

WILKIE COLLINS  
MAD MONKTON

Москва, 2018

ΥΔΚ 82  
ΒΒΚ 84

**Wilkie Collins**

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*Mad Monkton* is a bizarre ghost story. It is said that a strain of hereditary madness blights the Monkton family, heirs to the huge domain of Winnet Abbey. Rumours in the neighbourhood are that Alfred, the youngest scion, has inherited this insanity. His odd behaviour certainly points that way. Alfred is engaged to his childhood sweetheart, Ada Elmslie. But at the very moment when various obstacles to the match are overcome, Alfred suddenly departs for Italy, seeking the corpse of his disreputable uncle, who is believed to have been killed in a duel. What could have driven Alfred to do this?

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## CHAPTER I

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The *Monktons* of *Wincot Abbey* bore a sad character for want of sociability in our county. They never went to other people's houses, and, excepting my father, and a lady and her daughter living near them, never received anybody under their own roof.

Proud as they all certainly were, it was not pride, but dread, which kept them thus apart from their neighbors. The family had suffered for generations past from the horrible affliction of hereditary insanity, and the members of it shrank from exposing their calamity to others, as they must have exposed it if they had mingled with the busy little world around them. There is a frightful story of a crime committed in past times by two of the *Monktons*, near relatives, from which the first appearance of the insanity was always supposed to date, but it is needless for me to shock any one by repeating it. It is enough to say that at intervals almost every form of madness appeared in the family, monomania being the most frequent manifestation of the affliction among them. I have these particulars, and one or two yet to be related, from my father.

At the period of my youth but three of the *Monktons* were left at the Abbey – Mr. and Mrs. *Monkton* and their only child *Alfred*, heir to the property. The one other member of this,

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the elder branch of the family, who was then alive, was Mr. Monkton's younger brother, Stephen. He was an unmarried man, possessing a fine estate in Scotland; but he lived almost entirely on the Continent, and bore the reputation of being a shameless profligate. The family at Wincot held almost as little communication with him as with their neighbors.

I have already mentioned my father, and a lady and her daughter, as the only privileged people who were admitted into Wincot Abbey.

My father had been an old school and college friend of Mr. Monkton, and accident had brought them so much together in later life that their continued intimacy at Wincot was quite intelligible. I am not so well able to account for the friendly terms on which Mrs. Elmslie (the lady to whom I have alluded) lived with the Monktons. Her late husband had been distantly related to Mrs. Monkton, and my father was her daughter's guardian. But even these claims to friendship and regard never seemed to me strong enough to explain the intimacy between Mrs. Elmslie and the inhabitants of the Abbey. Intimate, however, they certainly were, and one result of the constant interchange of visits between the two families in due time declared itself: Mr. Monkton's son and Mrs. Elmslie's daughter became attached to each other.

I had no opportunities of seeing much of the young lady; I only remember her at that time as a delicate, gentle, lovable girl, the very opposite in appearance, and apparently in character also, to Alfred Monkton. But perhaps that was one reason why they fell in love with each other. The attachment was soon discovered, and was far from being disapproved by the parents

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on either side. In all essential points except that of wealth, the Elmslies were nearly the equals of the Monktons, and want of money in a bride was of no consequence to the heir of Wincot. Alfred, it was well known, would succeed to thirty thousand a year on his father's death.

Thus, though the parents on both sides thought the young people not old enough to be married at once, they saw no reason why Ada and Alfred should not be engaged to each other, with the understanding that they should be united when young Monkton came of age, in two years' time. The person to be consulted in the matter, after the parents, was my father, in his capacity of Ada's guardian. He knew that the family misery had shown itself many years ago in Mrs. Monkton, who was her husband's cousin. The illness, as it was significantly called, had been polluted by careful treatment, and was reported to have passed away. But my father was not to be deceived. He knew where the hereditary taint still lurked; he viewed with horror the bare possibility of its reappearing one day in the children of his friend's only daughter; and he positively refused his consent to the marriage engagement.

The result was that the doors of the Abbey and the doors of Mrs. Elmslie's house were closed to him. This suspension of friendly intercourse had lasted but a very short time when Mrs. Monkton died. Her husband, who was fondly attached to her, caught a violent cold while attending her funeral. The cold was neglected, and settled on his lungs. In a few months' time he followed his wife to the grave, and Alfred was left master of the grand old Abbey and the fair lands that spread all around it.

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At this period Mrs. Elmslie had the indelicacy to endeavor a second time to procure my father's consent to the marriage engagement. He refused it again more positively than before. More than a year passed away. The time was approaching fast when Alfred would be of age. I returned from college to spend the long vacation at home, and made some advances toward bettering my acquaintance with young Monkton. They were evaded – certainly with perfect politeness, but still in such a way as to prevent me from offering my friendship to him again. Any mortification I might have felt at this petty repulse under ordinary circumstances was dismissed from my mind by the occurrence of a real misfortune in our household. For some months past my father's health had been failing, and, just at the time of which I am now writing, his sons had to mourn the irreparable calamity of his death.

This event, through some informality or error in the late Mr. Elmslie's will, left the future of Ada's life entirely at her mother's disposal. The consequence was the immediate ratification of the marriage engagement to which my father had so steadily refused his consent. As soon as the fact was publicly announced, some of Mrs. Elmslie's more intimate friends, who were acquainted with the reports affecting the Monkton family, ventured to mingle with their formal congratulations one or two significant references to the late Mrs. Monkton and some searching inquiries as to the disposition of her son.

Mrs. Elmslie always met these polite hints with one bold form of answer. She first admitted the existence of these reports about the Monktons which her friends were unwilling to specify distinctly, and then declared that they were infa-

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mous calumnies. The hereditary taint had died out of the family generations back. Alfred was the best, the kindest, the sanest of human beings. He loved study and retirement; Ada sympathized with his tastes, and had made her choice unbiased; if any more hints were dropped about sacrificing her by her marriage, those hints would be viewed as so many insults to her mother, whose affection for her it was monstrous to call in question. This way of talking silenced people, but did not convince them. They began to suspect, what was indeed the actual truth, that Mrs. Elmslie was a selfish, worldly, grasping woman, who wanted to get her daughter well married, and cared nothing for consequences as long as she saw Ada mistress of the greatest establishment in the whole county.

It seemed, however, as if there was some fatality at work to prevent the attainment of Mrs. Elmslie's great object in life. Hardly was one obstacle to the ill-omened marriage removed by my father's death before another succeeded it in the shape of anxieties and difficulties caused by the delicate state of Ada's health. Doctors were consulted in all directions, and the result of their advice was that the marriage must be deferred, and that Miss Elmslie must leave England for a certain time, to reside in a warmer climate – the south of France, if I remember rightly. Thus it happened that just before Alfred came of age Ada and her mother departed for the Continent, and the union of the two young people was understood to be indefinitely postponed. Some curiosity was felt in the neighborhood as to what Alfred Monkton would do under these circumstances. Would he follow his lady-love? would he go yachting? would he throw open the doors of the old Abbey at last, and

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endeavor to forget the absence of Ada and the postponement of his marriage in a round of *gayeties*? He did none of these things. He simply remained at Wincot, living as suspiciously strange and solitary a life as his father had lived before him. Literally, there was now no companion for him at the Abbey but the old priest – the Monktons, I should have mentioned before, were Roman Catholics – who had held the office of tutor to Alfred from his earliest years. He came of age, and there was not even so much as a private dinner-party at Wincot to celebrate the event. Families in the neighborhood determined to forget the offense which his father's reserve had given them, and invited him to their houses. The invitations were politely declined. Civil visitors called resolutely at the Abbey, and were as resolutely bowed away from the doors as soon as they had left their cards. Under this combination of sinister and aggravating circumstances people in all directions took to shaking their heads mysteriously when the name of Mr. Alfred Monkton was mentioned, hinting at the family calamity, and wondering peevishly or sadly, as their tempers inclined them, what he could possibly do to occupy himself month after month in the lonely old house.

The right answer to this question was not easy to find. It was quite useless, for example, to apply to the priest for it. He was a very quiet, polite old gentleman; his replies were always excessively ready and civil, and appeared at the time to convey an immense quantity of information; but when they came to be reflected on, it was universally observed that nothing tangible could ever be got out of them. The housekeeper, a weird old woman, with a very abrupt and repelling manner, was too

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fierce and taciturn to be safely approached. The few indoor servants had all been long enough in the family to have learned to hold their tongues in public as a regular habit. It was only from the farm-servants who supplied the table at the Abbey that any information could be obtained, and vague enough it was when they came to communicate it.

Some of them had observed the "young master" walking about the library with heaps of dusty papers in his hands. Others had heard odd noises in the uninhabited parts of the Abbey, had looked up, and had seen him forcing open the old windows, as if to let light and air into the rooms supposed to have been shut close for years and years, or had discovered him standing on the perilous summit of one of the crumbling turrets, never ascended before within their memories, and popularly considered to be inhabited by the ghosts of the monks who had once possessed the building. The result of these observations and discoveries, when they were communicated to others, was of course to impress every one with a firm belief that "poor young Monkton was going the way that the rest of the family had gone before him," which opinion always appeared to be immensely strengthened in the popular mind by a conviction – founded on no particle of evidence – that the priest was at the bottom of all the mischief.

Thus far I have spoken from hearsay evidence mostly. What I have next to tell will be the result of my own personal experience.

## CHAPTER II

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About five months after Alfred Monkton came of age I left college, and resolved to amuse and instruct myself a little by traveling abroad.

At the time when I quitted England young Monkton was still leading his secluded life at the Abbey, and was, in the opinion of everybody, sinking rapidly, if he had not already succumbed, under the hereditary curse of his family. As to the Elmslies, report said that Ada had benefited by her sojourn abroad, and that mother and daughter were on their way back to England to resume their old relations with the heir of Wincot. Before they returned I was away on my travels, and wandered half over Europe, hardly ever planning whither I should shape my course beforehand. Chance, which thus led me everywhere, led me at last to Naples. There I met with an old school friend, who was one of the *attaches* at the English embassy, and there began the extraordinary events in connection with Alfred Monkton which form the main interest of the story I am now relating.

I was idling away the time one morning with my friend the *attache* in the garden of the Villa Reale, when we were passed by a young man, walking alone, who exchanged bows with my friend.

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I thought I recognized the dark, eager eyes, the colorless cheeks, the strangely-vigilant, anxious expression which I remembered in past times as characteristic of Alfred Monkton's face, and was about to question my friend on the subject, when he gave me unasked the information of which I was in search.

"That is Alfred Monkton," said he; "he comes from your part of England. You ought to know him."

"I do know a little of him," I answered; "he was engaged to Miss Elmslie when I was last in the neighborhood of Wincot. Is he married to her yet?"

"No, and he never ought to be. He has gone the way of the rest of the family — or, in plainer words, he has gone mad."

"Mad! But I ought not to be surprised at hearing that, after the reports about him in England."

"I speak from no reports; I speak from what he has said and done before me, and before hundreds of other people. Surely you must have heard of it?"

"Never. I have been out of the way of news from Naples or England for months past."

"Then I have a very extraordinary story to tell you. You know, of course, that Alfred had an uncle, Stephen Monkton. Well, some time ago this uncle fought a duel in the Roman States with a Frenchman, who shot him dead. The seconds and the Frenchman (who was unhurt) took to flight in different directions, as it is supposed. We heard nothing here of the details of the duel till a month after it happened, when one of the French journals published an account of it, taken from the papers left by Monkton's second, who died at Paris of consumption. These papers stated the manner in which the duel

was fought, and how it terminated, but nothing more. The surviving second and the Frenchman have never been traced from that time to this. All that anybody knows, therefore, of the duel is that Stephen Monkton was shot; an event which nobody can regret, for a greater scoundrel never existed. The exact place where he died, and what was done with the body are still mysteries not to be penetrated."

"But what has all this to do with Alfred?"

"Wait a moment, and you will hear. Soon after the news of his uncle's death reached England, what do you think Alfred did? He actually put off his marriage with Miss Elmslie, which was then about to be celebrated, to come out here in search of the burial-place of his wretched scamp of an uncle; and no power on earth will now induce him to return to England and to Miss Elmslie until he has found the body, and can take it back with him, to be buried with all the other dead Monktons in the vault under Wincot Abbey Chapel. He has squandered his money, pestered the police, and exposed himself to the ridicule of the men and the indignation of the women for the last three months in trying to achieve his insane purpose, and is now as far from it as ever. He will not assign to anybody the smallest motive for his conduct. You can't laugh him out of it or reason him out of it. When we met him just now, I happen to know that he was on his way to the office of the police minister, to send out fresh agents to search and inquire through the Roman States for the place where his uncle was shot. And, mind, all this time he professes to be passionately in love with Miss Elmslie, and to be miserable at his separation from her. Just think of that! And then think of his self-imposed absence

from her here, to hunt after the remains of a wretch who was a disgrace to the family, and whom he never saw but once or twice in his life. Of all the 'Mad Monktons,' as they used to call them in England, Alfred is the maddest. He is actually our principal excitement in this dull opera season; though, for my own part, when I think of the poor girl in England, I am a great deal more ready to despise him than to laugh at him."

"You know the Elmslies then?"

"Intimately. The other day my mother wrote to me from England, after having seen Ada. This escapade of Monkton's has outraged all her friends. They have been entreating her to break off the match, which it seems she could do if she liked. Even her mother, sordid and selfish as she is, has been obliged at last, in common decency, to side with the rest of the family; but the good, faithful girl won't give Monkton up. She humors his insanity; declares he gave her a good reason in secret for going away; says she could always make him happy when they were together in the old Abbey, and can make him still happier when they are married; in short, she loves him dearly, and will therefore believe in him to the last. Nothing shakes her. She has made up her mind to throw away her life on him, and she will do it."

"I hope not. Mad as his conduct looks to us, he may have some sensible reason for it that we cannot imagine. Does his mind seem at all disordered when he talks on ordinary topics?"

"Not in the least. When you can get him to say anything, which is not often, he talks like a sensible, well-educated man. Keep silence about his precious errand here, and you would

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fancy him the gentlest and most temperate of human beings; but touch the subject of his vagabond of an uncle, and the Monkton madness comes out directly. The other night a lady asked him, jestingly of course, whether he had ever seen his uncle's ghost. He scowled at her like a perfect fiend, and said that he and his uncle would answer her question together some day, if they came from hell to do it. We laughed at his words, but the lady fainted at his looks, and we had a scene of hysterics and hartshorn in consequence. Any other man would have been kicked out of the room for nearly frightening a pretty woman to death in that way; but 'Mad Monkton,' as we have christened him, is a privileged lunatic in Neapolitan society, because he is English, good-looking, and worth thirty thousand a year. He goes out everywhere under the impression that he may meet with somebody who has been let into the secret of the place where the mysterious duel was fought. If you are introduced to him he is sure to ask you whether you know anything about it; but beware of following up the subject after you have answered him, unless you want to make sure that he is out of his senses. In that case, only talk of his uncle, and the result will rather more than satisfy you."

A day or two after this conversation with my friend the *attaché*, I met Monkton at an evening party.

The moment he heard my name mentioned, his face flushed up; he drew me away into a corner, and referring to his cool reception of my advance years ago toward making his acquaintance, asked my pardon for what he termed his inexcusable ingratitude with an earnestness and an agitation which utterly astonished me. His next proceeding was to question me, as my

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friend had said he would, about the place of the mysterious duel.

An extraordinary change came over him while he interrogated me on this point. Instead of looking into my face as they had looked hitherto, his eyes wandered away, and fixed themselves intensely, almost fiercely, either on the perfectly empty wall at our side, or on the vacant space between the wall and ourselves, it was impossible to say which. I had come to Naples from Spain by sea, and briefly told him so, as the best way of satisfying him that I could not assist his inquiries. He pursued them no further; and, mindful of my friend's warning, I took care to lead the conversation to general topics. He looked back at me directly, and, as long as we stood in our corner, his eyes never wandered away again to the empty wall or the vacant space at our side.

Though more ready to listen than to speak, his conversation, when he did talk, had no trace of anything the least like insanity about it. He had evidently read, not generally only, but deeply as well, and could apply his reading with singular felicity to the illustration of almost any subject under discussion, neither obtruding his knowledge absurdly, nor concealing it affectedly. His manner was in itself a standing protest against such a nickname as "Mad Monkton." He was so shy, so quiet, so composed and gentle in all his actions, that at times I should have been almost inclined to call him effeminate. We had a long talk together on the first evening of our meeting; we often saw each other afterward, and never lost a single opportunity of bettering our acquaintance. I felt that he had taken a liking to me, and, in spite of what I had heard about his

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behavior to Miss Elmslie, in spite of the suspicions which the history of his family and his own conduct had arrayed against him, I began to like "Mad Monkton" as much as he liked me. We took many a quiet ride together in the country, and sailed often along the shores of the Bay on either side. But for two eccentricities in his conduct, which I could not at all understand, I should soon have felt as much at my ease in his society as if he had been my own brother.

The first of these eccentricities consisted in the reappearance on several occasions of the odd expression in his eyes which I had first seen when he asked me whether I knew anything about the duel. No matter what we were talking about, or where we happened to be, there were times when he would suddenly look away from my face, now on one side of me, now on the other, but always where there was nothing to see, and always with the same intensity and fierceness in his eyes. This looked so like madness – or hypochondria at the least – that I felt afraid to ask him about it, and always pretended not to observe him.

The second peculiarity in his conduct was that he never referred, while in my company, to the reports about his errand at Naples, and never once spoke of Miss Elmslie, or of his life at Wincot Abbey. This not only astonished me, but amazed those who had noticed our intimacy, and who had made sure that I must be the depository of all his secrets. But the time was near at hand when this mystery, and some other mysteries of which I had no suspicion at that period, were all to be revealed.

I met him one night at a large ball, given by a Russian nobleman, whose name I could not pronounce then, and cannot

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remember now. I had wandered away from reception-room, ballroom, and cardroom, to a small apartment at one extremity of the palace, which was half conservatory, half boudoir, and which had been prettily illuminated for the occasion with Chinese lanterns. Nobody was in the room when I got there. The view over the Mediterranean, bathed in the bright softness of Italian moonlight, was so lovely that I remained for a long time at the window, looking out, and listening to the dance-music which faintly reached me from the ballroom. My thoughts were far away with the relations I had left in England, when I was startled out of them by hearing my name softly pronounced.

I looked round directly, and saw Monkton standing in the room. A livid paleness overspread his face, and his eyes were turned away from me with the same extraordinary expression in them to which I have already alluded.

"Do you mind leaving the ball early to-night?" he asked, still not looking at me.

"Not at all," said I. "Can I do anything for you? Are you ill?"

"No – at least nothing to speak of. Will you come to my rooms?"

"At once, if you like."

"No, not at once. I must go home directly; but don't you come to me for half an hour yet. You have not been at my rooms before, I know, but you will easily find them out; they are close by. There is a card with my address. I must speak to you to-night; my life depends on it. Pray come! for God's sake, come when the half hour is up!"

I promised to be punctual, and he left me directly.

Most people will be easily able to imagine the state of nervous impatience and vague expectation in which I passed the allotted period of delay, after hearing such words as those Monkton had spoken to me. Before the half hour had quite expired I began to make my way out through the ballroom.

At the head of the staircase my friend, the *attaché*, met me.

"What! going away already?" said he.

"Yes, and on a very curious expedition. I am going to Monkton's rooms, by his own invitation."

"You don't mean it! Upon my honor, you're a bold fellow to trust yourself alone with 'Mad Monkton' when the moon is at the full."

"He is ill, poor fellow. Besides, I don't think him half as mad as you do."

"We won't dispute about that; but mark my words, he has not asked you to go where no visitor has ever been admitted before without a special purpose. I predict that you will see or hear something to-night which you will remember for the rest of your life."

We parted. When I knocked at the courtyard gate of the house where Monkton lived, my friend's last words on the palace staircase recurred to me, and, though I had laughed at him when he spoke them, I began to suspect even then that his prediction would be fulfilled.

## CHAPTER III

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The porter who let me into the house where Monkton lived directed me to the floor on which his rooms were situated. On getting upstairs, I found his door on the landing ajar. He heard my footsteps, I suppose, for he called to me to come in before I could knock.

I entered, and found him sitting by the table, with some loose letters in his hand, which he was just tying together into a packet. I noticed, as he asked me to sit down, that his expression looked more composed, though the paleness had not yet left his face. He thanked me for coming; repeated that he had something very important to say to me; and then stopped short, apparently too much embarrassed to proceed. I tried to set him at his ease by assuring him that, if my assistance or advice could be of any use, I was ready to place myself and my time heartily and unreservedly at his service.

As I said this I saw his eyes beginning to wander away from my face – to wander slowly, inch by inch, as it were, until they stopped at a certain point, with the same fixed stare into vacancy which had so often startled me on former occasions. The whole expression of his face altered as I had never yet seen it alter; he sat before me looking like a man in a death-trance.

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"You are very kind," he said, slowly and faintly, speaking, not to me, but in the direction in which his eyes were still fixed. "I know you can help me; but —"

He stopped; his face whitened horribly, and the perspiration broke out all over it. He tried to continue — said a word or two — then stopped again. Seriously alarmed about him, I rose from my chair with the intention of getting him some water from a jug which I saw standing on a side-table.

He sprang up at the same moment. All the suspicions I had ever heard whispered against his sanity flashed over my mind in an instant, and I involuntarily stepped back a pace or two.

"Stop," he said, sweating himself again; "don't mind me; and don't leave your chair. I want — I wish, if you please, to make a little alteration, before we say anything more. Do you mind sitting in a strong light?"

"Not in the least."

I had hitherto been seated in the shade of his reading-lamp, the only light in the room.

As I answered him he rose again, and, going into another apartment, returned with a large lamp in his hand; then took two candles from the side-table, and two others from the chimney piece; placed them all, to my amazement, together, so as to stand exactly between us, and then tried to light them. His hand trembled so that he was obliged to give up the attempt, and allow me to come to his assistance. By his direction, I took the shade off the reading-lamp after I had lit the other lamp and the four candles. When we sat down again, with this concentration of light between us, his better and gentler man-

ner began to return, and while he now addressed me he spoke without the slightest hesitation.

"It is useless to ask whether you have heard the reports about me," he said; "I know that you have. My purpose to-night is to give you some reasonable explanation of the conduct which has produced those reports. My secret has been hitherto confided to one person only; I am now about to trust it to your keeping, with a special object which will appear as I go on. First, however, I must begin by telling you exactly what the great difficulty is which obliges me to be still absent from England. I want your advice and your help; and, to conceal nothing from you, I want also to test your forbearance and your friendly sympathy, before I can venture on thrusting my miserable secret into your keeping. Will you pardon this apparent distrust of your frank and open character – this apparent ingratitude for your kindness toward me ever since we first met?"

I begged him not to speak of these things, but to go on.

"You know," he proceeded, "that I am here to recover the body of my Uncle Stephen, and to carry it back with me to our family burial-place in England, and you must also be aware that I have not yet succeeded in discovering his remains. Try to pass over, for the present, whatever may seem extraordinary and incomprehensible in such a purpose as mine is, and read this newspaper article where the ink-line is traced. It is the only evidence hitherto obtained on the subject of the fatal duel in which my uncle fell, and I want to hear what course of proceeding the perusal of it may suggest to you as likely to be best on my part."

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He handed me an old French newspaper. The substance of what I read there is still so firmly impressed on my memory that I am certain of being able to repeat correctly at this distance of time all the facts which it is necessary for me to communicate to the reader.

The article began, I remember, with editorial remarks on the great curiosity then felt in regard to the fatal duel between the Count St. Lo and Mr. Stephen Monkton, an English gentleman. The writer proceeded to dwell at great length on the extraordinary secrecy in which the whole affair had been involved from first to last, and to express a hope that the publication of a certain manuscript, to which his introductory observations referred, might lead to the production of fresh evidence from other and better-informed quarters. The manuscript had been found among the papers of Monsieur Foulon, Mr. Monkton's second, who had died at Paris of a rapid decline shortly after returning to his home in that city from the scene of the duel. The document was unfinished, having been left incomplete at the very place where the reader would most wish to find it continued. No reason could be discovered for this, and no second manuscript bearing on the all-important subject had been found, after the strictest search among the papers left by the deceased.

The document itself then followed.

It purported to be an agreement privately drawn up between Mr. Monkton's second, Monsieur Foulon, and the Count St. Lo's second, Monsieur Dalville, and contained a statement of all the arrangements for conducting the duel. The paper was dated "Naples, February 22d," and was divided into some

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seven or eight clauses. The first clause described the origin and nature of the quarrel – a very disgraceful affair on both sides, worth neither remembering nor repeating. The second clause stated that, the challenged man having chosen the pistol as his weapon, and the challenger (an excellent swordsman), having, on his side, thereupon insisted that the duel should be fought in such a manner as to make the first fire decisive in its results, the seconds, seeing that fatal consequences must inevitably follow the hostile meeting, determined, first of all, that the duel should be kept a profound secret from everybody, and that the place where it was to be fought should not be made known beforehand, even to the principals themselves. It was added that this excess of precaution had been rendered absolutely necessary in consequence of a recent address from the Pope to the ruling powers in Italy commenting on the scandalous frequency of the practice of dueling, and urgently desiring that the laws against duellists should be enforced for the future with the utmost rigor.

The third clause detailed the manner in which it had been arranged that the duel should be fought.

The pistols having been loaded by the seconds on the ground, the combatants were to be placed thirty paces apart, and were to toss up for the first fire. The man who won was to advance ten paces marked out for him beforehand – and was then to discharge his pistol. If he missed, or failed to disable his opponent, the latter was free to advance, if he chose, the whole remaining twenty paces before he fired in his turn. This arrangement insured the decisive termination of the duel at the

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first discharge of the pistols, and both principals and seconds pledged themselves on either side to abide by it.

The fourth clause stated that the seconds had agreed that the duel should be fought out of the Neapolitan States, but left themselves to be guided by circumstances as to the exact locality in which it should take place. The remaining clauses, so far as I remember them, were devoted to detailing the different precautions to be adopted for avoiding discovery. The duellists and their seconds were to leave Naples in separate parties; were to change carriages several times; were to meet at a certain town, or, failing that, at a certain post-house on the high road from Naples to Rome; were to carry drawing-books, color boxes, and camp-stools, as if they had been artists out on a sketching-tour; and were to proceed to the place of the duel on foot, employing no guides, for fear of treachery. Such general arrangements as these, and others for facilitating the flight of the survivors after the affair was over, formed the conclusion of this extraordinary document, which was signed, in initials only, by both the seconds.

Just below the initials appeared the beginning of a narrative, dated "Paris," and evidently intended to describe the duel itself with extreme minuteness. The hand-writing was that of the deceased second.

Monsieur Foulon, tire gentleman in question, stated his belief that circumstances might transpire which would render an account by an eyewitness of the hostile meeting between St. Lo and Mr. Monkton an important document. He proposed, therefore, as one of the seconds, to testify that the duel had been fought in exact accordance with the terms of the agree-

ment, both the principals conducting themselves like men of gallantry and honor (!). And he further announced that, in order not to compromise any one, he should place the paper containing his testimony in safe hands, with strict directions that it was on no account to be opened except in a case of the last emergency.

After thus preamble, Monsieur Foulon related that the duel had been fought two days after the drawing up of the agreement, in a locality to which accident had conducted the dueling party. (The name of the place was not mentioned, nor even the neighborhood in which it was situated.) The men having been placed according to previous arrangement, the Count St. Lo had won the toss for the first fire, had advanced his ten paces, and had shot his opponent in the body. Mr. Monkton did not immediately fall, but staggered forward some six or seven paces, discharged his pistol ineffectually at the count, and dropped to the ground a dead man. Monsieur Foulon then stated that he tore a leaf from his pocketbook, wrote on it a brief description of the manner in which Mr. Monkton had died, and pinned the paper to his clothes; this proceeding having been rendered necessary by the peculiar nature of the plan organized on the spot for safely disposing of the dead body. What this plan was, or what was done with the corpse, did not appear, for at this important point the narrative abruptly broke off.

A foot-note in the newspaper merely stated the manner in which the document had been obtained for publication, and repeated the announcement contained in the editor's introductory remarks, that no continuation had been found by the

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persons intrusted with the care of Monsieur Foualon's papers. I have now given the whole substance of what I read, and have mentioned all that was then known of Mr. Stephen Monkton's death.

When I gave the newspaper back to Alfred he was too much agitated to speak, but he reminded me by a sign that he was anxiously waiting to hear what I had to say. My position was a very trying and a very painful one. I could hardly tell what consequences might not follow any want of caution on my part, and could think at first of no safer plan than questioning him carefully before I committed myself either one way or the other.

"Will you excuse me if I ask you a question or two before I give you my advice?" said I.

He nodded impatiently.

"Yes, yes — any questions you like."

"Were you at any time in the habit of seeing your uncle frequently?"

"I never saw him more than twice in my life — on each occasion when I was a mere child."

"Then you could have had no very strong personal regard for him?"

"Regard for him! I should have been ashamed to feel any regard for him. He disgraced us wherever he went."

"May I ask if any family motive is involved in your anxiety to recover his remains?"

"Family motives may enter into it among others — but why do you ask?"

"Because, having heard that you employ the police to assist your search, I was anxious to know whether you had stimulat-

ed their superiors to make them do their best in your service by giving some strong personal reasons at headquarters for the very unusual project which has brought you here."

"I give no reasons. I pay for the work I want done, and, in return for my liberality, I am treated with the most infamous indifference on all sides. A stranger in the country, and badly acquainted with the language, I can do nothing to help myself. The authorities, both at Rome and in this place, pretend to assist me, pretend to search and inquire as I would have them search and inquire, and do nothing more. I am insulted, laughed at, almost to my face."

"Do you not think it possible – mind, I have no wish to excuse the misconduct of the authorities, and do not share in any such opinion myself – but do you not think it likely that the police may doubt whether you are in earnest?"

"Not in earnest?" he cried, starting up and confronting me fiercely, with wild eyes and quickened breath. "Not in earnest! You think I'm not in earnest too. I know you think it, though you tell me you don't. Stop; before we say another word, your own eyes shall convince you. Come here – only for a minute – only for one minute!"

I followed him into his bedroom, which opened out of the sitting-room. At one side of his bed stood a large packing-case of plain wood, upward of seven feet in length.

"Open the lid and look in," he said, "while I hold the candle so that you can see."

I obeyed his directions, and discovered to my astonishment that the packing-case contained a leaden coffin, magnificently emblazoned with the arms of the Monkton family, and in-

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scribed in old-fashioned letters with the name of "Stephen Monkton," his age and the manner of his death being added underneath.

"I keep his coffin ready for him," whispered Alfred, close at my ear. "Does that look like earnest?"

It looked more like insanity – so like that I shrank from answering him.

"Yes! yes! I see you are convinced," he continued quickly; "we may go back into the next room, and may talk without restraint on either side now."

On returning to our places, I mechanically moved my chair away from the table. My mind was by this time in such a state of confusion and uncertainty about what it would be best for me to say or do next, that I forgot for the moment the position he had assigned to me when we lit the candles. He reminded me of this directly.

"Don't move away," he said, very earnestly; "keep on sitting in the light; pray do! I'll soon tell you why I am so particular about that. But first give me your advice; help me in my great distress and suspense. Remember, you promised me you would."

I made an effort to collect my thoughts, and succeeded. It was useless to treat the affair otherwise than seriously in his presence; it would have been cruel not to have advised him as I best could.

"You know," I said, "that two days after the drawing up of the agreement at Naples, the duel was fought out of the Neapolitan States. This fact has of course led you to the conclusion

that all inquiries about localities had better be confined to the Roman territory?"

"Certainly; the search, such as it is, has been made there, and there only. If I can believe the police, they and their agents have inquired for the place where the duel was fought (offering a large reward in my name to the person who can discover it) all along the high road from Naples to Rome. They have also circulated – at least so they tell me – descriptions of the duellists and their seconds; have left an agent to superintend investigations at the post-house, and another at the town mentioned as meeting-points in the agreement; and have endeavored, by correspondence with foreign authorities, to trace the Count St. Lo and Monsieur Dalville to their place or places of refuge. All these efforts, supposing them to have been really made, have hitherto proved utterly fruitless."

"My impression is," said I, after a moment's consideration, "that all inquiries made along the high road, or anywhere near Rome, are likely to be made in vain. As to the discovery of your uncle's remains, that is, I think, identical with the discovery of the place where he was shot; for those engaged in the duel would certainly not risk detection by carrying a corpse any distance with them in their flight. The place, then, is all that we want to find out. Now let us consider for a moment. The dueling-party changed carriages; traveled separately, two and two; doubtless took roundabout roads; stopped at the post-house and the town as a blind; walked, perhaps, a considerable distance unguided. Depend upon it, such precautions as these (which we know they must have employed) left them very little time out of the two days – though they might start at sunrise

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and not stop at night-fall – for straightforward traveling. My belief therefore is, that the duel was fought somewhere near the Neapolitan frontier; and, if I had been the police agent who conducted the search, I should only have pursued it parallel with the frontier, starting from west to east till I got up among the lonely places in the mountains. That is my idea; do you think it worth anything?"

His face flushed all over in an instant. "I think it an inspiration!" he cried. "Not a day is to be lost in carrying out our plan. The police are not to be trusted with it. I must start myself to-morrow morning; and you –"

He stopped; his face grew suddenly pale; he sighed heavily; his eyes wandered once more into the fixed look at vacancy; and the rigid, deathly expression fastened again upon all his features.

"I must tell you my secret before I talk of to-morrow," he proceeded, faintly. "If I hesitated any longer at confessing everything, I should be unworthy of your past kindness, unworthy of the help which it is my last hope that you will gladly give me when you have heard all."

I begged him to wait until he was more composed, until he was better able to speak; but he did not appear to notice what I said. Slowly, and struggling as it seemed against himself, he turned a little away from me, and, bending his head over the table, supported it on his hand. The pocket of letters with which I had seen him occupied when I came in lay just beneath his eyes. He looked down on it steadfastly when he next spoke to me.

## CHAPTER IV

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"You were born, I believe, in our county," he said; "perhaps, therefore, you may have heard at some time of a curious old prophecy about our family, which is still preserved among the traditions of Wincot Abbey?"

"I have heard of such a prophecy," I answered, "but I never knew in what terms it was expressed. It professed to predict the extinction of your family, or something of that sort, did it not?"

"No inquiries," he went on, "have traced back that prophecy to the time when it was first made; none of our family records tell us anything of its origin. Old servants and old tenants of ours remember to have heard it from their fathers and grandfathers. The monks, whom we succeeded in the Abbey in Henry the Eighth's time, got knowledge of it in some way, for I myself discovered the rhymes, in which we know the prophecy to have been preserved from a very remote period, written on a blank leaf of one of the Abbey manuscripts. These are the verses, if verses they deserve to be called:

*When in Wincot wait a place  
Waits for one of Monkton's race —  
When that one forlorn shall lie*

*Graveless under open sky,  
Beggared of six feet of earth,  
Though lord of acres from his birth —  
That shall be a certain sign  
Of the end of Monkton's line.  
Dwindling ever faster, faster,  
Dwindling to the last-left master;  
From mortal ken, from light of day,  
Monkton's race shall pass away."*

"The prediction seems almost vague enough to have been uttered by an ancient oracle," said I, observing that he waited, after repeating the verses, as if expecting me to say something.

"Vague or not, it is being accomplished," he returned. "I am now the 'last-left master' — the last of that elder line of our family at which the prediction points; and the corpse of Stephen Monkton is not in the vaults of Wincot Abbey. Wait before you exclaim against me. I have more to say about this. Long before the Abbey was ours, when we lived in the ancient manor-house near it (the very ruins of which have long since disappeared), the family burying-place was in the vault under the Abbey chapel. Whether in those remote times the prediction against us was known and dreaded or not, this much is certain every one of the Monksions (whether living at the Abbey or on the smaller estate in Scotland) was buried in Wincot vault, no matter at what risk or what sacrifice. In the fierce fighting days of the olden time, the bodies of my ancestors who fell in foreign places were recovered and brought back to Wincot, though it often cost not heavy ransoms only, but

desperate bloodshed as well, to obtain them. This superstition, if you please to call it so, has never died out of the family from that time to the present day; for centuries the succession of the dead in the vault at the Abbey has been unbroken – absolutely unbroken – until now. The place mentioned in the prediction as waiting to be filled is Stephen Monkton's place; the voice that cries vainly to the earth for shelter is the spirit-voice of the dead. As surely as if I saw it, I know that they have left him unburied on the ground where he fell!"

He stopped me before I could utter a word in remonstrance by slowly rising to his feet, and pointing in the same direction toward which his eyes had wandered a short time since.

"I can guess what you want to ask me," he exclaimed, sternly and loudly; "you want to ask me how I can be mad enough to believe in a doggerel prophecy uttered in an age of superstition to awe the most ignorant hearers. I answer" (at those words his voice sank suddenly to a whisper), "I answer, because Stephen Monkton *himself stands there at this moment confirming me in my belief.*"

Whether it was the awe and horror that looked out ghostly from his face as he confronted me, whether it was that I had never hitherto fairly believed in the reports about his madness, and that the conviction of their truth now forced itself upon me on a sudden, I know not, but I felt my blood curdling as he spoke, and I knew in my own heart, as I sat there speechless, that I dare not turn round and look where he was still pointing close at my side.

"I see there," he went on, in the same whispering voice, "the figure of a dark-complexioned man standing up with his

head uncovered. One of his hands, still clutching a pistol, has fallen to his side; the other presses a bloody handkerchief over his mouth. The spasm of mortal agony convulses his features; but I know them for the features of a swarthy man who twice frightened me by taking me up in his arms when I was a child at Wincot Abbey. I asked the nurses at the time who that man was, and they told me it was my uncle, Stephen Monkton. Plainly, as if he stood there living, I see him now at your side, with the death-glare in his great black eyes; and so have I ever seen him, since the moment when he was shot; at home and abroad, waking or sleeping, day and night, we are always together, wherever I go!"

His whispering tones sank into almost inaudible murmuring as he pronounced these last words. From the direction and expression of his eyes, I suspected that he was speaking to the apparition. If I had beheld it myself at that moment, it would have been, I think, a less horrible sight to witness than to see him, as I saw him now, muttering inarticulately at vacancy. My own nerves were more shaken than I could have thought possible by what had passed. A vague dread of being near him in his present mood came over me, and I moved back a step or two.

He noticed the action instantly.

"Don't go! pray – pray don't go! Have I alarmed you? Don't you believe me? Do the lights make your eyes ache? I only asked you to sit in the glare of the candles because I could not bear to see the light that always shines from the phantom there at dusk shining over you as you sat in the shadow. Don't go – don't leave me yet!"

There was an utter forlornness, an unspeakable misery in his face as he spoke these words, which gave me back my self-possession by the simple process of first moving me to pity. I resumed my chair, and said that I would stay with him as long as he wished.

"Thank you a thousand times. You are patience and kindness itself," he said, going back to his former place and resuming his former gentleness of manner. "Now that I have got over my first confession of the misery that follows me in secret wherever I go, I think I can tell you calmly all that remains to be told. You see, as I said, my Uncle Stephen" he turned away his head quickly, and looked down at the table as the name passed his lips – "my Uncle Stephen came twice to Wincot while I was a child, and on both occasions frightened me dreadfully. He only took me up in his arms and spoke to me – very kindly, as I afterward heard, for *him* – but he terrified me, nevertheless. Perhaps I was frightened at his great stature, his swarthy complexion, and his thick black hair and mustache, as other children might have been; perhaps the mere sight of him had some strange influence on me which I could not then understand and cannot now explain. However it was, I used to dream of him long after he had gone away, and to fancy that he was stealing on me to catch me up in his arms whenever I was left in the dark. The servants who took care of me found this out, and used to threaten me with my Uncle Stephen whenever I was perverse and difficult to manage. As I grew up, I still retained my vague dread and abhorrence of our absent relative. I always listened intently, yet without knowing why, whenever his name was mentioned by my father or

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my mother – listened with an unaccountable presentiment that something terrible had happened to him, or was about to happen to me. This feeling only changed when I was left alone in the Abbey; and then it seemed to merge into the eager curiosity which had begun to grow on me, rather before that time, about the origin of the ancient prophecy predicting the extinction of our race. Are you following me?"

"I follow every word with the closest attention."

"You must know, then, that I had first found out some fragments of the old rhyme in which the prophecy occurs quoted as a curiosity in an antiquarian book in the library. On the page opposite this quotation had been pasted a rude old wood-cut, representing a dark-haired man, whose face was so strangely like what I remembered of my Uncle Stephen that the portrait absolutely startled me. When I asked my father about this – it was then just before his death – he either knew, or pretended to know, nothing of it; and when I afterward mentioned the prediction he fretfully changed the subject. It was just the same with our chaplain when I spoke to him. He said the portrait had been done centuries before my uncle was born, and called the prophecy doggerel and nonsense. I used to argue with him on the latter point, asking why we Catholics, who believed that the gift of working miracles had never departed from certain favored persons, might not just as well believe that the gift of prophecy had never departed, either? He would not dispute with me; he would only say that I must not waste time in thinking of such trifles; that I had more imagination than was good for me, and must suppress instead of exciting it. Such advice as this only irritated my curiosity. I determined

secretly to search throughout the oldest uninhabited part of the Abbey, and to try if I could not find out from forgotten family records what the portrait was, and when the prophecy had been first written or uttered. Did you ever pass a day alone in the long-deserted chambers of an ancient house?"

"Never! such solitude as that is not at all to my taste."

"Ah! what a life it was when I began my search. I should like to live it over again. Such tempting suspense, such strange discoveries, such wild fancies, such intrinsically terrifying, all belonged to that life. Only think of breaking open the door of a room which no living soul had entered before you for nearly a hundred years; think of the first step forward into a region of airless, awful stillness, where the light falls faint and sickly through closed windows and rotting curtains; think of the ghostly creaking of the old floor that cries out on you for treading on it, step as softly as you will; think of arms, helmets, weird tapestries of by-gone days, that seem to be moving out on you from the walls as you first walk up to them in the dim light; think of prying into great cabinets and iron-clasped chests, not knowing what horrors may appear when you bear them open; of poring over their contents till twilight stole on you and darkness grew terrible in the lonely place; of trying to leave it, and not being able to go, as if something held you; of wind wailing at you outside; of shadows darkening round you, and closing you up in obscurity within – only think of these things, and you may imagine the fascination of suspense and terror in such a life as mine was in those past days."

(I shrank from imagining that life: it was bad enough to see its results, as I saw them before me now.)

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"Well, my search lasted months and months; then it was suspended a little; then resumed. In whatever direction I pursued it I always found something to lure me on. Terrible confessions of past crimes, shocking proofs of secret wickedness that had been hidden securely from all eyes but mine, came to light. Sometimes these discoveries were associated with particular parts of the *Abbey*, which have had a horrible interest of their own for me ever since; sometimes with certain old portraits in the picture-gallery, which I actually dreaded to look at after what I had found out. There were periods when the results of this search of mine so horrified me that I determined to give it up entirely; but I never could persevere in my resolution; the temptation to go on seemed at certain intervals to get too strong for me, and then I yielded to it again and again. At last I found the book that had belonged to the monks with the whole of the prophecy written in the blank leaf. This first success encouraged me to get back farther yet in the family records. I had discovered nothing hitherto of the identity of the mysterious portrait; but the same intuitive conviction which had assured me of its extraordinary resemblance to my Uncle Stephen seemed also to assure me that he must be more closely connected with the prophecy, and must know more of it than any one else. I had no means of holding any communication with him, no means of satisfying myself whether this strange idea of mine were right or wrong, until the day when my doubts were settled forever by the same terrible proof which is now present to me in this very room."

He paused for a moment, and looked at me intently and suspiciously; then asked if I believed all he had said to me so

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far. My instant reply in the affirmative seemed to satisfy his doubts, and he went on.

"On a fine evening in February I was standing alone in one of the deserted rooms of the western turret at the Abbey, looking at the sunset. Just before the sun went down I felt a sensation stealing over me which it is impossible to explain. I saw nothing, heard nothing, knew nothing. This utter self-oblivion came suddenly; it was not fainting, for I did not fall to the ground, did not move an inch from my place. If such a thing could be, I should say it was the temporary separation of soul and body without death; but all description of my situation at that time is impossible. Call my state what you will, trance or catalepsy, I know that I remained standing by the window utterly unconscious – dead, mind and body – until the sun had set. Then I came to my senses again; and then, when I opened my eyes, there was the apparition of Stephen Monkton standing opposite to me, faintly luminous, just as it stands opposite me at this very moment by your side."

"Was this before the news of the duel reached England?" I asked.

"Two weeks before the news of it reached us at Wincot. And even when we heard of the duel, we did not hear of the day on which it was fought. I only found that out when the document which you have read was published in the French newspaper. The date of that document, you will remember, is February 22d, and it is stated that the duel was fought two days afterward. I wrote down in my pocketbook, on the evening when I saw the phantom, the day of the month on which it first appeared to me. That day was the 24th of February."

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He paused again, as if expecting me to say something. After the words he had just spoken, what could I say? what could I think?

"Even in the first horror of first seeing the apparition," he went on, "the prophecy against our house came to my mind, and with it the conviction that I beheld before me, in that spectral presence, the warning of my own doom. As soon as I recovered a little, I determined, nevertheless, to test the reality of what I saw; to find out whether I was the dupe of my own diseased fancy or not. I left the turret; the phantom left it with me. I made an excuse to have the drawing-room at the Abbey brilliantly lighted up; the figure was still opposite me. I walked out into the park; it was there in the clear starlight. I went away from home, and traveled many miles to the seaside; still the tall dark man in his death agony was with me. After this I strove against the fatality no more. I returned to the Abbey, and tried to resign myself to my misery. But this was not to be. I had a hope that was dearer to me than my own life; I had one treasure belonging to me that I shuddered at the prospect of losing; and when the phantom presence stood a warning obstacle between me and this one treasure, this dearest hope, then my misery grew heavier than I could bear. You must know what I am alluding to; you must have heard often that I was engaged to be married?"

"Yes, often. I have some acquaintance myself with Miss Elmslie."

"You never can know all that she has sacrificed for me – never can imagine what I have felt for years and years past" – his voice trembled, and the tears came into his eyes – "but I

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dare not trust myself to speak of that; the thought of the old happy days in the Abbey almost breaks my heart now. Let me get back to the other subject. I must tell you that I kept the frightful vision which pursued me, at all times and in all places, a secret from everybody, knowing the vile reports about my having inherited madness from my family, and fearing that an unfair advantage would be taken of any confession that I might make. Though the phantom always stood opposite to me, and therefore always appeared either before or by the side of any person to whom I spoke, I soon schooled myself to hide from others that I was looking at it except on rare occasions, when I have perhaps betrayed myself to you. But my self-possession availed me nothing with Ada. The day of our marriage was approaching."

He stopped and shuddered. I waited in silence till he had controlled himself.

"Think," he went on, "think of what I must have suffered at looking always on that hideous vision whenever I looked on my betrothed wife! Think of my taking her hand, and seeming to take it through the figure of the apparition! Think of the calm angel-face and the tortured specter-face being always together whenever my eyes met hers! Think of this, and you will not wonder that I betrayed my secret to her. She eagerly entreated to know the worst — nay, more, she insisted on knowing it. At her bidding I told all, and then left her free to break our engagement. The thought of death was in my heart as I spoke the parting words — death by my own act, if life still held out after our separation. She suspected that thought; she knew it, and never left me till her good influence had destroyed it for-

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ever. But for her I should not have been alive now; but for her I should never have attempted the project which has brought me here."

"Do you mean that it was at Miss Elmslie's suggestion that you came to Naples?" I asked, in amazement.

"I mean that what she said suggested the design which has brought me to Naples," he answered. "While I believed that the phantom had appeared to me as the fatal messenger of death, there was no comfort – there was misery, rather, in hearing her say that no power on earth should make her desert me, and that she would live for me, and for me only, through every trial. But it was far different when we afterward reasoned together about the purpose which the apparition had come to fulfill – far different when she showed me that its mission might be for good instead of for evil, and that the warning it was sent to give might be to my profit instead of to my loss. At those words, the new idea which gave the new hope of life came to me in an instant. I believed then, what I believe now, that I have a supernatural warrant for my errand here. In that faith I live; without it I should die. *She* never ridiculed it, never scorned it as insanity. Mark what I say! The spirit that appeared to me in the Abbey – that has never left me since – that stands there now by your side, warns me to escape from the fatality which hangs over our race, and commands me, if I would avoid it, to bury the unburied dead. Mortal loves and mortal interests must bow to that awful bidding. The specter-presence will never leave me till I have sheltered the corpse that cries to the earth to cover it! I dare not return – I dare not marry till I have filled the place that is empty in *Wincot* vault."

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His eyes flashed and dilated – his voice deepened – a fanatic ecstasy shone in his expression as he uttered these words. Shocked and grieved as I was, I made no attempt to remonstrate or to reason with him. It would have been useless to have referred to any of the usual commonplaces about optical delusions or diseased imaginations – worse than useless to have attempted to account by natural causes for any of the extraordinary coincidences and events of which he had spoken. Briefly as he had referred to Miss Elmslie, he had said enough to show me that the only hope of the poor girl who loved him best and had known him longest of any one was in humoring his delusions to the last. How faithfully she still clung to the belief that she could restore him! How resolutely was she sacrificing herself to his morbid fancies, in the hope of a happy future that might never come! Little as I knew of Miss Elmslie, the mere thought of her situation, as I now reflected on it, made me feel sick at heart.

“They call me Mad Monkton!” he exclaimed, suddenly breaking the silence between us during the last few minutes, “Here and in England everybody believes I am out of my senses except Ada and you. She has been my salvation, and you will be my salvation too. Something told me that when I first met you walking in the Villa Peale. I struggled against the strong desire that was in me to trust my secret to you, but I could resist it no longer when I saw you to-night at the ball; the phantom seemed to draw me on to you as you stood alone in the quiet room. Tell me more of that idea of yours about finding the place where the duel was fought. If I set out to-morrow to seek for it myself, where must I go to first? where?” He stopped; his

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strength was evidently becoming exhausted, and his mind was growing confused. "What am I to do? I can't remember. You know everything – will you not help me? My misery has made me unable to help myself"

He stopped, murmured something about failing if he went to the frontier alone, and spoke confusedly of delays that might be fatal, then tried to utter the name of "Ada"; but, in pronouncing the first letter, his voice faltered, and, turning abruptly from me, he burst into tears.

My pity for him got the better of my prudence at that moment, and without thinking of responsibilities, I promised at once to do for him whatever he asked. The wild triumph in his expression as he started up and seized my hand showed me that I had better have been more cautious; but it was too late now to retract what I had said. The next best thing to do was to try if I could not induce him to compose himself a little, and then to go away and think coolly over the whole affair by myself.

"Yes, yes," he rejoined, in answer to the few words I now spoke to try and calm him, "don't be afraid about me. After what you have said, I'll answer for my own coolness and composure under all emergencies. I have been so long used to the apparition that I hardly feel its presence at all except on rare occasions. Besides, I have here in this little packet of letters the medicine for every malady of the sick heart. They are Ada's letters; I read them to calm me whenever my misfortune seems to get the better of my endurance. I wanted that half hour to read them in to-night before you came, to make myself fit to see you, and I shall go through them again after you are gone;

so, once more, don't be afraid about me. I know I shall succeed with your help, and Ada shall thank you as you deserve to be thanked when we get back to England. If you hear the fools at Naples talk about my being mad, don't trouble yourself to contradict them; the scandal is so contemptible that it must end by contradicting itself."

I left him, promising to return early the next day.

When I got back to my hotel, I felt that any idea of sleeping after all that I had seen and heard was out of the question; so I lit my pipe, and, sitting by the window – how it refreshed my mind just then to look at the calm moonlight! – tried to think what it would be best to do. In the first place, any appeal to doctors or to Alfred's friends in England was out of the question. I could not persuade myself that his intellect was sufficiently disordered to justify me, under existing circumstances, in disclosing the secret which he had intrusted to my keeping. In the second place, all attempts on my part to induce him to abandon the idea of searching out his uncle's remains would be utterly useless after what I had incautiously said to him. Having settled these two conclusions, the only really great difficulty which remained to perplex me was whether I was justified in aiding him to execute his extraordinary purpose.

Supposing that, with my help, he found Mr. Monkton's body, and took it back with him to England, was it right in me thus to lend myself to promoting the marriage which would most likely follow these events – a marriage which it might be the duty of every one to prevent at all hazards? This set me thinking about the extent of his madness, or to speak more mildly and more correctly, of his delusion. Sure he certainly

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was on all ordinary subjects; nay, in all the narrative parts of what he had said to me on this very evening he had spoken clearly and connectedly. As for the story of the apparition, other men, with intellects as clear as the intellects of their neighbors had fancied themselves pursued by a phantom, and had even written about it in a high strain of philosophical speculation. It was plain that the real hallucination in the case now before me lay in Monkton's conviction of the truth of the old prophecy, and in his idea that the fancied apparition was a supernatural warning to him to evade its denunciations; and it was equally clear that both delusions had been produced, in the first instance, by the lonely life he had led acting on a naturally excitable temperament, which was rendered further liable to moral disease by an hereditary taint of insanity.

Was this curable? Miss Elmslie, who knew him far better than I did, seemed by her conduct to think so. Had I any reason or right to determine offhand that she was mistaken? Supposing I refused to go to the frontier with him, he would then most certainly depart by himself, to commit all sorts of errors, and perhaps to meet with all sorts of accidents; while I, an idle man, with my time entirely at my own disposal, was stopping at Naples, and leaving him to his fate after I had suggested the plan of his expedition, and had encouraged him to confide in me. In this way I kept turning the subject over and over again in my mind, being quite free, let me add, from looking at it in any other than a practical point of view. I firmly believed, as a derider of all ghost stories, that Alfred was deceiving himself in fancying that he had seen the apparition of his uncle before the news of Mr. Monkton's death reached England, and I was

on this account, therefore, uninfluenced by the slightest infection of my unhappy friend's delusions when I at last fairly decided to accompany him in his extraordinary search. Possibly my *harum-scarum* fondness for excitement at that time biased me a little in forming my resolution; but I must add, in common justice to myself, that I also acted from motives of real sympathy for Monkton, and from a sincere wish to allay, if I could, the anxiety of the poor girl who was still so faithfully waiting and hoping for him far away in England.

Certain arrangements preliminary to our departure, which I found myself obliged to make after a second interview with Alfred, betrayed the object of our journey to most of our Neapolitan friends. The astonishment of everybody was of course unbounded, and the nearly universal suspicion that I must be as mad in my way as Monkton himself showed itself pretty plainly in my presence. Some people actually tried to combat my resolution by telling me what a shameless profligate Stephen Monkton had been – as if I had a strong personal interest in hurting out his remains! Ridicule moved me as little as any arguments of this sort; my mind was made up, and I was as obstinate then as I am now.

In two days' time I had got everything ready, and had ordered the traveling carriage to the door some hours earlier than we had originally settled. We were jovially threatened with "a parting cheer" by all our English acquaintances, and I thought it desirable to avoid this on my friend's account; for he had been more excited, as it was, by the preparations for the journey than I at all liked. Accordingly, soon after sun-

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rise, without a soul in the street to stare at us, we privately left Naples.

Nobody will wonder, I think, that I experienced some difficulty in realizing my own position, and shrank instinctively from looking forward a single day into the future, when I now found myself starting, in company with "Mad Monkton," to hunt for the body of a dead duelist all along the frontier line of the Roman States!

## CHAPTER V

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I had settled it in my own mind that we had better make the town of Fondi, close on the frontier, our headquarters, to begin with, and I had arranged, with the assistance of the embassy, that the leaden coffin should follow us so far, securely nailed up in its packing-case. Besides our passports, we were well furnished with letters of introduction to the local authorities at most of the important frontier towns, and, to crown all, we had money enough at our command (thanks to Monkton's vast fortune) to make sure of the services of any one whom we wanted to assist us all along our line of search. These various resources insured us every facility for action, provided always that we succeeded in discovering the body of the dead duelist. But, in the very probable event of our failing to do this, our future prospects – more especially after the responsibility I had undertaken – were of anything but an agreeable nature to contemplate. I confess I felt uneasy, almost hopeless, as we posted, in the dazzling Italian sunshine, along the road to Fondi.

We made an easy two days' journey of it; for I had insisted, on Monkton's account, that we should travel slowly.

On the first day the excessive agitation of my companion a little alarmed me; he showed, in many ways, more symptoms of

a disordered mind than I had yet observed in him. On the second day, however, he seemed to get accustomed to contemplate calmly the new idea of the search on which we were bent, and, except on one point, he was cheerful and composed enough. Whenever his dead uncle formed the subject of conversation, he still persisted – on the strength of the old prophecy, and under the influence of the apparition which he saw, or thought he saw always – in asserting that the corpse of Stephen Monkton, wherever it was, lay yet unburied. On every other topic he deferred to me with the utmost readiness and docility; on this he maintained his strange opinion with an obstinacy which set reason and persuasion alike at defiance.

On the third day we rested at Fondi. The packing-case, with the coffin in it, reached us, and was deposited in a safe place under lock and key. We engaged some mules, and found a man to act as guide who knew the country thoroughly. It occurred to me that we had better begin by confiding the real object of our journey only to the most trustworthy people we could find among the better-educated classes. For this reason we followed, in one respect, the example of the fatal dueling-party, by starting, early on the morning of the fourth day, with sketch-books and color-boxes, as if we were only artists in search of the picturesque.

After traveling some hours in a northerly direction within the Roman frontier, we halted to rest ourselves and our mules at a wild little village far out of the track of tourists in general.

The only person of the smallest importance in the place was the priest, and to him I addressed my first inquiries, leav-

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ing Monkton to await my return with the guide. I spoke Italian quite fluently, and correctly enough for my purpose, and was extremely polite and cautious in introducing my business, but in spite of all the pains I took, I only succeeded in frightening and bewildering the poor priest more and more with every fresh word I said to him. The idea of a dueling-party and a dead man seemed to scare him out of his senses. He bowed, fidgeted, cast his eyes up to heaven, and piteously shrugging his shoulders, told me, with rapid Italian circumlocution, that he had not the faintest idea of what I was talking about. This was my first failure. I confess I was weak enough to feel a little dispirited when I rejoined Monkton and the guide.

After the heat of the day was over we resumed our journey.

About three miles from the village, the road, or rather cart-track, branched off in two directions. The path to the right, our guide informed us, led up among the mountains to a convent about six miles off. If we penetrated beyond the convent we should soon reach the Neapolitan frontier. The path to the left led far inward on the Roman territory, and would conduct us to a small town where we could sleep for the night. Now the Roman territory presented the first and fittest field for our search, and the convent was always within reach, supposing we returned to Fondi unsuccessful. Besides, the path to the left led over the widest part of the country we were starting to explore, and I was always for vanquishing the greatest difficulty first; so we decided manfully on turning to the left. The expedition in which this resolution involved us lasted a whole week, and produced no results. We discovered absolutely nothing, and

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returned to our headquarters at Fondi so completely baffled that we did not know whither to turn our steps next.

I was made much more uneasy by the effect of our failure on Monkton than by the failure itself. His resolution appeared to break down altogether as soon as we began to retrace our steps.

He became first fretful and capricious, then silent and desponding. Finally, he sank into a lethargy of body and mind that seriously alarmed me. On the morning after our return to Fondi he showed a strange tendency to sleep incessantly, which made me suspect the existence of some physical malady in his brain. The whole day he hardly exchanged a word with me, and seemed to be never fairly awake. Early the next morning I went into his room, and found him as silent and lethargic as ever. His servant, who was with us, informed me that Alfred had once or twice before exhibited such physical symptoms of mental exhaustion as we were now observing during his father's lifetime at Wincot Abbey. This piece of information made me feel easier, and left my mind free to return to the consideration of the errand which had brought us to Fondi.

I resolved to occupy the time until my companion got better in prosecuting our search by myself. That path to the right hand which led to the convent had not yet been explored. If I set off to trace it, I need not be away from Monkton more than one night, and I should at least be able, on my return, to give him the satisfaction of knowing that one more uncertainty regarding the place of the duel had been cleared up. These considerations decided me. I left a message for my friend in case he

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asked where I had gone, and set out once more for the village at which we had halted when starting on our first expedition.

Intending to walk to the convent, I parted company with the guide and the mules where the track branched off, leaving them to go back to the village and await my return.

For the first four miles the path gently ascended through an open country, then became abruptly much steeper, and led me deeper and deeper among thickets and endless woods. By the time my watch informed me that I must have nearly walked my appointed distance, the view was bounded on all sides and the sky was shut out overhead by an impervious screen of leaves and branches. I still followed my only guide, the steep path; and in ten minutes, emerging suddenly on a plot of tolerably clear and level ground, I saw the convent before me.

It was a dark, low, sinister-looking place. Not a sign of life or movement was visible anywhere about it. Green stains streaked the once white facade of the chapel in all directions. Moss clustered thick in every crevice of the heavy scowling wall that surrounded the convent. Long lank weeds grew out of the fissures of roof and parapet, and, drooping far downward, waved wearily in and out of the barred dormitory windows. The very cross opposite the entrance-gate, with a shocking life-sized figure in wood nailed to it, was so beset at the base with crawling creatures, and looked so slimy, green, and rotten all the way up, that I absolutely shrank from it.

A bell-rope with a broken handle hung by the gate. I approached it – hesitated, I hardly knew why – looked up at the convent again, and then walked round to the back of the building, partly to gain time to consider what I had better do

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next, partly from an unaccountable curiosity that urged me, strangely to myself, to see all I could of the outside of the place before I attempted to gain admission at the gate.

At the back of the convent I found an outhouse, built on to the wall – a clumsy, decayed building, with the greater part of the roof fallen in, and with a jagged hole in one of its sides, where in all probability a window had once been. Behind the outhouse the trees grew thicker than ever. As I looked toward them I could not determine whether the ground beyond me rose or fell – whether it was grassy, or earthy, or rocky. I could see nothing but the all-pervading leaves, brambles, ferns, and long grass.

Not a sound broke the oppressive stillness. No bird's note rose from the leafy wilderness around me; no voices spoke in the convent garden behind the scowling wall; no clock struck in the chapel-tower; no dog barked in the ruined outhouse. The dead silence deepened the solitude of the place inexpressibly. I began to feel it weighing on my spirits – the more, because woods were never favorite places with me to walk in. The sort of pastoral happiness which poets often represent when they sing of life in the woods never, to my mind, has half the charm of life on the mountain or in the plain. When I am in a wood, I miss the boundless loveliness of the sky, and the delicious softness that distance gives to the earthly view beneath. I feel oppressively the change which the free air suffers when it gets imprisoned among leaves, and I am always awed, rather than pleased, by that mysterious still light which shines with such a strange dim luster in deep places among trees. It may convict me of want of taste and absence of due feeling for

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the marvelous beauties of vegetation, but I must frankly own that I never penetrate far into a wood without finding that the getting out of it again is the pleasantest part of my walk – the getting out on to the barest down, the wildest hill-side, the bleakest mountain top – the getting out anywhere, so that I can see the sky over me and the view before me as far as my eye can reach.

After such a confession as I have now made, it will appear surprising to no one that I should have felt the strongest possible inclination, while I stood by the ruined outhouse, to retrace my steps at once, and make the best of my way out of the wood. I had, indeed, actually turned to depart, when the remembrance of the errand which had brought me to the convent suddenly stayed my feet. It seemed doubtful whether I should be admitted into the building if I rang the bell; and more than doubtful, if I were let in, whether the inhabitants would be able to afford me any clue to the information of which I was in search. However, it was my duty to Monkton to leave no means of helping him in his desperate object untried; so I resolved to go round to the front of the convent again, and ring at the gate-bell at all hazards.

By the merest chance I looked up as I passed the side of the outhouse where the jagged hole was, and noticed that it was pierced rather high in the wall.

As I stopped to observe this, the closeness of the atmosphere in the wood seemed to be affecting me more unpleasantly than ever.

I waited a minute and untied my cravat.

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Closeness? surely it was something more than that. The air was even more distasteful to my nostrils than to my lungs. There was some faint, indescribable smell loading it – some smell of which I had never had any previous experience – some smell which I thought (now that my attention was directed to it) grew more and more certainly traceable to its source the nearer I advanced to the outhouse.

By the time I had tried the experiment two or three times, and had made myself sure of this fact, my curiosity became excited. There were plenty of fragments of stone and brick lying about me. I gathered some of them together, and piled them up below the hole, then mounted to the top, and, feeling rather ashamed of what I was doing, peeped into the outhouse.

The sight of horror that met my eyes the instant I looked through the hole is as present to my memory now as if I had beheld it yesterday. I can hardly write of it at this distance of time without a thrill of the old terror running through me again to the heart.

The first impression conveyed to me, as I looked in, was of a long, recumbent object, tinged with a lightish blue color all over, extended on trestles, and bearing a certain hideous, half-formed resemblance to the human face and figure. I looked again, and felt certain of it. There were the prominences of the forehead, nose, and chin, dimly shown as under a veil – there, the round outline of the chest and the hollow below it – there, the points of the knees, and the stiff, ghostly, upturned feet. I looked again, yet more attentively. My eyes got accustomed to the dim light streaming in through the broken roof, and I satisfied myself, judging by the great length of the body from

head to foot, that I was looking at the corpse of a man – a corpse that had apparently once had a sheet spread over it, and that had lain rotting on the trestles under the open sky long enough for the linen to take the livid, light-blue tinge of mildew and decay which now covered it.

How long I remained with my eyes fixed on that dread sight of death, on that tombless, terrible wreck of humanity, poisoning the still air, and seeming even to stain the faint descending light that disclosed it, I know not. I remember a dull, distant sound among the trees, as if the breeze were rising – the slow creeping on of the sound to near the place where I stood – the noiseless whirling fall of a dead leaf on the corpse below me, through the gap in the outhouse roof – and the effect of awakening my energies, of relaxing the heavy strain on my mind, which even the slight change wrought in the scene I beheld by the falling leaf produced in me immediately. I descended to the ground, and, sitting down on the heap of stones, wiped away the thick perspiration which covered my face, and which I now became aware of for the first time. It was something more than the hideous spectacle unexpectedly offered to my eyes which had shaken my nerves as I felt that they were shaken now. Monkton's prediction that, if we succeeded in discovering his uncle's body, we should find it unburied, recurred to me the instant I saw the trestles and their ghastly burden. I felt assured on the instant that I had found the dead man – the old prophecy recurred to my memory – a strange yearning sorrow, a vague foreboding of ill, an inexplicable terror, as I thought of the poor lad who was awaiting my return in the distant town, struck through me with a chill of supersti-

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tious dread, robbed me of my judgment and resolution, and left me when I had at last recovered myself, weak and dizzy, as if I had just suffered under some pang of overpowering physical pain.

I hastened round to the convent gate and rang impatiently at the bell – waited a little while and rang again – then heard footsteps.

In the middle of the gate, just opposite my face, there was a small sliding panel, not more than a few inches long; this was presently pushed aside from within. I saw, through a bit of iron grating, two dull, light gray eyes staring vacantly at me, and heard a feeble husky voice saying:

“What may you please to want?”

“I am a traveler – ” I began.

“We live in a miserable place. We have nothing to show travelers here.”

“I don’t come to see anything. I have an important question to ask, which I believe some one in this convent will be able to answer. If you are not willing to let me in, at least come out and speak to me here.”

“Are you alone?”

“Quite alone.”

“Are there no women with you?”

“None.”

The gate was slowly unbarred, and an old Capuchin, very infirm, very suspicious, and very dirty, stood before me. I was far too excited and impatient to waste any time in prefatory phrases; so, telling the monk at once how I had looked through the hole in the outhouse, and what I had seen inside, I asked

him, in plain terms, who the man had been whose corpse I had beheld, and why the body was left unburied?

The old Capuchin listened to me with watery eyes that twinkled suspiciously. He had a battered tin snuff-box in his hand, and his finger and thumb slowly chased a few scattered grains of snuff round and round the inside of the box all the time I was speaking. When I had done, he shook his head and said "That was certainly an ugly sight in their outhouse; one of the ugliest sights, he felt sure, that ever I had seen in all my life!"

"I don't want to talk of the sight," I rejoined, impatiently; "I want to know who the man was, how he died, and why he is not decently buried. Can you tell me?"

The monk's finger and thumb having captured three or four grains of snuff at last, he slowly drew them into his nostrils, holding the box open under his nose the while, to prevent the possibility of wasting even one grain, snuffed once or twice luxuriously – closed the box – then looked at me again with his eyes watering and twinkling more suspiciously than before.

"Yes," said the monk, "that's an ugly sight in our outhouse – a very ugly sight, certainly!"

I never had more difficulty in keeping my temper in my life than at that moment. I succeeded, however, in repressing a very disrespectful expression on the subject of monks in general, which was on the tip of my tongue, and made another attempt to conquer the old man's exasperating reserve. Fortunately for my chances of succeeding with him, I was a snuff-taker myself,

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and I had a box full of excellent English snuff in my pocket, which I now produced as a bribe. It was my last resource.

"I thought your box seemed empty just now," said he; "will you try a pinch out of mine?"

The offer was accepted with an almost youthful alacrity of gesture. The Capuchin took the largest pinch I ever saw held between any man's finger and thumb – inhaled it slowly without spilling a single grain – half closed his eyes – and, wagging his head gently, patted me paternally on the back.

"Oh, my son," said the monk, "what delectable snuff! Oh, my son and amiable traveler, give the spiritual father who loves you yet another tiny, tiny pinch!"

"Let me fill your box for you. I shall have plenty left for myself."

The battered tin snuff-box was given to me before I had done speaking; the paternal hand patted my back more approvingly than ever; the feeble, husky voice grew glib and eloquent in my praise. I had evidently found out the weak side of the old Capuchin, and, on returning him his box, I took instant advantage of the discovery.

"Excuse my troubling you on the subject again," I said, "but I have particular reasons for wanting to hear all that you can tell me in explanation of that horrible sight in the outhouse."

"Come in," answered the monk.

He drew me inside the gate, closed it, and then leading the way across a grass-grown courtyard, looking out on a woody kitchen-garden, showed me into a long room with a low ceiling, a dirty dresser, a few rudely-carved stall seats, and one or

two grim, mildewed pictures for ornaments. This was the sacristy.

"There's nobody here, and it's nice and cool," said the old Capuchin. It was so damp that I actually shivered. "Would you like to see the church?" said the monk; "a jewel of a church, if we could keep it in repair, but we can't. Ah! malediction and misery, we are too poor to keep our church in repair!"

Here he shook his head and began fumbling with a large bunch of keys.

"Never mind the church now," said I. "Can you, or can you not, tell me what I want to know?"

"Everything, from beginning to end – absolutely everything. Why, I answered the gate-bell – I always answer the gate-bell here," said the Capuchin.

"What, in Heaven's name, has the gate-bell to do with the unburied corpse in your house?"

"Listen, son of mine, and you shall know. Some time ago – some months – ah! me, I'm old; I've lost my memory; I don't know how many months – ah! miserable me, what a very old, old monk I am!" Here he comforted himself with another pinch of snuff.

"Never mind the exact time," said I. "I don't care about that."

"Good," said the Capuchin. "Now I can go on. Well, let us say it is some months ago – we in this convent are all at breakfast – wretched, wretched breakfasts, son of mine, in this convent! – we are at breakfast, and we hear *bang! bang!* twice over. 'Guns,' says I. 'What are they shooting for?' says Brother Jeremy. 'Game,' says Brother Vincent. 'Ah! game,' says Brother

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Jeremy. 'If I hear more, I shall send out and discover what it means,' says the father superior. We hear no more, and we go on with our wretched breakfasts."

"Where did the report of firearms come from?" I inquired.

"From down below – beyond the big trees at the back of the convent, where there's some clear ground – nice ground, if it wasn't for the pools and puddles. But, ah! misery, how damp we are in these parts! how very, very damp!"

"Well, what happened after the report of firearms?"

"You shall hear. We are still at breakfast, all silent – for what have we to talk about here? What have we but our devotions, our kitchen-garden, and our wretched, wretched bits of breakfasts and dinners? I say we are all silent, when there comes suddenly such a ring at the bell as never was heard before – a very devil of a ring – a ring that caught us all with our bits – our wretched, wretched bits! – in our mouths, and stopped us before we could swallow them. 'Go, brother of mine,' says the father superior to me, 'go; it is your duty – go to the gate.' I am brave – a very lion of a Capuchin. I slip out on tiptoe – I wait – I listen – I pull back our little shutter in the gate – I wait, I listen again – I peep through the hole – nothing, absolutely nothing that I can see. I am brave – I am not to be daunted. What do I do next? I open the gate. Ah! sacred Mother of Heaven, what do I behold lying all along our threshold? A man – dead! – a big man; bigger than you, bigger than me, bigger than anybody in this convent – buttoned up tight in a fine coat, with black eyes, staring, staring up at the sky, and blood soaking through and through the front of his

shirt. What do I do? I scream once – I scream twice – and run back to the father superior!”

All the particulars of the fatal duel which I had gleaned from the French newspaper in Monkton's room at Naples recurred vividly to my memory. The suspicion that I had felt when I looked into the outhouse became a certainty as I listened to the old monk's last words.

“So far I understand,” said I. “The corpse I have just seen in the outhouse is the corpse of the man whom you found dead outside your gate. Now tell me why you have not given the remains decent burial.”

“Wait – wait – wait,” answered the Capuchin. “The father superior hears me scream and comes out; we all run together to the gate; we lift up the big man and look at him close. Dead! dead as this (smacking the dresser with his hand). We look again, and see a bit of paper pinned to the collar of his coat. Aha! son of mine, you start at that. I thought I should make you start at last.”

I had started, indeed. That paper was doubtless the leaf mentioned in the second's unfinished narrative as having been torn out of his pocketbook, and inscribed with the statement of how the dead man had lost his life. If proof positive were wanted to identify the dead body, here was such proof found.

“What do you think was written on the bit of paper?” continued the Capuchin. “We read and shudder. This dead man has been killed in a duel – he, the desperate, the miserable, has died in the commission of mortal sin; and the men who saw the killing of him ask us Capuchins, holy men, servants of Heaven, children of our lord the Pope – they ask us to give

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him burial! Oh! but we are outraged when we read that; we groan, we wring our hands, we turn away, we tear our beards, we — ”

“Wait one moment,” said I, seeing that the old man was heating himself with his narrative, and was likely, unless I stopped him, to talk more and more fluently to less and less purpose — “wait a moment. Have you preserved the paper that was pinned to the dead man’s coat; and can I look at it?”

The Capuchin seemed on the point of giving me an answer, when he suddenly checked himself. I saw his eyes wander away from my face, and at the same moment heard a door softly opened and closed again behind me.

Looking round immediately, I observed another monk in the sacristy — a tall, lean, black-bearded man, in whose presence my old friend with the snuff-box suddenly became quite decorous and devotional to look at. I suspected I was in the presence of the father superior, and I found that I was right the moment he addressed me.

“I am the father superior of this convent,” he said, in quiet, clear tones, and looking me straight in the face while he spoke, with coldly attentive eyes. “I have heard the latter part of your conversation, and I wish to know why you are so particularly anxious to see the piece of paper that was pinned to the dead man’s coat?”

The coolness with which he avowed that he had been listening, and the quietly imperative manner in which he put his concluding question, perplexed and startled me. I hardly knew at first what tone I ought to take in answering him. He observed my hesitation, and attributing it to the wrong cause,

signed to the old Capuchin to retire. Humbly stroking his long gray beard, and furtively consoling himself with a private pinch of the "delectable snuff," my venerable friend shuffled out of the room, making a profound obeisance at the door just before he disappeared.

"Now," said the father superior, as coldly as ever, "I am waiting, sir, for your reply."

"You shall have it in the fewest possible words," said I, answering him in his own tone. "I find, to my disgust and horror, that there is an unburied corpse in an outhouse attached to your convent. I believe that corpse to be the body of an English gentleman of rank and fortune, who was killed in a duel. I have come into this neighborhood with the nephew and only relation of the slain man, for the express purpose of recovering his remains; and I wish to see the paper found on the body, because I believe that paper will identify it to the satisfaction of the relative to whom I have referred. Do you find my reply sufficiently straightforward? And do you mean to give me permission to look at the paper?"

"I am satisfied with your reply, and see no reason for refusing you a sight of the paper," said the father superior; "but I have something to say first. In speaking of the impression produced on you by beholding the corpse, you used the words 'disgust' and 'horror.' This license of expression in relation to what you have seen in the precincts of a convent proves to me that you are out of the pale of the Holy Catholic Church. You have no right, therefore, to expect any explanation; but I will give you one, nevertheless, as a favor. The slain man died, unabsolved, in the commission of mortal sin. We infer so much

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from the paper which we found on his body; and we know, by the evidence of our own eyes and ears, that he was killed on the territories of the Church, and in the act of committing direct violation of those special laws against the crime of duelling, the strict enforcement of which the holy father himself has urged on the faithful throughout his dominions by letters signed with his own hand. Inside this convent the ground is consecrated, and we Catholics are not accustomed to bury the outlaws of our religion, the enemies of our holy father, and the violators of our most sacred laws in consecrated ground. Outside this convent we have no rights and no power; and, if we had both, we should remember that we are monks, not grave-diggers, and that the only burial with which we can have any concern is burial with the prayers of the Church. That is all the explanation I think it necessary to give. Wait for me here, and you shall see the paper." With those words the father superior left the room as quietly as he had entered it.

I had hardly time to think over this bitter and ungracious explanation, and to feel a little piqued by the language and manner of the person who had given it to me, before the father superior returned with the paper in his hand. He placed it before me on the dresser, and I read, hurriedly traced in pencil, the following lines:

"This paper is attached to the body of the late Mr. Stephen Monkton, an Englishman of distinction. He has been shot in a duel, conducted with perfect gallantry and honor on both sides. His body is placed at the door of this convent, to receive burial at the hands of its inmates, the survivors of the encounter being obliged to separate and secure their safety by im-

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mediate flight. I, the second of the slain man, and the writer of this explanation, certify, on my word of honor as a gentleman that the shot which killed my principal on the instant was fired fairly, in the strictest accordance with the rules laid down beforehand for the conduct of the duel.

"(Signed), F."

"F." I recognized easily enough as the initial letter of *Monsieur Foulon's* name, the second of *Mr. Monkton*, who had died of consumption at Paris.

The discovery and the identification were now complete. Nothing remained but to break the news to Alfred, and to get permission to remove the remains in the outhouse. I began almost to doubt the evidence of my own senses when I reflected that the apparently impracticable object with which we had left Naples was already, by the merest chance, virtually accomplished.

"The evidence of the paper is decisive," said I, handing it back. "There can be no doubt that the remains in the outhouse are the remains of which we have been in search. May I inquire if any obstacles will be thrown in our way should the late *Mr. Monkton's* nephew wish to remove his uncle's body to the family burial-place in England?"

"Where is this nephew?" asked the father superior.

"He is now awaiting my return at the town of Fondi."

"Is he in a position to prove his relationship?"

"Certainly, he has papers with him which will place it beyond a doubt."

"Let him satisfy the civil authorities of his claim, and he need expect no obstacle to his wishes from any one here."

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I was in no humor for talking a moment longer with my sour-tempered companion than I could help. The day was wearing on me fast; and, whether night overtook me or not, I was resolved never to stop on my return till I got back to Fondi. Accordingly, after telling the father superior that he might expect to hear from me again immediately, I made my bow and hastened out of the sacristy.

At the convent gate stood my old friend with the tin snuff-box, waiting to let me out.

"Bless you, my son," said the venerable recluse, giving me a farewell pat on the shoulder, "come back soon to your spiritual father who loves you, and amiably favor him with another tiny, tiny pinch of the delectable snuff."

## CHAPTER VI

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I returned at the top of my speed to the village where I had left the mules, had the animals saddled immediately, and succeeded in getting back to Foudi a little before sunset.

While ascending the stairs of our hotel, I suffered under the most painful uncertainty as to how I should best communicate the news of my discovery to Alfred. If I could not succeed in preparing him properly for my tidings, the results, with such an organization as his, might be fatal. On opening the door of his room, I felt by no means sure of myself; and when I confronted him, his manner of receiving me took me so much by surprise that, for a moment or two, I lost my self-possession altogether.

Every trace of the lethargy in which he was sunk when I had last seen him had disappeared. His eyes were bright, his cheeks deeply flushed. As I entered, he started up, and refused my offered hand.

"You have not treated me like a friend," he said, passionately; "you had no right to continue the search unless I searched with you — you had no right to leave me here alone. I was wrong to trust you; you are no better than all the rest of them."

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I had by this time recovered a little from my first astonishment, and was able to reply before he could say anything more. It was quite useless, in his present state, to reason with him or to defend myself. I determined to risk everything, and break my news to him at once.

"You will treat me more justly, Monkton, when you know that I have been doing you good service during my absence," I said. "Unless I am greatly mistaken, the object for which we have left Naples may be nearer attainment by both of us than —"

The flush left his cheeks almost in an instant. Some expression in my face, or some tone in my voice, of which I was not conscious, had revealed to his nervously-quickened perception more than I had intended that he should know at first. His eyes fixed themselves intently on mine; his hand grasped my arm; and he said to me in an eager whisper:

"Tell me the truth at once. Have you found him?"

It was too late to hesitate. I answered in the affirmative.

"Buried or unburied?"

His voice rose abruptly as he put the question, and his unoccupied hand fastened on my other arm.

"Unburied."

I had hardly uttered the word before the blood flew back into his cheeks; his eyes flashed again as they looked into mine, and he burst into a fit of triumphant laughter, which shocked and startled me inexpressibly.

"What did I tell you? What do you say to the old prophecy now?" he cried, dropping his hold on my arms, and pacing backward and forward in the room. "Own you were wrong.

Own it, as all Naples shall own it, when once I have got him safe in his coffin!"

His laughter grew more and more violent. I tried to quiet him in vain. His servant and the landlord of the inn entered the room, but they only added fuel to the fire, and I made them go out again. As I shut the door on them, I observed lying on a table near at hand the packet of letters from Miss Elmslie, which my unhappy friend preserved with such care, and read and re-read with such unflinching devotion. Looking toward me just when I passed by the table, the letters caught his eye. The new hope for the future, in connection with the writer of them, which my news was already awakening in his heart, seemed to overwhelm him in an instant at sight of the treasured memorials that reminded him of his betrothed wife. His laughter ceased, his face changed, he ran to the table, caught the letters up in his hand, looked from them to me for one moment with an altered expression which went to my heart, then sank down on his knees at the table, laid his face on the letters, and burst into tears. I let the new emotion have its way uninterruptedly, and quitted the room without saying a word. When I returned after a lapse of some little time, I found him sitting quietly in his chair, reading one of the letters from the pack at which rested on his knee.

His look was kindness itself; his gesture almost womanly in its gentleness as he rose to meet me, and anxiously held out his hand.

He was quite calm enough now to hear in detail all that I had to tell him. I suppressed nothing but the particulars of the state in which I had found the corpse. I assumed no right

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of direction as to the share he was to take in our future proceedings, with the exception of insisting beforehand that he should leave the absolute superintendence of the removal of the body to me, and that he should be satisfied with a sight of M. Foulon's paper, after receiving my assurance that the remains placed in the coffin were really and truly the remains of which we had been in search.

"Your nerves are not so strong as mine," I said, by way of apology for my apparent dictation, "and for that reason I must beg leave to assume the leadership in all that we have now to do, until I see the leaden coffin soldered down and safe in your possession. After that I shall resign all my functions to you."

"I want words to thank you for your kindness," he answered. "No brother could have borne with me more affectionately, or helped me more patiently than you."

He stopped and grew thoughtful, then occupied himself in tying up slowly and carefully the packet of Miss Elmslie's letters, and then looked suddenly toward the vacant wall behind me with that strange expression the meaning of which I knew so well. Since we had left Naples I had purposely avoided exciting him by talking on the useless and shocking subject of the apparition by which he believed himself to be perpetually followed. Just now, however, he seemed so calm and collected — so little likely to be violently agitated by any allusion to the dangerous topic, that I ventured to speak out boldly.

"Does the phantom still appear to you," I asked, "as it appeared at Naples?"

He looked at me and smiled.

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"Did I not tell you that it followed me everywhere?" His eyes wandered back again to the vacant space, and he went on speaking in that direction as if he had been continuing the conversation with some third person in the room. "We shall part," he said, slowly and softly, "when the empty place is filled in Wincot vault. Then I shall stand with Ada before the altar in the Abbey chapel, and when my eyes meet hers they will see the tortured face no more."

Saying this, he leaned his head on his hand, sighed, and began repeating softly to himself the lines of the old prophecy:

*When in Wincot vault a place  
Waits for one of Monkton's race —  
When that one fateful shall lie  
Graveless under open sky,  
Beggared of six feet of earth,  
Though lord of acres from his birth —  
That shall be a certain sign  
Of the end of Monkton's line.  
Dwindling ever faster, faster,  
Dwindling to the last-left master;  
From mortal ken, from light of day,  
Monkton's race shall pass away."*

Fancying that he pronounced the last lines a little incoherently, I tried to make him change the subject. He took no notice of what I said, and went on talking to himself.

"Monkton's race shall pass away," he repeated, "but not with me. The fatality hangs over my head no longer. I shall

bury the unburied dead; I shall fill the vacant place in Winicot vault; and then – then the new life, the life with Ada!” That name seemed to recall him to himself. He drew his traveling desk toward him, placed the packet of letters in it, and then took out a sheet of paper. “I am going to write to Ada,” he said, turning to me, “and tell her the good news. Her happiness, when she knows it, will be even greater than mine.”

Worn out by the events of the day, I left him writing and went to bed. I was, however, either too anxious or too tired to sleep. In this waking condition, my mind naturally occupied itself with the discovery at the convent and with the events to which that discovery would in all probability lead. As I thought on the future, a depression for which I could not account weighed on my spirits. There was not the slightest reason for the vaguely melancholy forebodings that oppressed me. The remains, to the finding of which my unhappy friend attached so much importance, had been traced; they would certainly be placed at his disposal in a few days; he might take them to England by the first merchant vessel that sailed from Naples; and, the gratification of his strange caprice thus accomplished, there was at least some reason to hope that his mind might recover its tone, and that the new life he would lead at Winicot might result in making him a happy man. Such considerations as these were, in themselves, certainly not calculated to exert any melancholy influence over me; and yet, all through the night, the same inconceivable, unaccountable depression weighed heavily on my spirits – heavily through the hours of darkness – heavily, even when I walked out to breathe the first freshness of the early morning air.

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With the day came the all-engrossing business of opening negotiations with the authorities.

Only those who have had to deal with Italian officials can imagine how our patience was tried by every one with whom we came in contact. We were bandied about from one authority to the other, were stared at, cross-questioned, mystified – not in the least because the case presented any special difficulties or intricacies, but because it was absolutely necessary that every civil dignitary to whom we applied should assert his own importance by leading us to our object in the most roundabout manner possible. After our first day's experience of official life in Italy, I left the absurd formalities, which we had no choice but to perform, to be accomplished by Alfred alone, and applied myself to the really serious question of how the remains in the convent outhouse were to be safely removed.

The best plan that suggested itself to me was to write to a friend in Rome, where I knew that it was a custom to embalm the bodies of high dignitaries of the Church, and where, I consequently inferred, such chemical assistance as was needed in our emergency might be obtained. I simply stated in my letter that the removal of the body was imperative, then described the condition in which I had found it, and engaged that no expense on our part should be spared if the right person or persons could be found to help us. Here, again, more difficulties interposed themselves, and more useless formalities were to be gone through, but in the end patience, perseverance, and money triumphed, and two men came expressly from Rome to undertake the duties we required of them.

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It is unnecessary that I should shock the reader by entering into any detail in this part of my narrative. When I have said that the progress of decay was so far suspended by chemical means as to allow of the remains being placed in the coffin, and to insure their being transported to England with perfect safety and convenience, I have said enough. After ten days had been wasted in useless delays and difficulties, I had the satisfaction of seeing the convent outhouse empty at last; passed through a final ceremony of snuff-taking, or rather, of snuff-giving, with the old Capuchin, and ordered the traveling carriages to be ready at the inn door. Hardly a month had elapsed since our departure ere we entered Naples successful in the achievement of a design which had been ridiculed as wildly impracticable by every friend of ours who had heard of it.

The first object to be accomplished on our return was to obtain the means of carrying the coffin to England — by sea, as a matter of course. All inquiries after a merchant vessel on the point of sailing for any British port led to the most unsatisfactory results. There was only one way of insuring the immediate transportation of the remains to England, and that was to hire a vessel. Impotent to return, and resolved not to lose sight of the coffin till he had seen it placed in Winscot vault, Monkton decided immediately on hiring the first ship that could be obtained. The vessel in port which we were informed could soonest be got ready for sea was a Sicilian brig, and this vessel my friend accordingly engaged. The best dock-yard artisans that could be got were set to work, and the smartest captain and crew to be picked up on an emergency in Naples were chosen to navigate the brig.

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Monkton, after again expressing in the warmest terms his gratitude for the services I had rendered him, disclaimed any intention of asking me to accompany him on the voyage to England. Greatly to his surprise and delight, however, I offered of my own accord to take passage in the brig. The strange coincidences I had witnessed, the extraordinary discovery I had hit on since our first meeting in Naples, had made his one great interest in life my one great interest for the time being as well. I shared none of his delusions, poor fellow; but it is hardly an exaggeration to say that my eagerness to follow our remarkable adventure to its end was as great as his anxiety to see the coffin laid in *Wincot* vault. Curiosity influenced me, I am afraid, almost as strongly as friendship, when I offered myself as the companion of his voyage home.

We set sail for England on a calm and lovely afternoon.

For the first time since I had known him, Monkton seemed to be in high spirits. He talked and jested on all sorts of subjects, and laughed at me for allowing my cheerfulness to be affected by the dread of seasickness. I had really no such fear; it was my excuse to my friend for a return of that unaccountable depression under which I had suffered at *Fondi*. Everything was in our favor; everybody on board the brig was in good spirits. The captain was delighted with the vessel; the crew, Italians and Maltese, were in high glee at the prospect of making a short voyage on high wages in a well-provisioned ship. I alone felt heavy at heart. There was no valid reason that I could assign to myself for the melancholy that oppressed me, and yet I struggled against it in vain.

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Late on our first night at sea, I made a discovery which was by no means calculated to restore my spirits to their usual equilibrium. Monkton was in the cabin, on the floor of which had been placed the packing-case containing the coffin, and I was on deck. The wind had fallen almost to a calm, and I was lazily watching the sails of the brig as they flapped from time to time against the masts, when the captain approached, and, drawing me out of hearing of the man at the helm, whispered in my ear:

"There's something wrong among the men forward. Did you observe how suddenly they all became silent just before sunset?"

I had observed it, and told him so.

"There's a Maltese boy on board," pursued the captain, "who is a smart enough lad, but a bad one to deal with. I have found out that he has been telling the men there is a dead body inside that packing-case of your friend's in the cabin."

My heart sank as he spoke. Knowing the superstitious irrationality of sailors – of foreign sailors especially – I had taken care to spread a report on board the brig, before the coffin was shipped, that the packing-case contained a valuable marble statue which Mr. Monkton prized highly, and was unwilling to trust out of his own sight. How could this Maltese boy have discovered that the pretended statue was a human corpse? As I pondered over the question, my suspicions fixed themselves on Monkton's servant, who spoke Italian fluently, and whom I knew to be an incorrigible gossip. The man denied it when I charged him with betraying us, but I have never believed his denial to this day.

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"The little imp won't say where he picked up this notion of his about the dead body," continued the captain. "It's not my place to pry into secrets; but I advise you to call the crew aft, and contradict the boy, whether he speaks the truth or not. The men are a parcel of fools who believe in ghosts, and all the rest of it. Some of them say they would never have signed our articles if they had known they were going to sail with a dead man; others only grumble; but I'm afraid we shall have some trouble with them all, in case of rough weather, unless the boy is contradicted by you or the other gentleman. The men say that if either you or your friend tell them on your words of honor that the Maltese is a liar, they will hand him up to be rope's-ended accordingly; but that if you won't, they have made up their minds to believe the boy."

Here the captain paused and awaited my answer. I could give him none. I felt hopeless under our desperate emergency. To get the boy punished by giving my word of honor to support a direct falsehood was not to be thought of even for a moment. What other means of extrication from this miserable dilemma remained? None that I could think of. I thanked the captain for his attention to our interests, told him I would take time to consider what course I should pursue, and begged that he would say nothing to my friend about the discovery he had made. He promised to be silent, sulkily enough, and walked away from me.

We had expected the breeze to spring up with the morning, but no breeze came. As it wore on toward noon the atmosphere became insufferably sultry, and the sea looked as smooth as glass. I saw the captain's eye turn often and anx-

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iously to windward. Far away in that direction, and alone in the blue heaven, I observed a little black cloud, and asked if it would bring us any wind.

"More than we want," the captain replied, shortly; and then, to my astonishment, ordered the crew aloft to take in sail. The execution of this maneuver showed but too plainly the temper of the men; they did their work sulkily and slowly, grumbling and murmuring among themselves. The captain's manner, as he urged them on with oaths and threats, convinced me we were in danger. I looked again to windward. The one little cloud had enlarged to a great bank of murky vapor, and the sea at the horizon had changed in color.

"The squall will be on us before we know where we are," said the captain. "Go below; you will be only in the way here."

I descended to the cabin, and prepared Monkton for what was coming. He was still questioning me about what I had observed on deck when the storm burst on us. We felt the little brig strain for an instant as if she would part in two, then she seemed to be swinging round with us, then to be quite still for a moment, trembling in every timber. Last came a shock which hurled us from our seats, a deafening crash, and a flood of water pouring into the cabin. We clambered, half-drowned, to the deck. The brig had, in the nautical phrase, "broaded to," and she now lay on her beam-ends.

Before I could make out anything distinctly in the horrible confusion except the one tremendous certainty that we were entirely at the mercy of the sea, I heard a voice from the fore part of the ship which stilled the clamoring and shouting of the rest of the crew in an instant. The words were in Italian,

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but I understood their fatal meaning only too easily. We had sprung a leak, and the sea was pouring into the ship's hold like the race of a mill-stream. The captain did not lose his presence of mind in this fresh emergency. He called for his ax to cut away the foremast, and, ordering some of the crew to help him, directed the others to rig out the pumps.

The words had hardly passed his lips before the men broke into open mutiny. With a savage look at me, their ringleader declared that the passengers might do as they pleased, but that he and his messmates were determined to take to the boat, and leave the accursed ship, and *the dead man in her*, to go to the bottom together. As he spoke there was a shout among the sailors, and I observed some of them pointing derisively behind me. Looking round, I saw Monkton, who had hitherto kept close at my side, making his way back to the cabin. I followed him directly, but the water and confusion on deck, and the impossibility, from the position of the brig, of moving the feet without the slow assistance of the hands, so impeded my progress that it was impossible for me to overtake him. When I had got below he was crouched upon the coffin, with the water on the cabin floor whirling and splashing about him as the ship heaved and plunged. I saw a warning brightness in his eyes, a warning flush on his cheek, as I approached and said to him:

"There is nothing left for it, Alfred, but to bow to our misfortune, and do the best we can to save our lives."

"Save yours," he cried, waving his hand to me, "for you have a future before you. Mine is gone when this coffin goes to the

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bottom. If the ship sinks, I shall know that the fatality is accomplished, and shall sink with her."

I saw that he was in no state to be reasoned with or persuaded, and raised myself again to the deck. The men were cutting away all obstacles so as to launch the longboat placed amidships over the depressed bulwark of the brig as she lay on her side, and the captain, after having made a last vain exertion to restore his authority, was looking on at them in silence. The violence of the squall seemed already to be spending itself, and I asked whether there was really no chance for us if we remained by the ship. The captain answered that there might have been the best chance if the men had obeyed his orders, but that now there was none. Knowing that I could place no dependence on the presence of mind of Monkton's servant, I confided to the captain, in the fewest and plainest words, the condition of my unhappy friend, and asked if I might depend on his help. He nodded his head, and we descended together to the cabin. Even at this day it costs me pain to write of the terrible necessity to which the strength and obstinacy of Monkton's delusion reduced us in the last resort. We were compelled to secure his hands, and drag him by main force to the deck. The men were on the point of launching the boat, and refused at first to receive us into it.

"You cowards!" cried the captain, "have we got the dead man with us this time? Isn't he going to the bottom along with the brig? Who are you afraid of when we get into the boat?"

This sort of appeal produced the desired effect; the men became ashamed of themselves, and retracted their refusal.

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Just as we pushed off from the sinking ship Alfred made an effort to break from me, but I held him firm, and he never repeated the attempt. He sat by me with drooping head, still and silent, while the sailors rowed away from the vessel; still and silent when, with one accord, they paused at a little distance off, and we all waited and watched to see the brig sink; still and silent, even when that sinking happened, when the laboring hull plunged slowly into a hollow of the sea – hesitated, as it seemed, for one moment, rose a little again, then sank to rise no more.

Sank with her dead freight – sank, and snatched forever from our power the corpse which we had discovered almost by a miracle – those jealously-preserved remains, on the safe-keeping of which rested so strangely the hopes and the low-destinies of two living beings! As the last signs of the ship in the depths of the waters.

I felt Monkton trembling all over as he sat close at my side, and heard him repeating to himself, sadly, and many times over, the name of "Ada."

I tried to turn his thoughts to another subject, but it was useless. He pointed over the sea to where the brig had once been, and where nothing was left to look at but the rolling waves.

"The empty place will now remain empty forever in Win-cot vault."

As he said these words, he fixed his eyes for a moment sadly and earnestly on my face, then looked away, leaned his cheek on his hand, and spoke no more.

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We were sighted long before nightfall by a trading vessel, were taken on board, and landed at Cartagena in Spain. Alfred never held up his head, and never once spoke to me of his own accord the whole time we were at sea in the merchantman. I observed, however, with alarm, that he talked often and incoherently to himself – constantly muttering the lines of the old prophecy – constantly referring to the fatal place that was empty in Wincot vault – constantly repeating in broken accents, which it affected me inexpressibly to hear, the name of the poor girl who was awaiting his return to England. Nor were these the only causes for the apprehension that I now felt on his account. Toward the end of our voyage he began to suffer from alternations of fever-fits and shivering-fits, which I ignorantly imagined to be attacks of ague. I was soon undeceived. We had hardly been a day on shore before he became so much worse that I secured the best medical assistance Cartagena could afford. For a day or two the doctors differed, as usual, about the nature of his complaint, but ere long alarming symptoms displayed themselves. The medical men declared that his life was in danger, and told me that his disease was brain fever.

Shocked and grieved as I was, I hardly knew how to act at first under the fresh responsibility now laid upon me. Ultimately I decided on writing to the old priest who had been Alfred's tutor, and who, as I knew, still resided at Wincot Abbey. I told this gentleman all that had happened, begged him to break my melancholy news as gently as possible to Miss Elmslie, and assured him of my resolution to remain with Monkton to the last.

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After I had dispatched my letter, and had sent to Gibraltar to secure the best English medical advice that could be obtained, I felt that I had done my best, and that nothing remained but to wait and hope.

Many a sad and anxious hour did I pass by my poor friend's bedside. Many a time did I doubt whether I had done right in giving any encouragement to his delusion. The reasons for doing so which had suggested themselves to me after my first interview with him seemed, however, on reflection, to be valid reasons still. The only way of hastening his return to England and to Miss Elmslie, who was pining for that return, was the way I had taken. It was not my fault that a disaster which no man could foresee had overthrown all his projects and all mine. But, now that the calamity had happened and was irretrievable, how, in the event of his physical recovery, was his moral malady to be combated?

When I reflected on the hereditary taint in his mental organization, on that first childish fright of Stephen Monkton from which he had never recovered, on the perilously-secluded life that he had led at the Abbey, and on his firm persuasion of the reality of the apparition by which he believed himself to be constantly followed, I confess I despaired of shaking his superstitious faith in every word and line of the old family prophecy. If the series of striking coincidences which appeared to attest its truth had made a strong and lasting impression on me (and this was assuredly the case), how could I wonder that they had produced the effect of absolute conviction on *his* mind, constituted as it was? If I argued with him, and he answered me, how could I rejoin? If he said, "The prophecy points at the last of

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the family: I am the last of the family. The prophecy mentions an empty place in Wincot vault; there is such an empty place there at this moment. On the faith of the prophecy I told you that Stephen Monkton's body was unburied, and you found that it was unburied" – if he said this, what use would it be for me to reply, "These are only strange coincidences after all?"

The more I thought of the task that lay before me, if he recovered, the more I felt inclined to despond. The oftener the English physician who attended on him said to me, "He may get the better of the fever, but he has a fixed idea, which never leaves him night or day, which has unsettled his reason, and which will end in killing him, unless you or some of his friends can remove it" – the oftener I heard this, the more acutely I felt my own powerlessness, the more I shrank from every idea that was connected with the hopeless future.

I had only expected to receive my answer from Wincot in the shape of a letter. It was consequently a great surprise, as well as a great relief, to be informed one day that two gentlemen wished to speak with me, and to find that of these two gentlemen the first was the old priest, and the second a male relative of Mrs. Elmslie.

Just before their arrival the fever symptoms had disappeared, and Alfred had been pronounced out of danger. Both the priest and his companion were eager to know when the sufferer would be strong enough to travel. They had come to Cartagena expressly to take him home with them, and felt far more hopeful than I did of the restorative effects of his native air. After all the questions connected with the first important point of the journey to England had been asked and answered,

I ventured to make some inquiries after Miss Elmslie. Her relative informed me that she was suffering both in body and in mind from excess of anxiety on Alfred's account. They had been obliged to deceive her as to the dangerous nature of his illness in order to deter her from accompanying the priest and her relation on their mission to Spain.

Slowly and imperfectly, as the weeks wore on, Alfred regained something of his former physical strength, but no alteration appeared in his illness as it affected his mind.

From the very first day of his advance toward recovery, it had been discovered that the brain fever had exercised the strangest influence over his faculties of memory. All recollection of recent events was gone from him. Everything connected with Naples, with me, with his journey to Italy, had dropped in some mysterious manner entirely out of his remembrance. So completely had all late circumstances passed from his memory that, though he recognized the old priest and his own servant easily on the first days of his convalescence, he never recognized me, but regarded me with such a wistful, doubting expression, that I felt inexpressibly pained when I approached his bedside. All his questions were about Miss Elmslie and Wincot Abbey, and all his talk referred to the period when his father was yet alive.

The doctors augured good rather than ill from this loss of memory of recent incidents, saying that it would turn out to be temporary, and that it answered the first great healing purpose of keeping his mind at ease. I tried to believe them – tried to feel as sanguine, when the day came for his departure, as the old friends felt who were taking him home. But the effort was

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too much for me. A foreboding that I should never see him again oppressed my heart, and the tears came into my eyes as I saw the worn figure of my poor friend half helped, half lifted into the traveling-carriage, and borne away gently on the road toward home.

He had never recognized me, and the doctors had begged that I would give him, for some time to come, as few opportunities as possible of doing so. But for this request I should have accompanied him to England. As it was, nothing better remained for me to do than to change the scene, and recruit as I best could my energies of body and mind, depressed of late by much watching and anxiety. The famous cities of Spain were not new to me, but I visited them again and revived old impressions of the Alhambra and Madrid. Once or twice I thought of making a pilgrimage to the East, but late events had sobered and altered me. That yearning, unsatisfied feeling which we call "homesickness" began to prey upon my heart, and I resolved to return to England.

I went back by way of Paris, having settled with the priest that he should write to me at my banker's there as soon as he could after Alfred had returned to Wincot. If I had gone to the East, the letter would have been forwarded to me. I wrote to prevent this; and, on my arrival at Paris, stopped at the banker's before I went to my hotel.

The moment the letter was put into my hands, the black border on the envelope told me the worst. He was dead.

There was but one consolation — he had died calmly, almost happily, without once referring to those fatal chances which had wrought the fulfillment of the ancient prophecy.

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"My beloved pupil," the old priest wrote, "seemed to rally a little the first few days after his return, but he gained no real strength, and soon suffered a slight relapse of fever. After this he sank gradually and gently day by day, and so departed from us on the last dread journey. Miss Elmslie (who knows that I am writing this) desires me to express her deep and lasting gratitude for all your kindness to Alfred. She told me when we brought him back that she had waited for him as his promised wife, and that she would nurse him now as a wife should; and she never left him. His face was turned toward her, his hand was clasped in hers when he died. It will console you to know that he never mentioned events at Naples, or the shipwreck that followed them, from the day of his return to the day of his death."

Three days after reading the letter I was at Wincot, and heard all the details of Alfred's last moments from the priest. I felt a shock which it would not be very easy for me to analyze or explain when I heard that he had been buried, at his own desire, in the fatal Abbey vault.

The priest took me down to see the place – a grim, cold, subterranean building, with a low roof, supported on heavy Saxon arches. Narrow niches, with the ends only of coffins visible within them, ran down each side of the vault. The nails and silver ornaments flashed here and there as my companion moved past them with a lamp in his hand. At the lower end of the place he stopped, pointed to a niche, and said, "He lies there, between his father and mother." I looked a little further on, and saw what appeared at first like a long dark tunnel. "That is only an empty niche," said the priest, following me. "If

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the body of Mr. Stephen Monkton had been brought to Wincot, his coffin would have been placed there."

A chill came over me, and a sense of dread which I am ashamed of having felt now, but which I could not combat then. The blessed light of day was pouring down gayly at the other end of the vault through the open door. I turned my back on the empty niche, and hurried into the sunlight and the fresh air.

As I walked across the grass glade leading down to the vault, I heard the rustle of a woman's dress behind me, and turning round, saw a young lady advancing, clad in deep mourning. Her sweet, sad face, her manner as she held out her hand, told me who it was in an instant.

"I heard that you were here," she said, "and I wished — " Her voice faltered a little. My heart ached as I saw how her lip trembled, but before I could say anything she recovered herself and went on: "I wished to take your hand, and thank you for your brotherly kindness to Alfred; and I wanted to tell you that I am sure in all you did you acted tenderly and considerately for the best. Perhaps you may be soon going away from home again, and we may not meet any more. I shall never, never forget that you were kind to him when he wanted a friend, and that you have the greatest claim of any one on earth to be gratefully remembered in my thoughts as long as I live."

The inexpressible tenderness of her voice, trembling a little all the while she spoke, the pale beauty of her face, the artless candor in her sad, quiet eyes, so affected me that I could not trust myself to answer her at first except by gesture. Before I

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## MAD MONKTON

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recovered my voice she had given me her hand once more and had left me.

I never saw her again. The chances and changes of life kept us apart. When I last heard of her, years and years ago, she was faithful to the memory of the dead, and was *Ada Elmolie* still for *Alfred Monkton's* sake.





original





o r i g i n a l



James Fenimore Cooper

The Crater; or, Vulcan's Peak:  
A Tale of the Pacific

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Wilkie Collins

Poor Miss Finch

original



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*Литературно-художественное издание*

**Wilkie Collins**

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