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THE CINEMA MURDER

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CHAPTER I

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With a somewhat prolonged grinding of the brakes and an unnecessary amount of fuss in the way of letting off steam, the afternoon train from London came to a standstill in the station at Detton Magna. An elderly porter, putting on his coat as he came, issued, with the dogged aid of one bound by custom to perform a hopeless mission, from the small, redbrick lamp room. The station master, occupying a position of vantage in front of the shed which enclosed the booking office, looked up and down the lifeless row of closed and streaming windows, with an expectancy dulled by daily disappointment, for the passengers who seldom alighted. On this occasion no records were broken. A solitary young man stepped out on to the wet and flinty platform, handed over the half of a third-class return ticket from London, passed through the two open doors and commenced to climb the long ascent which led into the town.

He wore no overcoat, and for protection against the inclement weather he was able only to turn up the collar of his well-worn blue serge coat. The damp of a ceaselessly

wet day seemed to have laid its cheerless pall upon the whole exceedingly ugly landscape. The hedges, blackened with smuts from the colliery on the other side of the slope, were dripping also with raindrops. The road, flinty and light grey in colour, was greasy with repellent-looking mud—there were puddles even in the asphalt-covered pathway which he trod. On either side of him stretched the shrunken, unpastoral-looking fields of an industrial neighbourhood. The town-village which stretched up the hillside before him presented scarcely a single redeeming feature. The small, grey stone houses, hard and unadorned, were interrupted at intervals by rows of brand-new, red-brick cottages. In the background were the tall chimneys of several factories; on the left, a colliery shaft raised its smoke-blackened finger to the lowering clouds.

After his first glance around at these familiar and unlovely objects, Philip Romilly walked with his head a little thrown back, his eyes lifted as though with intent to the melancholy and watery skies. He was a young man well above medium height, slim, almost inclined to be angular, yet with a good carriage notwithstanding a stoop which seemed more the result of an habitual depression than occasioned by any physical weakness. His features were large, his mouth querulous, a little discontented, his eyes filled with the light of a silent and rebellious bitterness which seemed, somehow, to have found a more or less permanent abode in his face. His clothes, although they were neat, had seen better days. He was ungloved, and he carried under his arm a small parcel, which appeared to contain a book, carefully done up in brown paper.

As he reached the outskirts of the village he slackened his pace. Standing a little way back from the road, from which they were separated by an ugly, gravelled playground, were the familiar school buildings, with the usual inscription carved in stone above the door. He laid his hand upon the wooden gate and paused. From inside he could catch the drone of children's voices. He glanced at his watch. It was barely twenty minutes past four. For a moment he hesitated. Then he strolled on, and, turning at the gate of an adjoining cottage, the nearest to the schools of a little unlovely row, he tried the latch, found it yield to his touch, and stepped inside. He closed the door behind him and turned, with a little weary sigh of content, towards a large easy-chair drawn up in front of the fire. For a single moment he seemed about to throw himself into its depths—his long fingers, indeed, a little blue with the cold, seemed already on their way towards the genial warmth of the flames. Then he stopped short. He stood perfectly still in an attitude of arrested motion, his eyes, wonderingly at first, and then with a strange, unanalysable expression, seeming to embark upon a lengthened, a scrupulous, an almost horrified estimate of his surroundings.

To the ordinary observer there would have been nothing remarkable in the appearance of the little room, save its entirely unexpected air of luxury and refinement. There was a small Chippendale sideboard against the wall, a round, gate-legged table on which stood a blue china bowl filled with pink roses, a couple of luxurious easy-chairs, some old prints upon the wall. On the sideboard was a basket, as yet unpacked, filled with hothouse fruit, and on a low settee by

the side of one of the easy-chairs were a little pile of reviews, several volumes of poetry, and a couple of library books. In the centre of the mantelpiece was a photograph, the photograph of a man a little older, perhaps, than this newly-arrived visitor, with rounder face, dressed in country tweeds, a flower in his buttonhole, the picture of a prosperous man, yet with a curious, almost disturbing likeness to the pale, over-nervous, loose-framed youth whose eye had been attracted by its presence, and who was gazing at it, spellbound.

"Douglas!" he muttered. "Douglas!"

He flung his hat upon the table and for a moment his hand rested upon his forehead. He was confronted with a mystery which baffled him, a mystery whose sinister possibilities were slowly framing themselves in his mind. While he stood there he was suddenly conscious of the sound of the opening gate, brisk footsteps up the tiled way, the soft swirl of a woman's skirt. The latch was raised, the door opened and closed. The newcomer stood upon the threshold, gazing at him.

"Philip!" she exclaimed. "Why, Philip!"

There was a curious change in the girl's tone, from almost glad welcome to a note of abrupt fear in that last pronouncement of his name. She stood looking at him, the victim, apparently, of so many emotions that there was nothing definite to be drawn either from her tone or expression. She was a young woman of medium height and slim, delicate figure, attractive, with large, discontented mouth, full, clear eyes and a wealth of dark brown hair. She was very simply dressed and yet in a manner which scarcely

suggested the school-teacher. To the man who confronted her, his left hand gripping the mantelpiece, his eyes filled with a flaming jealousy, there was something entirely new in the hang of her well-cut skirt, the soft colouring of her low-necked blouse, the greater animation of her piquant face with its somewhat dazzling complexion. His hand flashed out towards her as he asked his question.

"What does it mean, Beatrice?"

She showed signs of recovering herself. With a little shrug of the shoulders she turned towards the door which led into an inner room.

"Let me get you some tea, Philip," she begged. "You look so cold and wet."

"Stay here, please," he insisted.

She paused reluctantly. There was a curious lack of anything peremptory in his manner, yet somehow, although she would have given the world to have passed for a few moments into the shelter of the little kitchen beyond, she was impelled to do as he bade her.

"Don't be silly, Philip," she said petulantly. "You know you want some tea, and so do I. Sit down, please, and make yourself comfortable. Why didn't you let me know you were coming?"

"Perhaps it would have been better," he agreed quietly. "However, since I am here, answer my question."

She drew a little breath. After all, although she was lacking in any real strength of character, she was filled with a certain compensatory doggedness. His challenge was there to be faced. There was no way out of it. She would have lied willingly enough but for the sheer futility of

falsehood. She commenced the task of bracing herself for the struggle.

"You had better," she said, "frame your question a little more exactly. I will then try to answer it."

He was stung by her altered demeanour, embarrassed by an avalanche of words. A hundred questions were burning upon his lips. It was by a great effort of self-control that he remained coherent.

"The last time I visited you," he began, "was three months ago. Your cottage then was furnished as one would expect it to be furnished. You had a deal dresser, a deal table, one rather hard easy-chair and a very old wicker one. You had, if I remember rightly, a strip of linoleum upon the floor, and a single rug. Your flowers were from the hedges and your fruit from the one apple tree in the garden behind. Your clothes—am I mistaken about your clothes or are you dressed more expensively?"

"I am dressed more expensively," she admitted.

"You and I both know the value of these things," he went on, with a little sweep of the hand. "We know the value of them because we were once accustomed to them, because we have both since experienced the passionate craving for them or the things they represent. Chippendale furniture, a Turkey carpet, roses in January, hothouse fruit, Bartolozzi prints, do not march with an income of fifty pounds a year."

"They do not," she assented equably. "All the things which you see here and which you have mentioned, are presents."

His forefinger shot out with a sudden vigour towards the photograph.

"From him?"

"From Douglas," she admitted, "from your cousin."

He took the photograph into his hand, looked at it for a moment, and dashed it into the grate. The glass of the frame was shivered into a hundred pieces. The girl only shrugged her shoulders. She was holding herself in reserve. As for him, his eyes were hot, there was a dry choking in his throat. He had passed through many weary and depressed days, struggling always against the grinding monotony of life and his surroundings. Now for the first time he felt that there was something worse.

"What does it mean?" he asked once more.

She seemed almost to dilate as she answered him. Her feet were firmly planted upon the ground. There was a new look in her face, a look of decision. She was more or less a coward but she felt no fear. She even leaned a little towards him and looked him in the face.

"It means," she pronounced slowly, "exactly what it seems to mean."

The words conveyed horrible things to him, but he was speechless. He could only wait.

"You and I, Philip," she continued, "have been—well, I suppose we should call it engaged—for three years. During those three years I have earned, by disgusting and wearisome labour, just enough to keep me alive in a world which has had nothing to offer me but ugliness and discomfort and misery. You, as you admitted last time we met, have done no better. You have lived in a garret and gone often hungry to bed. For three years this has been going on. All that time I have waited for you to bring

something human, something reasonable, something warm into my life, and you have failed. I have passed, in those three years, from twenty-three to twenty-six. In three more I shall be in my thirtieth year—that is to say, the best time of my life will have passed. You see, I have been thinking, and I have had enough."

He stood quite dumb. The girl's newly-revealed personality seemed to fill the room. He felt crowded out. She was, at that stage, absolutely mistress of the situation.... She passed him carelessly by, flung herself into the easy-chair and crossed her legs. As though he were looking at some person in another world, he realized that she was wearing shoes of shapely cut, and silk stockings.

"Our engagement," she went on, "was at first the dearest thing in life to me. It could have been the most wonderful thing in life. I am only an ordinary person with an ordinary character, but I have the capacity to love unselfishly, and I am at heart as faithful and as good as any other woman. But there is my birthright. I have had three years of sordid and utterly miserable life, teaching squalid, dirty, unlovable children things they had much better not know. I have lived here, here in Detton Magna, among the smuts and the mists, where the flowers seem withered and even the meadows are stony, where the people are hard and coarse as their ugly houses, where virtue is ugly, and vice is ugly, and living is ugly, and death is fearsome. And now you see what I have chosen—not in a moment's folly, mind, because I am not foolish; not in a moment's passion, either, because until now the only real feeling I have had in life was for you. But I have chosen, and I hold to my choice."

"They won't let you stay here," he muttered.

"They needn't," she answered calmly. "There are other ways in which I can at least earn as much as the miserable pittance doled out to me here. I have avoided even considering them before. Shall I tell you why? Because I didn't want to face the temptation they might bring with them. I always knew what would happen if escape became hopeless. It's the ugliness I can't stand—the ugliness of cheap food, cheap clothes, uncomfortable furniture, coarse voices, coarse friends if I would have them. How do you suppose I have lived here these last three years, a teacher in the national schools? Look up and down this long, dreary street, at the names above the shops, at the villas in which the tradespeople live, and ask yourself where my friends were to come from? The clergyman, perhaps? He is over seventy, a widower, and he never comes near the place. Why, I'd have been content to have been patronized if there had been anyone here to do it, who wore the right sort of clothes and said the right sort of thing in the right tone. But the others—well, that's done with."

He remained curiously dumb. His eyes were fixed upon the fragments of the photograph in the grate. In a corner of the room an old-fashioned clock ticked wheezily. A lump of coal fell out on the hearth, which she replaced mechanically with her foot. His silence seemed to irritate and perplex her. She looked away from him, drew her chair a little closer to the fire, and sat with her head resting upon her hands. Her tone had become almost meditative.

"I knew that this would come one day," she went on. "Why don't you speak and get it over? Are you waiting to

clothe your phrases? Are you afraid of the naked words? I'm not. Let me hear them. Don't be more melodramatic than you can help because, as you know, I am cursed with a sense of humour, but don't stand there saying nothing."

He raised his eyes and looked at her in silence, an alternative which she found it hard to endure. Then, after a moment's shivering recoil into her chair, she sprang to her feet.

"Listen," she cried passionately, "I don't care what you think! I tell you that if you were really a man, if you had a man's heart in your body, you'd have sinned yourself before now—robbed some one, murdered them, torn the things that make life from the fate that refuses to give them. What is it they pay you," she went on contemptuously, "at that miserable art school of yours? Sixty pounds a year! How much do you get to eat and drink out of that? What sort of clothes have you to wear? Are you content? Yet even you have been better off than I. You have always your chance. Your play may be accepted or your stories published. I haven't even had that forlorn hope. But even you, Philip, may wait too long. There are too many laws, nowadays, for life to be lived naturally. If I were a man, a man like you, I'd break them."

Her taunts apparently moved him no more than the inner tragedy which her words had revealed. He did not for one moment give any sign of abandoning the unnatural calm which seemed to have descended upon him. He took up his hat from the table, and thrust the little brown paper parcel which he had been carrying, into his pocket. His eyes for a

single moment met the challenge of hers, and again she was conscious of some nameless, inexplicable fear.

"Perhaps," he said, as he turned away, "I may do that."

His hand was upon the latch before she realized that he was actually going. She sprang to her feet. Abuse, scorn, upbraidings, even violence—she had been prepared for all of these. There was something about this self-restraint, however, this strange, brooding silence, which terrified her more than anything she could have imagined.

"Philip!" she shrieked. "You're not going? You're not going like this?
You haven't said anything!"

He closed the door with firm fingers. Her knees trembled, she was conscious of an unexpected weakness. She abandoned her first intention of following him, and stood before the window, holding tightly to the sash. He had reached the gate now and paused for a moment, looking up the long, windy street. Then he crossed to the other side of the road, stepped over a stile and disappeared, walking without haste, with firm footsteps, along a cindered path which bordered the sluggish-looking canal. He had come and gone, and she knew what fear was!

CHAPTER II

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The railway station at Detton Magna presented, if possible, an even more dreary appearance than earlier in the day, as the time drew near that night for the departure

of the last train northwards. Its long strip of flinty platform was utterly deserted. Around the three flickering gas-lamps the drizzling rain fell continuously. The weary porter came yawning out of his lamp room into the booking office, where the station master sat alone, his chair turned away from the open wicket window to the smouldering embers of the smoky fire.

"No passengers to-night, seemingly," the latter remarked to his subordinate.

"Not a sign of one," was the reply. "That young chap who came down from London on a one-day return excursion, hasn't gone back, either. That'll do his ticket in."

The outside door was suddenly opened and closed. The sound of footsteps approaching the ticket window was heard. A long, white hand was thrust through the aperture, a voice was heard from the invisible outside.

"Third to Detton Junction, please."

The station-master took the ticket from a little rack, received the exact sum he demanded, swept it into the till, and resumed his place before the fire. The porter, with the lamp in his hand, lounged out into the booking-hall. The prospective passenger, however, was nowhere in sight. He looked back into the office.

"Was that Jim Spender going up to see his barmaid again?" he asked his superior.

The station master yawned drowsily.

"Didn't notice," he answered. "What an old woman you're getting, George!
Want to know everybody's business, don't you?"

The porter withdrew, a little huffed. When, a few minutes later, the train drew in, he even avoided ostentatiously a journey to the far end of the platform to open the door for the solitary passenger who was standing there. He passed up the train and slammed the door without even glancing in at the window. Then he stood and watched the red lights disappear.

"Was it Jim?" the station master asked him, on their way out.

"Didn't notice," his subordinate replied, a little curtly. "Maybe it was and maybe it wasn't. Good night!"

* * * * *

Philip Romilly sat back in the corner of his empty third-class carriage, peering out of the window, in which he could see only the reflection of the feeble gas-lamp. There was no doubt about it, however—they were moving. The first stage of his journey had commenced. The blessed sense of motion, after so long waiting, at first soothed and then exhilarated him. In a few moments he became restless. He let down the rain-blurred window and leaned out. The cool dampness of the night was immensely refreshing, the rain softened his hot cheeks. He sat there, peering away into the shadows, struggling for the sight of definite objects—a tree, a house, the outline of a field—anything to keep the other thoughts away, the thoughts that came sometimes like the aftermath of a grisly, unrealisable nightmare. Then he felt chilly, drew up the window, thrust his hands into his pockets from which he drew out a handsome cigarette case, struck a match, and smoked with vivid appreciation of the quality of the tobacco, examined the crest on the case as he put it

away, and finally patted with surreptitious eagerness the flat morocco letter case in his inside pocket.

At the Junction, he made his way into the refreshment room and ordered a long whisky and soda, which he drank in a couple of gulps. Then he hastened to the booking office and took a first-class ticket to Liverpool, and a few minutes later secured a seat in the long, north-bound express which came gliding up to the side of the platform. He spent some time in the lavatory, washing, arranging his hair, straightening his tie, after which he made his way into the elaborate dining-car and found a comfortable corner seat. The luxury of his surroundings soothed his jagged nerves. The car was comfortably warmed, the electric light upon his table was softly shaded. The steward who waited upon him was swift-footed and obsequious, and seemed entirely oblivious of Philip's shabby, half-soaked clothes. He ordered champagne a little vaguely, and the wine ran through his veins with a curious potency. He ate and drank now and then mechanically, now and then with the keenest appetite. Afterwards he smoked a cigar, drank coffee, and sipped a liqueur with the appreciation of a connoisseur. A fellow passenger passed him an evening paper, which he glanced through with apparent interest. Before he reached his journey's end he had ordered and drunk another liqueur. He tipped the steward handsomely. It was the first well-cooked meal which he had eaten for many months.

Arrived at Liverpool, he entered a cab and drove to the Adelphi Hotel. He made his way at once to the office. His clothes were dry now and the rest and warmth had given him more confidence.

"You have a room engaged for me, I think," he said, "Mr. Douglas Romilly.
I sent some luggage on."

The man merely glanced at him and handed him a ticket.

"Number sixty-seven, sir, on the second floor," he announced.

A porter conducted him up-stairs into a large, well-furnished bedroom. A fire was blazing in the grate; a dressing-case, a steamer trunk and a hatbox were set out at the foot of the bedstead.

"The heavier luggage, labelled for the hold, sir," the man told him, "is down-stairs, and will go direct to the steamer to-morrow morning. That was according to your instructions, I believe."

"Quite right," Philip assented. "What time does the boat sail?"

"Three o'clock, sir."

Philip frowned. This was his first disappointment. He had fancied himself on board early in the day. The prospect of a long morning's inaction seemed already to terrify him.

"Not till the afternoon," he muttered.

"Matter of tide, sir," the man explained. "You can go on board any time after eleven o'clock in the morning, though. Very much obliged to you, sir."

The porter withdrew, entirely satisfied with his tip. Philip Romilly locked the door after him carefully. Then he drew a bunch of keys from his pocket and, after several attempts, opened both the steamer trunk and the dressing-case. He surveyed their carefully packed contents with a certain grim and fantastic amusement, handled the silver brushes, shook

out a purple brocaded dressing-gown, laid out a suit of clothes for the morrow, even selected a shirt and put the links in it. Finally he wandered into the adjoining bathroom, took a hot bath, packed away at the bottom of the steamer trunk the clothes which he had been wearing, went to bed—and slept.

CHAPTER III

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The sun was shining into his bedroom when Philip Romilly was awakened the next morning by a discreet tapping at the door. He sat up in bed and shouted "Come in." He had no occasion to hesitate for a moment. He knew perfectly well where he was, he remembered exactly everything that had happened. The knocking at the door was disquieting but he faced it without a tremor. The floor waiter appeared and bowed deferentially.

"There is a gentleman on the telephone wishes to speak to you, sir," he announced. "I have connected him with the instrument by your side."

"To speak with me?" Philip repeated. "Are you quite sure?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Douglas Romilly he asked for. He said that his name was
Mr. Gayes, I believe."

The man left the room and Philip took up the receiver. For a moment he sat and thought. The situation was perplexing,

in a sense ominous, yet it had to be faced. He held the instrument to his ear.

"Hullo? Who's that?" he enquired.

"That Mr. Romilly?" was the reply, in a man's pleasant voice. "Mr.
Douglas Romilly?"

"Yes!"

"Good! I'm Gayes—Mr. Gayes of Gayes Brothers. My people wrote me last night from Leicester that you would be here this morning. You are crossing, aren't you, on the *Elletania*?"

Philip remained monosyllabic.

"Yes," he admitted cautiously.

"Can't you come round and see us this morning?" Mr. Gayes invited. "And look here, Mr. Romilly, in any case I want you to lunch with me at the club. My car shall come round and fetch you at any time you say."

"Sorry," Philip replied. "I am very busy this morning, and I am engaged for lunch."

"Oh, come, that's too bad," the other protested, "I really want to have a chat with you on business matters, Mr. Romilly. Will you spare me half an hour if I come round?"

"Tell me exactly what it is you want?" Philip insisted.

"Oh! just the usual thing," was the cheerful answer. "We hear you are off to America on a buying tour. Our last advices don't indicate a very easy market over there. I am not at all sure that we couldn't do better for you here, and give you better terms."

Philip began to feel more sure of himself. The situation, after all, he realized, was not exactly alarming.

"Very kind of you," he said. "My arrangements are all made now, though, and I can't interfere with them."

"Well, I'm going to bother you with a few quotations, anyway. See here, I'll just run round to see you. My car is waiting at the door now. I won't keep you more than a few minutes."

"Don't come before twelve," Philip begged. "I shall be busy until then."

"At twelve o'clock precisely, then," was the reply. "I shall hope to induce you to change your mind about luncheon. It's quite a long time since we had you at the club. Good-by!"

Philip set down the telephone. He was still in his pajamas and the morning was cold, but he suddenly felt a great drop of perspiration on his forehead. It was the sort of thing, this, which he had expected—had been prepared for, in fact—but it was none the less, in its way, gruesome. There was a further knock at the door, and the waiter reappeared.

"Can I bring you any breakfast, sir?" he enquired.

"What time is it?"

"Half-past nine, sir."

"Bring me some coffee and rolls and butter," Philip ordered.

He sprang out of bed, bathed, dressed, and ate his breakfast. Then he lit a cigarette, repacked his dressing-case, and descended into the hall. He made his way to the hall porter's enquiry office.

"I am going to pay some calls in the city," he announced—"Mr. Romilly is my name—and I may not be able to get

back here before my boat sails. I am going on the *Elletania*. Can I have my luggage sent there direct?"

"By all means, sir."

"Every article is properly labelled," Philip continued. "Those in my bedroom—number sixty-seven—are for the cabin, and those you have in your charge are for the hold."

"That will be quite all right, sir," the man assured him pocketing his liberal tip. "I will see to the matter myself."

Philip paid his bill at the office and breathed a little more freely as he left the hotel. Passing a large, plate-glass window he stopped suddenly and stared at his own reflection. There was something unfamiliar in the hang of his well-cut clothes and fashionable Homburg hat. It was like the shadow of some one else passing—some one to whom those clothes belonged. Then he remembered, remembered with a cold shiver which blanched his cheeks and brought a little agonised murmur to his lips. The moment passed, however, crushed down, stifled as he had sworn that he would stifle all such memories. He turned in at a barber's shop, had his hair cut, and yielded to the solicitations of a fluffy-haired young lady who was dying to go to America if only somebody would take her, and who was sure that he ought to have a manicure before his voyage. Afterwards he entered a call office and rang up the hotel on the telephone.

"Mr. Romilly speaking," he announced. "Will you kindly tell Mr. Gayes, if he calls to see me, that I have been detained in the city, and shall not be back."

The man took down the message. Philip strolled out once more into the streets, wandering aimlessly about for an hour or more. By this time it was nearly one o'clock, and,

selecting a restaurant, he entered and ordered luncheon. Once more it came over him, as he looked around the place, that he had, after all, only a very imperfect hold upon his own identity. It seemed impossible that he, Philip Romilly, should be there, ordering precisely what appealed to him most, without thought or care of the cost. He ate and drank slowly and with discrimination, and when he left the place he felt stronger. He sought out a first-class tobacconist's, bought some cigarettes, and enquired his way to the dock. At a few minutes after two, he passed up the gangway and boarded the great steamer. One of the little army of linen-coated stewards enquired the number of his room and conducted him below.

"Anything I can do for you, sir, before your luggage comes on?" the man asked civilly.

Philip shook his head and wandered up on deck again, where there were already a fair number of passengers in evidence. He leaned over the side, watching the constant stream of porters bearing supplies, and the steerage passengers passing into the forepart of the ship. With every moment his impatience grew. He looked at his watch sometimes half a dozen times in ten minutes, changed his position continually, started violently whenever he heard an unexpected footstep behind him. Finally he broke a promise he had made to himself. He bought newspapers, took them into a sheltered corner, and tore them open. Column by column he searched them through feverishly, running his finger down one side and up the next. It seemed impossible to find nowhere the heading he dreaded to see, to realize that they were entirely empty of any exciting incident. He

satisfied himself at last, however. The disappearance of a half-starved art teacher had not yet blazoned out to a sympathetic world. It was so much to the good…. There was a touch upon his shoulder, and he felt a chill of horror. When he turned around, it was the steward who had conducted him below, holding out a telegram.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said. "Telegram just arrived for you."

He passed on almost at once, in search of some one else. Philip stood for several moments perfectly still. He looked at the inscription—*Douglas Romilly*—set his teeth and tore open the envelope:

Understood you were returning to factory before leaving. Am posting a few final particulars to Waldorf Hotel, New York. Staff joins me in wishing you bon voyage.

Philip felt his heart cease its pounding, felt an immense sense of relief. It was a wonderful thing, this message. It cleared up one point on which he had been anxious and unsettled. It was taken for granted at the Works, then, that he had come straight to Liverpool. He walked up and down the deck on the side remote from the dock, driving this into his mind.

Everything was wonderfully simplified. If only he could get across, once reach New York! Meanwhile, he looked at his watch again and discovered that it wanted but ten minutes to three. He made his way back down to his stateroom, which was already filled with his luggage. He shook out an ulster from a bundle of wraps, and selected a tweed cap. Already there was a faint touch of the sea in the river breeze, and he was impatient for the immeasurable

open spaces, the salt wind, the rise and fall of the great ship. Then, as he stood on the threshold of his cabin, he heard voices.

"Down in number 110, eh?"

"Yes, sir," he heard his steward's voice reply. "Mr. Romilly has just gone down. You've only a minute, sir, before the last call for passengers."

"That's all right," the voice which had spoken to him over the telephone that morning replied. "I'd just like to shake hands with him and wish him bon voyage."

Philip's teeth came together in a little fury of anger. It was maddening, this, to be trapped when only a few minutes remained between him and safety! His brain worked swiftly. He took his chance of finding the next stateroom empty, as it happened to be, and stepped quickly inside. He kept his back to the door until the footsteps had passed. He heard the knock at his stateroom, stepped back into the corridor, and passed along a little gangway to the other side of the ship. He hurried up the stairs and into the smoking-room. The bugle was sounding now, and hoarse voices were shouting:

"Every one for the shore! Last call for the shore!"

"Give me a brandy and soda," he begged the steward, who was just opening the bar.

The man glanced at the clock and obeyed. Philip swallowed half of it at a gulp, then sat down with the tumbler in his hand. All of a sudden something disappeared from in front of one of the portholes. His heart gave a little jump. They were moving! He sprang up and hurried to the doorway. Slowly but unmistakably they were gliding away

from the dock. Already a lengthening line of people were waving their handkerchiefs and shouting farewells. Around them in the river little tugs were screaming, and the ropes from the dock had been thrown loose. Philip stepped to the rail, his heart growing lighter at every moment. His ubiquitous steward, laden with hand luggage, paused for a moment.

"I sent a gentleman down to your stateroom just before the steamer started, sir," he announced, "gentleman of the name of Gayes, who wanted to say good-by to you."

"Bad luck!" Philip answered. "I must have just missed him."

The steward turned around and pointed to the quay.

"There he is, sir—elderly gentleman in a grey suit, and a bunch of violets in his buttonhole. He's looking straight at you."

Philip raised his cap and waved it with enthusiasm. After a moment's hesitation, the other man did the same. The steward collected his belongings and shuffled off.

"He picked you out, sir, all right," he remarked as he disappeared in the companionway.

Philip turned away with a little final wave of the hand.

"Glad I didn't miss him altogether," he observed cheerfully.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Gayes! Good-by, England!"

CHAPTER IV

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Mr. Raymond Greene, very soon after the bugle had sounded for dinner that evening, took his place at the head of one of the small tables in the saloon and wished every one good evening. It was perfectly apparent that he meant to enjoy the trip, that he was prepared to like his fellow passengers and that he wished them to know it. Even the somewhat melancholy-looking steward, who had been waiting for his arrival, cheered up at the sight of his beaming face, and the other four occupants of the table returned his salutation according to their lights.

"Two vacant places, I am sorry to see," Mr. Greene observed. "One of them I can answer for, though. The young lady who is to sit on my right will be down directly—Miss Elizabeth Dalstan, the great actress, you know. She is by way of being under my charge. Very charming and talented young lady she is. Let us see who our other absentee is."

He stretched across and glanced at the name upon the card.

"Mr. Douglas Romilly," he read out. "Quite a good name—English, without a doubt. I have crossed with you before, haven't I, sir?" he went on affably, turning to his nearest neighbour on the left.

A burly, many-chinned American signified his assent.

"Why, I should say so," he admitted, "and I'd like a five-dollar bill,
Mr. Greene, for every film I've seen of yours in the United States."

Mr. Greene beamed with satisfaction.

"Well, I am glad to hear you've come across my stuff," he declared. "I've made some name for myself on the films and

I am proud of it. Raymond Greene it is, at your service."

"Joseph P. Hyam's mine," the large American announced, watching the disappearance of his soup plate with an air of regret. "I'm in the clothing business. If my wife were here, she'd say you wouldn't think it to look at me. Never was faddy about myself, though," he added, with a glance at Mr. Greene's very correct dinner attire.

"You ought to remember me, Mr. Greene," one of the two men remarked from the right-hand side of the table. "I've played golf with you at Baltusrol more than once."

Mr. Greene glanced surreptitiously at the card and smiled.

"Why, it's James P. Busby, of course!" he exclaimed. "Your father's the
Busby Iron Works, isn't he?"

The young man nodded.

"And this is Mr. Caroll, one of our engineers," he said, indicating a rather rough-looking personage by his side.

"Delighted to meet you both," Mr. Greene assured them. "Say, I remember your golf, Mr. Busby! You're some driver, eh? And those long putts of yours—you never took three on any green that I can remember!"

"Been playing in England?" the young man asked.

Mr. Raymond Greene shook his head.

"When I am on business," he explained, "I don't carry my sticks about with me, and I tell you this last fortnight has been a giddy whirl for me. I was in Berlin Wednesday night, and I did business in Vienna last Monday. Ah! here comes Miss Dalstan."