The assassin was never discovered, but it was supposed to be some passionate Italian lover. My grandfather Lockwood was so angry at the way in which his daughter had been treated that he never stood up for my rights. I would not do so, either, but that I love Miss Ward. Now, it is my intention to see Mrs. Jersey to-morrow and get the truth out of her."
"What does she know?"
"She knows where the marriage was celebrated, and can prove that my birth is legitimate. That is why I came here, Leonard."
"Why did you not speak to her to-night?"
"I think it is better she should be in a quieter frame of mind," said Brendon. "She has never seen me since I was a small child, and my name of Brendon is quite unknown to her."
"Why do you call yourself Brendon?" asked Train.
George began to pace up and down the room. "Pride made me do that," he declared. "When my father was murdered at San Remo, Lord Derrington denied the marriage, and refused to do anything for me. My grandfather Lockwood gave me his own name, and I was called George Lockwood for many a long day. At the age of fifteen Mr. Lockwood died, and then a note came to my guardian saying that Lord Derrington proposed to allow me a small income."
"For what reason?"
"I can't say. Perhaps it was remorse."
Train shook his head. "I have met Lord Derrington, and if such an old Tartar feels remorse, then there is a chance that pigs may fly."

"That's an elegant illustration, Leonard," observed George, with a smile; "but to continue (as I see it is nearly eleven), even as a boy I felt the indignity put upon me. I refused, with the permission of my guardian, the offered sum, and continued at school. When I left to go to college I changed my name so that Lord Derrington should not have the chance of insulting me further or of knowing who I was. My guardian suggested Brendon, so as that was as good a name as another I took it. Hence Mrs. Jersey can't possibly know me, or why I came to see her. She will be wiser in the morning," added Brendon grimly.

"But she evidently saw in you some likeness to your father."

"Evidently. From all I have heard Mrs. Jersey was in love with my father, even though she was only a lady's maid. But I know very little about her. My business here is to learn.

"But why has she kept silent all these years?"

Brendon shrugged his shoulders. "She has had no inducement to speak out," he said; "that is why I wish you to lend me three hundred pounds, Leonard. She will require a bribe."

"And a larger one than that, George. A woman like Mrs. Jersey would not part with such a secret for so small a sum."

"Oh, I can pay her what she demands when in possession of the estates. But at present she will want to see the color of my money."

Train stared into the fire meditating on this queer story, which was quite a romance. Then he saw an obstacle. "George," he said, "even if you prove that you are the heir you won't get any money. Lord Derrington is still living."

"Yes, and from all accounts he means to go on living like the truculent old tyrant he is. But the estates are entailed, and must come to me when he dies, and, of course, the title is mine, too, when he is done with it. If Mrs. Jersey learns these facts, she will come to terms, on a promise of money when I inherit."

"Then you will speak to her in the morning?"
"Yes. She is the only person who can right me. But I mean to be the husband of Dorothy Ward, and my only chance to get round the mother is to prove my legitimacy."
"I don't think Miss Ward cares much for her mother."
"Who could?" asked Brendon, cynically. "She is a worthless little canary-bird. But I tell you, Leonard, that frivolous as Mrs. Ward appears to be, she is a most determined woman, with an iron will. She will make her daughter do as she is bid, and will sell her to the highest bidder. As Lord Derrington's grandson and acknowledged heir, I have a good chance. As George Brendon--" he stopped as the clock struck eleven--"as George Brendon I am going to bed."
Train rose to light the candles which stood on a side-table, yawning as he did so. He was much interested in Brendon's story, but the telling of it had tired him. "I shall sleep like a top to-night."
"Well, get to bed. I'll put out the lamp," said George, and did so.
"No," said Leonard, taking a candlestick in either hand. "I'll see you to your virtuous couch," and he preceded him into the bedroom.
It was a quaint apartment, with heavy mahogany furniture and a Turkey carpet. Entering from the sitting-room, George saw that the bed was directly opposite the door. "It's been moved since my time."
"What?" cried Leonard, setting down the candles, "Is the furniture the same your grandfather had?"
"Yes. Mrs. Jersey bought the house and its contents. They are old-fashioned enough in all conscience. Look at that ugly wardrobe." He pointed to one against the inner wall and opposite the window. "The mirror in that used to frighten me as a little chap. It looked so ghostly in the moonlight. Humph! it's years and years since I slept in my old bed," said Brendon, taking off his coat. "I should dream

the dreams of childhood now that I am back again. But you needn't say anything of this, Leonard."
"Of course not," replied the other. "And you need not smash your yellow holly by leaving it in your coat all night. Put it in water."
"No." George stopped the too officious Leonard. "Dorothy put it into my coat, and there it shall remain. The berries are firm and won't fall. I'll see to that. Hush!"
"What's the matter?" asked Train, startled.
For answer, Brendon quickly extinguished both candles, and pointed to the door of the sitting-room, which stood half open. "Not a word," he murmured to Train, grasping his wrist to enforce attention. "I heard a footstep."
The two men stood in the darkness, silent and with beating hearts. A glimmer of light came from the fire and struck across into the bedroom. Leonard listened with all his ears. He distinctly heard stealthy footsteps coming along the passage, which was on the other side of the wall against which stood the wardrobe. The footsteps paused at the sitting-room door. They heard this open, and scarcely dared to breathe. Some one entered the room, and waited for a moment or so, evidently listening, Then the door was opened and closed again, and the footsteps died away. Even then Brendon stopped Leonard from lighting the candles.
"Go to bed in the dark," he said softly.
"Was it Mrs. Jersey?" asked Leonard.
"Of course it was. She came to see if you were in bed."
"But why should she?"
"I can't say. There's something queer about that old woman. Get to bed, Leonard. You can light your candle in your own room. I shall not light mine."
Train was bursting with indignation. "But it's absurd to be treated like a couple of schoolboys," he said, taking his candlestick.
"There's more in it than that," said Brendon, pushing him to the door. "Get to bed, and make no noise. We can talk in the

morning."
Train darted across the sitting-room, and retired. Brendon closed his door softly, and listened again. There was no return of the footsteps, so he slipped into bed without relighting the candle. The clock in the sitting-room chimed a quarter past eleven.