

***ARTHUR J REES,
JOHN WATSON***

A photograph of a park scene. In the foreground, a wooden bench sits on a grassy path. To the right, a large tree trunk is visible. The background is filled with dense green foliage and a red brick building with a dark roof. The scene is bright and sunny.

***THE MYSTERY
OF THE DOWNS***

Arthur J Rees, John Watson

The Mystery of the Downs

EAN 8596547322702

DigiCat, 2022

Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



TABLE OF CONTENTS

[CHAPTER I](#)

[CHAPTER II](#)

[CHAPTER III](#)

[CHAPTER IV](#)

[CHAPTER V](#)

[CHAPTER VI](#)

[CHAPTER VII](#)

[CHAPTER VIII](#)

[CHAPTER IX](#)

[CHAPTER X](#)

[CHAPTER XI](#)

[CHAPTER XII](#)

[CHAPTER XIII](#)

[CHAPTER XIV](#)

[CHAPTER XV](#)

[CHAPTER XVI](#)

[CHAPTER XVII](#)

[CHAPTER XVIII](#)

[CHAPTER XIX](#)

[CHAPTER XX](#)

[CHAPTER XXI](#)

[CHAPTER XXII](#)

[CHAPTER XXIII](#)

[CHAPTER XXIV](#)

[CHAPTER XXV](#)

[CHAPTER XXVI](#)

THE END

CHAPTER I

[Table of Contents](#)

THE storm had descended swiftly, sweeping in suddenly from the sea, driving across the downs to the hills at high speed, blotting out the faint rays of a crescent moon and hiding the country-side beneath a pall of blackness, which was forked at intervals by flashes of lightning.

The darkness was so impenetrable, and the fury of the storm so fierce, that Harry Marsland pulled his hat well over his eyes and bent over his horse's neck to shield his face from the driving rain, trusting to the animal's sagacity and sure-footedness to take him safely down the cliff road in the darkness, where a slip might plunge them into the breakers which he could hear roaring at the foot of the cliffs.

Hardly had Marsland done so when his horse swerved violently right across the road—fortunately to the side opposite the edge of the cliffs—slipped and almost fell, but recovered itself and then stood still, snorting and trembling with fear.

He patted and spoke to the horse, wondering what had frightened it. He had seen or heard nothing, but the darkness of the night and the roar of the gale would have prevented him, even if his face had not been almost buried in his horse's neck. However, the rain, beating with sharp persistence on his face and through his clothes, reminded him that he was some miles from shelter on a lonely country road, with only a vague idea of his whereabouts. So, with a few more soothing words, he urged his horse onward again. The animal responded willingly enough, but as soon as it

moved Marsland discovered to his dismay that it was lame in the off hind leg. The rider was quick to realize that it must have sprained itself in swerving.

He slipped out of his saddle and endeavoured to feel the extent of the horse's injury, but the animal had not entirely recovered from its fright, and snorted as his master touched it. Marsland desisted, and gently pulled at the bridle.

The horse struggled onwards a few paces, but it was badly lamed, and could not be ridden. It thrust a timid muzzle against its master's breast, as though seeking refuge from its fears and the fury of the storm. Marsland patted its head caressingly, and, facing the unpleasant fact that he was on an unknown lonely road with a lame horse in the worst storm he had ever seen, drew the bridle over his arm and started to walk forward.

He found it difficult to make progress in the teeth of the gale, but he realized that it would be useless to retrace his steps with the wind at his back, for only the bleak bare downs he had ridden over that afternoon lay behind, and the only house he had seen was a shepherd's cottage on the hill-side where he had stopped to inquire his way before the storm came on. There was nothing to be done but face the gale and go forward, following the cliff road which skirted the downs, or to seek shelter for himself and his horse at the way-side house until the fury of the storm had abated. Prudence and consideration for his horse dictated the latter course, but in the blackness of the night—which hung before him like a cloud—he was unable to discern a twinkle of light denoting human habitation.

The storm seemed to gather fresh force, rushing in from the sea with such fury that Marsland was compelled to stand still and seek shelter beside his horse. As he stood thus, waiting for it to abate, a vivid flash of lightning ran across the western sky, revealing lividly the storm clouds flying through the heavens, the mountainous yellow-crested sea, and the desolate, rain-beaten downs; but it revealed, also, a farm-house standing in the valley below, a little way back from the road which wound down towards it from where Marsland stood.

The lightning died away, the scene it had illumined disappeared, and a clap of thunder followed. Marsland heaved a sigh of relief. He judged that the house was less than a half a mile down the hill, a large, gaunt, three-storied stone building, with steeply sloping roof, standing back from the road, with a barn beside it. Doubtless it was the home of a sheep-farmer of the downs, who would at any rate afford shelter to himself and his horse till the violence of the storm had passed.

The horse responded to an encouraging appeal as though it fully understood, and Marsland doggedly resumed his battle with the storm. The road slanted away slightly from the cliff when horse and rider had covered another hundred yards, and wound through a long cutting on the hill which afforded some protection from the gale, enabling them to make quicker progress. But still Marsland could not see a yard in front of him. Even if his eyes had become accustomed to the darkness, the heavy rain, beating almost horizontally on his face, would have prevented him seeing anything.

He had matches in his pocket, but it was useless to attempt to strike them in such a wind, and he reproached himself for having come away without his electric torch. Slowly and cautiously he made his way down the road, feeling his footsteps as he went, the tired horse following obediently. The cutting seemed a long one, but at length a sudden blast of wind, roaring in from the sea, told him that he had emerged into the open again. He counted off another hundred paces, then paused anxiously.

"The house ought to be somewhere on the left down there," he muttered, staring blindly into the dark.

He wondered in an irritated fashion why there were no lights showing from the farm-house, which he felt must be very close to where he stood. But he recollected that farmers kept early hours, and he realized that the occupants of the house might well be excused for going to bed on such a night even earlier than usual.

As though in answer to an unspoken wish, a flash of lightning played over the sky. It was faint and fitful, but it was sufficient to reveal the farm standing a little way ahead, about a hundred yards back from the road. He saw clearly the hedge which divided its meadows from the road, and noted that a gate leading into a wagon drive on the side of the meadow nearest him had been flung open by the force of the gale, and was swinging loosely on its hinges. "They'll thank me for closing that gate if they've got any stock in the meadows," said Marsland.

The swinging white gate was faintly visible in the darkness when Marsland came close to it, and he turned into the open drive. He noticed as he walked along that the

gale was not so severely felt inside as out on the road, and he came to the conclusion that the farm was in a more sheltered part of the downs—was probably shielded from the wind by the hill through which the cutting ran.

He reflected that it was a good idea to build in a sheltered spot when farming on low downs facing the English Channel. He was glad to be able to walk upright, with the wind behind him and the rain on his back instead of beating on his face. For one thing, he found he was able to make some use of his eyes in spite of the darkness, and soon he discerned the house looming bleakly ahead of him, with the barn alongside.

As Marsland passed the barn, his horse surprised him by whinnying sharply and plucking the loose bridle from his arm. He felt for his matchbox and hastily struck a match. The wind extinguished it, but not before its brief splutter of light showed him the horse disappearing through an open doorway.

He followed it and struck another match. It flared up steadily under cover, and he saw that he was in a small storehouse attached to the barn. Gardening tools were neatly piled in one corner, and in another were a stack of potatoes and some bags of grain. His horse was plucking ravenously at one of the bags. By the light of another match Marsland espied an old lantern hanging on a nail above the tools. He took it from the nail, and found that it contained a short end of candle—a sight which filled him with pleasure.

He found a tin dish on top of the cornstack, opened one of the bags, poured a measure of oats into it, and set it before his horse. The animal eagerly thrust his nose into the

dish and commenced to eat. Marsland patted its wet flank, and then examined the injured leg by the light of the lantern. His examination failed to reveal any specific injury beyond a slight swelling, though the horse winced restively as he touched it.

Marsland left the horse munching contentedly at its food, shut the door of the storehouse to prevent the animal wandering away, and set out for the house. The light of the lantern showed him a path branching off the drive. He followed it till the outline of the house loomed before him out of the darkness.

The path led across the front of the house, but Marsland looked in vain for a ray of light in the upper stories which would indicate that one of the inmates was awake. He walked on till the path turned abruptly into a large porch, and he knew he had reached the front door. Instead of knocking, he walked past the porch in order to see if there was any light visible on the far side of the house. It was with pleasure that he observed a light glimmering through the second window on the ground floor. Judging by the position of the window, it belonged to the room immediately behind the front room on the right side of the house.

Marsland returned to the porch and vigorously plied the knocker on the door, so that the sound should be heard above the storm. He listened anxiously for approaching footsteps of heavily-shod feet, but the first sound he heard was that of the bolt being drawn back.

"Where have you been?" exclaimed a feminine voice. "I have been wondering what could have happened to you."

The girl who had opened the door to him had a candle in her hand. As she spoke, she shielded the light with her other hand and lifted it to his face. She uttered a startled exclamation.

"I beg your pardon," said Marsland, in an ingratiating tone. "I have lost my way and my horse has gone lame. I have taken the liberty of putting him in the outbuildings before coming to ask you for shelter from the storm."

"To ask me?" she repeated. "Oh, of course. Please come in."

Marsland closed the door and followed her into the dark and silent hall. She led the way into the room where he had seen the light, placed the candle on the table, and retreated to a chair which was in the shadow. It occurred to him that she was anxious to study him without being exposed to his scrutiny. But he had noticed that she was wearing a hat and a dark cloak. These things suggested to him that she had been on the point of going out when the storm came on. The mistaken way in which she had greeted him on opening the door seemed to show that she had been waiting for some one who was to have accompanied her. Apparently she was alone in the house when he had knocked.

"I am sorry to have intruded on you in this unceremonious way," he said, reviving his apology with the object of enabling her to dismiss any fears at her own unprotected state. "I am completely lost, and when I saw this house I thought the best thing I could do was to seek shelter."

"You are not intruding upon me," she said coldly. "The house is not mine—I do not live here. I saw the storm

coming on, and, like you, I thought it was a good idea to seek shelter."

It was apparent to him that her greeting had been intended for some one who had accompanied her to the house and had gone to one of the farm buildings for some purpose. He noted that her manner of speaking was that of a well-bred young lady rather than of a farmer's daughter.

The room in which they were sitting was evidently used as a parlour, and was sombrely furnished in an old-fashioned way. There was a horsehair suite, and in the middle of the room a large round table. Glancing about him into the dark corners of the room which the feeble light of the candle barely reached, Marsland noticed in one of them a large lamp standing on a small table.

"That will give us a better light," he said; "providing, of course, it has some oil in it."

He lifted the lamp to the centre table, and found it was nearly full of oil. He lit it, and it sent out a strong light, which was, however, confined to a radius of a few feet by a heavy lampshade. He glanced at the girl. She had extinguished her candle, and her face remained obstinately in shadow.

He sat down on one of the horsehair chairs; but his companion remained standing a little distance away. They waited in silence thus for some minutes. Marsland tried to think of something to say, but there was a pensive aloofness about the girl's attitude which deterred him from attempting to open a conversation with a conventional remark about the violence of the storm. He listened for a knock at the front door which would tell him that her companion had returned, but to his surprise the minutes passed without any

sign. He thought of asking her to sit down, but he reflected that such an invitation might savour of impertinence. He could dimly see the outline of her profile, and judged her to be young and pretty. Once he thought she glanced in his direction, but when he looked towards her she had her face still turned towards the door. Finally he made another effort to break down the barrier of silence between them.

"I suppose we must wait here until the storm has cleared away," he began. "It is a coincidence that both of us should have sought shelter in this empty house in the storm—I assume the house is empty for the time being or we would have heard from the inmates. My name is Marsland. I have been staying at Staveley, and I lost my way when out riding this afternoon—the downs seem endless. Perhaps you belong to the neighbourhood and know them thoroughly."

But instead of replying she made a swift step towards the door.

"Listen!" she cried. "What was that?"

He stood up also, and listened intently, but the only sounds that met his ears were the beating of the rain against the windows and the wind whistling mournfully round the old house. "I hear nothing—" he commenced.

But she interrupted him imperatively.

"Hush!" she cried. "Listen!" Her face was still turned away from him, but she held out a hand in his direction as though to enjoin silence.

They stood in silence, both listening intently. Somewhere a board creaked, and Marsland could hear the wind blowing, but that was all.

"I do not think it was anything," he said reassuringly. "These old houses have a way of creaking and groaning in a gale. You have become nervous through sitting here by yourself."

"Perhaps that is so," she assented in a friendlier tone than she had hitherto used. "But I thought—in fact, I felt—that somebody was moving about stealthily overhead."

"It was the wind sighing about the house," he said, sitting down again.

As he spoke, there was a loud crash in a room above—a noise as though china or glass had been broken. Marsland sprang to his feet.

"There *is* somebody in the house," he exclaimed.

"Who can it be?" she whispered.

"Probably some one who has more right here than we have," said Marsland soothingly. "He'll come downstairs and then we'll have to explain our presence here."

"The man who lives here is away," she replied, in a hushed tone of terror. "He lives here alone. If there is anybody in the house, it is some one who has no right here."

"If you are sure of that," said Marsland slowly, "I will go and see what has happened in the room above. The wind may have knocked something over. Will you stay here until I return?"

"No, no!" she cried, "I am too frightened now. I will go with you!"

He felt her hand on his sleeve as she spoke.

"In that case we may as well take this lamp," he said. "It will give more light than this." He put down his lantern and picked up the lamp from the table. "Come along, and see

what havoc the wind has been playing with the furniture upstairs."

He led the way out of the room, carefully carrying the lamp, and the girl followed. They turned up the hall to the staircase. As the light of the lamp fell on the staircase they saw a piece of paper lying on one of the lower stairs. Marsland picked it up and was so mystified at what he saw on it that he placed the lamp on a stair above in order to study it more closely.

"What can this extraordinary thing mean?" he said to his companion. He put his left hand in the top pocket of his waistcoat, and then exclaimed: "I have lost my glasses; I cannot make this out without them."

She came close to him and looked at the paper.

The sheet was yellow with age, and one side of it was covered with figures and writing. There was a row of letters at the top of the sheet, followed by a circle of numerals, with more numerals in the centre of the circle. Underneath the circle appeared several verses of Scripture written in a small, cramped, but regular handwriting. The ink which had been used in constructing the cryptogram was faded brown with age, but the figures and the writing were clear and legible, and the whole thing bore evidence of patient and careful construction. "This is very strange," she said, in a frightened whisper.

Marsland thought she was referring to the diagrams on the paper.

"It is a mysterious sort of document, whoever owns it," he said. "I think I'll put it on the table in there and we will

study it again when we come down after exploring the other parts of the house."

He picked up the lamp and went back to the room they had left. He deposited the sheet of paper on the table and placed the candlestick on it to keep it from being blown away by the wind.

"Now for the ghosts upstairs," he said cheerfully, as he returned.

He noted with a smile that his companion made a point of keeping behind him in all his movements. When they had climbed the first flight of stairs, they stood for a moment or two on the landing, listening, but could hear no sound.

"Let us try this room first," said Marsland, pointing to a door opposite the landing.

The door was closed but not shut, for it yielded to his touch and swung open, revealing a large bedroom with an old-fashioned fourposter in the corner furthest from the door. Marsland glanced round the room curiously. It was the typical "best bedroom" of an old English farm-house, built more than a hundred years before the present generation came to life, with their modern ideas of fresh air and light and sanitation. The ceiling was so low that Marsland had almost touched it with his head as he walked, and the small narrow-paned windows, closely shuttered from without, looked as though they had been hermetically sealed for centuries.

The room contained furniture as ancient as its surroundings: quaint old chests of drawers, bureaux, clothes-presses, and some old straight-backed oaken chairs. On the walls were a few musty old books on shelves, a

stuffed pointer in a glass case, a cabinet of stuffed birds, some dingy hunting prints. The combination of low ceiling, sealed windows, and stuffed animals created such a vault-like atmosphere that Marsland marvelled at the hardy constitution of that dead and gone race of English yeomen who had suffered nightly internment in such chambers and yet survived to a ripe old age. His eyes wandered to the fourposter, and he smiled as he noticed that the heavy curtains were drawn close, as though the last sleeper in the chamber had dreaded and guarded against the possibility of some stray shaft of fresh air eluding the precautions of the builder and finding its way into the room.

"Nothing here," he said, as he glanced round the floor of the room for broken pieces of glass or china ornaments that might have been knocked over by the wind or by a cat. "Let us try the room opposite."

She was the first to reach the door of the opposite room to which they turned. It occurred to Marsland that her fears were wearing off. As he reached the threshold, he lifted up the lamp above his head so that its light should fall within.

This room was a bedroom also, deep and narrow as though it had been squeezed into the house as an afterthought, with a small, deep-set window high up in the wall opposite the door. The room was furnished in the old-fashioned style of the room opposite, though more sparsely. But Marsland and the girl were astonished to see a man sitting motionless in a large arm-chair at the far end of the room. His head had fallen forward on his breast as though in slumber, concealing the lower part of his face.

"By heavens, this is extraordinary," said Marsland, in a low hoarse voice. With a trembling hand he placed the lamp on the large table which occupied the centre of the room and stood looking at the man.

The girl crept close to Marsland and clutched his arm.

"It is Frank Lumsden," she whispered quickly. "Do you think there is anything wrong with him? Why doesn't he speak to us?"

"Because he is dead," he answered swiftly.

"Dead!" she exclaimed, in an hysterical tone. "What makes you think so? He may be only in a fit. Oh, what shall we do?"

Marsland pushed her aside and with a firm step walked to the chair on which the motionless figure sat. He touched with his fingers the left hand which rested on the arm of the chair, and turned quickly.

"He is quite dead," he said slowly. "He is beyond all help in this world."

"Dead?" she repeated, retreating to the far end of the table and clasping her trembling hands together. "What a dreadful lonely death."

He was deep in thought and did not respond to her words.

"As we have discovered the body we must inform the police," he said at length. "I did not know he was ill," she said, in a soft whisper. "He must have died suddenly."

Marsland turned on her a searching questioning look. Her sympathy had conquered her vague fears of the presence of death, and she hesitatingly approached the body. Something on the table near the lamp attracted her

attention. It was an open pocket-book and beside it were some papers which had evidently been removed from it.

"What does this mean?" she cried. "Some one has been here."

"It is extraordinary," said Marsland.

He stood between her and the arm-chair so as to hide the dead body from her. She stepped aside as if to seek in the appearance of the dead man an explanation of the rifled pocket-book.

"Don't!" he said quickly, as he grasped her by the arm. "Do not touch it."

His desire to save her from a shock awoke her feminine intuition.

"You mean he has been murdered?" she whispered, in a voice of dismay.

CHAPTER II

[Table of Contents](#)

SHE hurried from the room in terror. Marsland remained a few minutes examining the papers that had been taken from the pocket-book.

With the lamp in his hand he was compelled to descend cautiously, and when he reached the foot of the staircase the girl had left the house. He extinguished the lamp he was carrying, relit the lantern, and stepped outside. The lantern showed him the girl waiting for him some distance down the path.

"Oh, let us leave this dreadful house," she cried as he approached. "Please take me out of it. I am not frightened of the storm—now."

"I will take you wherever you wish to go," he said gently. "Will you tell me where you live? I will accompany you home."

"You are very good," she said gratefully. "I live at Ashlingsea."

"That is the little fishing village at the end of the cliff road, is it not?" he said inquiringly. "I am staying at Staveley, but I have not been there long. Come, I will take you home, and then I will inform the police about—this tragic discovery."

"There is a police station at Ashlingsea," she said, in a low voice.

He explained to her that he wanted to look after the comfort of his horse before he accompanied her home, as it would be necessary to leave the animal at the farm until the

following day. She murmured a faint acquiescence, and when they reached the storehouse she took the lantern from him without speaking, and held it up to give him light while he made his horse comfortable for the night.

They then set out for Ashlingsea. The violence of the storm had passed, but the wind occasionally blew in great gusts from the sea, compelling them to halt in order to stand up against it. The night was still very black, but at intervals a late moon managed to send a watery beam through the scudding storm clouds, revealing the pathway of the winding cliff road, and the turbulent frothing waste of water dashing on the rocks below. Rain continued to fall in heavy frequent showers, but the minds of Marsland and his companion were so occupied with what they had seen in the old farm-house that they were scarcely conscious of the discomfort of getting wet.

The girl was so unnerved by the discovery of the dead body that she was glad to avail herself of the protection and support of Marsland's arm. Several times as she thought she saw a human form in the darkness of the road, she uttered a cry of alarm and clung to his arm with both hands. At every step she expected to encounter a maniac who had the blood of one human creature on his hands and was still swayed by the impulse to kill.

The reserve she had exhibited in the house had broken down, and she talked freely in her desire to shut out from her mental vision the spectacle of the murdered man sitting in the arm-chair.

On the other hand, the discovery of the body had made Marsland reserved and thoughtful.

He learned from her that her name was Maynard—Elsie Maynard—and that she lived with her widowed mother. Marsland was quick to gather from the cultivated accents of her voice that she was a refined and educated girl. He concluded that Mrs. Maynard must be a lady of some social standing in the district, and he judged from what he had seen of the girl's clothes that she was in good circumstances. She remarked that her mother would be anxious about her, but would doubtless assume she had sought shelter somewhere, as having lived in Ashlingsea for a long time she knew everybody in the district.

Marsland thought it strange that she made no reference to the companion who had accompanied her to the farm. If no one accompanied her, how was it that on opening the door to him she had greeted him as some one whom she had been expecting? She seemed unconscious of the need of enlightening him on this point. Her thoughts centred round the dead man to such an extent that her conversation related chiefly to him. Half-unconsciously she revealed that she knew him well, but her acquaintance with him seemed to be largely based on the circumstance that the dead man had been acquainted with a friend of her family: a soldier of the new army, who lived at Staveley.

She had told Marsland that the name of the murdered man was Frank Lumsden, but she did not mention the name of the soldier at Staveley. Lumsden had served in France as a private, but had returned wounded and had been invalided out of the army. He had been captured by the Germans during a night attack, had been shot through the palm of his right hand to prevent him using a rifle again,

and had been left behind when the Germans were forced to retreat from the village they had captured. After being invalided out of the Army he had returned home to live in the old farm-house—Cliff Farm it was called—which had been left to him by his grandfather, who had died while the young man was in France. The old man had lived in a state of terror during the last few months of his life, as he was convinced that the Germans were going to invade England, destroy everything, and murder the population as they had done in Belgium. He ceased to farm his land, he dismissed his men, and shut himself up in his house.

His housekeeper, Mrs. Thorpe, who had been in his service for thirty years, refused to leave him, and insisted on remaining to look after him. When he died as the result of injuries received in falling downstairs, it was found that he had left most of his property to his grandson, Frank, but he had also left legacies to Mrs. Thorpe and two of the men who had been in his employ for a generation. But these legacies had not been paid because there was no money with which to pay them. Soon after the outbreak of the war the old man had drawn all his money out of the bank and had realized all his investments. It was thought that he had done this because of his fear of a German invasion.

What he had done with the money no one knew. Most people thought he had buried it for safety, intending to dig it up when the war was over. There was a rumour that he had buried it on the farm. Another rumour declared that he had buried it in the sands at the foot of the cliffs, for towards the end of his life he was often seen walking alone on the sands. In his younger days he had combined fishing

with farming, and there was still a boat in the old boat-house near the cliffs. Several people tried digging in likely places in the sands after his death, but they did not find any trace of the money. Other people said that Frank Lumsden knew where the money was hidden—that his grandfather had left a plan explaining where he had buried it.

"What about the piece of paper with the mysterious plan on it which we found on the staircase?" said Marsland. "Do you think that had anything to do with the hidden money?"

"I never thought of that," she said. "Perhaps it had."

"We left it on the table in the room downstairs," he said. "I think we ought to go back for it, as it may have something to do with the murder."

"Don't go back," she said. "I could not bear to go back. The paper will be there when the police go. No one will go there in the meantime, so it will be quite safe."

"But you remember that his pocket-book had been rifled," he said, as he halted to discuss the question of returning. "May not that plan have been taken from his pocket-book after he was dead?"

"But in that case how did it come on the staircase?"

"It was dropped there by the man who stole it from the pocket-book."

"He will be too frightened to go back for it," she declared confidently. "He would be afraid of being caught."

"But he may have been in the house while we were there," he replied. "We did not solve the mystery of the crash we heard when we were in the room upstairs."

"You said at the time it was possibly caused by the wind upsetting something."

He was amused at the inconsequence of the line of reasoning she adopted in order to prevent him going back for the plan.

"At the time we did not know there was a dead body upstairs," he said.

"Do you think the murderer was in the house while we were there?" she asked.

"It is impossible to say definitely. My own impression now is that some one was in the house—that the crash we heard was not caused by the wind."

"Then he must have been there while I was sitting downstairs before you came," she said, with a shiver at the thought of the danger that was past.

"Yes," he answered. "The fact that you had a candle alight kept him upstairs. He was afraid of discovery. When we went upstairs to the first floor he must have retreated to the second floor—the top story."

She remained deep in thought for a few moments.

"I am glad he did not come down," she said at length. "I am glad I did not see who it was."

Again Marsland was reminded of the way in which she had greeted him at the door. Could it be that, instead of having gone to the farm for shelter with a companion, she had gone there to meet some one, and that unknown to her the person she was to meet had reached the house before her and had remained hidden upstairs?

"Did you close the front door when we left?" she asked.

"Yes. I slammed it and I heard the bolt catch. Why do you ask?"

"There is something I want to ask you," she said, at length.

"What is it?"

"I want you to promise if you can that you will not tell the police that I was at Cliff Farm tonight; I want you to promise that you will not tell any one."

"Do you think it—wise?" he asked, after a pause in which he gave consideration to the request.

"I do not want to be mixed up in it in any way," she explained. "The tragedy will give rise to a lot of talk in the place. I would not like my name to be mixed up in it."

"I quite appreciate that," he said. "And as far as it goes I would be willing to keep your name out of it. But have you considered what the effect would be if the police subsequently discovered that you had been there? That would give rise to greater talk—to talk of a still more objectionable kind."

"Yes; but how are they to discover that I was there unless you tell them?" she asked.

He laughed softly.

"They have to try to solve a more difficult problem than that without any one to tell them the solution," he said. "They have to try to find out who killed this man Lumsden—and why he was killed. There will be two or three detectives making all sorts of inquiries. One of them might alight accidentally on the fact that you, like myself, had taken shelter there in the storm."

She took refuge in the privilege of her sex to place a man in the wrong by misinterpreting his motives.

"Of course, if you do not wish to do it, there is no reason why you should." She removed her hand from his arm.

He pulled her up with a sharpness which left on her mind the impression that he was a man who knew his own mind.

"Please understand that I am anxious to do the best I can for you without being absurdly quixotic about it. I am quite willing to keep your name out of it in the way you ask, but I am anxious that you should first realize the danger of the course you suggest. It seems to me that, in order to avoid the unpleasantness of allowing it to be publicly known that you shared with me the discovery of this tragedy, you are courting the graver danger which would attach to the subsequent difficulty of offering a simple and satisfactory explanation to the police of why you wanted to keep your share in the discovery an absolute secret. And you must remember that your explanation to me of how you came to the farm is rather vague. It is true that you said you went there for shelter from the storm. But you have not explained how you got into the house, and from the way you spoke to me when you opened the door it is obvious that you expected to see some one else who was not a stranger."

She came to a halt in the road in order to put a direct question to him.

"Do you think that I had anything to do with this dreadful murder? Do you think that is the reason I asked you to keep my name out of it?"

"I am quite sure that you had nothing whatever to do with the tragedy—that the discovery of the man's dead body was as great a surprise to you as it was to me."

"Thank you," she said. The emphasis of his declaration imparted a quiver to her expression of gratitude. "You are quite right about my expecting to see some one else when I opened the door," she said. "I expected to see Mr. Lumsden."

"Oh, I beg your pardon. I never thought of that." He flushed at the way in which her simple explanation had convicted him of having harboured unjust suspicions against her.

"I went to the farm to see him—I had a message for him," she continued, with seeming candour. "The storm came on just before I reached the house. I knocked, but no one came, and then I noticed the key was in the lock on the outside of the door. Naturally I thought Mr. Lumsden had left it there—that when he saw the storm he had gone to the stable or cowshed to attend to a horse or a cow. I went inside the house, expecting he would be back every moment. When I heard your knock I thought it was he."

"I am afraid you must think me a dreadful boor," he said. "I apologize most humbly."

She replied with a breadth of view that in its contrast with his ungenerous suspicions added to his embarrassment.

"No, you were quite right," she said. "As I asked you to keep my name out of it—as I virtually asked you to show blind trust in me—you were at least entitled to the fullest explanation of how I came to be there."

"And I hope you quite understand that I do trust you absolutely," he said. "I know as well as it is possible to know

anything in this world that you were not connected in the remotest way with the death of this man."

Having been lifted out of the atmosphere of suspicion, she felt she could safely enter it again.

"I was not quite candid with you when I asked you to keep me out of the dreadful tragedy because of the way I would be talked about," she said, placing a penitent and appealing hand on his arm. "There are other reasons—one other reason at least—why I do not want it known I was at Cliff Farm to-night."

He was prepared to shield her if she was prepared to take the risk of being shielded.

"That alters the case," he said. "My reluctance to keep your name out of it arose from the fear that you did not realize the risk you would run."

"I realize it," she said. "And I wish to thank you for pointing it out so clearly. But it is a risk I must take."

"In that case you can rely on me."

"You will keep my name out of it?" she asked.

"I will tell no one," he replied.
