



MICHAEL ARLEN (1895-), ne *Dikran Kouyoumdjian*, was born in Bulgaria of Armenian parents. He was educated at Malvern College. He introduced a gay, sly, mildly satirical way of describing the jaunts and jollities of Mayfair that soon brought him many readers—not a few of them from Mayfair. Among his many successful books are "The Green Hat," "Lily Christine," and "These Charming People." Grimness, as this story shows, sometimes alternates with gaiety.

THE GHOUL OF GOLDERS GREEN

IT is fortunate that the affair should have happened to Mr. Ralph Wyndham Trevor and be told by him, for Mr. Trevor is a scholar of some authority. It is in a spirit of almost ominous premonition that he begins the tale, telling how he was walking slowly up Davies Street one night when he caught a crab. It need scarcely be said that Davies Street owes its name to that Mary Davies, the heiress, who married into the noble house of Grosvenor. That was years and years ago, of course, and is of no importance whatsoever now, but it may be of interest to students.

It was very late on a winter's night, and Mr. Trevor was depressed, for he had that evening lost a great deal more than he could afford at the card-game of auction-bridge. Davies Street was deserted; and the moon and Mr. Trevor walked alone towards Berkeley Square. It was not the sort of moon that Mr. Trevor remembered having seen before. It was, indeed, the sort of moon one usually meets only in books or wine. Mr. Trevor was sober.

Nothing happened, Mr. Trevor affirms, for quite a while; he just walked, and, at that corner where Davies Street and Mount Street join together the better to become Berkeley Square, stayed his walking, with the idea that he would soothe his depression with the fumes of a cigarette. His cigarette-case, however, was empty. All London, says Mr. Trevor, appeared to be empty that night. Berkeley Square lay pallid and desolate: looking clear, not as though with moonlight, but with dead daylight; and never a voice to put life into the still streets, never a breeze to play with the bits of paper in the gutters or to sing among the dry boughs of the trees. Berkeley Square looked like nothing so much as an old stage-

property that no one had any use for. Mr. Trevor had no use at all for it ; and became definitely antagonistic to it when a taxi-cab crawled wretchedly across the waste white expanse, and the driver, a man in a Homburg hat of green plush, looked into his face with a beseeching look.

" Taxi, sir ? " he said.

Mr. Trevor says that, not wanting to hurt the man's feelings, he just looked another way.

" Nice night, sir," said the driver miserably, " for a drive in an 'ackney-carriage."

" I live," said Mr. Trevor with restraint, " only a few doors off. So hackney-carriage to you."

" No luck ! " sighed the driver and accelerated madly away even as Mr. Trevor changed his mind, for would it not be an idea to drive to the nearest coffee-stall and buy some cigarettes ? This, however, he was not to do, for there was no other reply to his repeated calls of " Taxi ! " but certain heavy blows on the silence of Davies Street behind him.

" Wanting a taxi, sir ? " said a voice which could only belong to a policeman.

" Certainly not," said Mr. Trevor bitterly. " I never want a taxi. But now and then a taxi-driver thrusts himself on me and pays me to be seen in his cab, just to give it a tone. Next question."

" Ho ! " said the policeman thoughtfully.

" I beg your pardon ? " said Mr. Trevor.

" Ho ! " said the policeman thoughtfully.

" The extent of your vocabulary," said Mr. Trevor gloomily, " leads me to conclude that you must have been born a gentleman. Have you, in that case, a cigarette you could spare ? "

" Gaspers," said the policeman.

" Thank you," said Mr. Trevor, rejecting them. " I am no stranger to ptomaine-poisoning."

" That's funny," said the policeman, " your saying that. I was just thinking of death."

" Death ? " said Mr. Trevor.

" You've said it," said the policeman.

" I've said what ? " said Mr. Trevor.

" Death," said the policeman.

" Oh, death ! " said Mr. Trevor. " I always say ' death,' constable. It's my favourite word."

" Ghoulish, I calls it, sir. Ghoulish, no less."

" That entirely depends," said Mr. Trevor, " on what you

are talking about. In some things, ghoulish is as ghoulish does. In others, no."

"You've said it," said the policeman. "But ghoulish goes, in this 'ere affair. One after the other lying in their own blood, and not a sign as to who's done it, not a sign!"

"Oh, come, constable! Tut-tut! Not even a thumb-mark in the blood?"

"I'm telling you," said the policeman severely. "Corpses slit to ribbons all the way from 'Ampstead 'Eath to this 'ere Burkley Square. And why? That's what I asks myself. And why?"

"Of course," said Mr. Trevor gaily, "there certainly have been a lot of murders lately. Ha-ha! But not, surely, as many as all that!"

"I'm coming to that," said the policeman severely. "We don't allow of the Press reporting more'n a quarter of them. No, sir. That's wot it 'as come to, these larst few days. A more painful situation 'as rarely arisen in the hannals of British crime. The un'ear'd-of bestiality of the criminal may well baffle ordinary minds like yours and mine."

"I don't believe a word of it!" snapped Mr. Trevor.

"Ho, *you* don't!" said the policeman. "*You* don't!"

"That's right," said Mr. Trevor, "I don't. Do you mean to stand there and tell me that I wouldn't 'ave 'ear'd—I mean, have heard of this criminal if he had really existed?"

"You're a gent," said the policeman.

"You've said it," said Mr. Trevor.

"And gents," said the policeman, "know nothing. And what they do know is mouldy. Ever 'ear'd of Jack the Ripper?"

"Yes, I 'ave," said Mr. Trevor bitterly.

"*Have* is right, sir, if you'll excuse me. Well, Jack's death was never rightly proved, not it! So it might well be 'im at 'is old tricks again, even though 'e has been retired, in a manner of speaking, these forty years. Remorseless and indiscriminate murder, swift and sure, was Jack's line, if you remember, sir."

"Before my time," said Mr. Trevor gloomily.

"Well, Jack's method was just to slit 'em up with a razor, frontwise and from south to north, and not a blessed word spoken. No one's touched 'im yet, not for efficiency, but this new chap, 'e looks like catching Jack up. *And* at Jack's own game, razor and all. Makes a man fair sick, sir, to see the completed work. Just slits 'em up as clean as you or me

might slit up a vealanam-pie. We was laying bets on 'im over at Vine Street only to-night, curious like to see whether 'e'd beat Jack's record. But it'll take some beating, I give you my word. Up to date this chap 'as only done in twelve in three weeks—not that that's 'alf bad, seeing as how 'e's new to the game, more or less."

"Oh rather, more or less!" said Mr. Trevor faintly. "Twelve! Good God—only twelve! But why—why don't you catch the ghastly man?"

"Ho, why don't we!" said the policeman. "Becos we don't know 'ow, that's why. Not us! It's the little one-corpse men we're good for, not these 'ere big artists. Look at Jack the Ripper—did we catch 'im? Did we? And look at Julian Raphael—did we catch 'im? I'm asking you."

"I know you are," said Mr. Trevor gratefully. "Thank you."

"I don't want your thanks," said the policeman. "I'm just warning you."

Mr. Trevor gasped: "Warning *me*!"

"You've said it," said the policeman. "You don't ought to be out alone at this time of night, an 'earty young chap like you. These twelve 'e's already done in were all 'earty young chaps. 'E's partial to 'em 'earty, I do believe. And social gents some of 'em was, too, with top-'ats to hand, just like you might be now, sir, coming 'ome from a smoking-concert. Jack the Ripper all over again, that's wot I say. Except that this 'ere new corpse-fancier, 'e don't seem to fancy women at all."

"A chaps' murderer, what!" said Mr. Trevor faintly. "Ha-ha! What!"

"You've said it," said the policeman. "But you never know your luck, sir. And maybe as 'ow thirteen's your lucky number."

Mr. Trevor lays emphasis on the fact that throughout he treated the constable with the courtesy due from a gentleman to the law. He merely said: "Constable, I am now going home. I do not like you very much. You are an alarmist. And I hope that when you go to sleep to-night your ears swell so that when you wake up in the morning you will be able to fly straight to Heaven and never be seen or heard of again. You and your razors and your thirteens!"

"Ho, they ain't mine, far from it!" said the policeman, and even as he spoke a voice crashed upon the silence from the direction of Mount Street. The voice belonged to a tall

figure in black and white, and on his head was a top-hat that shone under the pallid moon like a monstrous black jewel.

"That there," said the policeman, "is a Noise."

"He's singing," said Mr. Trevor.

"I'll teach 'im singing!" said the policeman.

Sang the voice :

*"With an host of furious fancies,
Whereof I am commander,
With a burning spear
And a horse of air
To the wilderness I wander."*

"You will," said the policeman. "Oh, you will!"

*"By a knight of ghosts and shadows
I summoned am to tourney
Ten leagues beyond
The wide world's end—
Methinks it is no journey!"*

"Not to Vine Street, it isn't," said the policeman.

"Ho there!" cried the approaching voice. "Who dares interrupt my song!"

"Beau Maturin!" cried Mr. Trevor gladly. "It's not you! Bravo, Beau Maturin! Sing, bless you, sing! For I am depressed."

*"From Heaven's Gate to Hampstead Heath
Young Bacchus and his crew
Came tumbling down, and o'er the town
Their bursting trumpets blew."*

"Fine big gent, your friend," said the policeman thoughtfully.

*"And when they heard that happy word
Policemen leapt and ambled :
The busmen pranced, the maidens danced,
The men in bowlers gambolled."*

"Big!" said Mr. Trevor. "Big? Let me tell you, constable, that the last time Mr. Maturin hit Jack Dempsey, Dempsey bounced back from the floor so quick that he knocked Mr. Maturin out on the rebound."

Mr. Trevor says that Beau Maturin came on through the night like an avenger through a wilderness, so little did he reckon of cruel moons and rude policemen. Said he: "Good evening, Ralph. Good evening, constable. Lo, I am in wine!"

"You've said it," said the policeman.

"Gently, my dear! Or," said Mr. Maturin cordially, "I will dot you one, and look at it which way you like it is a far better thing to be in wine than in a hospital. Now, are there any good murders going to-night?"

"Going?" said the constable. "I'm 'ere to see there ain't any coming. But I've just been telling this gent about some recent crises. Corpses slit to ribbons just as you or me might slit up a vealanam——"

"Don't say that again!" snapped Mr. Trevor.

"By Heaven, what's that?" sighed Mr. Maturin; and, following his intent eyes, they saw, a yard or so behind them on the pavement, a something that glittered in the moonlight. Mr. Trevor says that, without a thought for his own safety, he instantly took a step towards the thing, but that the policeman restrained him. It was Mr. Maturin who picked the thing up. The policeman whistled thoughtfully.

"A razor, let's face it!" whispered Beau Maturin.

"*And sharp!*" said the policeman, thoughtfully testing the glittering blade with the ball of his thumb.

Mr. Trevor says that he was never in his life less conscious of any feeling of excitement. He merely pointed out that he could swear there had been no razor there when he had come round the corner, and that, while he had stood there, no one had passed behind him.

"The chap that owns this razor," said the policeman, emphasizing each word with a gesture of the blade, "must 'ave slunk behind you and me as we stood 'ere talking and dropped it, maybe not finding it sharp enough for 'is purpose. What do you think, Mr. Maturin?"

But Mr. Maturin begged to be excused from thinking, protesting that men are in the hands of God, and God is in the hands of women and so what the devil is there to think about?

Mr. Trevor says that the motive behind his remark at that moment, which was to the effect that he simply must have a drink, was merely that he was thirsty. A clock struck two.

"After hours," said the policeman; and he seemed, Mr. Trevor thought, to grin evilly.

"What do they know of hours," sighed Mr. Maturin, "who only *Ciro's* know? Come, Ralph. My love, she jilted me but the other night. Therefore I will swim in wine, and thrice will I call upon her name when I am drowning. Constable, good-night to you."

"Now I've warned you!" the policeman called after them. "Don't go into any alleys or passages like *Lansdowne Passage*, else you'll be finding yourselves slit up like *vealanampies*."

Maybe it was only the treacherous light of the moon, but Mr. Trevor fancied as he looked back that the policeman, where he stood thoughtfully fingering the shining blade, seemed to be grinning evilly at them.

II

THEY walked in silence, their steps ringing sharp on the bitter-chill air. The night in the sky was pale at the white disdain of the moon. It was Mr. Maturin who spoke at last, saying: "There's too much talk of murder to-night. A man cannot go to bed on such crude talk. You know me, kid. Shall we go to *The Garden of My Grandmother*?"

At that moment a taxi-cab crawled across the moonlight; and the driver, a man in a *Homburg* hat of green plush, did not attempt to hide his pleasure at being able to satisfy the gentlemen's request to take them to *The Garden of My Grandmother*.

Mr. Trevor says that he has rarely chanced upon a more unsatisfactory taxi-cab than that driven by the man in the *Homburg* hat of green plush. By closing one's eyes one might perhaps have created an illusion of movement by reason of certain internal shrieks and commotions, but when one saw the slow procession of shops by the windows and the lamp-posts loitering by the curb, one was, as Beau Maturin pointed out, justified in believing that the hackney-cab in question was not going fast enough to outstrip a retired Czecho-Slovakian Admiral in an egg-and-spoon race. Nor were they altogether surprised when the taxi-cab died on them in *Conduit Street*. The man in the *Homburg* hat of green plush jumped out and tried to re-start the engine. He failed. The gentlemen within waited the issue in silence. The silence, says Mr. Trevor, grew terrible. But the taxi-cab moved not, and the man in the *Homburg* hat of green plush began, in his agitation, thumping the carburettor with his clenched fist.

"No petrol," he pleaded. "No petrol."

Said Mr. Trevor to Mr. Maturin: "Let us go. Let us leave this man."

"'Ere, my fare!" said the fellow.

"Your fare?" said Mr. Maturin, with contracted brows. "What do you mean, 'your fare'?"

"Bob on the meter," said the wretch.

"My friend will pay," said Mr. Maturin, and stalked away. Mr. Trevor says that, while retaining throughout the course of that miserable night his undoubted flair for generosity, he could not but hold Beau Maturin's high-handed disavowal of his responsibilities against him; and he was hurrying after him up Conduit Street, turning over such phrases as might best point the occasion and make Mr. Maturin ashamed of himself, when that pretty gentleman swung round sharply and said: "Ssh!"

But Mr. Trevor was disinclined to Ssh, maintaining that Mr. Maturin owed him ninepence.

"Ssh, you fool!" snapped Mr. Maturin; and Mr. Trevor had not obliged him for long before he discerned in the quietness of Conduit Street a small discordant noise, or rather, says Mr. Trevor, a series of small discordant noises.

"She's crying, let's face it," whispered Mr. Maturin.

"She! Who?"

"Ssh!" snapped Mr. Maturin.

They were at that point in Conduit Street where a turn to the right will bring one into a fat little street which looks blind but isn't, inasmuch as close by the entrance to the Alpine Club Galleries there is a narrow passage or alley leading into Savile Row. Mr. Trevor says that the repugnance with which he at that moment looked towards the darkness of that passage or alley had less than nothing to do with the bloodthirsty policeman's last words, but was due merely to an antipathy he had entertained towards all passages or alleys ever since George Tarlyon had seen a ghost in one. Mr. Maturin and he stood for some minutes in the full light of the moon while, as though from the very heart of the opposite darkness, the lacerating tremors of weeping echoed about their ears.

"I can't bear it!" said Beau Maturin. "Come along." And he advanced towards the darkness, but Mr. Trevor said he would not, pleading foot-trouble.

"Come," said Beau Maturin, but Mr. Trevor said: "Tomorrow, yes. But not to-night."

Then did Beau Maturin advance alone into the darkness

towards the passage or alley, and with one pounce the darkness stole his top-hat from the moon. Beau Maturin was invisible. The noise of weeping abated.

"Oi!" called Mr. Trevor. "Come back, you fool!"

"Ssh!" whispered the voice of Mr. Maturin.

Mr. Trevor said bitterly: "You're swanking, that's all!"

"It's a girl!" whispered the voice of Mr. Maturin, whereupon Mr. Trevor, who yielded to no man in the chivalry of his address towards women, at once advanced, caught up Mr. Maturin, and, without a thought for his own safety, was about to pass ahead of him, when Beau Maturin had the bad taste to whisper, "Ware razors!" and thus again held the lead.

She who wept, now almost inaudibly, was a dark shape just within the passage. Her face, says Mr. Trevor, was not visible, yet her shadow had not those rather surprising contours which one generally associates with women who weep in the night.

"Madam," began Mr. Maturin.

"Oh!" sobbed the gentle voice. "He is insulting me!"

Mr. Trevor lays some emphasis on the fact that throughout the course of that miserable night his manners were a pattern of courtliness. Thinking, however, that a young lady in a situation so lachrymose would react more favourably to a fatherly tone, he said:

"My child, we hope——"

"Ah," sobbed the gentle voice. "Please go away, please! I am *not* that sort!"

"Come, come!" said Mr. Maturin. "It is us whom you insult with a suspicion so disagreeable. My friend and I are not of the sort to commit ourselves to so low a process as that which is called, I believe, 'picking up.'"

"We have, as a matter of fact, friends of our own," said Mr. Trevor haughtily.

"Speaking generally," said Mr. Maturin, "women like us. Time over again I have had to sacrifice my friendship with a man in order to retain his wife's respect."

"Ah, you are a man of honour!" sobbed the young lady.

"We are two men of honour," said Mr. Trevor.

"And far," said Mr. Maturin warmly, "from intending you any mischief, we merely thought, on hearing you weeping——"

"You *heard* me, sir!"

"From Conduit Street," said Mr. Trevor severely, whereupon Mr. Maturin lifted up his voice and sang :

*"From Conduit Street, from Conduit Street,
The street of ties and tailors :
From Conduit Street, from Conduit Street,
A shocking street for trousers."*

"Oh!" sobbed the young lady. "Is this chivalry?"

"Trousers," said Mr. Maturin, "are closely connected with chivalry, insomuch as he who commits chivalry without them is to be considered a rude fellow. But, child," Mr. Maturin protested sincerely, "we addressed you only in the hope that we might be of some service in the extremity of your grief. I assure you that you can trust us, for since we are no longer soldiers, rape and crime have ceased to attract us. However, you do not need us. We were wrong. We will go."

"It was I who was wrong!" came the low voice; and Mr. Trevor says that only then did the young lady raise her face, when it was instantly as though the beauty of that small face sent the surrounding darkness scurrying away. Not, however, that Mr. Trevor was impressed altogether in the young lady's favour. Her eyes, which were large, dark, and charming, appeared to rest on handsome Beau Maturin with an intentness which Mr. Trevor can only describe as bold; while her disregard of his own presence might have hurt him had he, says Mr. Trevor, cared two pins for that kind of thing.

"You see, I have not eaten to-day," the young lady told Beau Maturin, who cried: "But, then, we *can* help you!"

"Ah, how do I know! Please," the young lady began weeping again, and Mr. Trevor says that had he not hardened his heart he could not say what he might not have done. "Please, sirs, I simply do not know what to do! I am so unhappy, so alone—oh, but you cannot imagine! You are gentlemen?"

"Speaking for my friend," said Mr. Maturin warmly, "he has been asked to resign from Buck's Club only after repeated bankruptcies."

"Mr. Maturin," said Mr. Trevor, "has in his time been cashiered from no less a regiment than the Coldstream Guards."

The young lady did not, however, favour Mr. Trevor with so much as a glance, never once taking her beautiful eyes from the handsome face of Beau Maturin. Indeed, throughout the

course of that miserable night she admirably controlled any interest Mr. Trevor might have aroused in her, which Mr. Trevor can only account for by the supposition that she must have been warned against him. Beau Maturin, meanwhile, had taken the young lady's arm, a familiarity with which Mr. Trevor cannot too strongly dissociate himself, and was saying :

"Child, you may come with us, if not with honour, at least with safety. And while you refresh yourself with food and drink you can tell us, if you please, the tale of your troubles. Can't she, Ralph ? "

"I don't see," said Mr. Trevor, "what good we can do."

"Your friend," said the young lady sadly to Beau Maturin, "does not like me. Perhaps you had better leave me alone to my misery."

"My friend," said Beau Maturin, guiding her steps down the fat little street towards Conduit Street, "likes you only too well, but is restraining himself for fear of your displeasure. Moreover, he cannot quickly adapt himself to the company of ingenuous young ladies, for he goes a good deal into society, where somewhat cruder methods obtain."

"But oh, where are you taking me to ? " suddenly cried the young lady.

"To *The Garden of My Grandmother*," said Mr. Trevor bitterly, and presently they found a taxi-cab on Regent Street which quickly delivered them at the place in Leicester Square. Mr. Trevor cannot help priding himself on the agility with which he leapt out of that taxi-cab, saying to the driver : "My friend will pay."

But Mr. Maturin, engrossed in paying those little attentions to the young lady which really attractive men, says Mr. Trevor, can afford to neglect, told the driver to wait, and when the driver said he did not want to wait, to go and boil his head.

III

MR. TREVOR describes *The Garden of My Grandmother* in some detail, but that would be of interest only to the specialist. The place was lately raided, and is now closed ; and remained open so long as it did only with the help of such devices as commend themselves to those aliens who know the laws of the land only to circumvent them. For some time, indeed, the police did not even know of its existence as a night-club, for the entrance to the place was through two mean-

looking doors several yards apart, on one of which was boldly inscribed the word "Gentlemen" and on the other "Ladies."

Within, all was gaiety and chic. From the respectable night-clubs and restaurants, all closed by this hour, would come the *jeunesse* of England; and an appetizing smell of kippers brought new life to the jaded senses of young ladies, while young gentlemen cleverly contrived to give the appearance of drinking ginger-ale by taking their champagne through straws. Mr. Trevor says, however, that there was not the smallest chance of the place being raided on the night in question, for among the company was a Prince of the Blood; and it is an unwritten law in the Metropolitan Police Force that no night-club shall be raided while a Prince of the Blood is pulling a party therein.

The young lady and our two gentlemen were presently refreshing themselves at a table in a secluded corner; and when at last only the wine was left before them Mr. Maturin assumed his courtliest manner to beg the young lady to tell her tale, and in detail, if she thought its relation would relieve her at all. She thought, with all the pensive beauty of her dark eyes, that it would, and immediately began on the following tale:

THE TALE OF THE BULGARIAN GIRL

I am (she said) twenty-three years old, and although I once spent two years in England at a boarding-school in Croydon, my life hitherto has been lived entirely in Bulgaria. My father was a Bulgar of the name of Samson Samsonovitch Samsonoff, my mother an Englishwoman of the Lancashire branch of the race of Jones, and for her tragic death in a railway accident just over a year ago I shall grieve all my life: which, I cannot help praying, may be a short one, for I weary of the insensate cruelties that every new day opens out for me.

I must tell you that my mother was an unusual woman, of rigid principles, lofty ideals, and a profound feeling for the grace and dignity of the English tongue, in which, in spite of my father's opposition, for the Samsonoffs are a bitter proud race, she made me proficient at an early age. Never had this admirable woman a thought in her life that was not directed towards furthering her husband's welfare and to obtaining the happiness of her only child; and I am convinced that my father had not met his cruel death two months ago had she been spared to counsel him.

My father came of an ancient Macedonian house. For hundreds of years a bearer of the name of Samson Samsonovitch Samsonoff has trod the stark hillsides of the Balkans and raided the sweet, rich valleys about Philippopolis. As brigands, the Samsonoffs had never a rival; as *comitadjis*, in war or peace, their name was a name for heroism and of terror; while as assassins—for the domestic economy of Bulgaria has ever demanded the occasional services of a hawk's eye and a ruthless hand—a Samsonoff has been honourably associated with some of the most memorable coups in Balkan history. I am well aware that pride of family has exercised a base dominion over the minds of many good men and women; yet I do not hesitate to confess that it is with almost unbearable regret that I look upon the fact that I, a wretched girl, am the last and only remnant of our once proud house.

Such a man it was with whom my mother, while accompanying her father, a civil engineer, through Bulgaria, married. Nor did it need anything less than the ardour of her love and the strength of her character to seduce a Samson Samsonovitch from the dour dominion of the hills to the conventional life of the valleys. I loved my father, but cannot be blind to the grave flaws in his character. A tall, hairy man, with a beard such as would have appalled your English description of Beaver, he was subject to ungovernable tempers and, occasionally, to regrettable lapses from that moral code which is such an attractive feature of English domestic life. Ah, you who live in the content and plenty of so civilized a land, how can you even imagine the horrors of lawlessness that obtain among primitive peoples! Had not that good woman my mother always willed him to loving-kindness, Samsonovitch Samsonoff had more than once spilled the blood of his dearest friends in the heat of some petty tavern brawl.

We lived in a farmhouse in what is surely the loveliest valley in the world, that which is called the Valley of the Roses, and whence is given to the world that exquisite essence known as attar of roses. Our little household in that valley was a happy and united one; more and more infrequent became my father's demoniac tempers; and, but for his intolerance of fools and cravens, you had taken the last of the Samsonoffs to be a part of the life of the valley-men, of whose industry, the cultivation of roses, he rapidly became a master.

Thus we come to the time which I now think of as two months before my mother's death. My father had attained to a certain degree of wealth, and was ever enticing my mother

with dreams of a prolonged visit to her beloved birthplace, Southport, which is, I believe, a pretty town on the seaboard of Lancashire, and which I look forward with delight to visiting. While enticing her, however, with such visions, he did not hesitate to warn her that she must wait on the issue of his fanciful hobby, which daily grew on him ; for the last of the Samsonoffs had become an inventor of flowers !

You may well look bewildered. But had you known my father you would in some measure have understood how a man, of an extreme audacity of temperament, might be driven into any fanciful pursuit that might lend a spice to a life of intolerable gentility. Nor was that pursuit so fanciful as might at first appear to those of conventionally studious minds : my father had a profound knowledge of the anatomy of flowers ; and was in the habit of saying that he could not but think that the mind of man had hitherto neglected the invention and cultivation of the most agreeable variations. In fine, the tempestuous but simple mind of Samsonovitch Samsonoff had been captivated by the possibility of growing green carnations.

My mother and I were, naturally enough, not at all averse from his practising so gentle a hobby as the invention and cultivation of improbable flowers. And it was long before we even dreamt of the evil consequences that might attend so inoffensive an ambition. But my poor mother was soon to be rid of the anxieties of this life.

One day she and I were sitting in the garden discussing the English fashion-journals, when, silently as a cloud, my father came out of the house and looked towards us in the half-frowning, half-smiling way of his best mood. Tall and patriarchal, he came towards us—and in his hand we saw a flower with a long slender stem, and we stared at it as though we could not believe our eyes, for it was a green carnation !

“ You have painted it ! ” we cried, my mother and I, for his success had seemed to us as remote as the stars.

“ I have *made* it ! ” said my father, and he smiled into his beard, which was ever his one confidential friend. “ Women, I have made it in my laboratory. And as I have made this I can make thousands, millions, and thousands of millions ! ”

He waved a closely-covered piece of paper towards me. “ My daughter,” he said, “ here is your dower, your heritage. I am too old to burden myself with the cares of great riches, but by the help of this paper, you, my beloved child, will become an heiress who may condescend to an Emperor or an

American. We will not lose a minute before going to England, the land of honest men, to put the matter of the patent in train. For on this paper is written the formula by which green carnations, as well as all previously known varieties of carnations, can be *made* instead of grown. *Made*, I say, instead of grown! Women, do you understand what it is that I have achieved? I have stolen something of the secret of the sun!"

"Samson, boast not!" cried my mother, but he laughed at her and fondled me, while I stared in great wonder at the slip of paper that fluttered in his hand, and dreamed the fair dreams of wealth and happiness in a civilized country. Ah, me, ah me, the ill-fated excellence of dreams! For here I am in the most civilized country in the world, a pauper, and more wretched than a pauper!

Our preparations for removal to England were not far advanced before that happened which brought the first cruel turn to our fortunes. On an evil day my mother set out to Vienna to buy some trivial thing, and—but I cannot speak of that, how she was returned to us a mangled corpse, her dear features mutilated beyond recognition by the fury of the railway accident.

My father took his sudden loss strangely: it was as though he was deprived at one blow of all the balance, the restraint, with which so many years of my mother's influence had softened the dangerous temper of the Samsonoff; and the brooding silence he put upon his surroundings clamoured with black thoughts. Worst of all, he began again to frequent the taverns in the valley, wherein he seemed to find solace in goading to fury the craven-hearted lowlanders among whom he had lived in peace for so long. The Samsonoff, in short, seemed rapidly to be reverting to type; and I, his daughter, must stand by and do nothing, for my influence over him was never but of the pettiest sort.

The weeks passed, and our preparations for departure to England proceeded at the soberest pace. In England we were going to stay with my mother's brother, a saintly man of some little property who lived a retired life in London, and whose heir I would in due course be, since he was himself without wife or children.

My father, never notable for the agreeable qualities of discretion and reticence, soon spread about the report of his discovery of the green carnation. He could not resist boasting of it in his cups, of the formula with which he could always make them, of the fortune he must inevitably make. Nor did

he hesitate to taunt the men of the valley, they who came of generations of flower-growers, with his own success in an occupation which, he said, he had never undertaken but at a woman's persuasion, since it could be regarded as manly only by those who would describe as manly the painted face of a Circassian eunuch. Thus he would taunt them, laughing me to scorn when I ventured to point out that even worms will turn and cravens conspire. Woe and woe to the dour and high-handed in a world of polity, for their fate shall surely find them out!

One day, having been to the village to procure some yeast for the making of a *yauort* or *yawort*, which is that same Bulgarian "sour milk" so strongly recommended to Anglo-Saxon digestions, I was startled, as I walked up the path to the door, by the bruit of loud, rough voices. Only too soon was my fear turned to horror. One of the voices was my father's, arrogant and harsh as only his could be, with a sneer like a snake running through it. The other I could not recognize, but could hear only too well that it had not the soft accents of the men of the valley; and when, afraid to enter, I peered in through the window, I saw my father in violent altercation with a man his equal in stature and demeanour—another bearded giant, as fair as my father was dark, and with the livid eyes of a wolf.

What was my horror on recognizing him as Michaelis the *comitadji*, the notorious and brutal Michaelis of the hills. The Michaelis and the Samsonovitch Samsonoffs had always been the equal kings of the *banditti*, and, in many a fight between Christian and Turk, the equal champions of the Cross against the Crescent. And now, as I could hear through the window, the last of the Michaelis was asking of the last of the Samsonoffs some of his great wealth, that he might arm and munition his troop to the latest mode.

My father threw back his head and laughed. But his laugh had cost him dear had I not screamed a warning, for the Michaelis with the wolfish eyes had raised a broad knife. My father leapt to one side, and taking up the first thing that came to hand, a heavy bottle of *mastic*, crashed it down like an axe on the fair giant's head; and then, without so much as a glance at the unconscious man, and massive though the Michaelis was, slung him over his shoulder, strode out of the house and garden, and flung him into the middle of the roadway, where he lay for long moaning savagely with the pain of his broken head. I had gone to the aid of the wretch, but

my father would not let me, saying that no Michaelis ever yet died of a slap on the crown and that a little blood-letting would clear the man's mind of his boyish fancies. Ah, if it had !

It was at a late hour of the very next night—for since my mother's death my father would loiter in the taverns until all hours—that his hoarse voice roused me from my sleep ; and on descending I found him raging about the kitchen like a wounded tiger, his clothes in disorder and showing grim dark stains that, as I clung to him, foully wetted my hands. I prayed him, in an access of terror, to tell me he was not hurt, for what other protection than him had I in that murderous land ?

“ I am not hurt, child,” he growled impatiently. “ But I have been driven to hurt some so that they can never again feel pain.”

They had ambushed him, the cowards, as he came home through the wood—as though a hundred of those maggots of the valley could slay a Samsonovitch Samsonoff ! My father had caught the last of them by the throat, and the trembling coward had saved himself by confessing the plot. It appeared that it was they who had persuaded the Michaelis to visit us the day before, inflaming his fancy with tales of the discovery of the carnation and of the great riches the Samsonoff had concealed about the house. And the Michaelis had come to our house not for part of my father's wealth but for all he could find, as also for the secret of the carnation, which he might sell at a great price to some Jew in Sofia—he had come to kill my father !

“ And I, like a fool,” cried my father, “ only broke the skin of his wolfish head ! Girl, we must be off at once ! I have not lived in unwilling peace all these years to die like a rat ; and now that these weak idiots have failed to kill me Michaelis and his troop will surround the house, and who shall escape the wolves of the hills ? Now linger not for your clothes and fineries. Grigory Eshekovitch has horses for us at the edge of the wood, and we can make Philippopolis by the morning. Here is all our money in notes. Take them, so that you will be provided for should these scum get me. And the formula—take care of the formula, child, for that is your fortune ! Should I have to stay behind, your mother's brother in England is a good man and will probably not rob you of more than half the profits of it.”

And so we came to leave our beloved home, stealing like

thieves through the darkness of a moonless night. How shall I ever forget those desperate moments ! Our farm lay far from any other habitation, and a long sloping lane joined our pastures to the extensive Karaloff Wood, a wood always evoked by Bulgarian poets of past centuries as the home of vampires and the kennel of the hounds of hell.

There, at its borders, Grigory Eshekovitch, a homely man devoted to our interests, awaited us with two horses ; and, although I could not see his face in the darkness, I could imagine by the tremor of his never very assured voice how pallid, indeed green, it must have been ; for poor Grigory Eshekovitch suffered from some internal affection, which had the effect of establishing his complexion very uncertainly.

“ Have you seen any one in the wood ? ” my father asked him.

“ No, but I have heard noises,” Grigory Eshekovitch trembled.

“ Bah ! ” growled my father. “ That was the chattering of your own miserable teeth.”

I wonder what has happened to poor Grigory Eshekovitch, whether he survived that hideous night. We left him there, a trembling figure on the borders of the wood, while we put our horses into the heart of that darkness ; and I tried to find solace in our desperate situation by looking forward to the safety and comfort of our approaching life in England. Little I knew that I was to suffer such agonies of fear in this huge city that I would wish myself back in the land of wolves !

My dreams were shattered by a low growl from my father, and we pulled up our horses, listening intently. By this time we were about half-way through the wood ; and had we not known the place by heart we had long since lost our way, for the curtain of leaves between us and the faint light of the stars made the place so black that we could not even see the faintest glimmer of each other. At last my father whispered that it was all right, and we were in the act of spurring our tired horses for the last dash through the wood when torches flamed on all sides, and we stood as in the tortured light of a crypt in moonlight.

“ Samson Samsonovitch,” cried a hoarse voice, and like a stab at my heart I knew it for the voice of the Michaelis, “ we hope your sins are not too heavy, for your time has come.”

It ill becomes a girl to boast of her parent ; but shall I neglect to mention the stern fortitude, the patriarchal resigna-

tion, the monumental bravery of my father, how he sat his horse still as a rock in a tempest and only his lips moved in a gentle whisper to me. "Child, save yourself," said he, and that was his farewell. "I command you to go—to save yourself and my secret from these hounds. Maybe I too will get through. God is as good to us as we deserve. Head right through them. Their aim, between you and me, will be so unsure that we might both escape. Go, and God go with you!"

Can you ask me to remember the details of the awful moment? The darkness, the flaming torches, the hoarse cries of the bandits as they rode in on us, my father's great courage—all these combined to produce in me a state for which the word "terror" seems altogether too homely. Perhaps I should not have left my father. Perhaps I should have died with him. I did not know what I was doing. Blindly as in a nightmare I spurred my horse midway between two moving torches. The horse, startled already, flew madly as the wind. Cries, curses, shots seemed to sweep about me, envelop me, but terror lent wings to my horse, and the shots and shouts faded behind me as phantoms might fade in a furious wind. Last of all came a fearful fusillade of shots, then a silence broken only by the harsh rustle of the bracken under my horse, which with the livid intelligence of fear, did not stop before we reached Philippopolis in the dawn.

I was never to see my father again. Until noon of the next day I sat anxiously in the only decent inn of the ancient town, praying that some act of Providence had come to his aid and that he might at any moment appear; when, from a loquacious person, who did not know my name, I heard that the last of the Samsonoffs had that morning been found in Karaloff Wood nailed to a tree-trunk with eighteen bullet wounds in his body.

I will spare you my reflections on the pass in which I then found myself. No young girl was ever so completely alone as she who sat the day through in the parlour of the Bulgarian inn, trying to summon the energy with which to arrange for her long journey on the Orient Express to England.

Arrived in London, I at once set out to my uncle's house in Golgotha Road, Golders Green. I was a little surprised that he had not met me at the station, for I had warned him of my arrival by telegram; but, knowing he was a gentleman of particular though agreeable habits, it was with a sufficiently

good heart that I rang the bell of his tall, gloomy house, which stood at the end of a genteel street of exactly similar houses.

Allow me, if you please, to hurry over the relation of my further misfortunes. My uncle had died of a clot of blood on the heart a week before my arrival. His property he had, of course, left to me ; and I could instantly take possession of his house in Golgotha Road. I was utterly alone.

That was four weeks ago. Though entirely without friends or acquaintance—for my uncle's lawyer, Mr. Tarbold, was a man who bore his own lack of easy conversation and human sympathy with a resigned fortitude worthy of more wretched sorrows—I passed the first two weeks pleasantly enough in arranging the house to my taste, in engaging a housekeeper and training her to my ways, and in wondering how I must proceed as regards the patenting and exploiting of the carnation, the formula for which I kept locked in a secret drawer of my toilet-table.

At the end of three weeks—one week ago—my housekeeper gave me notice of her instant departure, saying that no consideration would persuade her to spend another night in the house. She was, it seemed, psychic, and the atmosphere of the house, which was certainly oppressive, weighed heavily on her mind. She had heard noises in the night, she affirmed, and also spoke indignantly of an unpleasant smell in the basement of the house, a musty smell which she for one made no bones of recognizing as of a graveyard consistency ; and if she did not know a graveyard smell, she asked, from one of decent origins, who did, for she had buried three husbands ?

Of course I laughed at her tremors, for I am not naturally of a nervous temper, and when she insisted on leaving that very day I was not at all disturbed. Nor did I instantly make inquiries for another woman, for I could very well manage by myself, and the work of the house, I thought, must help to fill in the awful spaces made by the utter lack of companionship. As to any nervousness at being left entirely alone in a house, surrounded as it was by the amenities of Golders Green, I never gave a thought to it, for I had been inured to a reasonable solitude all my life. And, putting up a notice of " Apartments to Let " in one of the ground-floor windows, I set about the business of the house in something of a spirit of adventure natural, if I may say so, to one of my years.

That, as I have said, was one week ago ; and the very next day but one after my housekeeper had left me was to see my hardly-won peace shattered at one blow. I do not know if

you gentlemen are aware of the mode of life that obtains in Golders Green ; but I must tell you that the natives of that quarter do not discourage the activities of barrel-organs—a somewhat surprising exercise of restraint to one who has been accustomed to the dolorous and beautiful songs of the Balkan *cziganes*. It is true, however, that these barrel-organs are played mostly by foreigners, and I have been given to understand that foreigners are one of the most sacred institutions of this great country.

The very next morning after my housekeeper had left me I was distracted from my work by a particularly disagreeable combination of sounds, which, I had no doubt, could come only from a barrel-organ not of the first order and the untrained voice of its owner. A little amused, I looked out of the window—and with a heart how still leapt back into the room, for the face of the organ-grinder was the face of the Michaelis !

I spent an hour of agony in wondering if he had seen me, for how could I doubt but that he had followed me to England in quest of the formula of the carnation ? At last, however, I decided that he could not have seen me, and I was in some degree calmed by the decreasing noise of the barrel-organ as it inflicted itself on more distant streets. London, I told myself, was a very large city ; it was not possible that the Michaelis could have the faintest idea in what part of it I lodged ; and it could only have been by the most unfortunate combination of chances that he had brought his wretched organ into Golgotha Road. Nevertheless I took the precaution to withdraw the notice of Apartments to Let from the window, lest yet another unfortunate combination of chances should lead him or his minions to search for lodging in my house.

The next day passed quietly enough. I went out shopping with a veil over my face, for reasons you can well understand. And little did I dream that the approaching terror was to come from a quarter which would only be known to the Michaelis when he was dead.

That evening in my bedroom, in a curious moment of forgetfulness, I chanced to pull the bell-rope. I wanted some hot water, had for the moment forgotten that the silly woman had left me, and only remembered it with a smile when, far down in the basement, I heard the thin clatter of the bell. The bathroom was some way down the passage, and I had reached the door, empty jug in hand, when I was arrested by

the sound of approaching steps ! They were very faint, they seemed to be coming up from the basement, as though in answer to the bell ! I pressed my hand to my forehead in a frantic attempt to collect my wits, and I have no hesitation in saying that for those few moments I was near insane. The accumulation of terrors in my recent life had, I thought, unhinged my mind ; and I must that day have engaged a servant and forgotten it.

Meantime the steps ascended, slowly, steadily, exactly as an elderly servant might ascend in answer to the bell ; and as they ascended I was driven, I cannot tell you how, somehow past fear. Maybe it was the blood of the Samsonoffs at last raging in me : I was not afraid, and, without locking the door, I withdrew to a far corner of the room, awaiting the moment when the steps must reach the door. I must not forget to add that the empty jug was still in my hand.

Steadily, but with a shuffling as of carpet-slippers, the steps came up the passage : slowly the door was opened, and a gaunt, grey-haired woman in musty black stood there, eyeing me with strange contempt. Fear returned, enveloped me, shook me, and I sobbed, I screamed. The woman did not move, did not speak, but stood there, gaunt and grey and dry, eyeing me with a strange contempt ; and on her lined face there was such an undreamt-of expression of evil. Yet I recognized her.

I must tell you that my mother had often, in telling me of her brother, spoken of his confidential housekeeper. My mother was a plain-spoken woman, and I had gathered from her that the woman had exercised some vulgar art to enthrall my poor uncle and had dominated him, to his hurt, in all things. At the news of this woman's death just before my mother's tragic end, she had been unable to resist an expression of relief ; and I, on having taken possession of the house a few weeks before, had examined with great interest, as girls will, the various photographs of her that stood about the rooms.

It was from these that I recognized the woman who stood in the doorway. But she was dead, surely she had died more than a year ago ! Yet there she now stood, eyeing me with that strange contempt—with such contempt, indeed, that I, reacting from fear to anger, sternly demanded of her what she did there and what she wanted.

She was silent. That was perhaps the most awful moment of all—but no, no, there was worse to come ! For, sobbing

with terror, I hurled the empty jug at her vile face with a precision of aim which now astonishes me : but she did not waver so much as the fraction of an inch as the jug came straight at her—and, passing through her head, smashed into pieces against the wall of the passage outside. I must have swooned where I stood, for when I was again conscious of my surroundings she was gone : I was alone ; but, far down in the house, I could hear the shuffling steps, retreating, descending, to the foul shades whence she had come.

Now I am one who cannot bear any imposition ; and unable, despite the witness of my own eyes, to believe in the psychic character of the intruder, I ran out of the room and in hot pursuit down the stairs. The gaunt woman must have descended with a swiftness surprising in one of her years, for I could only see her shadow far below, on the last flight of stairs that would take her to the basement. Into that lower darkness, I must confess, I had not the courage to follow her ; and still less so when, on peering down the pitch-dark stairs into the kitchen, I was assailed by that musty smell which my housekeeper had spoken of with such indignant conviction as of a graveyard consistency.

I locked the door of my room and slept, I need scarcely say, but ill that night. However, in the cheerful light of the following morning, I was inclined, as who would not, to pooh-pooh the incredible events of the previous night ; and again pulled the bell-rope, just to see the event, if any. There was ; and, unable to await the ascent of the shuffling steps, I crammed on a hat and ran down the stairs.

The woman was coming upstairs, steadily, inevitably. As she heard me descending she stopped and looked up, and I cannot describe the effect that the diabolical wickedness of her face had on me in the clear daylight. I stopped, was rooted there, could not move. To get to the front door I must pass the foul thing, and that I could not summon the courage to do. And then she raised an arm, as though to show me something, and I saw the blade of a razor shining in her hand. You may well shudder, gentlemen !

When I came to, it was to find myself lying at the foot of the stairs, whither I must have fallen, and the foul thing gone. Why she did not kill me, I do not know. God will pardon me for saying that maybe it had been better if she had, for what miseries are not still in store for me ! Trembling and weak, I reached the door and impelled myself into the clear air of morning. Nor could the fact that I had forgotten my veil,

and the consequent fear of the Michaelis, persuade me to re-enter that house until I had regained some degree of calmness.

All day long I wandered about, knowing neither what to do nor where to go. I am not without some worldly sense, and I knew what little assistance the police could give me in such a dilemma, even had they believed me; while, as for the lawyer, Mr. Tarbold, how could I face a man of so little sympathy in ordinary things with such an extraordinary tale?

Towards ten o'clock that night, I determined to return and risk another night in that house; I was desperate with weariness and hunger; and could not buy food nor lodging for the night, for in my flight I had forgotten my purse; while I argued to myself that if, after all, she had intended to murder me, she could without any difficulty have done so that morning when I lay unconscious on the stairs.

My bravery, however, did not help me to ascend the stairs to my bedroom with any resolution. I stole upstairs, myself verily like a phantom. But, hearing no sound in the house, I plucked up the courage to switch on the light on my bedroom landing. My bedroom-door stood open, but I could not remember whether or not I had left it so that morning. It was probable, in my hasty descent. I tiptoed to it and peered in—and I take the liberty to wonder whether any man, was he never such a lion-heart, had been less disturbed than I at the sight which the light of the moon revealed to my eyes.

The Michaelis lay full length on the floor, his great fair beard darkened with his blood, which came, I saw, from a great gash behind his ear. Across him, with her back to me, sat straddled the gaunt, foul thing, as silent as the grave. Yet even my terror could not overcome my curiosity as to her actions, for she kept on lowering and raising her left hand to and from the Michaelis's beard, while with her right, in which shone the bloody razor, she sawed the air from side to side. I could not realize what that vile shape was doing—I could, and could not admit the realization. For with her left hand she was plucking out one by one the long hairs of the Michaelis's beard, while with the razor in her right she was slicing them to the floor!

I must have gasped, made some noise, for she heard me; and, turning on me and brandishing the dripping razor, she snarled like an animal and leapt towards me. But I am young and quick, and managed just in time to reach the street door and slam it against her enraged pursuit.

That was last night. Since then, gentlemen, I have wandered about the streets of London, resting a little among the poor people in the parks. I have had no food, for what money I have is in that house, together with the formula for the green carnation ; but nothing, not death by exposure nor death by starvation, would induce me to return to the house in Golders Green while it is haunted by that foul presence. Is she a homicidal lunatic or a phantom from hell ? I do not know, I am too tired to care. I have told you two gentlemen my story because you seem kind and capable, and I can only pray that I have not wearied you overmuch. But I do beg you to believe that nothing is farther from my mind than to ask, and indeed nothing would induce me to accept, anything from you but the generous sympathy of your understanding and the advice of your chivalrous intelligence. My tale is finished, gentlemen. And, alas, am not I ?

IV

MR. TREVOR is somewhat confused in his relation of the course of events immediately subsequent to Miss Samsonoff's narrative. During its course he had time, he says, to study the young lady's beauty, which, though of a very superior order, was a little too innocent and insipid for his taste. His judgment, however, cannot be entirely fair, for such was the direction of the young lady's eyes that Mr. Trevor could judge her by her features only. As to the story itself, Mr. Trevor says that, while yielding to no one in his liking for a good story, he could not see his way to considering Miss Samsonoff's notable either for interest, entertainment, or that human note of stark realism which makes for conviction ; and while, in the ordinary way, a murderer was to him like a magnet, he could not rouse himself to feel irresistibly attracted towards the ghoul of Golders Green. It was therefore with surprise not unmingled with pain that he heard Mr. Maturin saying :

" Ralph, we are in luck ! "

" To what," Mr. Trevor could not entirely cleanse his voice from the impurity of sarcasm, " to what do you refer ? " But it was not without some compunction that he heard the young lady sigh miserably to Beau Maturin :

" I am afraid I have wearied your friend. Forgive me. "

" My friend," said Beau Maturin gently, " is an ass. In point of fact, Miss Samsonoff, far from wearying us, you have put us under a great obligation——"

"Ah, you are kind!" the young lady was moved to sob.

"On the contrary," Mr. Maturin warmly protested, "I am selfish. I gather you have not been reading the newspapers lately? Had you done so, you would have read of a murderer who has recently been loose in London and has so far evaded not only capture but even identification. So far as the public know through the newspapers, this criminal has been responsible for only two or three murders; but this very night my friend and I have had private information to the effect that within the last few weeks twelve mutilated corpses have been found in various parts of London; to which we must now, no doubt, add a thirteenth, the remains of your late enemy, Mr. Michaelis. But where *your* information," said Mr. Maturin gallantly, "is especially valuable is that the police do not dream that the criminal is of your sex. To my friend and me it is this original point that invests the pursuit——"

"Pursuit?" Mr. Trevor could not help starting.

"——with," said Mr. Maturin coldly, "an added charm. And now with your permission, Miss Samsonoff, we will not only return to you your formula, as to the financial worth of which I cannot entirely share your late parent's optimism, but also——"

"Also," Mr. Trevor said with restraint, "we will first of all call at Vine Street and borrow a few policemen."

"Oh yes!" the young lady said eagerly. "We will be sure to need some policemen. Please get some policemen. They will listen to you."

"I do not find an audience so difficult to find as all that," said Mr. Maturin coldly. "The London police, Miss Samsonoff, are delightful, but rather on the dull side. They are much given to standing in the middle of crowded roads and dreaming, and in even your short stay in London you must have observed what a serious, nay intolerable, obstruction they are to the traffic. No, no, my friend and I will get this murderer ourselves. Come, Miss Samsonoff."

"But I dare not come with you!" cried the young lady. "I simply dare not approach that house again! May I not await your return here?"

"The attacks of ten murderers," said Mr. Maturin indignantly, "cannot disfigure your person more violently than being left alone in a night-club will disfigure your reputation. Bulgarians may be violent, Miss Samsonoff. But lounge-lizards are low dogs."

Mr. Trevor says that he was so plunged in thought that he

did not arise from the table with his usual agility ; and the first notice he had that Mr. Maturin had risen and was nearly at the door was on hearing him waive aside a pursuing waiter with the damnable words : " My friend will pay."

Without, the taxi-cab was still waiting. Its driver, says Mr. Trevor, was one of those stout men of little speech and impatient demeanour : on which at this moment was plainly written the fact that he had been disagreeably affected by waiting in the cold for nearly two hours ; and on Mr. Maturin's sternly giving him a Golders Green direction he just looked at our two gentlemen and appeared to struggle with an impediment in his throat.

Golgotha Road was, as the young lady had described it, a genteel street of tall, gloomy houses. Mr. Trevor says that he cannot remember when he liked the look of a street less. The taxi-cab had not penetrated far therein when Miss Samsonoff timidly begged Mr. Maturin to stop its farther progress, pointing out that she could not bear to wait immediately opposite the house, and would, indeed, have preferred to await her brave cavaliers in an altogether different part of London. Mr. Maturin, however, soothed her fears ; and, gay as a school-boy, took the key of the house from her reluctant fingers and was jumping from the cab when Miss Samsonoff cried :

" But surely you have weapons ! "

Mr. Trevor says that, while yielding to no one in deploring the use of weapons in daily life, in this particular instance the young lady's words struck him as full of a practical grasp of the situation.

" Of course," said Mr. Trevor nonchalantly, " we must have weapons. How stupid of us to have forgotten ! I will go back to my flat and get some. I won't be gone a moment."

" That's right," Mr. Maturin agreed, " because you won't be gone at all. My dear Miss Samsonoff, my friend and I do not need weapons. We put our trust in God and St. George. Come along, Ralph. Miss Samsonoff, we will be back in a few moments."

" And wot do I do ? " asked the taxi-driver.

" Nothing," cried Mr. Maturin gaily. " Nothing at all. Aren't you lucky ! "

The house which the young lady had pointed out to them had an air of even gloomier gentility than the others, and Mr. Trevor says he cannot remember when he liked the look of a house less, particularly when the ancient brown door gave to Beau Maturin's hand before he had put the key into the lock.

Mr. Trevor could not resist a natural exclamation of surprise. Mr. Maturin begged him not to shout. Mr. Trevor said that he was not shouting, and, without a thought for his own safety, was rushing headlong into the house to meet the terror single-handed when he found that his shoe-lace was untied.

He found Beau Maturin in what, he supposed, would be called a hall when it was not a pit of darkness. A stealthily lit match revealed that it was a hall, a narrow one, and it also revealed a closed door to the right, by Mr. Trevor's elbow, which he removed. The match went out.

"Quietly," said Mr. Maturin quite unnecessarily, for Mr. Trevor says he cannot remember when he felt less noisy. He heard the door to his right open, softly, softly.

"Is it you opening that door?" he asked, merely from curiosity.

"Ssh!" snapped Beau Maturin. "Hang on to my shoulder-blades."

Mr. Trevor thought it better to calm Beau Maturin's fears by acceding to his whim, and clung close behind him as they entered the room. The moon, which Mr. Trevor already had reason to dislike, was hanging at a moderate elevation over Golders Green as though on purpose to reveal the darkness of that room. Mr. Trevor's foot then struck a shape on the floor. The shape was soft and long. Mr. Trevor was surprised. Mr. Maturin whispered:

"Found anything?"

Mr. Trevor said briefly that his foot had.

"So's mine," said Beau Maturin. "What's yours like? Mine's rather soft to the touch."

"And mine," said Mr. Trevor.

"They're corpses, let's face it," sighed Mr. Maturin. "Making fifteen in all, With us, seventeen. Just give yours a kick, Ralph, to see if it's alive. I've kicked mine."

"I don't kick corpses," Mr. Trevor was muttering when he felt a hard round thing shoved into the small of his back.

"Ow!" said Mr. Trevor.

"Found anything?" said Mr. Maturin.

Mr. Trevor said briefly that there was something against his back.

"And mine," sighed Mr. Maturin. "What's yours like? Mine's rather hard on the back."

"So is mine," said Mr. Trevor.

"They're revolvers, let's face it," sighed Beau Maturin.

"They are," said a harsh voice behind them. "So don't move."

"I've got some sense, thank you," snapped Beau Maturin.

"Sir," said the harsh voice, and it was a woman's voice, "I want none of your lip. I have you each covered with a revolver——"

"Waste," said Beau Maturin. "One revolver would have been quite enough. Besides, my friend and I were distinctly given to understand that you were partial to a razor. Or do you use that for shaving?"

"I use a razor," said the harsh voice, "only when I want to kill. But I have a use for you two."

The light was suddenly switched on, a light so venomous, says Mr. Trevor, that they had to blink furiously. And that must have been a very large room, for they could not see into its far corners. The light came from what must have been a very high-powered lamp directly above a table in the middle of the room; and it was concentrated by a shade in such a way as to fall, like a searchlight, exactly on the two helpless gentlemen. Mr. Trevor says that Beau Maturin's handsome face looked white and ghastly, so the Lord knows what Mr. Trevor's must have looked like. Meanwhile their captor leapt from her station behind them, and they were privileged to see her for the first time. She was, says Mr. Trevor, exactly as Miss Samsonoff had described her, grey and gaunt and dry, and her expression was strangely contemptuous and evil as sin. And never for a moment did she change the direction of her revolvers, which was towards our gentlemen's hearts. Mr. Trevor says he cannot remember when he saw a woman look less afraid that a revolver might go off in her hand.

"Look down," she commanded.

"It's all right," said Beau Maturin peaceably; "we've already guessed what they are. Corpses. Nice cold night for them, too. Keep for days in weather like this."

Mr. Trevor could not resist looking down to his feet. The corpses were of two youngish men in dress-clothes.

"They're cut badly," said Mr. Maturin.

"They're not cut at all," said the woman harshly. "I shot these two for a change."

"I meant their clothes," Mr. Maturin explained. "Death was too good for them with dress-clothes like that."

"Well, I can't stop here all night talking about clothes," snapped the woman. "Now then, to business. These bodies have to be buried in the back-garden. You will each

take one. There are spades just behind you. I shall not have the slightest hesitation in killing you as I have killed these two, but it will be more convenient if you do as you are told. I may kill you later, and I may not. Now be quick !”

“Lord, what’s that !” cried Mr. Trevor sharply. He had that moment realized a strange muffled, ticking noise which must, he thought, come either from somewhere in the room or from a room nearby. And, while he was never in his life less conscious of feeling fear, he could not help but be startled by that ticking noise, for he had heard it before when timing a dynamite-bomb.

“That is why,” the woman explained with what, Mr. Trevor supposed, was meant to be a smile, “you will be safer in the garden. Women are but weak creatures, and so I take the precaution of having a rather large size in dynamite-bombs so timed that I have but to press a button to send us all to blazes. It will not be comfortable for the police when, if ever, they catch me. But pick up those spades and get busy.”

“Now don’t be rude,” begged Beau Maturin. “I can stand anything from plain women but discourtesy. Ralph, you take the bigger corpse, as you are smaller than I am, while I take this little fellow on my shoulder—which will probably be the nearest he will ever get to Heaven, with clothes cut as badly as that.”

“You can come back for the bodies when you’ve dug the graves,” snapped the woman. “Take the spades and go along that passage. No tricks ! I am just behind you.”

There was a lot of rubbish in that garden. It had never been treated as a garden, it did not look like a garden, it looked even less like a garden than did *The Garden of My Grandmother*. High walls enclosed it. And over it that deplorable moon threw a sheet of dead daylight.

“Dig,” said the woman with the revolvers, and they dug.

“Do you mind if we take our coats off ?” asked Beau Maturin. Mr. Trevor says that he was being sarcastic.

“I don’t mind what you take off,” snapped the woman.

“Now don’t say naughty things !” said Mr. Maturin. “Nothing is more revolting than the naughtiness of plain women.”

“Dig,” said the woman with the revolvers, and they dug.

They dug, says Mr. Trevor, for a long time, for a very long time. Not, however, that it was difficult digging once one had got into the swing of it, for that garden was mostly dug-up soil. Suddenly Beau Maturin said :

"Bet you a fiver I dig a grave for my fellow before you."

"Right!" said Mr. Trevor.

"Dig," said the woman with the revolvers, and they dug.

"And," said the woman, "I don't allow any betting in this house. So call that bet off."

"What?" said Mr. Maturin.

"Dig," said the woman with the revolvers.

Mr. Maturin threw down his spade.

"Dig," said the woman with the revolvers.

Mr. Trevor dug.

Mr. Maturin said: "Dig yourself!"

"Dig," said the woman with the revolvers.

Mr. Trevor brandished his spade from a distance. He noticed for the first time that they had been digging in the light of the dawn and not of the moon.

"And who the deuce," said Mr. Maturin dangerously, "do you think you are, not to allow any betting? I have stood a lot from you, but I won't stand that."

"Dig," said the woman with the revolvers, but Mr. Maturin advanced upon the revolvers like a punitive expedition. Mr. Trevor brandished his spade.

"Another step, and I fire!" cried the woman harshly.

"Go ahead," said Mr. Maturin. "I'll teach you to stop me betting! And I hate your face."

"Oh dear, oh dear!" the woman suddenly cried with a face of fear, and, lowering her revolvers, fled into the house.

Mr. Trevor was so surprised that he could scarcely speak. Mr. Maturin laughed so much that he could not speak.

"What's there to laugh about?" Mr. Trevor asked at last.

"It's funny. They've had us, let's face it. Come on, let's follow her in."

"She may shoot," Mr. Trevor cautioned.

"Shoot my eye!" sighed Beau Maturin.

Once in the house, Mr. Trevor stopped spellbound. There were voices, there was laughter—from the room of the two corpses!

"They're laughing at us!" said Mr. Trevor.

"Who wouldn't!" laughed Beau Maturin, and, opening the door, said: "Good morning."

"You've said it," said the policeman. "Haw-haw!"

"You'll have some breakfast?" asked the woman with the revolvers.

"Please do!" said Miss Samsonoff.



"I shall not have the slightest hesitation in killing you."

"You *ought* to be hungry," said the taxi-driver with the Homburg hat of green plush.

"Look here!" gasped Mr. Trevor. "What the blazes——"

"Haw-haw!" laughed the policeman. "'Ave a bit of vealanam-pie?"

"Now, Ted, don't be rude to the gentlemen!" said the woman with the revolvers.

"Quite right, mother," said Miss Samsonoff. "We owe these gentlemen an explanation and an apology——"

"And if they don't take it we *are* in the soup!" miserably said the man in the Homburg hat of green plush.

"Now, you two, go and get cups and plates for the two gentlemen," said the woman with the revolvers to the two corpses in dress-clothes.

"Listen, please," Miss Samsonoff gravely addressed Mr. Maturin, "my name isn't Samsonoff at all but Kettlewell, and that's my mother and these are my four brothers——"

"How do you do?" said Mr. Maturin, absently drinking the policeman's coffee, but Mr. Trevor is glad that no one heard what he said.

"You see," said Miss Kettlewell, and she was shy and beautiful, "we are The Kettlewell Film Company, just us, but of course we haven't got a lot of money——"

"A 'lot' is good!" said the policeman.

"My brother there," and Miss Kettlewell pointed to the wretched man with the Homburg hat of green plush, "was the director of an American company in Los Angeles, but he got the sack lately, and so we thought we would make some films on our own. You see, we are such a large family! And the recent murders gave us a really brilliant idea for a film called *The Ghoul of Golders Green*, which, thanks to you two¹ gentlemen, we have completed to-night. Oh, I do hope it will be a success, especially as you have been kind enough to help us in our predicament, for we hadn't any money to engage actors—and we did so need two gentlemen, just like you, who really looked the part, didn't we, mother?"

"But, my dear child," cried Beau Maturin, "I'm afraid your film can't have come out very well. Trevor and I will

¹ When the film was released by the Kettlewell Film Corporation, evidences of public favour were so notably lacking that it was offered to the Society for Presenting Nature Films to the Blind.

Surely, after the above exposure of the methods adopted, no further reasons should be sought for the so much deplored inferiority of British films.

look perfectly ghastly, as we neither of us had any make-up on."

"But it's that kind of film!" smiled Miss Kettlewell. "You see, you and your friend are supposed to be corpses who, by some powerful psychic agency, are digging your own graves—Heavens, what's that?"

There, at the open door, stood an apparition with a dreadful face. He appeared, says Mr. Trevor, to have some difficulty in choosing among the words that his state of mind was suggesting to him.

"And me?" gasped the taxi-driver hoarsely. "Wot abaht me? 'Angingabahtallnight! 'Oo's going to pay me, that's wot I want to know? There's four quid and more on that clock——"

Mr. Maturin swept his empty coffee-cup round to indicate the family Kettlewell.

"My friends will pay," sighed Mr. Maturin.