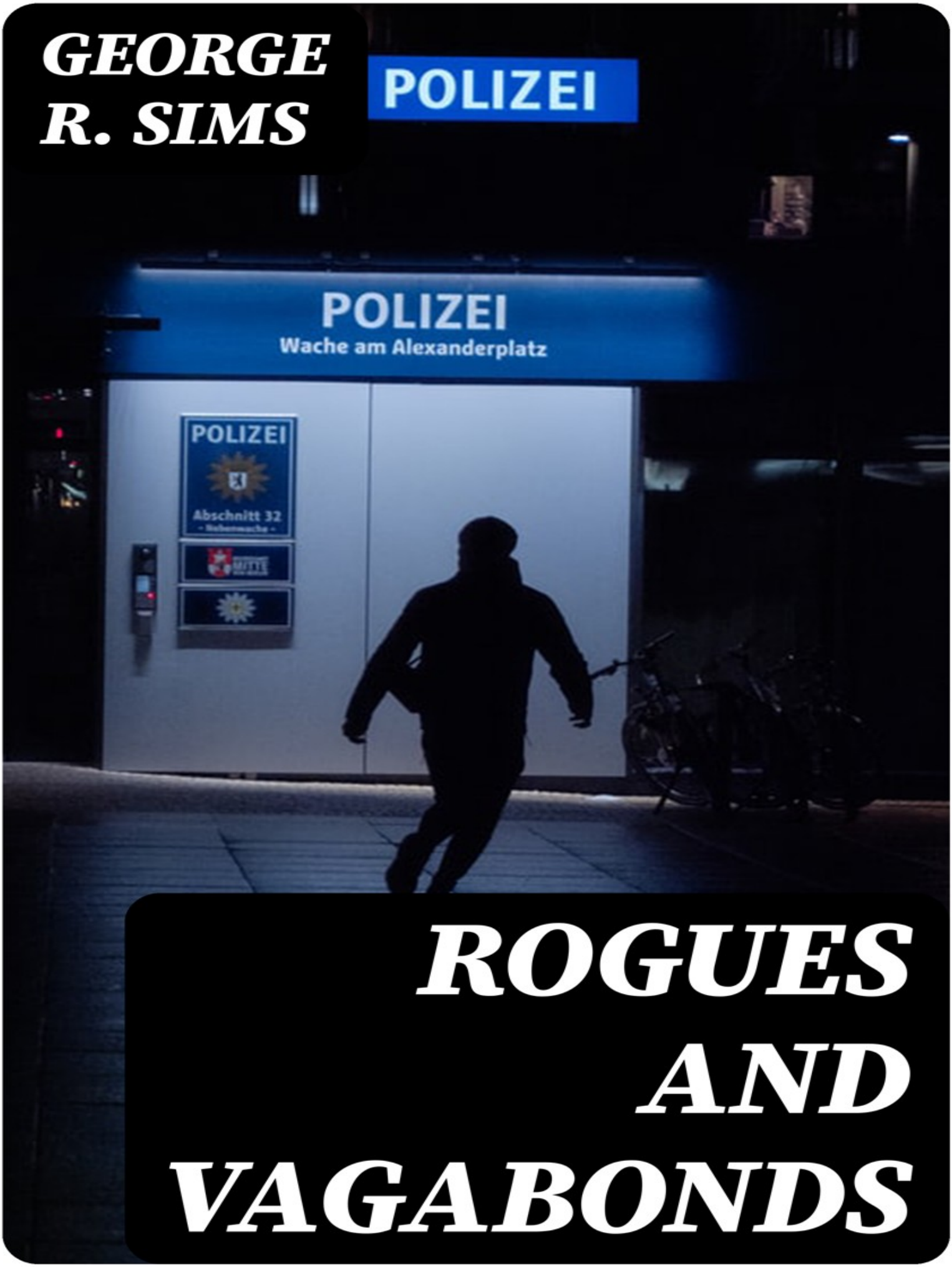
GEORGE
R. SIMS
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Abschnitt 32
ROGUES
AND
VAGABONDS

George R. Sims

Rogues and Vagabonds

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Table of Contents

To
My Good Friends,
Agostino and Stefano Gatti,
This Story,
Now First Published in Novel Form,
Is Gratefully

CHAPTER I. THE WRECK OF THE ‘BON ESPOIR.’

Table of Contents

The ship was going down!

The sky was cloudless, the sun rode high in the heavens, and the waves glistened in the clear, bright light. It was a glorious summer day—a time when life pulsed joyously, and everything invited a man to forget his troubles, close his eyes, and lie basking in the warmth.

A soft, invigorating breeze fanned the pallid cheeks of the eager watchers; the eyes worn with long vigils glistened in the silver light that fell on them; the glowing orb above sent its rays upon haggard faces and seemed to make them smile.

The ship was going down—going down in a calm sea. Here, shut off from all human aid—here, with no one to know the secret of that last hour of anguish and despair—Death had come to the fifty souls left on board the *Bon Espoir.* They were alone upon the trackless ocean. Around them lay leagues of lonely water. Their fate would be a mystery. As the weeks went on, and no tidings came of the ship, her name would be upon every tongue, and strange conjectures as to her fate would drop from thousands of lips.

The world would picture the good ship caught in some furious tempest, dashed to pieces, and engulfed amid the roar of the billows, the howling of the wind, and the wild cries for help of terror-stricken men.

But there was no tempest, no wind to howl—only a gentle zephyr, that kissed the men's checks as gently as their mothers did in their happy childhoods; no billows to seethe—only little playful wavelets that lapped against the ship's side gently, and seemed to say, 'You are ours; presently we shall dance and sport above you, and toss your bodies softly to and fro in the merry sunshine.'

A night had passed since the crew and passengers of the *Bon Espoir* knew they were doomed. She had sprung a leak in midocean on the previous night, in a lonely part, far out of the regular track, where for weeks and weeks never a sail might be seen.

The night was dark.

The sea was rough, and there had been a panic. The boats had been filled with passengers and some of the crew at once. The captain had shouted to them to keep near the ship, but the order had been disobeyed. When the light dawned those on board the *Bon Espoir* scanned the horizon, and saw no floating thing upon the waves.

A light mist hung like a veil over the waters, narrowing their range of vision. The wind had sunk, the waves were at rest, and the sun bursting through the mist gleamed upon a vast expanse of smiling sea.

Those who had stuck to the ship, hoping against hope that she might keep afloat yet until they fell into the track of other vessels, took counsel together and talked of a raft when every effort to save the vessel had been found useless.

But they were in a latitude where the storm came swiftly on the calm; where, with little warning, the baby waves

swelled into gigantic billows, and the sighing zephyr, gathering sudden strength, shrieked aloud and lashed the sea to fiercest fury.

The sailors who remained were principally foreigners. They had remained on the ship all night, refusing to work when they found the water gaining on them. They had gone below, torn their hair, beaten their breasts, cried aloud to the saints. Then they attacked the spirit store, and drank till they reeled down and slept a brutish, drunken sleep where they lay.

The passengers still left were all men, but unskilled. Without the aid of the sailors they could not make a raft. The sailors were not in a condition to move—certainly not to work. They had resigned themselves to their fate now. That strange sense of calm which comes mercifully even to cowards when hope is absolutely dead had fallen on them all.

They stood leaning over the ship’s sides, waiting for the end, their faces pale, their eyes haggard, and their thoughts far away.

Some of them had wives and children at home, and the images of their beloved ones rose up before them. They seemed to pierce the space and see the place that would know them no more. One man whispered to those who stood near him that he had heard his little boy cry “Father!” and another said that in the night he had seen his wife hearing his little ones their prayers, and when they said “God bless papa!” she looked up, and her eyes were filled with tears.

There were yet some hours between them and death, and they could still talk to each other.

It seemed a relief to do so; it created a companionship in misery; they cheered each other with their voices.

There was a clergyman among the passengers, and, as the captain went away to his post after a few last words of encouragement to the little band, the reverend gentleman asked their attention for a moment.

Earnestly and calmly, as became an English gentleman in the presence of death, the man of God prayed to the Throne of Grace for strength and sustenance in this hour of supreme peril. Briefly he addressed his little flock of doomed ones, and then went his way, deeming the last moments of his fellow-voyagers sacred to themselves.

As he was walking quietly aft, he felt a hand laid upon his shoulder.

He turned, and found that one of the passengers had followed him. He was a quiet, gentlemanly man, who had hardly spoken to any one during the voyage. He was tall, dark, and well built, apparently a man of five or six and thirty. The face was pleasing at first glance, the features being well cut, and not too prominent. But on a closer inspection the defects were apparent. The lips were sensual; the eyes had that strange look which one sees in the hunted animal. The fear of something behind was apparent upon the face the moment the features were disturbed from their repose. A dark moustache covered the too thick upper lip, and the rest of the face was bronzed with long travel and exposure to sun and sea. One thing would instantly attract the attention of the ordinary observer—the strange way in

which “indecision” was expressed in his countenance. His eyes and his lips would have revealed the secret of his character to a physiognomist at once.

He had evidently made up his mind in a hurry to say something to the clergyman. Directly that gentleman turned kindly, and asked what service he could render him, he hesitated.

‘I beg your pardon,’ he said, after a pause; ‘but can I speak with you alone?’

They walked to a deserted part of the ship.

‘I am going to make an extraordinary statement to you,’ said the passenger, his undecided eyes now looking in the clergyman’s face and now resting on the deck; ‘but I think I ought to. You are a clergyman, and I know no one better to whom in the hour of death I can confess a secret that should not die with me.’

The clergyman surveyed his interviewer earnestly for a moment.

‘Is it a crime?’ he asked.

The passenger nodded.

‘I don’t want to die with it on my mind,’ he murmured. ‘I fancy when the—the end comes, I shall die easier.’

‘My friend,’ said the clergyman, kindly, ‘do not imagine that a confession at the last moment takes guilt from the soul. To confess a crime to one who is about to share your fate is, perhaps, rather a superstitious than a religious deed. Let us understand each other. We both believe that we are about to die. You confess to me, perhaps thinking that no possible harm can come to you from it—that you run no

such risk as you would in confessing under other circumstanccs.’

‘I haven’t thought about that,’ answered the passenger, almost in a whisper. ‘Let me tell some human being my secret, and it will at least be off my mind. I feel as if the secret would choke me if I kept it any longer. I cannot die with murder on my soul.’

‘Murder!’ exclaimed the clergyman, starting back; then, recovering himself, he added, ‘Speak on; but I warn you that whatever you tell me, should we, by the Lord’s will, be saved, I will keep as no secret. Neither shall you deny it. Write.’

The clergyman drew out his pocket-book, and handed it, with a pencil, to the passenger.

The latter hesitated.

Presently, with a supreme effort, he wrote:—

‘On board the *Bon Espoir*.

‘The ship is sinking rapidly. I, Gurth Egerton, believing that I am about to die, do solemnly declare that on the night of the 15th of September, 18—, I stabbed my cousin, Ralph Egerton, in a gambling-house, kept by a man named Heckett, and that the wound proved fatal. I freely make this confession, and may God forgive me.

‘Signed, Gurth Egerton.’

The clergyman took the book from him and read it. Then he wrote something beneath it.

The confession once made, a swift revulsion of feeling came over Gurth Egerton. He reached out his hand, as though he would have snatched it back.

The clergyman closed the book and thrust it into his pocket.

‘Unhappy sinner!’ he said; ‘even now you repent the acknowledgment of your awful crime. Pray, for your time is short. Remember, should God spare me, I will use every effort to bring you to justice.’

As the last words left his lips, and Gurth Egerton, with a white face, was about to turn away, a loud cry rang out from the look-out man.

‘A sail! A sail!’

The doomed men rushed to the side of the vessel and strained their eyes. In that wild moment of sudden hope all was forgotten. Gurth Egerton flew to the vessel’s side.

Yes. Far away in the distance, but still visible, were the white sails of a ship.

Hope sprang up with renewed vigour in every breast. Strong men laughed and cried and hugged each other. A strange delirium animated them.

One or two of the sailors awoke from their drunken sleep, and came staggering on deck.

The excitement was at its height, each man shouting above his neighbour what was to be done to attract the passing ship’s attention, when suddenly the vessel heeled over, there was a gurgling sound, the roar and rush of a huge volume of water pouring in, and then down like a stone, to the depths of the ocean, went the *Bon Espoir.*

The waves danced and glittered in the sunlight. Over the spot where the ship and her living freight had sunk the blue waves closed, and there was nothing to tell of their vanished prey.

A bottle bobbed about, carried now here now there by the playful waves. As the *Bon Espoir* sank, the clergyman's hand had hurled it far out to sea. It contained a leaf torn from his pocket-book.

The ship *Diana*, bound for Baltimore, sailed late that afternoon over the spot where the *Bon Espoir* had sunk.

A sailor who was in the rigging cried out that he could see something that looked like a barrel floating in the sea some distance away.

A boat was manned and put off.

In half an hour it returned with a strange story.

To the barrel they had seen in the water clung a man in the last stage of exhaustion. They had released him, and brought him with them.

Tenderly the sailors lifted a half-drowned body from the stern of the boat, and it was hoisted on board.

The surgeon of the *Diana* took it in charge, and pronounced it to be still alive.

Presently the half-drowned man opened his eyes.

'What ship?' asked the captain, when he had recovered sufficiently to speak.

'From the *Bon Espoir*,' answered the man, feebly. 'She sprang a leak and went down.'

'Who are you?'

The man hesitated a moment. His senses were evidently half scattered.

‘My name is George Englehardt, of Philadelphia,’ he said presently.

Then he looked round anxiously.

‘Are there any saved except me?’ he asked, in a faint whisper.

‘Not a soul.’

The man heaved a deep sigh, and relapsed once more into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER II. TOPSEY TURVEY SEES A GHOST.

Table of Contents

I don’t imagine that Mrs. Turvey had ever read Cowper: in fact, it is exceedingly improbable that Mrs. Turvey’s poetical readings had ever extended beyond the works of the late lamented Dr. Watts. This talented author had, it is pretty certain, come under her notice, for it is on record that she once reprimanded her niece, Topsey, for putting her fingers into the marmalade-pot, by telling her that—

‘Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do.’

And fancying that this solemn warning by itself might not be sufficient, she had added to it a picture of the delights of an active life by requesting Topsey to contemplate the habits of the busy bee, who ‘improves each shining hour by gathering honey all the day from every opening flower.’ A quotation which was singularly inapt under the circumstance, for, substitute marmalade for honey, and open jam-pot for opening flower, and Topsey had been really doing her best to imitate the bright example aforesaid.

Topsey might have retorted to this effect had she been a sharp child, but unfortunately she was not. So she just wiped her sticky little fingers on her pinafore, looked up with a roguish smile at her ‘aunty,’ and darted from the room, to

find as much mischief (or marmalade) as she could elsewhere.

Mrs. Turvey and Topsey, her twelve-year-old niece, were the sole inhabitants of a great old-fashioned house in a street near Russell Square. Mrs. Turvey was housekeeper to Mr. Gurth Egerton, a gentleman who was travelling abroad for the benefit of his health, and feeling lonely with fourteen rooms all to herself, not to speak of cellars, dark corners, and gloomy passages, she had, in an evil hour, obtained permission of her brother, a widower and a railway guard, to take his little daughter into her keeping, and so have the echoes of the desolate mansion occasionally awakened with a human voice.

Topsey woke the echoes, and no mistake. The echoes had a bad time of it if they were at all sleepy echoes. They did have forty winks now and then in the day, when Topsey ran errands; but as a rule they were only allowed to drop off and take their natural rest when Topsey took hers—at night.

See what a mischievous little thing this Topsey is. She has actually kept Cowper waiting while we are attending to her.

Let us hark back to Cowper and Mrs. Turvey at once.

There is a well-known passage in ‘The Winter’s Evening,’ which I never read, even on a hot June day, without wishing it was a winter’s evening, and I could take the poet’s advice. Thus it runs:—

‘Now stir the fire, and close the shutters fast,
Let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round,
And while the bubbling and loud hissing urn

Throws up a steamy column, and the cups
That cheer but not inebriate wait on each,
So let us welcome peaceful evening in.’

Now Mrs. Turvey, I will venture to say, had never read this charming piece of advice, but she was certainly putting it into practice. It *was* a winter’s evening, singularly enough, and she had stirred the fire, closed the shutters fast, and let fall the curtains. The table stood too near the fire for a sofa, to be wheeled round, but three chairs were set in nice convenient places, the urn was bubbling and hissing away as cheerily as possible, and three cups and saucers stood waiting in a quiet and contented manner to take their proper part in the programme of the evening’s entertainment.

Cowper doesn’t mention muffins, beautifully browned and lavishly buttered, standing on the hob, and he is discreetly silent as to a glass dish of home-made marmalade. Neither can I discover any reference to a fat black pussy dozing, the picture of sleek contentment, on the hearthrug. In these particulars Mrs. Turvey had, I make bold to assert, improved upon the poet. But then Cowper only proposed to welcome the evening in. Mrs. Turvey’s welcome was designed for something with a more substantial appetite.

Don’t imagine I intend to convey that Mrs. Turvey’s visitor was going to eat the cat. That was always on the hearthrug. The marmalade and the muffins were the specialities which denoted the expected advent of company.

There were *three* cups and saucers set. Now, allotting one to Mrs. Turvey and one to Topsey, we might, by setting our wits to work, arrive at the conclusion that only one visitor was expected. Our wits would have performed the task confided to them most creditably if this was the result of their labour, for there is a knock at the door, and presently Topsey, who has been upstairs on the *qui vive*, comes dancing down into the housekeeper's little room with the intelligence that 'He's come.'

'He' follows very closely at Miss Topsey's heels. 'He' is a fat, smiling gentleman of fifty, and so shining that it seems almost a waste to burn the gas when he is in the room.

His bald head shines, his face shines, his coat shines, his boots shine, his buttons shine, his black stock shines, and his old-fashioned stand-up collar shines.

He smiles a sweet smile at Mrs. Turvey, and when he opens his mouth you see that he has white shiny teeth.

'You're late, Mr. Jabez,' says Mrs. Turvey, as, having shaken hands with her visitor and motioned him to the tea-table, she seats herself and prepares to do the honours.

'Business, my dear madam, business. Nothing but business would have made me late for this appointment, you may be sure,' answers the gentleman, shining all over his face, till he reflects the teapot and the teapot reflects him.

'Ah!' sighs Mrs. Turvey, 'business is a strange thing!'

'Yes, my dear madam, it is, and never stranger than in our line. Muffins—thank you; I adore muffins. I've been in our line thirty years, Mrs Turvey, and our business gets

stranger every day. Now our business to-night, for instance ——’

‘Ahem!’

Mr. Jabez is so suddenly interrupted by the warning eye of Mrs. Turvey that he gives a little cough, and swallows a little piece of muffin, and the redness which ensues, together with the extra shininess, makes him look like a setting sun sinking slowly below the horizon of Mrs. Turvey’s tea-table.

Mrs. Turvey’s glance has implied that the conversation is to be deferred till Topsey is out of the room. Let us take advantage of the lull in the conversation to properly introduce the worthy housekeeper’s visitor.

Mr Jabez Duck is a clerk in the employ of that eminent firm of solicitors, Messrs. Grigg and Limpet, Lincoln’s Inn. Messrs. Grigg and Limpet are the family solicitors of Mr. Gurth Egerton, and have the entire management of his affairs during his long absence abroad. Mr. Duck is the clerk specially entrusted with this part of the firm’s business, and occasions for visits to the house have from time to time arisen.

Mr. Duck pays Mrs. Turvey her housekeeping allowance, sees her with regard to accounts that are applied for, authorises repairs, and comes occasionally to refer to papers and documents, or to see if they are in the library of the firm’s absent client. This is the business part of the acquaintanceship. But beyond this there is a little personal friendship. Mrs. Turvey is a spinster, in spite of her matronly appellation, and Mr. Duck is a bachelor. Mr. Duck stays occasionally to take a friendly cup of tea after his business

has been transacted. Confidences have been exchanged; under the potent influence of the cheering cup their hearts have been opened, and little secrets have oozed out. Curiosity has been awakened on both sides, and the affairs of the absent Mr. Egerton have become deeply interesting to them.

Mr. Duck has come to tea this evening by special invitation, for something has occurred of the deepest interest. The firm have news of a very startling character; and what more natural than that, having called in the morning and hinted that he should perhaps have something of great importance to communicate, Mr. Duck should have been requested to come to tea that evening and have a quiet chat?

Mrs. Turvey hated to hear important intelligence on the doorstep, or to have a secret imparted to her in the vulgar daylight, when brushes and brooms were about. If there was a nice delightful mystery to be revealed, or a little scandal to be whispered, let her drink it with her tea, after her work was done, and when she could sit still and enjoy it with muffin and marmalade.

Mr. Duck was quite of her opinion, and so the invitation had been readily accepted.

The only difficulty was Topsey; but this, with great diplomacy, Mrs. Turvey had got over.

The servant next door was going to the Polytechnic that evening, and had promised to take Topsey with her directly Mrs. Turvey hinted that her niece had few opportunities of going out, and she thought that the ghost entertainment

was one which, from an educational point of view, no child should miss.

The glance with which Mrs. Turvey favoured Mr. Duck was therefore intended to inform him that he was to hold his tongue on the important matter for the present, but that by-and-by he would have an opportunity of speaking unreservedly.

Mrs. Turvey had not calculated upon also sending the good man's piece of muffin the wrong way. That was an unforeseen contingency, from which, however, Mr. Duck speedily recovered, and shone as placidly as ever.

When tea was over, and Topsey had been packed off to see the ghost, with instructions not only for the evening but for her entire conduct in life, with many warnings not to tumble under 'buses or to leave go her friend's hand, and with strict injunctions not to get entangled in any machinery that might happen to be going at the Polytechnic, Mrs. Turvey settled herself down and prepared to hear Mr. Duck's narrative.

Mr. Duck commenced by solemnly lifting his eyes to the ceiling, and exclaiming, in dramatic tones:

'Mrs. Turvey, madam, Mr. Gurth Egerton is there!'

Mrs. Turvey started up with a little scream, and glanced in amazement at the ceiling. Then she looked at Mr. Duck, to see if he was in his right senses.

'Where?' she gasped, presently.

'In heaven, ma'am,' answered the gentleman; then, dropping his voice and glancing significantly at the carpet, he added, 'I trust he's not *there*.'

‘Lawks a mercy, Mr. Duck, how awful! You don’t mean to say that the master’s dead?’

‘I don’t say positively he is, ma’am, and I can’t say positively that he is not, but the chances are that he is *there* now.’ Mr. Duck had glanced at the carpet as he spoke, but he instantly corrected the mistake, and looked up solemnly at the ceiling.

‘Mr. Duck,’ said Mrs. Turvey, half crying, ‘don’t trifle with my feelings. I’ve been alone in this house so long, I’ve lost all the nerve I ever had. If the master’s dead I’d rather not stop here. I shouldn’t like to be in a dead man’s house. He was never easy in his life, poor man, and—and——’

‘And he’s just one of those men you’d expect to come wandering about his house after death—eh, Mrs. Turvey?’

‘Well,’ answered the lady, glancing uneasily round, ‘it’s a dreadful thing to say, but I always did believe, and I always shall believe, as the master had—had——’

‘Had something on his conscience that wouldn’t let him rest. Exactly, Mrs. Turvey.’

‘Lor’ how you do catch me up. Well, yes. It’s no good mincing matters. But how and where did he die?’

‘How and where we can’t exactly tell,’ answered Mr. Duck; ‘but from information received, as they say at Scotland Yard, he left America in the *Bon Espoir*, that was wrecked last summer; and as he has never been heard of since, the conclusion is obvious.’

‘But he might not have come in the *Boney’s Paw*.’

‘We are certain that he did sail in her. The information that he was among the passengers reached our firm only this week, though the wreck took place six months ago. But

the information is correct; the owners confirm it upon application.'

'But he may be heard of yet. There were some persons saved.'

'Every one of them is accounted for. The boats were all picked up, and the passengers our firm have written to all state that a Mr. Gurth Egerton was on board. The *Diana* passed the scene of the wreck, and reported, on her arrival at Baltimore, that she had saved one passenger—a Mr. George Englehardt. Besides, if he had been saved we should, of course, have heard from him. Dr. Birnie was his intimate friend, and is left executor to the will. Dr. Birnie agrees with the firm that Mr. Gurth Egerton went down, my dear Mrs. Turvey, in the *Bon Espoir*.'

When she realised that her master was actually dead, Mrs. Turvey felt she ought to cry, and she begged Mr. Duck to excuse her while she did so. What was to become of her? She'd lived in the house this ten years, first as servant and then as housekeeper, and of course it wouldn't be kept on. Oh, it was very dreadful, and she didn't know what she should do.

Mr. Duck let her have a good cry, and then he shone upon her. 'My poor soul,' he said, when the paroxysm was over, 'you distress yourself needlessly. I think I may tell you, without a breach of confidence, that you are provided for. The will was opened by the firm to-day.'

Mrs. Turvey sobbed again.

Mr. Duck edged his chair a little nearer to her. 'Susan,' he said, softly, 'I shouldn't have spoken so abruptly but for this. Oh, Susan, you need never want a home.'

Mrs. Turvey looked up through her tears and beheld the shining face of Messrs. Grigg and Limpet's clerk so close to hers that it almost made her blink. At least that must have been the reason that she turned her head away.

Mr. Duck took her hand.

'Susan,' he said, pressing the imprisoned member gently against his shiny satin waistcoat, 'don't spurn me. You are alone in the world now, but I can offer you a shelter.

Come, weep on my bosom, my own stricken deer,
Though the world all turn from thee, thy shelter is here.

Those are lines, Susan, which I composed myself the first time I saw you, but which I dared not utter till now.'

The stricken deer sighed, but declined to weep upon the shiny bosom of her adorer.

'It is very sudden,' she faltered. 'I—I really never thought there was anything——'

Jabez assured her there had always been a suspicion; that now it had ripened into a fact.

For an hour or more the conversation was a mixture of poetical quotations, business suggestions, reminiscences of Mr. Gurth Egerton, and tender declarations in Mr. Duck's shiniest and sweetest manner.

Suddenly there was a loud knock at the door.

Mrs. Turvey jumped up from her chair and straightened her cap.

'Who is it?' exclaimed Mr. Duck, nervously.

'Why, it must be Topsey,' said the lady, after a moment's thought. 'Dear me! I'd no idea it was so late. I think you'd

better go, Mr. Duck.’

‘And when shall I call again, Susan?—for your answer.’

Mr. Duck showed his shiny teeth and rolled his shiny eyes so sweetly that Mrs. Turvey could not resist him any more.

‘To-morrow, Jabez.’

There was a soft sound as of the sudden collision of a pair of lips and a cheek, and then Mrs. Turvey, followed by Mr. Duck, went upstairs to the front door.

It was Topsey brought back. Mr. Duck bade Mrs. Turvey good-night on the steps as though nothing had happened, for Topsey’s sharp little ears were open, and he went off whistling ‘’Tis my delight on a shiny night,’ and Topsey went downstairs with her aunt.

She was full of the ghost. She acted the ghost. She showed her aunty how the ghost looked, and how it rose mysteriously from nothing and walked towards its victim.

Mrs. Turvey did not enter very heartily into the scene. She did not like ghosts at any time, but to-night, when her master’s death had been so suddenly communicated to her, she positively hated ghosts.

Do what she would, she could not shake off the idea that she was in a dead man’s house. All the stories of uneasy spirits visiting their earthly dwelling-places floated across her brain, and presently she turned sharply to the child, and told her not to chatter but to get ready for bed.

They slept on the ground floor, in a room that had been a servant’s room in the days when Mr. Egerton kept up an establishment.

Now in her confusion at parting with her elderly admirer right under Topsey’s watchful eye, Mrs. Turvey had forgotten

to fasten up the front door. As a matter of fact, she had closed it so carelessly that the lock had not caught at all.

She suddenly recollected her omission to examine the fastenings with her usual care, so she sent Topsey to do it, while she got the bread and cheese out of the larder for her frugal supper.

Topsey ran up and got half-way down the hall. Then she started back, trembling in every limb. It was quite dark in the passage, but the door was slowly swinging back on its hinges. As it opened and the pale light of the street lamp wandered in, the figure of a man with a face ghastly in the glare of the flickering illumination from without glided towards her. Her brain was full of the ghost illusion she had seen that evening. This was just how the apparition had walked.

Slowly it came nearer and nearer to her.

With a sudden effort the terrified child found her voice and gave a wild cry.

‘Aunty!’ she shrieked. ‘Save me! The ghost! the ghost!’

Mrs. Turvey ran upstairs, terrified at the child’s cries.

She reached the hall, held up her arms, and fell down in a swoon.

The sea had given up its dead.

There, in the hall of his earthly dwelling, stood the ghost of Gurth Egerton.

CHAPTER III. MR. EDWARD MARSTON MEETS AN OLD FRIEND.

Table of Contents

Now, gentlemen, please!’

The landlord of the Blue Pigeons had one eye on the clock and the other on his customers. It wanted only five minutes to closing time, and the patrons of the Blue Pigeons required a great deal of soft persuasion, as a rule, before they shook themselves up from their free-and-easy attitudes at the counter and on the benches, and filed out into the street.

On this especial night there was every excuse for the apparent inattention with which they received the landlord’s hint. Inside it was warm and cheery, the brilliant gas flared upon polished pewter, and gay-coloured glass, through the open door of the bar-parlour the ruddy glare of the fire could be seen dancing on the hearth, and everything was suggestive of warmth and light and comfort.

Outside—oh, what a night it was outside! The rain was coming down in torrents, the streets were seas of slush, and every time the big door swung open to admit a benighted traveller a roaring blast of east wind followed him to give him a final buffet, and seemed to say, ‘Take that; and I’ll give you another when you come out.’

It was no wonder the Blue Pigeons was crammed such a night as this; it was no wonder that once under the hospitable portals, and sheltered from the rain and the wind, the customers hesitated to leave the haven behind them.

‘Now, gentlemen, please!’

This time the landlord put a little more determination into his warning note, and gave the sign to the potman to lower the gas and fidget with the front door.

Reluctantly the gentlemen and ladies drained their glasses, wiped their lips, and shook themselves together preparatory to turning out into the night. Coat-collars were turned up, shawls were flung over battered bonnets, hands were thrust deep into trousers pockets, there was a little laughing, more growling, and a great deal of swearing, mixed with maudlin farewells and some rough horseplay, and then the motley crowd of drinkers oozed through the swing doors, melted gradually, and vanished.

Where to?

To foul alleys and rookeries, to cellars and human kennels, to low lodging-houses and tumble-down hovels.

The lights of the Blue Pigeons go out one by one, silence steals over the street, and the great crowd of drinkers separates, and each component part of it wends his or her way to some place which is ‘home,’—some place—mean, vile, and awful though it be—which contains the scanty household gods and something near and dear.

Although the Blue Pigeons is within a stone’s throw of the Seven Dials, its immediate vicinity is wrapped in silence when the clock strikes one. As a rule the sounds of revelry

and riot linger in the narrow streets long after the public has disgorged its prey, and men and women stand about at the street corners, and joke and laugh and quarrel, despite the rough injunction to move on bestowed upon them by the especial policeman told off to superintend their conduct.

To-night the rain is so pitiless and the air so keen and merciless that the lowest and meanest of the populace have hurried off to such shelter as they can find. A thick fog, too, has begun to settle down upon the scene of desolation, and it is not a time for the proverbial dog to be out of doors.

But there is one customer who still hovers about the closed doors of the “Blue Pigeons.”

He had been inside from nine until closing time, and has come out at the last moment with the rest.

He had stood about unnoticed among the little groups, shifting about from one to the other, and pretending to belong to them. In the Dials a pot of beer does duty for a good many mouths sometimes, and neither the landlord nor the potman noticed the stranger sufficiently to discover that during the entire evening he had been enjoying the warmth and light and the smell of the spirits and tobacco-smoke without spending one penny for the good of the house.

Edward Marston hadn’t anything to spend or he would have spent it. He had made a dive into the house to escape the storm, and it had sheltered him for an hour or two. Now the doors were shut, and he was out in the streets again—homeless! penniless!

‘I’m on my beam ends now, and no mistake,’ he said to himself. ‘What the dickens am I to do? I suppose I’d better go and get quietly into the river.’