
E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM
EXPIATION

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I — THE REFUGEES

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A solitary cabin stood far away in the backwoods of Canada, outside all tracks of civilization, in a region which only the native Indians and a few daring trappers cared to penetrate. Rudely built of pine logs, it was ill-calculated to withstand the piercing cold and frost which, for nine months out of the twelve, holds this region in an iron grip. Around it, a small clearing had been effected, but the ground was many feet thick in snow, which, save where in front of the door it had been cut away, surrounded the frail little building, and reached up to the rude window.

A wild and lonesome spot, in the very thick of an almost impenetrable forest, little wonder then that the two men who had built this dwelling-place lived undisturbed, and all but undreamt of.

The two inmates were seated within on pine log segments, crouching over a fast dying-out fire, its decaying embers casting a fitful glare around on the little there was to show. Bare, uneven walls, against one side of which stood a rough cupboard, the only apology for furniture, save the seats and a longer stump set up as a table. Some furs, flung together in separate heaps, were evidently their beds; two long rifles standing in a corner, and a few trifles scattered carelessly about; this was all the feeble glimmer could reveal.

The men's faces were strangely alike, and yet, in another sense, strangely dissimilar: their features might have been

cast in the same mould, but the expression of each face was totally different. He who appeared to be rather the younger of the two—though their stature agreed, and it was not by that means one distinguished any variation—was leaning forward, supporting his face with his hands, and gazing with a look of settled despair, indicating thoughts of an unenviable past, into the feeble remains of the fire. Now and then his lips moved, and a feeble smile played upon them, soon to vanish, as if chased away by darker broodings, and to be succeeded by the former expression of hopelessness.

His companion appeared to be steadily watching him through half-closed eyes, in which shone a restless, anxious light, contrasting markedly with the other's almost sullen look. A nervousness beyond his control seemed to have taken complete possession of him, and showed itself by the frequent changes of position, and restless movements of limbs. The one act to which he remained constant was the watch upon his companion, and in whose slightest motion he betrayed a keen interest.

The hours passed slowly on; but, as if unheedful, or perhaps unconscious of the flight of time, the two men maintained their positions unmoved. The only disturbing sound outside was the dull roar of the icy wind as it shook the tops of the pine trees, and passed on through the forest. Within the hut perfect silence reigned, unless when the ashes dropped softly off from the log fast burning out on the hearth.

At last the younger man rose slowly from his seat, but only to sink down with a weary sigh upon one of the heaps of furs, and stretch himself out for sleep. His mate flung

another log upon the embers, but continued his watch. After a short time, when its object showed all the signs of sleep, the other arose and, moving on tiptoe, approached the sleeper, over whom he bent to study him narrowly. Apparently satisfied by the closed eyes and regular breathing that the slumber was no feigned one, he resumed his seat He drew from his pocket a newspaper, and after a cautious glance round, commenced to read. One article alone claimed his whole attention, and this he read with an air of eager interest three or four times. Thus it ran:—

EXECUTION OF JAMES DALTON

EXTRAORDINARY CONFESSION OF THE CRIMINAL

This morning, at eight o'clock, James Dalton, under sentence of death for the murder of Robert Harrison, policeman, suffered the extreme penalty of the law at the borough gaol."

After giving details of the execution, the reporter proceeded to dilate upon the last confession of the criminal, as follows:

"About six o'clock, Dalton, who appeared calm and resigned, pleaded for an interview with the governor, alleging that he wished to make confession of a crime committed by himself, for which, he had reason to believe, some innocent person had been suspected. Immediately on the request being conveyed to the governor, he, in company with the chaplain, and attended by his shorthand clerk, proceeded to the prisoner's cell, and received this confession of the unhappy man, given verbatim.

"At eight o'clock," he said, "I shall pass into another world. I have lived a life of crime from my youth here. The

chaplain tells me that even now, if I confess everything and repent, I may be forgiven. That's what I can't take whole; but it's neither here nor there on what's on my heart. I want to tell you this straight. As near as I can remember, what I am going to clear off happened some twenty odd year' ago in the month of November. I was then one of a gang of burglar, whose chief lay it was to mark empty houses, when the owners were away, you see. We weren't doing much in the more desperate line then, as this paid us better, especially in the swell parts. It was a dark night, and me and a pal had to go on to some plate left for one night only in a house in Upper Sleeke Street, off Park Lane, London. Two menservants were kep', but only one was to be left in the house, and it were him what blew the thing to us on promise of half the metal when melted. He was to leave the scullery window open, and when we had got in, we was to knock him about a bit and tie him up, to make the thing look square. Howsomever, when we gets to the corner of the street, we meets him skulking about for us, and we l'arnt that, during the day, the plate had been removed, and so there warn't no go. As we talked this bilk over, we heard the tramp of a policeman t'other side of the street, and my pal and the footman naterally cut their lucky. Being in the shadow, I knew he would not see me, so I stood bolt up against the wall, and he passed on, in course, without noticing o' me. While I waited for him to get a safe distance off, I saw a light in the second-floor window of the house exactly opposite me. What possessed me I don't know, but even after the copper were out of hearing, I stood watching that 'ere light. It struck me that there were something wrong up there;

what for I don't know, for it warn't partic'lar late. I ain't superstitious as a rule, but a sort of a kind 0' creepiness come over me that something would happen in that house, if I waited, and something did happen for true. I hadn't been there above five minutes, and was jist a making up o' my mind to step it, when I see a hand pull the window open, and I skipped back into the shadow and squeezed myself up against the wall. Soon I see a man put his head and shoulders cautiously out and look carefully up and down. There warn't a soul about but me, and not a sound to be heard, and presently he stepped out on to the little balcony, and listened again. I saw him plainly then, though he couldn't see me, and by the awful scared look on his face I could guess something was queer. He looked jist wild-like; pale as a ghost, and an awful look in his big black eyes. He was dressed like a swell, but his collar was torn open, and his bit of white tie hanging down. After he had stood there listening for a, minute or two, he stepped back into the room, leaving of the window open. I waited, holding my breath, and crouching down in the dark still. He was back in a moment, and another swell with him.

"I could not see this gentleman so well as him, as afore coming out again he had lowered the lamp, but I could see they was both of a height, and about the same build. They whispered together for a bit, then one climbed over the balcony and dropped into the flower-beds below. The rails wasn't high, and the ground was soft with rain, so it wasn't no hard job, and in a moment the other was down, too. They opened the gate and turned down the street, walking very fast; but as they passed under the street lamp opposite me,

I could see them plain. Lord! how scared they looked, both as pale as whitewash, and one of them shaking so as if he couldn't scarcely walk. They was both much alike, tall and dark. The one as seemed least put about, took the other's arm, and hurried him round the corner, out of sight in a twinkling.

"While I were hesitating whether to follow them or not, I noticed as how they hadn't shut the window, and I see as how it was easy to get up, by stepping on the first-floor window ledge, and swinging up by the balcony rails. In a jiffy I had screwed up my thinker to get into that room; and I did. What I see, though I had expected summat of the sort, almost took my breath away. Stretched on the floor in the far corner was a man whom I took for corpsed, for he was lying quite still, and I could see a drop or two of dark red blood streaming down his temple, and staining his hair, which was a light colour. I had seen many a stiff-un afore, but coming on him so suddent-like, clean took my nerve away, and I had half a mind to cut out again quicker'n I'd come; but then I thought as how, as I'd run the risk, I might as well lay my hands on some goods or other, and, spying some silver hornyments on the chimbley piece, I stepped up to it and stuffed them into my pocket. The room was richly furnished, and as I heerd no sound in the house, I opened a cupboard, too, and 'found' a silver cigar-case, and some other knickery-knacks. After I'd helped myself to about as much as I could carry away convenient, I was turning to go, when I heerd a noise behind me, and, turning round, sees the man whom I took for dead, on his feet and looking round in a dazed sort of way, until his eyes rested on me, and then

he stared at me frightened-like. Seeing him up on his feet so unexpected startled me, and my senses seemed clean to go, and instead of making myself scarce at once, I jist stood and stared back at him until at last he spoke."

"What are you doing here!" he said.

"The sound of his voice brung me to myself, and I leapt for the window, but he was in front of it and caught me in his arms, and in a moment we were wrestling together. I was rayther weak at that time, jist getting over the fever, and he were a big, strong man, so he was copping the best of it, and there was nothing for it but to use my life-preserver. I got it out all right, no fear, and as he snatched at it, I dodged him, and brought it full force on to his temple. He guyve one deep groan and he sunk back, and I knowed by the way he fell that he was done for this time, and no error. I snatched the things that I had took out of my pockets, and put them all back agin, reckoning they would say the swells had done the job if there was nothing missing, and then I got through the window and on to the balcony. There was no one in the street, and in a moment I had swung myself down and had got clean off. As I never heerd nothing more of it, and none of our lot was looked after for it, I suppose the police fixed it on them two swells. I don't think they were nabbed, though, or I should have heerd of it, cos an' why we allers has a good read of the Sunday paper after bein' out on the job, and there was no mention that I come across. If them 'ere swells has had to go on the strict q.t., on the Continong, f'r instance, why, like as not they may hear of this, and know they only stunned their friend, and that it was me who settled him. There's

nowt else I think on, 'cept the letters on the cigar-case, I remember, was a H and a h'M. That be all, governor."

So far the word for word confession. The report concluded:—

"There is no difficulty in connecting this revelation with a mysterious murder at Mr. Mornington's London house, No. 6, Upper Sleeke Street, on the 20th of November, twenty-two years ago. On that night, the proprietor and a friend, Mr. Cecil Braithwaite, left the house, and no intelligence of them ever came to hand. The evidence before the coroner's jury, which sat on a body found in the house, implicated one or both of the gentlemen so deeply that warrants were issued for their apprehension. Upon this burglar murderer's confession, the Home Secretary was communicated with, and its corroboration being easy and immediate, we believe that these warrants have been already cancelled, and every effort will be made by the families concerned, no doubt, to discover the fugitives and apprise them of the proof of their innocence."

This was the article which seemed so much to interest the man who read it by the light of the pine logs. It further inspired him with a decision, for, after he had put the paper back into his pocket, he crossed the room, and once more bent over the sleeping man. His deep, regular breathing, and other evidences of sleep, encouraged the viewer, for with a firm hand he drew a small key out of the loose waistcoat pocket of the sleeper, and crossing the hut with careful tread, and every now and then a stealthy glance behind, he fitted the key into a small black box in the furthest corner, and pushing the lid up, took out two or

three bundles of papers, and with them crossed again to the light of the fire. Here he glanced rapidly through them, pausing in his task at intervals, to bestow an anxious gaze at his companion. His task did not occupy him long; in a few minutes he came to the end of the little pile, and carefully thrusting selected ones into his inner pocket, he replaced the others precisely as he had found them. Then he relocked the box, and carefully replaced the key in the sleeping man's pocket. He breathed more freely now, as if the most difficult part of his task were accomplished; but he never for one moment relaxed his wary watch on the slumberer. He dragged out a pair of snow shoes from a corner, and placed them in readiness for use by the door; wrapped some thick furs around him, and slung his rifle across his shoulder by its strap as if about to leave.

On the threshold, he deliberated for a moment, turned back, and tearing a leaf out of an old pocketbook, yellow with age, wrote these few words:

"Going into the back country for some months; expect me back when the frost gives."

He folded the paper up and put it where he knew his companion would find it when he awoke. Then with a last backward glance at the latter, in which shone bitterest malice, the while his dark, heavy eyebrows almost met in a frown of hatred, he left the hut. Crossing the open space in front, he shot along on the racquets into the blackest depths of the forest, as one whose ban was lifted, and to whom a new life had given wings.

II — THE WELCOMING HOME

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Merrily pealed the church bells of the little village of Mornington. Loud rose the discordant strains of the local brass-band. Eagerly pressed the villagers one against the other to be the first to see, the first to welcome home their long-absent lord and master. For the squire of Mornington, whose return home this day was such an event for the sleepy little hamlet, not only owned every acre in the parish, but was the largest landowner in the county. Every man and boy in the place was either tenant or labourer on his estates; and yet twenty-three years had passed since Harold Mornington had visited his home. Little wonder, then, that his appearance should be such a source of excitement to the good folk; and that they should peal their joy-bells, turn out their band, don their Sunday clothes, and turn into a general holiday the day which marked so important an event.

Mornington is a small village, and not a particularly picturesque one, although there certainly are some points about it worthy of admiration.

For instance, its cottages are clean and well-thatched, and its lattice windows, when opened, disclose many cleanly and comfortable interiors. Peep into one of them—as an index of all—for fashions do not vary in Mornington. There is the oft-scrubbed floor of red tiles, rather uneven in some places, and with a crack or two here and there, but none the less pleasant to look upon; the high-backed chair drawn up to the fireplace for the oldest member of the family, very

stiff and uncomfortable to look at, but considered by the occupants the very acme of luxurious ease. A few cheap prints and texts on the wall, and, for certain, the photograph on the mantelpiece of "my niece and her baby," or "my wife's brother in his uniform," wretchedly taken, but none the less prized. A plain white deal table in the middle of the room for meals, round the red-painted legs of which play chubby youngsters with still redder legs. A smaller table in the corner, on which are spread out to the best advantage a few cheaply yet gaily bound volumes, comprising, nearly always, "The Pilgrim's Progress," "Robinson Crusoe," or some such inevitable works, and invariably the prayer-book and hymn-book and family Bible, on the latter of which gleams the old man's spectacles. Perhaps, if the cupboard door be half open, you may get a glimpse of the neatly assorted crockery, the china spotlessly white, and the tin ware polished into a dazzling degree of shininess. On the top shelf the best tea-service glitters, most likely an heir-loom, jealously guarded by the housewife, who suffers no one to dust it but herself; the occasional breakage of an article is her greatest trouble.

Outside is a little plot of flower garden which, small though it may be, is sure to be well stocked with homely, sweet-smelling flowers. The rector gives a prize every year to the best kept garden, and the rivalry provoked thereby is keen, some a very blaze of colour, perfuming the air around. There is generally room enough behind the cottage to grow a few vegetables and rear a brood of chickens or ducks, and very often a pig-stye, to show that the labourer is not ignorant of the means whereby to add to his weekly wage.

Broad-shouldered sons of the plough are these honest, God-fearing men, with few ideas perhaps, but those few sound ones; who do their duty to their master during the week, and on Sunday never miss attending either the parish church, or the tiny red brick Bethel at the other end of the village. To this latter comes on the Sabbath an itinerant preacher who has perhaps walked six or eight miles through the dusty lanes. Some black sheep there are in Mornington —as in all places; but they are few in number and not very black. In the village of Mornington there is such a majority of righteous and honest men, that a black sheep would be quite crushed by the overwhelming odds against him of those who found no cause for admiration or respect in his drunken orgies, his boastful talk, or his other evil habits. And, seeing himself coldly treated, even despised, and being forced to acknowledge to himself that the righteous ones had the best of it as far as the good things of this world go, he would, most likely, reform if black through weak-mindedness, and in time become one of the respected and prosperous. Or if he were one steeped in vice and wedded to iniquity, whom nothing could influence to good, he would then depart from Mornington at the first opportunity and seek a congenial resort. "Behind the times" some people would no doubt call Mornington. Perhaps it is so; as it has not yet learnt to grumble at what it has, or covet something unreasonable and unattainable. In short, it is contented, and therein lies its offence in the eyes of those who thus malign it. Long may it be behind the times in this respect!

This was no ordinary home-coming to the little village. No man possessing so magnificent a home as Mornington Abbey, with estates whose rent-roll rose far into five figures, would of his own choice desert such attraction in his youth and bury himself in unknown obscurity in a far away country. And yet this was what Harold Mornington had done, or rather had been forced to do by circumstances. With the remembrance before them of his long exile and wasted youth, no wonder that tenants and labourers, and all who made up the population of the district, should unite to show their sympathy by giving their lord a hearty welcome home.

Clash went the bells, the band which had been playing in a desultory manner some popular airs, to the intense delight of the juveniles, broke off suddenly, and prepared to sound the first notes of "See the Conquering Hero comes." The villagers roused themselves to the highest pitch of' expectancy, for the cry, "He is coming," had been raised. A moment later, indeed, the Mornington landau was seen rounding the corner, followed by a little troop of horsemen. "Hurrah for Squire! Hurrah for Muster Mornington!" Hats were waved, and throats became hoarse with cheering, whilst all eyes were fixed on the occupant of the front seat of the vehicle. He stood up to bow his thanks, and when they saw him rise, and recalled in his face and bearing the likeness of his father and all the Mornington race—saw the old proud but kindly smile, and marked the ravages which privation and unhappiness had made in his looks—their enthusiasm knew no bounds. Willing hands undid the traces and unharnessed the horses, and when, a second later, the little procession proceeded, Mornington tenants drew their

lord in triumph to his park gates. Here, there was another halt, and while the horses were being re-harnessed, the county gentlemen, who had followed on horseback, pressed forward to shake hands with their new neighbour, and he, unable to address individuals, arose and spoke a few words to all collectively:

"Gentlemen, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your kind welcome," he said hesitatingly. "You will forgive my saying very few words to you now. I see," he continued, looking slowly around, "many familiar faces, which in my long exile had become almost as the shadows of another life; and they regain their pleasant brightness but slowly. Sir Miles Averill, my father's oldest friend, let me grasp your hand! What, you, Hamilton? I never hoped to see you again in this life. Gentlemen, all, I have come back after a long and weary exile, to spend the rest of my days among you. You all know my history, and the sad misfortune which has kept me away from my native country so long. But three short months ago, I never thought to see it again; and but for the good fortune of lighting on a home newspaper, I never should have done so. But fate has at last been kind to me, and I am enabled to spend my remaining years in the country and among the scenes which boyish associations endeared to me. Once more I thank you heartily for your welcome. We shall all, I trust, meet often in the future."

Harold Mornington with a sigh of relief, but with no other visible emotion, resumed his seat, and under a final cheer, the little cavalcade moved on. The carriage turned off the road into one of the finest deer parks which any English mansion can boast. There are few more beautiful sights

than an old English house with picturesque surroundings; and few more perfect specimens than Mornington Abbey. The first approach to it is through stately avenues of oak trees which lead for more than a mile through scenes of wonderful beauty. A grand expanse of sward on either side terminating in slopes, richly wooded, and in the valley with deer browsing on them. Along the latter winds a trickling stream, which often crosses the smooth drive, and loses itself in the woods on either side, only to reappear and present tempting views of huge trout leaping to the surface, and leaving behind them long ripples on the stream. Then the carriage began to ascend the hill from the summit of which are charming views of wooded glades and fairy dells, untenanted save by myriads of rabbits and the stately denizens of the park, who bound away at the sound of the wheels. Farther still, are waving cornfields, bathed in the golden light of the setting sun; and fertile pasture land, in which the rarest cattle are grazing; old-fashioned farmhouses and prosperous-looking homesteads; and, fairest sight of all, each bend of the road brings more distinct peeps of the most glorious residence which English commoner can boast—Mornington Abbey.

Built for the purpose its name implies, in the reign of Henry VII., it was during his and the succeeding reign one of the largest and most important monasteries in the south of England. It was tenanted at first by the Dominican order of monks, noted for the severity of their principles, and the rigour of their discipline. Relics of the tortures, with which these monks were wont to chase unholy thoughts and worldly longings from their minds, are still preserved in the

narrow cells where they worked out their punishments. After the Reformation, the Abbey passed, in common with many other such buildings, into royal hands, until at last it was bestowed by Elizabeth on Sydney Mornington, the first of that name. He won, by the favour of a Queen's smile, that fortune which the gallant commander of men had sought for in vain. During the Civil Wars, Mornington Abbey was severely treated by the troops of the Commonwealth; but, on the Accession, it was restored and enlarged. From then until the present time, it had passed in an uninterrupted line with uneventful story. These Morningtons were a quiet race, and for generations had been content to play the *rtle* of country squire and county magnate, and had not sought to extend their influence by political means.

One Mornington, three generations before, had indeed sat in Parliament for a short time, during which he behaved in a most exemplary manner, never missing a division and never once opening his mouth. But after three years the Parliament was dissolved, and before the next election a death in the family had occurred, and the new possessor of the Mornington estates did not appeal for such honours. Little different in disposition from his ancestors was the present Harold Mornington's grandfather. He was the son of the sixth Lord of Mornington, and was the first to marry out of his own county. His wife was the only daughter of a Scotch laird, whose pedigree was as long as his purse was short. She died in giving birth to Harold's father, George Mornington, who inherited, however, his mother's ambitious temper rather than the contented disposition and almost singular inertness common to the Morningtons. He

commenced his career by being expelled from a public school, and later on was "rusticated" at Oxford. He then studied for a short time at Heidelberg, but soon returned to England where his extravagance and wildness broke his father's heart. This appeared to sober him; and, when he inherited the estates, he settled down quietly, marrying a clergyman's daughter, and spending the rest of his years in seclusion. Their only child was Harold, whom his too affectionate mother completely spoiled. She died when he was fourteen, and her husband, whose latter years appeared to be embittered by the remembrance of his early follies, did not long survive her. At fifteen, then, Harold was an orphan, left to the guardianship of Sir Miles Averill, his father's oldest friend, and Mr. Woodruff, the family solicitor, for whom Mr. Mornington had always had a most profound respect and even esteem. This Harold it was, who, after a wasted youth, ruined by one rash act, had returned after an absence of three-and-twenty years to the home of his ancestors. The last summit is surmounted, and Harold Mornington can plainly see the majestic pile of which he is the owner.

It is a scene which might well awake interest, even enthusiasm, in a stranger, but he looked upon it unmoved. It stands in full view, with its queer old gables and lofty turrets, old-fashioned chimneys and irregular front, presenting, it is true, an incongruous aspect, but beautiful in its incongruity, and its irregularities harmonised and softened by age. The last rays of the sun are falling upon it, filling the windows with a wonderful fire, and softening the rugged aspect of the old grey stone. No wonder that Harold

Mornington, as he gazed upon it, and then at the landscape beyond, knowing that, as far as the eye could reach, all was his, felt the indifference vanish which seemed so strongly his characteristic, and fervently blessed the chance which had brought him back to the enjoyment of a home so magnificent and possessions so ample. And yet, as he stood up in the carriage with folded arms gazing around and below, no expression of unmixed delight was reflected from his countenance. Exultation there certainly was, but no settled glow of happiness, as might have been expected. No look of content, or peace, or thankfulness shone in his eyes, dull and expressionless mostly, and, at best, filled with an anxious troubled light, perhaps from the memory of bygone miseries.

Mr. Woodruff, his companion, as he narrowly watched his manner, decided within himself that Harold Mornington was still an unhappy and disappointed man; and caught himself more than once wondering what hidden griefs he could treasure so deep that they could not be banished, even at such moments as the present. An uninterrupted silence had reigned between the two men from the moment they entered the park gates; but, as Mr. Mornington resumed his seat, the lawyer broke the silence.

"It is very much to be regretted," he said, "that neither Miss Eva nor Mr. Godfrey should have been here to receive you."

"I am scarcely sorry," was the reply; "although had I not in the hurry of embarking completely forgotten it, I' should certainly have 'cabled.' The wonder to me is that,

considering I only arrived in England the night before last, any of the people here should have known of my return."

"News of such importance soon spreads," said the lawyer with a smile. "Half an hour after you called on me, I wired to your agent here, Mr. Cameron, and I suppose he soon spread the news."

Further conversation was here rendered impossible, as the carriage turned now into the final sweep, and drew up at the hall door. Mr. Woodruff, who had acted as guardian to Godfrey Mornington, had always kept up an establishment at the Abbey, so that, as the carriage drew up, Mr. Mornington found himself greeted by a formidable assemblage of servants, who stood on either side of the hall. From amongst them stepped out the grey-headed butler, fast becoming superannuated, the first to address his master as he walked up the steps with Mr. Woodruff by his side.

"Welcome home, Mr. Harold," said he, peering up anxiously into his face as he addressed him. "'Tis a glad day for us to have one of the old name master here again."

"I thank you, Burrows," said Mr. Mornington simply, extending his hand, which the old man pressed with warmth.

"A true Mornington," he muttered to himself as he retired; "like his father—very fine men all of them; yet how wonderful he have altered."

With a nod to the other servants, Mr. Mornington passed at once into the dining-room. Dining-room? Well, it might more aptly be called banqueting hall. The walls were oak panelled high up, and curiously ornamented, and the large

chimney-piece was of black oak, carved and figured with exquisite designs. The front windows all opened out on the stone balcony, from which steps led down to the well-kept flower gardens. Fine paintings, many of them masterpieces, hung on the walls, but a small sketch placed exactly opposite the door, appeared to fascinate Mr. Mornington. Looking neither to the right nor to the left, he walked straight across and stood gazing up at it. As a work of art, it was inferior to any in the room, but though the execution was imperfect, and the style crude, the artist had succeeded in producing a striking picture. It was the likeness of a woman—and such a woman! As he gazed, Harold Mornington felt his thoughts go back through a long vista of years to the first time he had ever met her. She was one loved so passionately, that even now, at the mere sight of her image, he felt his senses reel and his eyes grow dim. The woman whom it depicted wore a riding habit, the long skirts of which were held up in one hand, while the other, grasping a riding whip, fell gracefully by her side. Her figure was tall and perfectly moulded; her hair fair, though her eyes and brows were dark; her expression was somewhat spoilt by reason of intense *hauteur*. And yet, he who gazed upon those pictured eyes, could remember when they had shone, though not on him, with a tender love-light which altered the whole aspect, and supplied the one thing wanting to make the likeness perfect. There are some women whose beauty no painter can adequately portray, for the reason that their principal charm is an ever-varying expression, changing in a single moment from love to anger, or from happiness to grief, but beautiful in each and all. The

painter can reproduce in his picture but one of these. And though he may choose the one in which his subject looks loveliest, still there is a peculiar charm in a fleeting expression, beyond his art to show.

An apologetic cough from the prosaic lawyer, who wanted his dinner, and thought that his companion had spent quite long enough gazing at his wife's portrait, at last recalled Mr. Mornington from his brown study, and the two gentlemen left the room.

III — THE SIN OF OMISSION

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Dinner was over, Mr. Mornington and his solicitor had moved their easy chairs upon the balcony outside the dining-room, and the former, reclining to the utmost extent, and with a cigar in his mouth, seemed enjoying to the full the luxurious ease. Conversation between the two had not flourished, the remarks which Mr. Woodruff ventured upon either falling to the ground unnoticed, or provoking merely the most commonplace rejoinders. Perceiving, therefore, that his companion was in no mood for conversation, and contented enough in the degustation of the fine old Lafitte, and the flavour of his Havannah, Mr. Woodruff relapsed into silence, which was at last broken by the host.

"My daughter will not be here until eleven, you say?" He looked up inquiringly.

"She cannot reach here before, and it may probably be later—say half-past."

Mr. Mornington took out his watch and consulted it. "Half-past eight. Well, Mr. Woodruff, there has been much in my past life, and especially the events which led to my leaving England so suddenly, which must appear inexplicable to you; and, with your permission, I will devote a portion of the time to explaining matters. You will then be better able to understand the course of events which culminated in such unhappiness to me."

The lawyer bowed, and, drawing his chair up a little closer, assumed a listening air.

"First of all," went on Mr. Mornington, "before I begin, let me ask about my children. Is Eva like her mother?"

"She is considered remarkably so," answered Mr. Woodruff, who, although he could not see his companion's face, could tell by the silence which ensued, and the slight tremor in his tone when he spoke again, that the reply had affected him.

"And my son?"

"Oh, he is the image of all the Mornington men," was the reply; "exactly what you were twenty-five years ago, and would be now, if living abroad had not altered you so much. A fine young fellow too," he continued admiringly, for Godfrey Mornington was a favourite of the lawyer's.

After another short silence, Mr. Mornington commenced his tale.

"As you know, I was an orphan at sixteen, and my life, until I went to college, was uneventful enough. I had been at Oxford about six months when I met Cecil Braithwaite, and in a very short time there sprung up between us a strong friendship. Who he was, and where he came from, I knew not then, and I know not now; perhaps it was the mystery seeming to surround him which first excited my fancy, and unconsciously attracted me to him. However that may be, we speedily became inseparable, and, being in the same college, we spent all our time together. One day we received an invitation from an old 'coach' of mine—a Mr. Wakefield—to spend a Sunday with him at his house down the river. You will excuse my passing over this part as quickly as possible, as it is exceedingly painful to me."

Mr. Woodruff bowed sympathetically.

"We accepted, and arranged to row down on the Saturday afternoon. How well I remember that row. It was the middle of summer, just before 'the Long,' one of the hottest days of the year. Luckily for us, the current was in our favour, and with very little exertion we glided along, every little while taking long rests, and letting our boat drift among the willows, while we refreshed ourselves with a smoke and claret cup. It was too hot to talk much, and our friendship had long ago reached that point which renders it unnecessary for two fellows to talk for the sake of talking; and we passed time in idly speculating as to what sort of place our friend had, and whether we should be obliged to go to church next day. The hours fleeted by—too quickly for us—for we reached our destination about six o'clock. It was one of those charming little cottages with lawn sloping down to the river, the dwelling itself half-hidden among trees, and covered with ivy. The moment we saw it we went into raptures. Our host was on the look-out, and we, having tied up our boat, went with him into the house, and were shown into our rooms to doff our flannels and dress for dinner. When we descended to the drawing-room, our host met us at the door, and we all entered together. To my surprise—for I had always thought Mr. Wakefield a bachelor—a girl was in the room, and we were introduced to her as his daughter. Love at first sight is, generally, I believe, supposed to be a mere captivation of the senses which seldom forms the foundation for a deep and lasting passion. However that may be, before dinner was over I had made up my mind that earth held but one woman for me, and life but one object, to call Eva Wakefield mine. After dinner we all took

our coffee on the lawn, and smoked and talked, till, after a while, Miss Wakefield went into the drawing-room, and, opening the French windows, sang to us. How that scene comes back to me even now! We three—Wakefield, Cecil, and I—on low garden chairs on the lawn, with the full moon shining upon the river flowing within a few yards of us, and the faint odour of roses and mignonette which reached us from the side of the walk. Above all, that rich, clear, musical voice, singing some old German love song, the tune of which haunts me still. Then she—Eva—came forth to join us again, and we all chatted in low tones, as if fearing to break the charm of the scene by loudness or jarring laughter. Last of all, when Cecil and old Wakefield were deep in some question of ancient Egyptian history, Eva and I rose, and strolled the garden together. What our conversation was; what I said to her, I could never recall. I only know that my senses seemed intoxicated, and in every word of mine, and with every glance, I betrayed my sudden passion. She seemed startled at first, as well she might be, and looked at me with those wondrous eyes filled with a half-mocking, half-tender, light, till I almost went wild, and several times I nearly burst out with my tale of passionate love, and nothing but the fear of the deserved rebuke for so abrupt a wooing restrained me. At last came the time for Cecil and me to retire to our rooms. There was no sleep for me that night. I threw open the little latticed window, and sat for hours gazing at the stars and moon, and down at the silvery river flowing beneath, and when I turned at last to my bed, it was still not to sleep, but to build up dreams of a future, in all of which Eva was the central figure.