

## Two Stories

By Ella D'Arcy

### I—The Death Mask

THE Master was dead ; and Peschi, who had come round to the studio to see about some repairs—part of the ceiling had fallen owing to the too lively proceedings of Dubourg and his eternal visitors overhead—Peschi displayed a natural pride that it was he who had been selected from among the many *mouleurs* of the Quarter, to take a mask of the dead man.

All Paris was talking of the Master, although not, assuredly, under that title. All Paris was talking of his life, of his genius, of his misery, and of his death. Peschi, for the moment, was sole possessor of valuable unedited details, to the narration of which Hiram P. Corner, who had dropped in to pass the evening with me, listened with keenly attentive ears.

Corner was a recent addition to the American Art Colony ; ingenuous as befitted his eighteen years, and of a more than improbable innocence. Paris, to him, represented the Holiest of Holies ; the dead Master, by the adorable impeccability of his writings, figuring therein as one of the High Priests. Needless to say, he had never come in contact with that High Priest, had never even seen him ; while the Simian caricatures which so  
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frequently embellished the newspapers, made as little impression on the lad's mind as did the unequivocal allusions, jests, and epigrams, for ever flung up like sea-spray against the rock of his unrevered name.

The absorbing interest Corner felt glowed visibly on his fresh young western face, and it was this, I imagine, which led Peschi to propose that we should go back with him to his *atelier* and see the mask for ourselves.

Peschi is a Genoese; small, lithe, very handsome; a skilled workman, a little demon of industry; full of enthusiasms, with the real artist-soul. He works for Felon the sculptor, and it was Felon who had been commissioned to do the bust for which the death mask would serve as model.

It is always pleasant to hear Peschi talk; and to-night, as we walked from the Rue Fleurus to the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs he told us something of mask-taking in general, with illustrations from this particular case.

On the preceding day, barely two hours after death had taken place, Rivereau, one of the dead man's intimates, had rushed into Peschi's workroom, and carried him off, with the necessary materials, to the Rue Monsieur, in a cab. Rivereau, though barely twenty, is perhaps the most notorious of the *bande*. Peschi described him to Corner as having dark, evil, narrow eyes set too close together in a perfectly white face, framed by falling, lustreless black hair; and with the stooping shoulders, the troubled walk, the attenuated hands common to his class.

Arrived at the house, Rivereau led the way up the dark and dirty staircase to the topmost landing, and as they paused there an instant, Peschi could hear the long-drawn, hopeless sobs of a woman within the door.

On being admitted he found himself in an apartment consisting

consisting of two small, inconceivably squalid rooms, opening one from the other.

In the outer room, five or six figures, the disciples, friends, and lovers of the dead poet, conversed together ; a curious group in a medley of costumes. One in an opera-hat, shirt-sleeves, and soiled grey trousers tied up with a bit of stout string ; another in a black coat buttoned high to conceal the fact that he wore no shirt at all ; a third in clothes crisp from the tailor, with an immense bunch of Parma violets in his buttonhole. But all were alike in the strangeness of their eyes, their voices, their gestures.

Seen through the open door of the further room, lay the corpse under a sheet, and by the bedside knelt the stout, middle-aged mistress, whose sobs had reached the stairs.

Madame Germaine, as she was called in the Quarter, had loved the Master with that complete, self-abnegating, sublime love of which certain women are capable—a love uniting that of the mother, the wife, and the nurse all in one. For years she had cooked for him, washed for him, mended for him ; had watched through whole nights by his bedside when he was ill ; had suffered passively his blows, his reproaches, and his neglect, when, thanks to her care, he was well again. She adored him dumbly, closed her eyes to his vices, and magnified his gifts, without in the least comprehending them. She belonged to the *ouvrière* class, could not read, could not write her own name ; but with a characteristic which is as French as it is un-British, she paid her homage to intellect, where an Englishwoman only gives it to inches and muscle. Madame Germaine was prouder perhaps of the Master's greatness, worshipped him more devoutly, than any one of the super-cultivated, ultra-corrupt group, who by their flatteries and complaisances had assisted him to his ruin.

It was with the utmost difficulty, Peschi said, that Rivereau  
and

and the rest had succeeded in persuading the poor creature to leave the bedside and go into the other room while the mask was being taken.

The operation, it seems, is a sufficiently horrible one, and no relative is permitted to be present. As you cover the dead face over with the plaster, a little air is necessarily forced back again into the lungs, and this air as it passes along the windpipe causes strange rattlings, sinister noises, so that you might swear that the corpse was returned to life. Then, as the mould is removed, the muscles of the face drag and twitch, the mouth opens, the tongue lolls out ; and Peschi declared that this always remains for him a gruesome moment. He has never accustomed himself to it ; on every recurring occasion it fills him with the same repugnance ; and this, although he has taken so many masks, is so deservedly celebrated for them, that *la bande* had instantly selected him to perpetuate the Master's lineaments.

"But it's an excellent likeness," said Peschi ; "you see they sent for me so promptly that he had not changed at all. He does not look as though he were dead, but just asleep."

Meanwhile we had reached the unshuttered shop-front, where Peschi displays, on Sundays and week-days alike, his finished works of plastic art to the *gamins* and *filles* of the Quarter.

Looking past the statuary, we could see into the living-room beyond, it being separated from the shop only by a glass partition. It was lighted by a lamp set in the centre of the table, and in the circle of light thrown from beneath its green shade, we saw a charming picture : the young head of Madame Peschi bent over her baby, whom she was feeding at the breast. She is eighteen, pretty as a rose, and her story and Peschi's is an idyllic one ; to be told, perhaps, another time. She greeted us with the smiling, cordial, unaffected kindness which in France warms your blood  
with

with the constant sense of brotherhood ; and, giving the boy to his father—a delicious opalescent trace of milk hanging about the little mouth—she got up to see about another lamp which Peschi had asked for.

Holding this lamp to guide our steps, he preceded us now across a dark yard to his workshop at the further end, and while we went we heard the young mother's exquisite nonsense-talk addressed to the child, as she settled back in her place again to her nursing.

Peschi, unlocking a door, flashed the light down a long room, the walls of which, the trestle-tables, the very floor, were hung, laden, and encumbered with a thousand heterogeneous objects. Casts of every description and dimension, finished, unfinished, broken ; scrolls for ceilings ; caryatides for chimney-pieces ; cornucopias for the entablatures of buildings ; chubby Cupids jostling emaciated Christs ; broken columns for Père Lachaise, or consolatory upward-pointing angels ; hands, feet, and noses for the Schools of Art ; a pensively posed *échorché* contemplating a Venus of Milo fallen upon her back ; these, and a crowd of nameless, formless things, seemed to spring at our eyes, as Peschi raised or lowered the lamp, moved it this way or the other.

"There it is," said he, pointing forwards ; and I saw lying flat upon a modelling-board, with upturned features, a grey, immobile simulacrum of the curiously mobile face I remembered so well.

"Of course you must understand," said Paschi, "it's only in the rough, just exactly as it came from the *creux*. Fifty copies are to be cast altogether, and this is the first one. But I must prop it up for you. You can't judge of it as it is."

He looked about him for a free place on which to set the lamp. Not finding any, he put it down on the floor. For a few moments he stood busied over the mask with his back to us.

"Now

“Now you can see it properly,” said he, and stepped aside.

The lamp threw its rays upwards, illuminating strongly the lower portion of the cast, throwing the upper portion into deepest shadow, with the effect that the inanimate mask was become suddenly a living face, but a face so unutterably repulsive, so hideously bestial, that I grew cold to the roots of my hair. . . . A fat, loose throat, a retreating chinless chin, smeared and bleared with the impressions of the meagre beard; a vile mouth, lustful, flaccid, the lower lip disproportionately great; ignoble lines; hateful puffinesses; something inhuman and yet worse than inhuman in its travesty of humanity; something that made you hate the world and your fellows, that made you hate yourself for being ever so little in *this* image. A more abhorrent spectacle I have never seen. . . .

So soon as I could turn my eyes from the ghastly thing, I looked at Corner. He was white as the plaster faces about him. His immensely opened eyes showed his astonishment and his terror. For what I experienced was intensified in his case by the unexpected and complete disillusionment. He had opened the door of the tabernacle, and out had crawled a noisome spider; he had lifted to his lips the communion cup, and therein squatted a toad. A sort of murmur of frantic protestation began to rise in his throat; but Peschi, unconscious of our agitation, now lifted the lamp, passed round with it behind the mask, held it high, and let the rays stream downwards from above.

The astounding way the face changed must have been seen to be believed in. It was exactly as though, by some cunning sleight of hand, the mask of a god had been substituted for that of a satyr. . . . You saw a splendid dome-like head, Shakespearean in contour; a broad, smooth, finely-modelled brow; thick, regular, horizontal eyebrows, casting a shadow which diminished the too  
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great distance separating them from the eyes ; while the deeper shadow thrown below the nose altered its character entirely. Its snout-like appearance was gone, its deep, wide-open, upturned nostrils were hidden, but you noticed the well-marked transition from forehead to nose-base, the broad ridge denoting extraordinary mental power. Over the eyeballs the lids had slidden down smooth and creaseless ; the little tell-tale palpebral wrinkles which had given such libidinous lassitude to the eye had vanished away. The lips no longer looked gross, and they closed together in a beautiful, sinuous line, now first revealed by the shadow on the upper one. The prominence of the jaws, the muscularity of the lower part of the face, which gave it so painfully microcephalous an appearance, were now unnoticeable ; on the contrary, the whole face looked small beneath the noble head and brow. You remarked the medium-sized and well-formed ears, with the "swan" distinct in each, the gently-swelling breadth of head above them, the full development of the forehead over the orbits of the eyes. You discerned the presence of those higher qualities which might have rendered him an ascetic or a saint ; which led him to understand the beauty of self-denial, to appreciate the wisdom of self-restraint : and you did not see how these qualities remained inoperative in him, being completely over-balanced by the size of the lower brain, the thick, bull throat, and the immense length from the ear to the base of the skull at the back.

I had often seen the Master in life : I had seen him sipping *absinthe* at the d'Harcourt ; reeling, a Silemus-like figure, among the nocturnal Bacchantes of the Boul' Miche ; lying in the gutter outside his house, until his mistress should come to pick him up and take him in. I had seen in the living man more traces than a few of the bestiality which the death-mask had completely  
verified ;

verified ; but never in the living man had I suspected anything of the beauty, of the splendour, that I now saw.

For that the Master had somewhere a beautiful soul you divined from his works ; from the exquisite melody of all of them, from the pure, the ecstatic, the religious altitude of some few. But in actual daily life, his loose and violent will-power, his insane passions, held that soul bound down so close a captive, that those who knew him best were the last to admit its existence.

And here, a mere accident of lighting displayed not only that existence, but its visible, outward expression as well. In these magnificent lines and arches of head and brow, you saw what the man might have been, what God had intended him to be ; what his mother had foreseen in him, when, a tiny infant like Peschi's yonder, she had cradled the warm, downy, sweet-smelling little head upon her bosom, and dreamed day-dreams of all the high, the great, the wonderful things her boy later on was to do. You saw what the poor, purblind, middle-aged mistress was the only one to see in the seamed and ravaged face she kissed so tenderly for the last time before the coffin-lid was closed.

You saw the head of gold ; you could forget the feet of clay, or, remembering them, you found for the first time some explanation of the anomalies of his career.

You understood how he who could pour out passionate protestations of love and devotion to God in the morning, offering up body and soul, flesh and blood in his service ; dedicating his brow as a footstool for the Sacred Feet ; his hands as censers for the glowing coals, the precious incense ; condemning his eyes, misleading lights, to be extinguished by the tears of prayer ; you understood how, nevertheless, before evening was come, he would set every law of God and decency at defiance, use every member, every faculty, in the service of sin.



It was given to him, as it is given to few, to see the Best, to reverence it, to love it; and the blind, groping hesitatingly forward in the darkness, do not stray as far as he strayed.

He knew the value of work, its imperative necessity; that in the sweat of his brow the artist, like the day-labourer, must produce, must produce: and he spent his slothful days shambling from café to café.

He never denied his vices; he recognised them and found excuses for them, high moral reasons even, as the intellectual man can always do. To indulge them was but to follow out the dictates of Nature, who in herself is holy; cynically to expose them to the world was but to be absolutely sincere.

And his disciples, going further, taught with a vague poetic mysticism that he was a fresh Incarnation of the Godhead; that what was called his immorality was merely his scorn of truckling to the base conventions of the world. But in his saner moments he described himself more accurately as a man blown hither and thither by the winds of evil chance, just as a withered leaf is blown in autumn; and having received great and exceptional gifts, with Shakespeare's length of years in which to turn them to account, he had chosen instead to wallow in such vileness that his very name was anathema among honourable men.

Chosen? Did he choose? Can one say after all that he chose to resemble the leaf rather than the tree? The gates of gifts close on the child with the womb, and all we possess comes to us from afar, and is collected from a thousand diverging sources.

If that splendid head and brow were contained in the seed, so also were the retreating chin, the debased jaw, the animal mouth. One as much as the other was the direct inheritance of former generations. Considered in a certain aspect, it seems that a man

by

by taking thought, may as little hope to thwart the implanted propensities of his character, as to alter the shape of his skull or the size of his jawbone.

I lost myself in mazes of predestination and free-will. Life appeared to me as a huge kaleidoscope turned by the hand of Fate. The atoms of glass coalesce into patterns, fall apart, unite together again, are always the same, but always different, and, shake the glass never so slightly, the precise combination you have just been looking at is broken up for ever. It can never be repeated. This particular man, with his faults and his virtues, his unconscious brutalities, his unexpected gentlenesses, his furies of remorse ; this man with the lofty brain, the perverted tastes, the weak, irresolute, indulgent heart, will never again be met with to the end of time ; in all the endless combinations to come, this precise combination will never be found. Just as of all the faces the world will see, a face like the mask there will never again exchange glances with it. . . .

I looked at Corner, and saw his countenance once more aglow with the joy of a recovered Ideal ; while Peschi's voice broke in on my reverie, speaking with the happy pride of the artist in a good and conscientious piece of work.

“Eh bien, how do you find it ?” said he ; “it is beautiful, is it not ?”

## II—The Villa Lucienne

MADAME COETLEGON told the story, and told it so well, that her audience seemed to know the sombre alley, the neglected garden, the shuttered house, as intimately as though they had visited it themselves ; seemed to feel a faint reverberation of the  
incommunicable

incommunicable thrill which she had felt,—which the surly guardian, the torn rag of lace, the closed pavilion had made her feel. And yet, as you will see, there is in reality no story at all ; it is merely an account of how, when in the Riviera two winters ago, she went with some friends to look over a furnished villa, which one of them thought of taking.

It was afternoon when we started on our expedition, Madame de M——, Cécile her widowed daughter-in-law, and I. Cécile's little girl Renée, the nurse, and Médor, the boarhound of which poor Guy had been so inordinately fond, dawdled after us up the steep and sunny road.

The December day was deliciously blue and warm. Cécile took off her furs and carried them over her arm. We only put down our sunshades when a screen of olive-trees on the left interposed their grey-green foliage between the sunshine and us.

Up in these trees barefooted men armed with bamboos were beating the branches to knock down the fruit ; and three generations of women, grandmothers, wives, and children, knelt in the grass, gathering up the little purplish olives into baskets. All paused to follow us with black persistent eyes, as we passed by ; only the men went on working unmoved. The tap-tapping, swish-swishing, of their light sticks against the boughs played a characteristically southern accompaniment to our desultory talk.

We were reasonably happy, pleasantly exhilarated by the beauty of the weather and the scene. Renée and Médor, with shrill laughter and deep-mouthed joy-notes, played together the whole way. And when the garden wall, which now replaced the olive-trees upon our right, gave place to a couple of iron gates standing open

open upon a broad straight drive, and we, looking up between the overarching palm-trees and cocoanuts, saw a white, elegant, sun-bathed house at the end, Cécile jumped to the conclusion that here was the Villa Lucienne, and that nowhere else could she find a house which on the face of it would suit her better.

But the woman who came to greet us, the jocund, brown-faced young woman, with the superb abundance of bosom beneath her crossed neckkerchief of orange-coloured wool, told us no; this was the Villa Soleil (appropriate name!) and belonged to Monsieur Morgera, the deputy who was now in Paris. The Villa Lucienne was higher up; she pointed vaguely behind her through the house: a long walk round by the road. But if these ladies did not mind a path which was a trifle damp perhaps, owing to Monday's rain, they would find themselves in five minutes at the Villa, for the two houses in reality were not more than a stone's-throw apart.

She conducted us across a spacious garden golden with sunshine, lyric with bird-song, brilliant with flowers, where eucalyptus, mimosa, and tea-roses interwove their strong and subtle perfumes through the air, to an angle in a remote laurel hedge. Here she stooped to pull aside some ancient pine-boughs which ineffectually closed the entrance to a dark and trellised walk. Peering up it, it seemed to stretch away interminably into green gloom, the ground rising a little all the while, and the steepness of the ascent being modified every here and there by a couple of rotting wooden steps.

We were to go up this alley, our guide told us, and we would be sure to find Laurent at the top. Laurent, she explained to us, was the gardener who lived at the Villa Lucienne and showed it to visitors. But there were not many who came, although it had been to let an immense time, ever since the death of old Madame  
Gray,

Gray, and that had occurred before she, the speaker, had come south with the Morgeras. We were to explain to Laurent that we had been sent up from the Villa Soleil, and then it would be all right. For he sometimes used the alley himself, as it gave him a short cut into Antibes ; but the passage had been blocked up many years ago, to prevent the Morgera children running into it.

Oh, Madame was very kind, it was no trouble at all, and of course if these ladies liked they could return by the alley also ; but once they found themselves at the Villa they would be close to the upper road, which they would probably prefer. Then came her cordial voice calling after Cécile, "Madame had best put on her furs again, it is cold in there."

It was cold, and damp, too, with the damp coldness of places where sun and wind never penetrate. It was so narrow that we had to walk in single file. The walls close on either hand, the low roof above our heads, were formed of trellised woodwork now dropping into complete decay. But these might have been removed altogether, and the alley would still have retained its form ; for the creepers which overgrew it had with time developed gnarled trunks and branches, which formed a second natural tunnelling outside. Through the broken places in the woodwork we could see the thick, inextricably twisted stems ; and outside again was a tangled matting of greenery that suffered no drop of sunlight to trickle through. The ground was covered with lichens, deathstool, and a spongy moss exuding water beneath the foot, and one had the consciousness that the whole place, floor, walls, and roof, must creep with the repulsive, slimy, running life which pullulates in dark and solitary places.

The change from the gay and scented garden to this dark alley, heavy with the smells of moisture and decay, was curiously depressing. We followed each other in silence ; first Cécile ;  
then

then Renée clinging to her nurse's hand, with Médor pressing close against them ; Madame de M—— next ; and I brought up the rear.

One would have pronounced it impossible to find in any southern garden so sombre a place, but that, after all, it is only in the south that such extraordinary contrasts of gaiety and gloom ever present themselves.

The sudden tearing away of a portion of one of the wooden steps beneath my tread startled us all, and the circular scatter of an immense colony of wood-lice that had formed its habitat in the crevices of the wood filled me with shivering disgust. I was exceedingly glad when we emerged from the tunnel upon daylight again and the Villa.

Upon daylight, but not upon sunlight, for the small garden in which we found ourselves was ringed round by the compact tops of the umbrella-pines which climbed the hill on every side. The site had been chosen of course on account of the magnificent view which we knew must be obtainable from the Villa windows, though from where we stood we could see nothing but the dark trees, the wild garden, the overshadowed house. And we saw none of these things very distinctly, for our attention was focussed on the man standing stolidly there in the middle of the garden, and evidently knee-deep in the grass, awaiting us.

He was a short, thick-set peasant, dressed in the immensely wide blue velveteen trousers, the broad crimson sash, and the flannel shirt, open at the throat, which are customary in these parts. He was strong-necked as a bull, dark as a mulatto, and his curling, grizzled hair was thickly matted over head and face and breast. He wore a flat knitted cap, and held the inevitable cigarette between his lips, but he made no attempt to remove one or the other at our approach. He stood motionless, silent, his  
hands

hands thrust deep into his pockets, staring at us, and shifting from one to another his suspicious and truculent little eyes.

So far as I was concerned, and though the Villa had proved a palace, I should have preferred abandoning the quest at once to going over it in his company ; but Cécile addressed him with intrepid politeness.

“ We had been permitted to come up from the Villa Soleil. We understood that the Villa Lucienne was to let furnished ; if so, might we look over it ? ”

From his heavy, expressionless expression, one might have supposed that the very last thing he expected or desired was to find a tenant for the Villa, and I thought with relief that he was going to refuse Cécile's request. But, after a longish pause :

“ Yes, you can see it,” he said, grudgingly, and turned from us, to disappear into the lower part of the house.

We looked into each other's disconcerted faces, then round the grey and shadowy garden in which we stood : a garden long since gone to ruin, with paths and flower-beds inextricably mingled, with docks and nettles choking up the rose-trees run wild, with wind-planted weeds growing from the stone vases on the terrace, with grasses pushing between the marble steps leading up to the hall door.

In the middle of the garden a terra-cotta faun, tumbled from his pedestal, grinned sardonically up from amidst the tangled greenery, and Madame de M—— began to quote :

“ Un vieux faune en terre-cuite  
Rit au centre des boulingrins,  
Présageant sans doute une fuite  
De ces instants sereins  
Qui m'ont conduit et t'ont conduite . . . ”

The Villa itself was as dilapidated, as mournful-looking as the garden. The ground-floor alone gave signs of occupation, in a checked shirt spread out upon a window-ledge to dry, in a worn besom, an earthenware pipkin, and a pewter jug, ranged against the wall. But the upper part, with the yellow plaster crumbling from the walls, the grey-painted persiennes all monotonously closed, said with a thousand voices it was never opened, never entered, had not been lived in for years.

Our surly gardener reappeared, carrying some keys. He led the way up the steps. We exchanged mute questions ; all desire to inspect the Villa was gone. But Cécile is a woman of character : she devoted herself.

"I'll just run up and see what it is like," she said ; "it's not worth while you should tire yourself too, Mamma. You, all, wait here."

We stood at the foot of the steps ; Laurent was already at the top. Cécile began to mount lightly towards him, but before she was half-way she turned, and to our surprise, "I wish you would come up all of you," she said, and stopped there until we joined her.

Laurent fitted a key to the door, and it opened with a shriek of rusty hinges. As he followed us, pulling it to behind him, we found ourselves in total darkness. I assure you I went through a bad quarter of a minute. Then we heard the turning of a handle, an inner door was opened, and in the semi-daylight of closed shutters we saw the man's squat figure going from us down a long, old-fashioned, vacant drawing-room towards two windows at the further end.

At the same instant Renée burst into tears :

"Oh, I don't like it. Oh, I'm frightened !" she sobbed.

"Little goosie !" said her grandmother, "see, it's quite light now !"



now !” for Laurent had pushed back the persiennes, and a magical panorama had sprung into view ; the whole range of the mountains behind Nice, their snow-caps suffused with a heavenly rose colour by the setting sun.

But Renée only clutched tighter at Madame de M——’s gown, and wept :

“ Oh, I don’t like it, *Bonnemaman* ! She is looking at me still. I want to go home !”

“ No one is looking at you,” her grandmother told her, “ talk to your friend Médor. He’ll take care of you.”

But Renée whispered :

“ He wouldn’t come in ; he’s frightened too.”

And, listening, we heard the dog’s impatient and complaining bark calling to us from the garden.

Cécile sent Renée and the nurse to join him, and while Laurent let them out, we stepped on to the terrace, and for a moment our hearts were eased by the incomparable beauty of the view, for raised now above the tree-tops, we looked over the admirable bay, the illimitable sky ; we feasted our eyes upon unimaginal colour, upon matchless form. We were almost prepared to declare that the possession of the Villa was a piece of good fortune not to be let slip, when we heard a step behind us, and turned to see Laurent surveying us morosely from the window threshold, and again to experience the oppression of his ungenial personality.

Under his guidance we now inspected the century-old furniture, the faded silks, the tarnished gilt, the ragged brocades, which had once embellished the room. The oval mirrors were dim with mildew, the parquet floor might have been a mere piece of grey drugget, so thick was the overlying dust. Curtains, yellowish, ropey, of undeterminable material, hung forlornly where once they had draped windows and doors. Originally they

may have been of rose satin, for there were traces of rose colour still on the walls and the ceiling, painted in gay southern fashion with loves and doves, festoons of flowers, and knots of ribbons. But these paintings were all fragmentary, indistinct, seeming to lose sequence and outline the more diligently you tried to decipher them.

Yet you could not fail to see that when first furnished the room must have been charming and coquettish. I wondered for whom it had been thus arranged, why it had been thus abandoned. For there grew upon me, I cannot tell you why, the curious conviction that the last inhabitant of the room having casually left it, had, from some unexpected obstacle, never again returned. They were but the merest trifles that created this idea; the tiny heaps of brown ash which lay on a marble guéridon, the few withered twigs in the vase beside it, spoke of the last rose plucked from the garden; the big berceuse chair drawn out beside the sculptured mantelpiece seemed to retain the impression of the last occupant; and in the dark recesses of the unclosed hearth my fancy detected smouldering heat in the half-charred logs of wood.

The other rooms in the villa resembled the *salon*; each time our surly guide opened the shutters we saw a repetition of the ancient furniture, of the faded decoration; everything dust-covered and time-decayed. Nor in these other rooms was any sign of former occupation to be seen, until, caught upon the *girandole* of a pier-glass, a long ragged fragment of lace seized my eye; an exquisitely fine and cobwebby piece of lace, as though caught and torn from some gala shawl or flounce, as the wearer had hurried by.

It was odd perhaps to see this piece of lace caught thus, but not odd enough surely to account for the strange emotion which seized

seized hold of me : an overwhelming pity, succeeded by an overwhelming fear. I had had a momentary intention to point the lace out to the others, but a glance at Laurent froze the words on my lips. Never in my life have I experienced such a paralysing fear. I was filled with an intense desire to get away from the man and from the Villa.

But Madame de M—— looking from the window, had noticed a pavilion standing isolated in the garden. She inquired if it were to be let with the house. Then she supposed we could visit it. No, said the man, that was impossible. But she insisted it was only right that tenants should see the whole of the premises for which they would have to pay, but he refused this time with such rudeness, his little brutish eyes narrowed with such malignancy, that the panic which I had just experienced now seized the others, and it was a *sauve-qui-peut*.

We gathered up Renée, nurse, and Médor in our hasty passage through the garden, and found our way unguided to the gate upon the upper road.

And once at large beneath the serene evening sky, winding slowly westward down the olive bordered ways : “What an odious old ruffian !” said one ; “What an eerie, uncanny place !” said another. We compared notes. We found that each of us had been conscious of the same immense, the same inexplicable sense of fear.

Cécile, the least nervous of women, had felt it the first. It had laid hold of her when going up the steps to the door, and it had been so real a terror, she explained to us, that if we had not joined her she would have turned back. Nothing could have induced her to enter the Villa alone.

Madame de M——’s account was that her mind had been more or less troubled from the first moment of entering the garden,

garden, but that when the man refused us access to the pavilion, it had been suddenly invaded by a most intolerable sense of something wrong. Being very imaginative (poor Guy undoubtedly derived his extraordinary gifts from her), Madame de M—— was convinced that the gardener had murdered some one and buried the body inside the pavilion.

But for me it was not so much the personality of the man—although I admitted he was unprepossessing enough—as the Villa itself which inspired fear. Fear seemed to exude from the walls, to dim the mirrors with its clammy breath, to stir shudderingly among the tattered draperies, to impregnate the whole atmosphere as with an essence, a gas, a contagious disease. You fought it off for a shorter or longer time, according to your powers of resistance, but you were bound to succumb to it at last. The oppressive and invisible fumes had laid hold of us one after the other, and the incident of the closed pavilion had raised our terrors to a ludicrous pitch.

Nurse's experiences, which she gave us a day or two later, supported this view. For she told us that when Renée began to cry, and she took her hand to lead her out, all at once she felt quite nervous and uncomfortable too, as though the little one's trouble had passed by touch into her.

"And what is strange too," said she, "when we reached the garden, there was Médor, his forepaws planted firmly on the ground, his whole body rigid, and his hair bristling all along his backbone from end to end."

Nurse was convinced that both the child and the dog had seen something we others could not see.

This reminded us of a word of Renée's, a very curious word :

"I don't like it, *she* is looking at me still,"—and Cécile undertook to question her.

"You

“ You remember, Renée, when mother took you the other day to look over the pretty Villa—— ”

Renée opened wide, mute eyes.

“ Why did you cry ? ”

“ I was frightened of the lady,” she whispered.

“ Where was the lady ? ” asked Cécile.

“ She was in the drawing-room, sitting in the big chair.”

“ Was she an old lady like grandmamma, or a young lady like mother ? ”

“ She was like Bonnemaman,” said Renée, and her little mouth began to quiver.

“ And what did she do ? ”

“ She got up and began to—to come—— ”

But here Renée burst into tears again. And as she is a very nervous, excitable child, we had to drop the subject.

But what it all meant, whether there was anything in the history of the house or of its guardian which could account for our sensations, we never knew. We made inquiries of course concerning Laurent and the Villa Lucienne, but we learned very little, and that little was so vague, so remote, so irrelevant, that it does not seem worth while repeating.

The indisputable fact is the overwhelming fear which the adventure awoke in each and all of us ; and this effect is impossible to describe, being just the crystallisation of one of those subtle, unformulated emotions in which only poor Guy himself could have hoped to succeed.