

Fred M. White

The Man who was Two

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Published by Good Press, 2022

goodpress@okpublishing.info

EAN 4066338099952

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CHAPTER I.--THE MAN IN MOTLEY.

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The Throne Room in the Royal Windsor Hotel was discreetly full of diners--the management never allowed that sacred haven to be packed even in holiday times--and every little table, with its shaded pink lights, held its sheaf of youth and beauty spilling with laughter and dazzling with eyes as bright and alluring as the gems that seemed to float there on a sea of foamy froth cradled in pink and mauve chiffon and diaphanous lace. There was something exceedingly intimate in the half-shrouded tables, each encrusted with the loveliest things that breathe and palpitate in this transient life of ours, and yet it seemed part of one smooth harmonious whole as if the elect gathered there were, after all, one exclusive family.

It was warm and alluring there that eventful New Year's Eve, with its lights and warmth and laughter, its well-trained waiters, and the scent of roses that clung caressingly to it all. The mere whisper of care or sorrow or tragedy there would have savoured of outrage, and yet those inconsequent diners were no more than ordinary flesh and blood with the heritage of sorrow and suffering that comes to us all. But not to-night, surely not to-night, amidst the wealth of flowers and the ripple of laughter and the sheer joy of being. And it was some half humorous philosophy like this that Roy Gillette was casting inconsequently before his three dinner companions as he sat at Sir Marston Manley's table in the centre of the room.

"Now, to an old traveller like me," he frivelled on, "this is a lasting joy. To a man of the world, Sir Marston, this is a dozen novels rolled into one. How many stories, how many plots for my film dramas that one day shall thrill the world are awaiting me here if only the gifts of Asmodeus were mine?"

Gillette waved his well-manicured hand comprehensively around and smiled into the faces of his companions. That clean-shaven, handsome face of his was distinctly alluring. Sir Marston smiled, too, but it was a smile of envy, that the famous painter successfully disguised behind his white flowing beard and wide-rimmed silver spectacles. Yet he loved to be with youth and bathe in it. And that was why he was entertaining youth and beauty tonight.

"It's good to hear that you are going to do something at last," he said "Even the youngest of us has his responsibilities. But the cinema! Really, my dear Roy."

"And why not?" Gillette demanded. "There's a great future before the pictorial drama when the cowboys cease from troubling and the Chaplins are at rest. And it fills me with grief, my dear old guardian, to see this professional jealousy. A painter who is the friend of kings ought to be beyond such weakness."

"Oh, well," the famous artist laughed, "I ought to be happy in the knowledge that you are doing something useful. But do you really mean it, dear boy? What about the famous comedy that was to make the shade of Sheridan turn uneasily in his grave? And the novel that should cause folk to forget the very name of Dickens."

The girl in the pink chiffon rippled merrily. There were lurking little demons in her eyes that looked like limpid lakes of unfathomable blue in the half-shades of the lights. And even the inconsequent Gilette was fully conscious of the witchery of them, though he knew that they could never be meant wholly for him. But he noted the round firmness of the cheeks and the exquisite colouring, indeed everything that gave Peggy Ferriss her own particular charm. Not that he was in love with this almost flawless little Devonshire beauty--what heart he cherished in that hot adventurous youth of his belonged to the more stately and self-contained beauty of Hetty Bond--the tall, dark girl who sat by Peggy's side.

There was nothing between Roy Gilette and Hetty Bond except the understanding of a perfect silence, no terms of intimate endearment, no exchange of caresses, only an ideal realisation that someday, when the wander lust had burnt itself out, Gilette would come home and lay his sheaves and sword at Hetty's feet.

Dinner was nearly over now, and the spirit of the night was beginning to be felt on the air, a quickening of the pulses and the relaxation of New Year's Eve. There were little spurts and snaps as some of the many children there were getting busy with the crackers that lay in silver and blue and dazzling gold on the various tables. There were sharp crackles of laughter on all sides. Gilette had pulled one with Peggy, and the Quaker cap out of its gorgeous interior lay on the table. Roy's suggestion that Peggy should wear it had met with no response so far. Sooth to say, she

was looking just a little wistfully at the two empty covers that lay undisturbed on the table.

"Oh, he'll come presently," Gilette laughed. "My dear Peggy, if you will bestow those engaging young charms on a cold-blooded man of science, you must put up with the consequences. But there really is no excuse for Pennington not turning up. I hope that those two have not been quarreling again."

This was the first allusion to the fact that the supper-party was not complete. It should have been made up with Walter Pennington, a barrister of some repute, and Raymond Mallison, Peggy's fiance, a man who was regarded as one of the coming celebrities in the scientific world that revolved round the afflicted in the way of blindness and deafness and the loss of speech. These two men had been fast friends at one time, but a misunderstanding had forced them apart, and this little dinner was intended to bring them together again. Mallison was ever a little uncertain, but there was no excuse for the defection of Pennington. So the meal had commenced without them: and now Peggy was beginning to get a little uneasy and annoyed.

"Oh, Raymond will be here in time for the Christmas tree and the dance," she said lightly. "Do go on telling us all about this new venture of yours, Mr. Gilette. Are you actually going to run a cinema company? Somewhere here in England?"

"See what Eton and Christ Church have done for him," Sir Marston smiled grimly, "What his poor mother would have said if she were alive I tremble to think. She, poor dear, could never make up her mind between the Woolsack and

Canterbury. Personally, I could never visualise Roy in the role of an Archbishop."

"Oh, well," Gillette said. "One must not be too hard on the morbid fancies of a fond parent. It was one of my mother's delusions that I was capable of anything in that line."

As he sat there with the light shining on his dark, handsome face, with its keen humorous and intellectual lines, even the most cynical might have pardoned a fond parent's dreams. The man seemed to exude strength and power, bravery and courage were deeply stamped on him, and he possessed in a marked degree a bland audacity and assurance that was almost childlike in its semblance of unconsciousness. Indeed that charming impudence of his was almost a household word amongst his friends. As he was fond of quoting, the world was his oyster, and he had the weapons to open it. Youth and strength and fortune--what could any darling of the Gods ask for more?

"What can a man do?" he asked as he waved a comprehensive hand towards the brilliantly lighted room. "I can't get my plays produced unless I take a theatre of my own and that way madness lies. No publisher will look at my novels. Those wily old Turks Say 'bosh' to my works, as some profound philosopher remarked on a certain historic occasion. So I am trying the pictures. My own crowd, called 'The Long Trail Players,' with a studio at Sheen and a big company are at present waiting for fine weather down in Devonshire. By the way, they are not far from Merston, Sir Marston."

"How splendid." Peggy cried. "Why, that's close to my home. Do you know that Raymond Mallison was brought up

there too? And Sir Marston's summer studio is close by. I feel that I am going to have a most interesting summer. What a background Merston will make with all those glorious rocks and cliffs. Is it some great historical novel that you are adapting, Mr. Gilette."

"Well, no," Gilette said. "A modern story of crime and temptation. 'A poor thing but mine own,' as the immortal bard said. I got on to it when I spent all those months in the Argentine last year. And such a villain! A man with the polished manners of an archdeacon and the face of a Byron. I call it the 'Story of a Crime.' The crime isn't finished yet, but I hope to be in at the death. There's a lot in it about lip-reading that ought to interest Mallison. He's a dab at that sort of thing, and that's why I am so anxious to meet your young man. Not but what I am pretty good at the game myself."

"Oh, Roy is wonderful," Peggy exclaimed. "He says that with a proper school of lipreading and Braille, blind people and deaf mutes will in the future be as well--"

"Really?" Hetty Bond exclaimed. "It sounds like a fairy tale to me. I should like to see it done."

"Then you shall," Gilette said in his most audacious manner. "I got on to my big story entirely through it. Now watch those two people at the table opposite. With all this noise and clatter it is impossible to hear a word they say. Watch the woman's lips, one moment. Yes, that's right. She is saying that the din is making her head ache and wants to go on to a music hall for an hour and then come back for the dance. One moment and I will tell you where she wants to go. See, the man is speaking now. He calls the waiter. A box

of Pathe's gloves, Hetty, to a ripe banana that he will tell the man to get him two stalls for the Palace."

To Miss Bond's astonishment it was exactly as Gilette had said. She caught the word 'Palace' as it fell from the waiter's lips, she saw him hurry away to the telephone and come back again with the lady's wraps, and watched her and her companion as they strolled away.

"Alone I did it," Gilette cried. "There's for you now, as they say in Wales. Magic while you wait. That sort of thing ought to teach the spiritualist mugs a lesson, but of course it won't. And when Mallison does come and after he is introduced to me--Good God! Talk of spirits--here's one. I wouldn't have him see me for a million. Excuse me, Sir Marston."

With that Gilette coolly but promptly lifted the big silver-rimmed glasses from the astonished painter's face and fitted them over his own eyes. Then he proceeded to snatch up the tissue paper Quaker cap from the table and hide his sleek dark head in it. As he did so a diner strolled down the gangway between the tables. He was not in evening dress, but was clad in a thick dark overcoat and carried a soft hat in his gloved hand. His clothes fitted his spare, elegant figure to perfection, his fine face exuded benevolence and high intelligence, his smile was broad and kindly. A fine silver beard swept his chest, and his shining white hair set off a presence that would have commanded attention in any company. He passed into the vestibule and out of sight.

"What a fine, attractive man," Peggy cried, "Mr. Gilette, anyone would imagine that you were afraid of him."

"Well, I was in a mortal funk lest he should see me," Gilette confessed. "I--I--didn't know that he was in England."

There was just a shade of grey under Gilette's healthy tan as he spoke. The gay debonair manner and easy audacity had been wiped out as if with a sponge. Sir Marston noticed it as he held out an impatient hand for the ravished spectacles.

"Why, what is the matter!" he asked. "Any one would think that you had seen a ghost. Upon my word, you don't flatter the fighting blood of your ancestors just at present. But perhaps this benevolent-looking stranger has something to do with the immortal film-story."

Gilette seemed to shake himself free from some unseen horror with an effort. Then he was his old audacious self again.

"Never mind that," he said. "We famous authors don't believe in giving away the mystery in the early chapters. If that man had spotted me--but that would have been another story. Would you do me a great favour, Sir Marston? The height of cheek to ask, of course, but it is almost a desperate matter. Would you mind following that man out and ascertain where he goes to? I would not trouble you, but--"

"Sir Galahad to the rescue," the great painter laughed. "The spirit of adventure is not dead in me yet. Perhaps I also may have the felicity of appearing on your deathless film."

"Well, upon my word, it is more than likely," Gilette chuckled. "But time is fleeting. If you really don't mind--"

Sir Marston vanished with an agility that did more than credit to his years. Gilette dropped back in his chair with an

air of undisguised relief. By this time the big room was quite full--coloured lamps began to twinkle and sparkle amidst the floral decorations, the ripple of happy childish laughter made music on the air. From all round the room came the whip-like crack of exploding bon-bons. Gilette could see the flush on the fair faces of his companions as the spirit of the hour wove its lure about them. Peggy seemed a little perturbed as she glanced at the still unoccupied places.

"He cometh not, she said," Gilette quoted gaily. "Oh, these men of science. Wilt thou tread a measure with me, fair lady, for by my halidame the fiddlers are inviting us to the floor. I don't in the least know what a halidame is, but you are welcome to half mine. Waiter, a halidame on the half shell."

Gilette frivelled on for some minutes, and then in the doorway saw Sir Marston beckoning to him. There was a certain agitation about the great man that set Gilette fluttering. With a muttered excuse he followed the older man into the lounge.

"What is wrong?" he asked a little anxiously. "Has he gone?"

"To catch the American boat at Liverpool," Sir Marston explained. "Staying in the hotel and giving the name of Marne. But never mind that, Roy. Something dreadful has happened. I met your friend Rivers in the hall. He was looking for you. Listen. Pennington has been found in his chambers foully murdered."

"Murdered!" Gilette gasped. "Oh, impossible! When?"

"About an hour ago. And that is not the worst, Raymond Mallison has been arrested as the actual culprit."

"Mallison!" Gillette whispered hoarsely. "Good God, Sir Marston, who is going to break this vile thing to Peggy Ferriss?"

CHAPTER II.--THE VALET'S STORY.

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The two men regarded each other with strained anxious eyes. Sir Marston was as if suddenly ten years had been added to his life. He was white and haggard behind his glasses, whilst Gilette, standing there, seemed to be unconscious of the paper cap that he was still wearing.

"For heaven's sake, take that thing off," the artist groaned. "It looks so horribly cold-blooded, well, callous."

Almost mechanically Gilette lifted his hand to his head. He crushed the gaudy tissue and flung it at his feet. A small Eton boy of his acquaintance grinned amiably, obviously waiting for the nod of recognition from such an athletic god as Gilette. But the little man in the white waistcoat might have been so much thin air so far as the object of his admiration was concerned.

The brilliantly-lighted rooms were filling up fast now and in the distance a band was playing some alluring dance music. From where he stood Gilette could see the two girls still seated at the table watching the gay throng and smiling as a child in shimmering hair and silken stockings threw herself with a cry of delight on Hetty Bond. It seemed almost impossible to couple all this abandon of happiness and gaiety with a sordid crime.

"Tell me all about it." Gilette asked, "When did it happen and where? What did Rivers say? I can't believe it. I have always heard people speak so well of Mallison. I was looking forward to meeting him to-night if only for Miss Ferriss' sake."

"I have known Mallison ever since he was a child," Sir Marston went on in the same absent, tired voice. "His father died before he was born--a man in the army he was, and made a runaway match with his wife. They were poor enough because Mrs. Mallison's father cast her off when she married and would never see her again. A sort of foreigner he was--half Spaniard, who made a great fortune cattle ranching in the Argentine. Proud as Lucifer, I'm told. They say that there was nobody good enough to associate with Marne."

Gillette stiffened as if a spark of fire had scorched him.

"What name did you say?" he asked thickly. "Marne! Why, that is the name of the man you followed for me just now. Sir Marston, my big story turns on a man called Marne who lives in the Argentine. I mean the super-film I told you about. This is amazing. My story--but go on. Tell me all about Mallison. His father died, yes?"

"When he was a child," Sir Marston proceeded. "Leaving his widow very poor. All this took place a year or two before I took that studio of mine in Merston. I mean the old house where I do my painting all the summer. You've been there often enough."

Gillette nodded. Well enough he knew that smiling paradise where Sir Marston painted and golfed and recuperated all through the long golden summers. There was no more romantic or beautiful spot in the British Isles. Occasionally Gillette picnicked there in Manley's absence yet, strangely enough, he had never met the unhappy Mallison or the girl he was engaged to until the last

fortnight, when Peggy had come to town from Herston to spend a few days with her old school friend, Hetty Bond.

"Well," Sir Marston muttered. "Miss Mallison and her boy--that is the poor chap we are speaking of--lived at Merston on a small income allowed by her father so long as she did not bother him and so long as she stayed in the heart of the country. Until the time of her death she never saw her father, and he refused to do anything for his grandson directly he was old enough to get his own living. Probably, old Marne is dead and buried by this time."

"I'm sure he isn't," Gilette exclaimed. "But that side of the story we shall come to all in good time. But what about the tragedy in Rutland Inn? Did it happen in Rutland Inn? Was Rivers looking for me when you saw him here just now?"

"So I gathered," Sir Marston said. "He says that you were one of the very last to see Walter Pennington this afternoon and when he heard what had happened, he came here at once, because you had told him that you were dining here with a party to-night."

"Did Rivers say anything more?"

"Very little. From what I can gather, Pennington got back to his quarters in Rutland Inn about seven o'clock and proceeded to his bedroom over his professional chambers at once. He told his man that he was dining out and that he needed nothing. A little while after the telephone bell rang and Fisher, that is Pennington's man, answered it. The message was for himself, to the effect that his brother wanted to see him for a moment and would he, Fisher, step round to the 'Green Man,' a little respectable public house in

Armory-street. Fisher went up and, knocked at his master's door and got the requisite permission. He was away perhaps for three-quarters of an hour and came back a little annoyed at the discovery that the whole thing was a hoax, indeed, he found out that his brother was not even in town, but that he had gone off for a few days' work in the country. When Fisher found that his master's evening overcoat and silk scarf were still hanging up in the passage he began to get alarmed. Getting no reply, after knocking at the door of Pennington's bedroom, he went in and found Pennington dead on the floor with a ghastly wound on the back of the head."

"Yes, but where does Mallison come in?" Gillette asked abruptly.

"Ah, that is the worst feature," Sir Marston went on. "As Fisher was hurrying along the corridor in the direction of Pennington's suite he met Mallison coming along as if he had been calling on Pennington. He had a little black bag in his hand, and seemed in a great hurry. Fisher was rather surprised, because he knew that his master and Mallison had been on extremely bad terms for some time, and therefore, he took particular notice. He says he spoke to Mallison, who seemed disturbed at being seen there, and he made no response. But Mallison was also recognised by two other members of the inn, and they also spoke to him. In each case he made no reply, but pushed on hurriedly into the darkness. These two men were the first to turn up when Fisher gave the alarm, and at once suspicion attached itself to Mallison. He was arrested in his rooms about an hour ago, and as he could not, or would not, give any account of

himself until he came to dress for our party, the police took him to Brent-street station, and he is there now. I must go and see him in the morning, for I am convinced that there has been some lamentable mistake somewhere."

Gillette stood there for a few moments in anxious thought. It seemed almost sinful to him that all this mad gaiety was going on at a time when a fellow creature was beginning to fight for his very life. From where he was he could see the slim, graceful figure in pink and watch the happy laughter in Peggy's eyes. The fun was now reaching its height, the band played on alluringly, the giddy throng floated across the floor--a light foaming sea of rainbow hues, with the shimmer and point of diamonds here and there. The incongruity of it seemed to shriek alone in Gillette's ears as he watched.

"Not to-night," he protested. "You can't possibly see Mallison to-night. It's almost cruel to leave that poor girl there smiling and happy when there is this hideous thing to face. Will you go and fetch them out, or shall I?"

"No, no, I'll go," Sir Marston said. "It is old folk like me that understand sorrow best. We learn that sort of thing as we grow older--there are so many breaks for us. No, I'll go, Roy."

Gillette stood there anxiously waiting. He had learnt a lot to-night, far more than had been dreamt of in his philosophy. That story of his founded on tragic and criminal facts gleaned in the Argentine was following him even to London. The blazing trail had hit him full in the eyes not an hour ago. And in a dim way he was beginning to see the connection between this new and startling development and

the history of Mallison's misfortune. Gillette had an unerring instinct for the psychology of crime, and already his mind was subconsciously piecing the scattered fragments together.

Then he put it out of his mind resolutely. There would be ample time for that. What he wanted now was to get this ghastly business of breaking the news to Peggy Ferriss out of the way. He saw her come along presently smiling and dimpling, with a little girl hanging on either arm. Hetty followed on close behind more sedately, but with an approving gleam in her eyes, too. The painter, white and agitated, brought up the rear. It was no easy matter to choke off the fairy manikins, but it was done at length, and then Sir Marston led the way to a secluded corner of the lounge. And it was not till then that Peggy grasped that there was something wrong.

"Why, what's the matter?" she smiled. "Oh, you have heard that Raymond is not coming. What a shame! And Mr. Pennington, too."

"No, he is not coming, my dear," the painter said gently. "I want you to be brave, Peggy. Something has happened."

Peggy of the pale cheeks and dewy eyes seemed to divine the root of the trouble at once. She caught her lip between her white teeth.

"It's Raymond," she said. "I have had the feeling for the last hour. If he is dead, tell me at once. I shall know how to bear it."

Then, very gently and tenderly with tears in his eyes, the old man told Peggy all that he had learnt. He saw the pallor

washed off her clear pale cheek by the rising red tide of anger and indignation. It was just as he had expected.

"They must be mad," she cried. "Oh, the idea of Raymond even thinking of such a thing is fantastic. Sir Marston, I must go to him. You must take me there at once. He would expect me."

Sir Marston shook his head sorrowfully.

"I am afraid that is impossible," he said. "The authorities do not allow that sort of thing. We will do everything that is necessary in the way of employing counsel, and in the morning I will see what else can be done. Perhaps if I call on the Home Secretary he may give me a special permit to visit the--I mean Mallison. My dear, you are the bravest girl I ever met. And God knows you want that courage."

But Peggy broke down badly enough once she was in the taxi on her way home with Hetty. Then it was that the precious solace of tears came to her aid, and she flung herself, weeping passionately, on the sympathetic breast of her companion. And far into the night she and Hetty discussed the tragic situation.

"He couldn't have done it," she said for the fiftieth time. "I say he couldn't. Ah. You don't know Raymond. Nobody knows him as I do. Oh, it's maddening to sit here doing nothing and Raymond perhaps imagining that we have all deserted him. Yes, I know that there was bad blood between Raymond and Walter Pennington, but it was only some silly quarrel over some statement that Raymond made in a criminal case where the poor boy was giving scientific evidence. Raymond thought that Mr. Pennington was trying to discredit him and he resented it. Then they carried it on

in the club, and there was a bit of a scene. Talk about women gossiping."

Hetty sat there powerless to stop the flow of Peggy's grief. There was nothing to say or do until, utterly exhausted, Peggy allowed herself to be put into bed, where she declared she could not sleep. And almost immediately she fell into a deep, but restless, slumber. Then Hetty stole away, her eyes dim and aching with sympathy.

CHAPTER III.--THE GREEN SPECTACLES.

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Sir Marston Manley had quite made up his mind what to do before he said good night to Gilette. He was not going to leave a stone unturned in getting to the bottom of this mystery. Ever since he had purchased his romantic studio-residence at Merston on the coast of North Devon he had known Raymond Mallison, who was now confronted by a charge that sounded almost grotesque to anyone who knew him. For the great artist had a high opinion of Mallison, who had thrust his way into a fine position by sheer hard work and genuine merit. He knew the hard struggle that Mallison's mother had had to send her boy to a public school and maintain him at a London hospital afterwards. He knew that Mrs. Mallison's income was a slender one derived from her father on the other side of the world, but as to that, Marie Mallison said very little, nor would she hear of Manley accepting any share in her beloved Raymond's professional training. It was in vain that the great painter protested that he had no kith or kin in the world who stood in need of his help, and that in any case his will would see Raymond handsomely provided for. And so he had watched the boy's career with almost fatherly interest until he had carved out a real reputation for himself. This had taken some years, of course, during which time Sir Marston had painted those famous pictures of his, both in the grand house in Regent's Park and at the lovely old place at Merston. In the latter establishment Raymond Mallison came and went at his own

sweet will, and occasionally took a hand with the catering of that delightful establishment, for there Manley lived the simple life and was looked after exclusively by an old woman and her fisherman husband, who shut up the rambling place in the winter, and retired to their own cottage on the beach.

Here Roy Gillette put in an occasional week or so during the fishing season, when he camped in the cottage and preferred to cater for himself. And, strange to say, he had never met Mallison, who had either been away at school or keeping his hospital terms in London whenever Gillette had paid one of his flying visits.

Obviously, then, Gillette could not be expected to take the same interest in the tragedy as did Sir Marston. We shall see presently how far the great artist's conclusions on this point were correct. He dropped Gillette presently, and gave his chauffeur directions to drive to the House of Commons, where, from the light in the tower, he could see that legislators were still sitting. The presentation of his card to an attendant in the lobby exercised its usual magical effect, and a few minutes later he found himself in the private room of the Home Secretary. Fortunately the great man had just emerged with flying colours from a verbal combat with a truculent member of the Opposition, and was consequently in his most amiable mood.

"Well, what can I do for you, my dear fellow?" he asked.

Sir Marston came to the point at once. He described the whole of the tragedy in detail, and wound up with a request for an order to see the prisoner in private. Mr. Calverley pursed his lips.

"My dear man," he protested, "this is most unusual. If you think that there is one law for the rich and--"

"Another for the politician," Sir Marston interrupted dryly. "That fact has not escaped me, Mr. Minister. We are old friends, and that being so, I can speak plainly. That boy's welfare is very dear to me, though he does not know it. I have watched his career from the time he was a little chap in knickerbockers, and never once has he disappointed me. And, dash it all, I was in love with his mother and would have married her, but she preferred to remain faithful to a memory. There is something desperately wrong here, and I mean to get to the bottom of it if it costs me half my fortune. And now you know all about it. You can give me that order if you choose."

"Very well, then," the Home Secretary growled. "But if some of those Red Flag chaps on the Opposition side below the gangway get wind of it, there will be trouble."

Sir Marston departed presently with the precious order in his pocket. He naturally concluded that Mallison would be brought before the presiding magistrate the following morning, when the police would give no more than evidence of arrest, and then ask for a formal remand of probably a week. It was his intention to see Mallison before he was brought into court. It was about half-past 9 the following morning when he passed over his permit to the inspector in charge, and a few moments later found himself in the cell where Raymond Mallison was detained.

It was a dreary and depressing place. A narrow whitewashed cell dimly lighted by a small barred window some eight feet from the ground, and containing nothing

more than a wool mattress and a stool whereon reposed an empty basin, from which, obviously. Mallison had been eating something that passed as a breakfast. He sat on the bed with his head in his hands, a picture of lonely despair. He glanced up indifferently as Sir Marston entered, and a flush dyed his face.

Then he rose awkwardly enough, and half held out his hand.

"This--this is very kind of you," he whispered. "Sir Marston, if you only knew what it is to feel--"

But Manley was having nothing of that. He took Mallison's hand, and shook it warmly. Then he noticed for the first time that Mallison was wearing a pair of green-tinted spectacles. Under the right eye was a nasty red scar. Just for an instant Sir Marston's faith in his young friend was a little shaken. He pointed to the glasses.

"In the name of goodness, what have you been doing to yourself?" he asked. "What's wrong with your one eye?"

"Oh, that's nothing." Mallison said. "Just a bit of an accident after I got home to change last night. I got back too late for your dinner, as I told you I might do, and when I was changing to join you after I had a fancy to do a few exercises with my Sandow outfit. When I was on my back pulling at the elastic straps the hook in the wall gave away, and the fastening struck me violently in the eye. Nothing very serious, but by way of a precaution I put on these glasses, and very glad I am because I find that the trouble is likely to last for a month or so. I'm afraid that I have damaged the optic nerve. But why do you ask? Oh, well, in

the circumstances, I suppose that anyone might ask a pointed question."

Mallison smiled a little bitterly as he spoke.

"You are quite wrong, my boy," Sir Marston said warmly. "I am quite prepared to believe everything that you say. Otherwise, I should not be here to-day. Naturally this has been a terrible shock to us all, but there is not one of your friends that count who is not absolutely convinced of your innocence."

"That is the sort of thing that brings the tears into the eyes," Mallison murmured. "And Peggy--how is she? It must have been a terrible shock to her. Did she send anything in--?"

"Peggy is as true as steel," Sir Marston said. "She's a girl in a million, Raymond. She absolutely refuses to hear a word against you. And, as she said last night, even if you were guilty. It would make no difference to her. Raymond, you are not guilty?"

"No more than you are," Mallison said with a quiet sincerity that carried conviction to the visitor's mind. "I was nowhere near Rutland Inn last night. Pennington and myself have not spoken for months, friends as we used to be. You will remember that I thought he had carried the privilege of counsel too far when he tried to discredit me in the Venn case. It was just after 9 o'clock when I got back to my rooms, and I was just dressing to join your party when they came along and arrested me. I was dumbfounded."

"But where had you been?" Sir Marston asked. "You should have no difficulty in proving an alibi. Someone must have seen you."

"So I thought at first. But it is not so easy as you think. I don't remember coming in contact with anybody who knows me. Upon my word, Sir Marston, I am in more desperate case than I thought. Here are three credible witnesses--people who have no sort of a grudge against me--who come forward ready to swear that they saw me coming along the corridor leading from Pennington's chambers a few minutes before his man found him dead--murdered. His man positively identified me. Then there were those two men outside, acquaintances of mine. And, mind you, I didn't get back to my rooms until a quarter of an hour after Pennington's body was found. Oh, as regards time, they have a splendid case."

"But where were you all last night?" Sir Marston asked. "Can't you see how vitally important it is?"

Mallison gave a groan of something like despair.

"Of course I can," he admitted doggedly. "And it is just here that I am going to test your belief in my story to the breaking point. Let me try and explain. About five o'clock I had an urgent message on the telephone to meet Blake--that's our big man--at an address in Willesden for an unusually interesting operation. I need not bother you with the details. Anyway, it was the sort of case that appeals to me, and I wanted the experience. I rather wondered why the venue was a private house, although it didn't very much matter. So I arranged to be there. Being a little short of exercise, I decided to walk. When I got to the address in question I found that the people in the house had never heard of Blake, and that no operation was needed. There was nothing for it but to come back and apologise to Blake

for my stupidity in mistaking the address, and so I walked back again. But, Sir Marston, I shall never get a magistrate to believe that story."

"You never can tell," Sir Marston murmured. Even to his ears it sounded exceedingly thin.

"Did you 'phone to Blake when you got back? But of course you did. Blake's evidence ought to be a tower of strength to you. At any rate it goes to prove that you promised to go to Willesden, and in the circumstances anybody might be excused for blundering over the address. Let's have Blake by all means."

"Oh, I 'phoned Blake all right," Mallison sighed. "I got him personally. It was not Blake who called me up originally, but some assistant at the hospital, as I imagined. You can picture my feelings now when Blake told me that he had sent for me, and that, as a matter of fact, he had been out of town all day. Sir Marston, some enemy of mine has done this thing. My story will sound ridiculous in court, especially when Blake is called to depose that he never made any attempt to get me on the telephone. So you see the more truthful I am the worse it looks for me. And yet, so far as I know, I have not a single enemy in the world. It sounds like a scrap from some wild melodrama in which the villain lays a deadly trap for the hero. Who is it that hates me so virulently to get me hanged?"

To this wildly improbable tale Sir Marston listened with a queer sinking of the heart. A blacker case against an accused man he had never listened to. Still, so far as he was concerned, he did not doubt Mallison for a moment. But as a man of the world he was forced to the conclusion that

Mallison's statement was terribly inadequate in the face of the evidence possessed by the police.

"I believe you, Raymond," he said. "And I am quite sure that the others will share my view. But it is the jury that we have to think about. You must have the best advice that money can procure. But that I have already seen to. I asked my own man on the telephone before I came here, and he recommended a criminal attorney who has a big reputation in cases like yours, and he will be here in due course. I expect that the evidence to-day will only be formal and that the police will ask for a remand. Now is there anyone else that you would like to see, because if so I think that I can manage it? What shall I tell Peggy, for instance?"

Mallison looked with almost loving gratitude at the benign figure of his old friend whose presence had heartened him so much. Here was one with a world-wide reputation, the friend of rulers, who had put everything else aside to come at once to his assistance. It was good to have such a friend as Sir Marston Manley.

"I think I understand." he said thickly. "My fondest love to Peggy and tell her how her faith inspires me. But no, she must not come here--the very atmosphere would break her heart. I must go my own way and stick it as best I can until I am free or until I am forced to turn my back upon the world. I shall not fear."

Then came a warder with a curt intimation that time was up, though he was civil enough so far as Sir Marston was concerned. It was for Mallison that the almost brutal brevity was reserved, and Manley could see how the sensitive blood