

CHAPTER XVIII

THE VOICE FROM THE PAST

The library, whither Jimmy had made his way after leaving Mrs. Pett, was a large room on the ground floor, looking out on the street which ran parallel to the south side of the house. It had French windows, opening onto a strip of lawn which ended in a high stone wall with a small gate in it, the general effect of these things being to create a resemblance to a country house rather than to one in the centre of the city. Mr. Pett's town residence was full of these surprises.

In one corner of the room a massive safe had been let into the wall, striking a note of incongruity, for the remainder of the wall-space was completely covered with volumes of all sorts and sizes, which filled the shelves and overflowed into a small gallery, reached by a short flight of stairs and running along the north side of the room over the door.

Jimmy cast a glance at the safe, behind the steel doors of which he presumed the test-tube of Partridgite which Willie had carried from the luncheon-table lay hid: then transferred his attention to the shelves. A cursory inspection of these revealed nothing which gave promise of whiling away entertainingly the moments which must elapse before the return of Ann. Jimmy's tastes in

literature lay in the direction of the lighter kind of modern fiction, and Mr. Pett did not appear to possess a single volume that had been written later than the eighteenth century--and mostly poetry at that. He turned to the writing-desk near the window, on which he had caught sight of a standing shelf full of books of a more modern aspect. He picked one up at random and opened it.

He threw it down disgustedly. It was poetry. This man Pett appeared to have a perfect obsession for poetry. One would never have suspected it, to look at him. Jimmy had just resigned himself, after another glance at the shelf, to a bookless vigil, when his eye was caught by a name on the cover of the last in the row so unexpected that he had to look again to verify the discovery.

He had been perfectly right. There it was, in gold letters.

THE LONELY HEART

BY

ANN CHESTER

He extracted the volume from the shelf in a sort of stupor. Even now he was inclined to give his goddess of the red hair the

benefit of the doubt, and assume that some one else of the same name had written it. For it was a defect in Jimmy's character--one of his many defects--that he loathed and scorned minor poetry and considered minor poets, especially when feminine, an unnecessary affliction. He declined to believe that Ann, his Ann, a girl full of the finest traits of character, the girl who had been capable of encouraging a comparative stranger to break the law by impersonating her cousin Jimmy Crocker, could also be capable of writing *The Lonely Heart* and other poems. He skimmed through the first one he came across, and shuddered. It was pure slush. It was the sort of stuff they filled up pages with in the magazines when the detective story did not run long enough. It was the sort of stuff which long-haired blighters read alone to other long-haired blighters in English suburban drawing-rooms. It was the sort of stuff which--to be brief--gave him the Willies. No, it could not be Ann who had written it.

The next moment the horrid truth was thrust upon him. There was an inscription on the title page.

"To my dearest uncle Peter, with love from the author, Ann Chester."

The room seemed to reel before Jimmy's eyes. He felt as if a friend had wounded him in his tenderest feelings. He felt as if some loved one had smitten him over the back of the head with a

sandbag. For one moment, in which time stood still, his devotion to Ann wobbled. It was as if he had found her out in some terrible crime that revealed unsuspected flaws in her hitherto ideal character.

Then his eye fell upon the date on the title page, and a strong spasm of relief shook him. The clouds rolled away, and he loved her still. This frightful volume had been published five years ago.

A wave of pity swept over Jimmy. He did not blame her now. She had been a mere child five years ago, scarcely old enough to distinguish right from wrong. You couldn't blame her for writing sentimental verse at that age. Why, at a similar stage in his own career he had wanted to be a vaudeville singer. Everything must be excused to Youth. It was with a tender glow of affectionate forgiveness that he turned the pages.

As he did so a curious thing happened to him. He began to have that feeling, which every one has experienced at some time or other, that he had done this very thing before. He was almost convinced that this was not the first time he had seen that poem on page twenty-seven entitled "A Lament." Why, some of the lines seemed extraordinarily familiar. The people who understood these things explained this phenomenon, he believed, by some stuff about the cells of the brain working simultaneously or something.

Something about cells, anyway. He supposed that that must be it.

But that was not it. The feeling that he had read all this before grew instead of vanishing, as is generally the way on these occasions. He had read this stuff before. He was certain of it. But when? And where? And above all why? Surely he had not done it from choice.

It was the total impossibility of his having done it from choice that led his memory in the right direction. There had only been a year or so in his life when he had been obliged to read things which he would not have read of his own free will, and that had been when he worked on the Chronicle. Could it have been that they had given him this book of poems to review? Or--?

And then memory, in its usual eccentric way, having taken all this time to make the first part of the journey, finished the rest of it with one lightning swoop, and he knew.

And with the illumination came dismay. Worse than dismay. Horror.

"Gosh!" said Jimmy.

He knew now why he had thought on the occasion of their first meeting in London that he had seen hair like Ann's before. The mists rolled away and he saw everything clear and stark. He knew

what had happened at that meeting five years before, to which she had so mysteriously alluded. He knew what she had meant that evening on the boat, when she had charged one Jimmy Crocker with having cured her of sentiment. A cold sweat sprang into being about his temples. He could remember that interview now, as clearly as if it had happened five minutes ago instead of five years. He could recall the article for the Sunday Chronicle which he had written from the interview, and the ghoulish gusto with which he had written it. He had had a boy's undisciplined sense of humour in those days, the sense of humour which riots like a young colt, careless of what it bruises and crushes. He shuddered at the recollection of the things he had hammered out so gleefully on his typewriter down at the Chronicle office. He found himself recoiling in disgust from the man he had been, the man who could have done a wanton thing like that without compunction or ruth. He had read extracts from the article to an appreciative colleague. . . .

A great sympathy for Ann welled up in him. No wonder she hated the memory of Jimmy Crocker.

It is probable that remorse would have tortured him even further, had he not chanced to turn absently to page forty-six and read a poem entitled "Love's Funeral." It was not a long poem, and he had finished it inside of two minutes; but by that time a change had come upon his mood of self-loathing. He no longer felt like a

particularly mean murderer. "Love's Funeral" was like a tonic. It braced and invigorated him. It was so unspeakably absurd, so poor in every respect. All things, he now perceived, had worked together for good. Ann had admitted on the boat that it was his satire that had crushed out of her the fondness for this sort of thing. If that was so, then the part he had played in her life had been that of a rescuer. He thought of her as she was now and as she must have been then to have written stuff like this, and he rejoiced at what he had done. In a manner of speaking the Ann of to-day, the glorious creature who went about the place kidnapping Ogdens, was his handiwork. It was he who had destroyed the minor poetry virus in her.

The refrain of an old song came to him.

"You made me what I am to-day!

I hope you're satisfied!"

He was more than satisfied. He was proud of himself.

He rejoiced, however, after the first flush of enthusiasm, somewhat moderately. There was no disguising the penalty of his deed of kindness. To Ann Jimmy Crocker was no rescuer, but a sort of blend of ogre and vampire. She must never learn his real identity--or not until he had succeeded by assiduous toil, as he hoped he would, in neutralising that prejudice of the distant

past.

A footstep outside broke in on his thoughts. He thrust the book quickly back into its place. Ann came in, and shut the door behind her.

"Well?" she said eagerly.

Jimmy did not reply for a moment. He was looking at her and thinking how perfect in every way she was now, as she stood there purged of sentimentality, all aglow with curiosity to know how her nefarious plans had succeeded. It was his Ann who stood there, not the author of "The Lonely Heart."

"Did you ask her?"

"Yes. But--"

Ann's face fell.

"Oh! She won't let him come back?"

"She absolutely refused. I did my best."

"I know you did."

There was a silence.

"Well, this settles it," said Jimmy. "Now you will have to let me help you."

Ann looked troubled.

"But it's such a risk. Something terrible might happen to you. Isn't impersonation a criminal offence?"

"What does it matter? They tell me prisons are excellent places nowadays. Concerts, picnics--all that sort of thing. I shan't mind going there. I have a nice singing-voice. I think I will try to make the glee-club."

"I suppose we are breaking the law," said Ann seriously. "I told Jerry that nothing could happen to us except the loss of his place to him and being sent to my grandmother to me, but I'm bound to say I said that just to encourage him. Don't you think we ought to know what the penalty is, in case we are caught?"

"It would enable us to make our plans. If it's a life sentence, I shouldn't worry about selecting my future career."

"You see," explained Ann, "I suppose they would hardly send me to prison, as I'm a relation--though I would far rather go there

than to grandmother's. She lives all alone miles away in the country, and is strong on discipline--but they might do all sorts of things to you, in spite of my pleadings. I really think you had better give up the idea, I'm afraid my enthusiasm carried me away. I didn't think of all this before."

"Never. This thing goes through, or fails over my dead body. What are you looking for?"

Ann was deep in a bulky volume which stood on a lectern by the window.

"Catalogue," she said briefly, turning the pages. "Uncle Peter has heaps of law books. I'll look up kidnapping. Here we are. Law Encyclopedia. Shelf X. Oh, that's upstairs. I shan't be a minute."

She ran to the little staircase, and disappeared. Her voice came from the gallery.

"Here we are. I've got it."

"Shoot," said Jimmy.

"There's such a lot of it," called the voice from above. "Pages and pages. I'm just skimming. Wait a moment."

A rustling followed from the gallery, then a sneeze.

"This is the dustiest place I was ever in," said the voice. "It's inches deep everywhere. It's full of cigarette ends, too. I must tell uncle. Oh, here it is. Kidnapping--penalties--"

"Hush" called Jimmy. "There's some one coming."

The door opened.

"Hello," said Ogden, strolling in. "I was looking for you. Didn't think you would be here."

"Come right in, my little man, and make yourself at home," said Jimmy.

Ogden eyed him with disfavour.

"You're pretty fresh, aren't you?"

"This is praise from Sir Hubert Stanley."

"Eh? Who's he?"

"Oh, a gentleman who knew what was what."

Ogden closed the door.

"Well, I know what's what, too. I know what you are for one thing." He chuckled. "I've got your number all right."

"In what respect?"

Another chuckle proceeded from the bulbous boy.

"You think you're smooth, don't you? But I'm onto you, Jimmy Crocker. A lot of Jimmy Crocker you are. You're a crook. Get me? And I know what you're after, at that. You're going to try to kidnap me."

From the corner of his eye Jimmy was aware of Ann's startled face, looking over the gallery rail and withdrawn hastily. No sound came from the heights, but he knew that she was listening intently.

"What makes you think that?"

Ogden lowered himself into the depths of his favourite easy chair, and, putting his feet restfully on the writing-desk, met Jimmy's gaze with a glassy but knowing eye.

"Got a cigarette?" he said.

"I have not," said Jimmy. "I'm sorry."

"So am I."

"Returning, with your permission, to our original subject," said Jimmy, "what makes you think that I have come here to kidnap you?"

Ogden yawned.

"I was in the drawing-room after lunch, and that guy Lord Wisbeach came in and said he wanted to talk to mother privately. Mother sent me out of the room, so of course I listened at the door."

"Do you know where little boys go who listen to private conversations?" said Jimmy severely.

"To the witness-stand generally, I guess. Well, I listened, and I heard this Lord Wisbeach tell mother that he had only pretended to recognise you as Jimmy Crocker and that really he had never seen you before in his life. He said you were a crook and that they had got to watch you. Well, I knew then why you had come here. It was pretty smooth, getting in the way you did. I've got

to hand it to you."

Jimmy did not reply. His mind was occupied with the contemplation of this dashing counter-stroke on the part of Gentleman Jack. He could hardly refrain from admiring the simple strategy with which the latter had circumvented him. There was an artistry about the move which compelled respect.

"Well, now, see here," said Ogden, "you and I have got to get together on this proposition. I've been kidnapped twice before, and the only guys that made anything out of it were the kidnapers. It's pretty soft for them. They couldn't have got a cent without me, and they never dreamed of giving me a rake-off. I'm getting good and tired of being kidnapped for other people's benefit, and I've made up my mind that the next guy that wants me has got to come across. See? My proposition is fifty-fifty. If you like it, I'm game to let you go ahead. If you don't like it, then the deal's off, and you'll find that you've a darned poor chance of getting me. When I was kidnapped before, I was just a kid, but I can look after myself now. Well, what do you say?"

Jimmy found it hard at first to say anything. He had never properly understood the possibilities of Ogden's character before. The longer he contemplated him, the more admirable Ann's scheme appeared. It seemed to him that only a resolute keeper of a home for dogs would be adequately equipped for dealing with

this remarkable youth.

"This is a commercial age," he said.

"You bet it is," said Ogden. "My middle name is business. Say, are you working this on your own, or are you in with Buck Maginnis and his crowd?"

"I don't think I know Mr. Maginnis."

"He's the guy who kidnapped me the first time. He's a rough-neck. Smooth Sam Fisher got away with me the second time. Maybe you're in with Sam?"

"No."

"No, I guess not. I heard that he had married and retired from business. I rather wish you were one of Buck's lot. I like Buck. When he kidnapped me, I lived with him and he gave me a swell time. When I left him, a woman came and interviewed me about it for one of the Sunday papers. Sob stuff. Called the piece 'Even Kidnappers Have Tender Hearts Beneath A Rough Exterior.' I've got it upstairs in my press-clipping album. It was pretty bad slush. Buck Maginnis hasn't got any tender heart beneath his rough exterior, but he's a good sort and I liked him. We used to shoot craps. And he taught me to chew. I'd be tickled to death to have

Buck get me again. But, if you're working on your own, all right.
It's all the same to me, provided you meet me on the terms."

"You certainly are a fascinating child."

"Less of it, less of it. I've troubles enough to bear without
having you getting fresh. Well, what about it? Talk figures. If I
let you take me away, do we divvy up or don't we? That's all
you've got to say."

"That's easily settled. I'll certainly give you half of whatever
I get."

Ogden looked wistfully at the writing-desk.

"I wish I could have that in writing. But I guess it wouldn't
stand in law. I suppose I shall have to trust you."

"Honour among thieves."

"Less of the thieves. This is just a straight business
proposition. I've got something valuable to sell, and I'm darned
if I'm going to keep giving it away. I've been too easy. I ought
to have thought of this before. All right, then, that's settled.
Now it's up to you. You can think out the rest of it yourself."

He heaved himself out of the chair, and left the room. Ann, coming down from the gallery, found Jimmy meditating. He looked up at the sound of her step.

"Well, that seems to make it pretty easy for us, doesn't it?" he said. "It solves the problem of ways and means."

"But this is awful. This alters everything. It isn't safe for you to stay here. You must go away at once. They've found you out. You may be arrested at any moment."

"That's a side-issue. The main point is to put this thing through. Then we can think about what is going to happen to me."

"But can't you see the risk you're running?"

"I don't mind. I want to help you."

"I won't let you."

"You must."

"But do be sensible. What would you think of me if I allowed you to face this danger--?"

"I wouldn't think any differently of you. My opinion of you is a

fixed thing. Nothing can alter it. I tried to tell you on the boat, but you wouldn't let me. I think you're the most perfect, wonderful girl in all the world. I've loved you since the first moment I saw you. I knew who you were when we met for half a minute that day in London. We were utter strangers, but I knew you. You were the girl I had been looking for all my life. Good Heavens, you talk of risks. Can't you understand that just being with you and speaking to you and knowing that we share this thing together is enough to wipe out any thought of risk? I'd do anything for you. And you expect me to back out of this thing because there is a certain amount of danger!"

Ann had retreated to the door, and was looking at him with wide eyes. With other young men and there had been many--who had said much the same sort of thing to her since her debutante days she had been cool and composed--a little sorry, perhaps, but in no doubt as to her own feelings and her ability to resist their pleadings. But now her heart was racing, and the conviction had begun to steal over her that the cool and composed Ann Chester was in imminent danger of making a fool of herself. Quite suddenly, without any sort of warning, she realised that there was some quality in Jimmy which called aloud to some corresponding quality in herself--a nebulous something that made her know that he and she were mates. She knew herself hard to please where men were concerned. She could not have described what it was in her that all the men she had met, the men with

whom she had golfed and ridden and yachted, had failed to satisfy: but, ever since she had acquired the power of self-analysis, she had known that it was something which was a solid and indestructible part of her composition. She could not have put into words what quality she demanded in man, but she had always known that she would recognise it when she found it: and she recognised it now in Jimmy. It was a recklessness, an irresponsibility, a cheerful dare-devilry, the complement to her own gay lawlessness.

"Ann!" said Jimmy.

"It's too late!"

She had not meant to say that. She had meant to say that it was impossible, out of the question. But her heart was running away with her, goaded on by the irony of it all. A veil seemed to have fallen from before her eyes, and she knew now why she had been drawn to Jimmy from the very first. They were mates, and she had thrown away her happiness.

"I've promised to marry Lord Wisbeach!"

Jimmy stopped dead, as if the blow had been a physical one.

"You've promised to marry Lord Wisbeach!"

"Yes."

"But--but when?"

"Just now. Only a few minutes ago. When I was driving him to his hotel. He had asked me to marry him before I left for England, and I had promised to give him his answer when I got back. But when I got back, somehow I couldn't make up my mind. The days slipped by. Something seemed to be holding me back. He pressed me to say that I would marry him, and it seemed absurd to go on refusing to be definite, so I said I would."

"You can't love him? Surely you don't--?"

Ann met his gaze frankly.

"Something seems to have happened to me in the last few minutes," she said, "and I can't think clearly. A little while ago it didn't seem to matter much. I liked him. He was good-looking and good-tempered. I felt that we should get along quite well and be as happy as most people are. That seemed as near perfection as one could expect to get nowadays, so--well, that's how it was."

"But you can't marry him! It's out of the question!"

"I've promised."

"You must break your promise."

"I can't do that."

"You must!"

"I can't. One must play the game."

Jimmy groped for words. "But in this case you mustn't--it's awful--in this special case--" He broke off. He saw the trap he was in. He could not denounce that crook without exposing himself. And from that he still shrank. Ann's prejudice against Jimmy Crocker might have its root in a trivial and absurd grievance, but it had been growing through the years, and who could say how strong it was now?

Ann came a step towards him, then paused doubtfully. Then, as if making up her mind, she drew near and touched his sleeve.

"I'm sorry," she said.

There was a silence.

"I'm sorry!"

She moved away. The door closed softly behind her. Jimmy scarcely knew that she had gone. He sat down in that deep chair which was Mr. Pett's favourite, and stared sightlessly at the ceiling. And then, how many minutes or hours later he did not know, the sharp click of the door-handle roused him. He sprang from the chair. Was it Ann, come back?

It was not Ann. Round the edge of the door came inquiringly the fair head of Lord Wisbeach.

"Oh!" said his lordship, sighting Jimmy.

The head withdrew itself.

"Come here!" shouted Jimmy.

The head appeared again.

"Talking to me?"

"Yes, I was talking to you."

Lord Wisbeach followed his superstructure into the room. He was outwardly all that was bland and unperturbed, but there was a wary look in the eye that cocked itself at Jimmy, and he did not

move far from the door. His fingers rested easily on the handle behind him. He did not think it probable that Jimmy could have heard of his visit to Mrs. Pett, but there had been something menacing in the latter's voice, and he believed in safety first.

"They told me Miss Chester was here," he said by way of relaxing any possible strain there might be in the situation.

"And what the devil do you want with Miss Chester, you slimy, crawling second-story-worker, you damned, oily yegg?" enquired Jimmy.

The sunniest optimist could not have deluded himself into the belief that the words were spoken in a friendly and genial spirit. Lord Wisbeach's fingers tightened on the door-handle, and he grew a little flushed about the cheek-bones.

"What's all this about?" he said.

"You infernal crook!"

Lord Wisbeach looked anxious.

"Don't shout like that! Are you crazy? Do you want people to hear?"

Jimmy drew a deep breath.

"I shall have to get further away from you," he said more quietly. "There's no knowing what may happen if I don't. I don't want to kill you. At least, I do, but I had better not."

He retired slowly until brought to a halt by the writing-desk. To this he anchored himself with a firm grip. He was extremely anxious to do nothing rash, and the spectacle of Gentleman Jack invited rashness. He leaned against the desk, clutching its solidity with both hands. Lord Wisbeach held steadfastly to the door-handle. And in this tense fashion the interview proceeded.

"Miss Chester," said Jimmy, forcing himself to speak calmly, "has just been telling me that she has promised to marry you."

"Quite true," said Lord Wisbeach. "It will be announced to-morrow." A remark trembled on his lips, to the effect that he relied on Jimmy for a fish-slice, but prudence kept it unspoken. He was unable at present to understand Jimmy's emotion. Why Jimmy should object to his being engaged to Ann, he could not imagine. But it was plain that for some reason he had taken the thing to heart, and, dearly as he loved a bit of quiet fun, Lord Wisbeach decided that the other was at least six inches too tall and fifty pounds too heavy to be bantered in his present mood by one of his own physique. "Why not?"

"It won't be announced to-morrow," said Jimmy. "Because by to-morrow you will be as far away from here as you can get, if you have any sense."

"What do you mean?"

"Just this. If you haven't left this house by breakfast time to-morrow, I shall expose you."

Lord Wisbeach was not feeling particularly happy, but he laughed at this.

"You!"

"That's what I said."

"Who do you think you are, to go about exposing people?"

"I happen to be Mrs. Pett's nephew, Jimmy Crocker."

Lord Wisbeach laughed again.

"Is that the line you are going to take?"

"It is."

"You are going to Mrs. Pett to tell her that you are Jimmy Crocker and that I am a crook and that you only pretended to recognise me for reasons of your own?"

"Just that."

"Forget it!" Lord Wisbeach had forgotten to be alarmed in his amusement. He smiled broadly. "I'm not saying it's not good stuff to pull, but it's old stuff now. I'm sorry for you, but I thought of it before you did. I went to Mrs. Pett directly after lunch and sprang that line of talk myself. Do you think she'll believe you after that? I tell you I'm ace-high with that dame. You can't queer me with her."

"I think I can. For the simple reason that I really am Jimmy Crocker."

"Yes, you are."

"Exactly. Yes, I am."

Lord Wisbeach smiled tolerantly.

"It was worth trying the bluff, I guess, but it won't work. I know you'd be glad to get me out of this house, but you've got to

make a better play than that to do it."

"Don't deceive yourself with the idea that I'm bluffing. Look here." He suddenly removed his coat and threw it to Lord Wisbeach. "Read the tailor's label inside the pocket. See the name. Also the address. 'J. Crocker. Drexdale House. Grosvenor Square. London.'"

Lord Wisbeach picked up the garment and looked as directed. His face turned a little sallow, but he still fought against his growing conviction.

"That's no proof."

"Perhaps not. But, when you consider the reputation of the tailor whose name is on the label, it's hardly likely that he would be standing in with an impostor, is it? If you want real proof, I have no doubt that there are half a dozen men working on the Chronicle who can identify me. Or are you convinced already?"

Lord Wisbeach capitulated.

"I don't know what fool game you think you're playing, but I can't see why you couldn't have told me this when we were talking after lunch."

"Never mind. I had my reasons. They don't matter. What matters is that you are going to get out of here to-morrow. Do you understand that?"

"I get you."

"Then that's about all, I think. Don't let me keep you."

"Say, listen." Gentleman Jack's voice was plaintive. "I think you might give a fellow a chance to get out good. Give me time to have a guy in Montreal send me a telegram telling me to go up there right away. Otherwise you might just as well put the cops on me at once. The old lady knows I've got business in Canada. You don't need to be rough on a fellow."

Jimmy pondered this point.

"All right. I don't object to that."

"Thanks."

"Don't start anything, though."

"I don't know what you mean."

Jimmy pointed to the safe.

"Come, come, friend of my youth. We have no secrets from each other. I know you're after what's in there, and you know that I know. I don't want to harp on it, but you'll be spending to-night in the house, and I think you had better make up your mind to spend it in your room, getting a nice sleep to prepare you for your journey. Do you follow me, old friend?"

"I get you."

"That will be all then, I think. Wind a smile around your neck and recede."

The door slammed. Lord Wisbeach had restrained his feelings successfully during the interview, but he could not deny himself that slight expression of them. Jimmy crossed the room and took his coat from the chair where the other had dropped it. As he did so a voice spoke.

"Say!"

Jimmy spun round. The room was apparently empty. The thing was beginning to assume an uncanny aspect, when the voice spoke again.

"You think you're darned funny, don't you?"

It came from above. Jimmy had forgotten the gallery. He directed his gaze thither, and perceived the heavy face of Ogden hanging over the rail like a gargoyle.

"What are you doing there?" he demanded.

"Listening."

"How did you get there?"

"There's a door back here that you get to from the stairs. I often come here for a quiet cigarette. Say, you think yourself some joshier, don't you, telling me you were a kidnapper! You strung me like an onion. So you're really Jimmy Crocker after all? Where was the sense in pulling all that stuff about taking me away and divvying up the ransom? Aw, you make me tired!"

The head was withdrawn, and Jimmy heard heavy steps followed by the banging of a door. Peace reigned in the library.

Jimmy sat down in the chair which was Mr. Pett's favourite and which Ogden was accustomed to occupy to that gentleman's displeasure. The swiftness of recent events had left him a little dizzy, and he desired to think matters over and find out exactly what had happened.

The only point which appeared absolutely clear to him in a welter of confusing occurrences was the fact that he had lost the chance of kidnapping Ogden. Everything had arranged itself so beautifully simply and conveniently as regarded that venture until a moment ago; but now that the boy had discovered his identity it was impossible for him to attempt it. He was loth to accept this fact. Surely, even now, there was a way . . .

Quite suddenly an admirable plan occurred to him. It involved the co-operation of his father. And at that thought he realised with a start that life had been moving so rapidly for him since his return to the house that he had not paid any attention at all to what was really as amazing a mystery as any. He had been too busy to wonder why his father was there.

He debated the best method of getting in touch with him. It was out of the question to descend to the pantry or wherever it was that his father lived in this new incarnation of his. Then the happy thought struck him that results might be obtained by the simple process of ringing the bell. It might produce some other unit of the domestic staff. However, it was worth trying. He rang the bell.

A few moments later the door opened. Jimmy looked up. It was not his father. It was a dangerous-looking female of uncertain age,

dressed as a parlour-maid, who eyed him with what seemed to his conscience-stricken soul dislike and suspicion. She had a tight-lipped mouth and beady eyes beneath heavy brows. Jimmy had seldom seen a woman who attracted him less at first sight.

"Jer ring, S'?"

Jimmy blinked and almost ducked. The words had come at him like a projectile.

"Oh, ah, yes."

"J' want anything, s'?"

With an effort Jimmy induced his mind to resume its interrupted equilibrium.

"Oh, ah, yes. Would you mind sending Skinner the butler to me."

"Y's'r."

The apparition vanished. Jimmy drew out his handkerchief and dabbed at his forehead. He felt weak and guilty. He felt as if he had just been accused of nameless crimes and had been unable to deny the charge. Such was the magic of Miss Trimble's eye--the left one, which looked directly at its object. Conjecture pauses

baffled at the thought of the effect which her gaze might have created in the breasts of the sex she despised, had it been double instead of single-barrelled. But half of it had wasted itself on a spot some few feet to his right.

Presently the door opened again, and Mr. Crocker appeared, looking like a benevolent priest.