# The Garden at 19

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# Chapter I
# I Came to Live at No. 20

IT HAD long been plain to me that I should live my life in London, that I could not hope to save enough money to buy or start, a practice in a country town till I was too old to begin life afresh with any hope of success. Since therefore I was destined to life in London, I had always desired to live in Hertford Park, for it is the prettiest and greenest of the inner suburbs, and for me an outer suburb is too far from the office. But it seemed impossible that I should compass even that desire for years; I was saving money far too slowly to hope to rent, much less to buy, a house in Hertford Park for a very long while. Then came my flutter in Tegean Corporations.

I have never understood how I came to take that flutter. I was no gambler. Very seldom I played bridge for tenpence a hundred at my boarding-house, Paragon House, in the Goldhawk Road; always I had half-a-crown on a Derby loser. My father, a country doctor with a large practice, had always had a flyer on a Derby loser; it seemed only dutiful to maintain the family tradition. But to buy a thousand Tegean Corporation shares on a margin was a very different matter.

Yet walking through Richmond Park one moonlit night I made up my mind that I would buy them. Perhaps it was that the moon was full. It is no confession for a young lawyer to make; but sometimes at the full moon I am a little mad. Several of my acquaintances have admitted to me that they are. It is an odd fact;

but that it is a fact I am sure. Yet I ought to have awakened next morning in a more sober and less speculative spirit, my head clear of moonshine. I awoke with the resolve to buy them stronger than ever. It was something in the nature of a revolt against the tedium of my life so cramped by want of money. After all it was not a bad gamble. The syndicate proposed to acquire a large tract of land near Tegea, a village in Greece, for the purpose of growing on a large scale the little grapes which are dried into currants; and all the chief currant-merchants of Athens and London were interested in the venture and shareholders.

As soon as I reached the city, I went to the offices of the stock brokers who had acted for my father when he had run through all his money and property in a persevering effort to fill the pockets of Alfred Beit and Whitaker Wright. He died ten years earlier than he would have done, had those benefactors of the British Empire never emerged from the ghettos in which they were born. I had with me my Birkbeck bank-book which showed that I had £211 on deposit; and in five minutes I had arranged that my broker should buy me a thousand Tegean Corporations at nineteen shillings. There was the less difficulty about it since he knew me from the days when I had straightened out my paralyzed father's affairs and saved enough from the wreck to keep him in decent comfort for the two years he survived his losses.

Having completed this transaction, I went to my cousin's offices where I work. I got none of the gambler's excitement out of my flutter. It was a little odd, but I found myself almost indifferent whether Tegean Corporations went up or down. I dreamt none of Alnaschar's dreams. I went steadily through my work. When I went out to my lunch I did not trouble to buy an evening paper to

learn whether Tegean Corporations were going up or down; I met a fellow member of the New Bohemians, and we talked about the latest book of G.K. Chesterton.

I did not even bother to buy a paper as I went home. But I found a late edition of the *Pall Mall* in the drawing-room of Paragon House, and read that Tegean Corporations had fallen to eighteen shillings. Fifty pounds out of my £211 had gone.

I was not depressed, though I sighed when I saw their price. After dinner I set out for Richmond Park and spent a delightful evening in it. At some moment during it I filled with the sense that Tegean Corporations were on the knees of the gods, and I was very well content to leave them there. If the gods wanted my two hundred and eleven pounds, they would certainly take them, and that was all there was to it. Still I could have wished that I was enjoying more of the sense of adventure in my flutter.

The shares remained at eighteen shillings for two days – the gods seemed to have lost all interest in my two hundred and eleven pounds. Then when I came out to lunch on the third day, the words Tegean Corporations, large on a poster, caught my eye, and I bought the paper.

It was one of those share-pushing penny rags which minister to the simple intellectual needs of the hardy clerk and at the same time strive to allure him to unburden himself in bucket-shops of any savings he may chance to have. But it was obliging me deeply by setting forth that Tegean Corporations were the noblest speculative venture presented to the British public since the palmy days of the Rand. That night Tegean Corporations stood at

twenty- one. My two hundred and eleven pounds were swelling. The next morning there were articles on the company in the financial dailies; they dealt with it in terms of lofty eulogy. Plainly the directors had made some useful press friends in the usual handsome fashion.

I thought it well to go round to my stock broker at eleven o'clock. I found that Tegean Corporations were occupying a good deal of the attention of the Stock Exchange. They had already reached twenty-six, and were still rising. All the flutterers in London were taking a flutter. I gave instructions to my stock broker to sell my thousand if they sank to twenty-four, and went back to my work, proudly conscious that my two hundred and eleven pounds were at any rate four hundred and fifty. At half-past three my broker telephoned me that the shares were at thirty-four shillings and advised me to sell. I guessed that he had large selling orders at thirty-five, and bade him sell them. The next morning I received a check for £770, and started a deposit account at the Chiswick branch of the London and South Western bank.

That night I went up to my bedroom at Paragon House early, and sat down to consider at length what to do with my nine hundred and eighty-one pounds. The possession of that round sum had filled me with the feeling that I was master of my destiny.

I debated with myself whether I should invest it in securities and devote the income from it to the enlarging of my life, or invest that income and watch my capital grow. Then the screeching of laughter rising to my ears from the drawing-room, where Mr. Lewis L. Melville, the chartered humorist of the boarding-house, was amusing my fellow boarders, settled the question. With the

bulk of that round sum I would gratify my desire to have a house of my own, where I could live and read in peace and quiet. After three years in lodgings and six in boarding-house the prospect charmed me.

I think that that desire was also very much an inheritance. The Plowdens, my father, grandfather, grand-uncles and uncles had all lived in houses of their own. I was following the family tradition.

I made no haste to buy that house. I have acquired a good deal of caution – a quality with which I was not born – during my years of practice of the law, and I searched for that house with great care. I knew where to look for it; I meant to live in Hertford Park, and I examined thoroughly all the houses for sale, all of them; that is, likely to be within the price I could pay, in Hertford Park. Indeed I rather worried the house agents in that district by the thoroughness of my researches.

At last after weighing the conflicting attractions of several houses, I decided to buy No. 20 at Walden Road – at my own price, £450. It was a low price for a really well built, semi-detached ten-room house in Hertford Park. But it had been empty for six years. I had three long discussions with the imploring and almost tearful agent about that price before he accepted my offer. But in the end he accepted it, with what I thought a childish petulance, and handed the title-deeds over to me for examination.

I satisfied myself that they were in order and I should have a sound title; then thinking it a good thing to have a second opinion, I asked my cousin, Howard Stryke, the chief partner in

the firm of Stryke and Hodgson, with whom I work, to look through them for me.

Howard received the information that I was buying a house of these parts and magnitude – I did not tell him the price – with considerable surprise, and said that he would be very pleased to look through the deeds, in a tone with quite a new inflection of respect in it. He gave me back the deeds the same afternoon, saying that the title was quite sound. Two days later, when I came in from lunch, a clerk told me that Mr. Stryke wished to speak to me. In his room I found Hodgson also. The firm was wearing an air of having lunched well, and in a joint conversation they informed me that they were pleased with my work – it was the first intimation I had had of it – and had decided to raise my salary from a hundred and fifty to two hundred a year. I thanked them with all the proper expressions of gratitude; and while I was very well aware that, little as I love the law, my work was good, I was not blind to the fact that my being an owner of house property had made it much easier for them to perceive its excellence. This rise of salary justified me of my expenditure on the house; the fifty pounds extra equalled five per cent interest on my £98l, and I had the house as well. In this world one cannot have everything. But I had certainly performed the feat of eating my cake and having it, too.

In the course of the next month I settled in No. 20, repaired, painted and papered at the expense of its late proprietor. When I handed over the £450 to the agent, he said: "Well, Mr. Plowden, you've certainly got a bargain. You wouldn't have got the house as cheaply as this, if there hadn't been something unlucky about Walden Road, or at any rate about the lower half of it."

"It is rather full of empty houses," I said.

"Yes; nine out of the twenty are empty, ten to eighteen. "

"Let's hope that my having taken No. 20 will break the spell," I said piously.

But as a matter of fact, I had no desire in the world to see the road fuller of inhabitants. I should hardly have taken a house at the bottom of a little *cul-de-sac* if I had hungered for neighbors. The fact is, I had become a good deal of a bookworm. When my father succumbed to the companies of Messrs. Beit and Whitaker Wright, I had just won a scholarship at Magdalen, and was looking forward with most glorious expectations to four years at Oxford. After the crash, when I had settled down to the business of the law as an articled clerk to the firm of Stryke and Hodgson, partly out of obstinacy and partly because I found no pleasure in the society to which my lack of money condemned me and there was nothing else to do, I set myself to get exactly the education I should have had at Oxford. I read all the books, Classics, history and philosophy, I should have read for Honor Mods. and Greats. I spent my evenings and most of the holidays of the five years between twenty and twenty-five on this work. It had been no slight strain to buy the books till I learned of the London library and became a subscriber. The result was that I had so cultivated my taste for reading that for the last three years I had read as much as during the earlier five.

I did not talk about this taste at the office; if anyone there had known of it, I should have been reckoned utterly useless at the

law, no matter what the actual quality of my work might be. It would indeed have been as safe to let it be known there that I was a member of the Society of New Bohemians.

It was then a great pleasure to come back from the office to my new home and get to my books unjarred by the conversation, at dinner, of my fellow boarders at Paragon House. Walden Road must have been the quietest place in London. Perhaps it was owing to the fact that it curved, but though it was a turning off one of the main roads of Hertford Park, no sound of traffic reached No. 20 at the bottom of it. All the houses were on the left side of it. Along the right side of it ran the high brick wall of the garden of some city magnate. I did not mind the outlook on this blank wall, because the tall trees of the garden hung over it, and their green was, to my thinking at any rate, pleasanter than a row of houses would have been. The road then enjoyed the stillness of the country.

I began by furnishing three rooms only, three rooms and the kitchen. I furnished them barely, and gave myself the pleasure of picking up a piece of furniture at a time, when such a piece caught my fancy.

In this way I presently became the possessor of the most comfortable easy chair in London; and my bed, though it is large for my bedroom, must have been built and adorned for some eighteenth century princess. I bought both of them in sale-rooms, where I also bought several other pieces of furniture, one at a time, which I believed to be beautiful or knew to be comfortable. The bed I had fitted with the luxurious spring-mattress it

deserved, for in the matter of furniture I do not believe in beauty divorced from comfort.

The matter of servants gave me no trouble. I took into my service a respectable old woman, Mrs. Ringrose, whose husband, a carpenter, had been disabled in a railway accident, and then swindled by the railway company out of his proper compensation. He had come to Stryke and Hodgson when it was too late – after he had signed away his claim for proper compensation to a wheedling rogue, the company's agent, for thirty pounds. When, soon afterwards, he died, his widow had been in a very poor way; and I had helped her get work, not much, cleaning offices. It had only sufficed to keep her alive; and when I offered her the post of cook and housekeeper to me, a home and wages, she accepted the offer with tears of joy. She was very deaf and not very skillful; but she kept the house spotlessly clean, and my simple tastes did not greatly tax her cooking powers. She looked after me with genuine devotion, served my purpose very well, and gave me no trouble.

I settled down in No. 20 early in the summer, and presently I joined the Hertford Park Lawn Tennis Club. I did not wish to become a sluggish recluse without muscles; and moreover, as a boy I had been a promising player. I was bad indeed at first, but at the end of a fortnight I began to play a moderate game. I am rather pertinacious when I give my mind to anything; and I fear that I neglected my books for lawn tennis whenever the weather was fine. But it was not fine long together, and I hardened my muscles and straightened out the stoop I was acquiring. At the Tennis Club I made the acquaintance of some of the inhabitants of the Park, their wives and their daughters, very pleasant people.

One evening I sat waiting with one of the oldest inhabitants of the Park, a Mr. Herbert Vincent, till a court should be vacant and we could play singles. We were talking as we waited, and presently he said: "You live in the Walden Road, don't you?"

"Yes, at No. 20," said I.

"Do you find anything queer about the road?"

"Queer? No. How do you mean?" I said in some surprise.

"Well, I can remember the time when every house in it was always occupied. But for the last five or six years it has been impossible to get people to stay in it. One family at any rate cleared out when they had only been in it two months and went on paying rent for their house for three years; they lived at No. 18. Another family cleared out of No. 16 because they could not get a servant to stay with them. They say, both families, that there's something queer about it, but they don't seem to really know what."

"I've noticed nothing queer about it," I said. "Of course it's oddly quiet. The bend in it seems to have cut off the lower half from the sound of the traffic along the Southwell Road. Sometimes I have the feeling of being far away from London, buried in the heart of the country. I have it even stronger sometimes than when I have actually been in the country. Now and then you hear the faint bleat of an electric train; and it destroys the impression. I like the stillness. But queer – no, I've never noticed anything queer."

"There are queer things, you know," said Vincent; and he rose, for the court was vacant.

I played tennis till the light went, and then I set out home. As I came down Walden Road I thought of what Vincent had said about its being queer. Truly, it was very still; and the fancy came to me that there rested on it the brooding hush which sometimes comes before a storm.

# Chapter II
# I Get a Fright

I HAD been in No. 20 some three weeks before I saw anything of the dwellers at No. 19. Then one evening as I came into the gate of my little front garden, on my return from the office, the door of No. 19 opened and a slip of a girl came out. I raised my hat, for it seemed only neighborly, and she bowed. We looked at one another curiously as she paused on the step. She looked to me to be about sixteen, and her face attracted me. Her skin was of a warm pallor, almost a golden pallor; and for the first time I understood what Theocritus meant by the epithet "honey-pale." Her features were delicate and clean-cut. Her nose was a little tip-tilted; her lips were full, a little voluptuous, a little sensitive, and very scarlet in her pale face. Her eyes were brown, and too large for her face. A mass of dark hair framed it, very soft hair, drawn together at the back, tied with a piece of ribbon, and falling below her waist. She had something of a shy air, and I had a strong impression that I was looking at a creature of the woodland, a wild creature, akin to the nymphs the Greeks knew. It was an odd impression for a lawyer to have, and I was rather surprised by it.

It seemed to me that a light of recognition gathered in her eyes as she looked at me. Yet I was sure that I had never seen her before. I could not have forgotten her face if I had.

It takes some time to write this down, but I suppose that we did not look at one another for as long as ten seconds; and she went out of her gate and down the street. I turned round and, leaning

over my gate, looked after her. I saw that she moved with a light grace quite in keeping with her air of a shy creature of the woodland.

Her face came back to me several times during the evening. Indeed I took my Theocritus from the shelf and read about the honey-pale shepherdess.

I began to take interest in my neighbors. I could not see into the garden of No. 19 from my garden because on the other side of the close-set paling between them was a thick privet hedge over seven feet high, and right down on to the hedge came a thick screen of the lower branches of the row of sycamores which run between the two gardens. I could not even see much of it from the top windows at the back of my house, for besides the sycamore screen along the side it was full of a mass of shrubs grown high and tangled, deodars and Wellingtonias. In the middle of the tangle rose a little cupola roof some seven feet across. It was gray; and I could not tell whether it was made of marble, or painted wood, or stucco. It stood about twelve feet high. I could not see what it covered.

A few days later I saw another of my neighbors, an old man, sixty years old at least; and his big frame stooped. But I did not think that he was bowed by weakness, for all of his face which was not hidden by his high-growing gray beard was ruddy with a strong glow of health. It might very well have been the face of a sea-captain. I wondered if his stoop had been caused by too much reading like the stoop I was straightening out by lawn tennis. It seemed likely, for he wore the clothes, baggy at the elbows and knees, of a careless student, though I saw that they must have

been cut by a good tailor. He passed me in the Walden Road without a glance, his brow knitted in a thoughtful frown. I resolved to make his acquaintance, if I could. He looked as if he had interesting things to tell; besides, if I made his acquaintance, I should come to know his daughter – I took her to be his daughter; and that I was growing eager to do.

Several times I met her about Hertford Park, shopping, or on some errand. I always raised my hat to her. Always she bowed; and always the light grace with which she moved awoke afresh my admiration.

One evening I heard her singing in their garden, singing softly to the accompaniment of the clicking whir of a sewing machine as she worked. It was a sweet voice of a delightful tone; and it made me more eager to make her acquaintance. I stopped reading to listen to her. A sense of the loneliness of my life came on me as I listened; and I wished that I could go and talk to her while she worked. I had never known well a girl or a woman, since I had fallen as a boy out of my old world. Into the contracted life of the solitary clerk, nice women rarely enter; and the relation of the adventures of my fellow clerks with shop-girls and others of the dollymop type had never tempted me to seek that diversion. The women of the boarding-houses in which I had lived seemed to spend their lives in expeditions to get a glimpse of some royal person, or in attending drapers' sales. I felt that the child next door would be nice and sympathetic to talk to. And then I should watch her face while we talked.

It was some ten days after Vincent had talked to me about the queerness of the Walden Road that I had my first experience of it.

It was on a Sunday afternoon. The day was still and stifling hot; and it seemed to me best not to go to the tennis club till after tea. I hauled my comfortable easy chair out into the garden, and read that delightful book, *The Plea of Pan*.

I had read for half an hour perhaps, when I was disturbed by a flight of shrilly chirping sparrows from the sycamores of No. 19. I looked after them and observed that they flew uncommonly fast and straight for sparrows, as if they had been badly frightened. My eyes were seeking the page again when another movement caught them; and a big rat, a middle-sized rat, and two small rats ran out from under the palings of No. 19, helter skelter across my garden, and disappeared among the plants on the other side of it. I have never seen rats run so fast; and I stared, astonished, at the place where they had vanished.

As I stared I thought I heard an odd, faint, coughing grunt in the garden of No. 19, the grunt of some animal to which I could not put a name. It was a nasty sound.

And then a cold chill ran down my back, the cold chill that sometimes runs down your back late at night when you go upstairs in the dark after reading a gruesome tale. It is a hateful feeling at any time, but in the staring sunshine of that hot afternoon it was beyond words hateful.

I rose from my chair, dropping *The Plea of Pan,* and stood shivering in horrid fear – I did not know of what – and a cold sweat broke out on me. I was in a daze of terror; my mind would not work; I tried to grasp what was happening, listening with all my ears.

Then my wits cleared a little; and I heard, or fancied I heard, a movement in the garden of No. 19; a quiet movement, a faint dragging, brushing movement; and I had an impression – it was not as much as a vision – of a hideous shapeless, sluggish beast, drawing its pendulous belly over turf. It was moving towards the house.

I stood gasping. Then there came a sharp cry from the dining room of No. 19; and the girl's voice, shrill and full of fear, cried, "Uncle! Uncle! There's something horrible in the garden!"

I heard the sound of heavy footsteps, hurrying in the house; they crunched on the gravel of the garden path; stopped short; and a man’s voice, deep and angry, rose loud on the air.

I did not know the tongue in which he spoke. It sounded like a barbarous Latin jargon. But he was uttering a remonstrance, or an adjuration, or even an exorcism, in a deep chanting tone which presently sank to the quick muttering of a priest reciting a liturgy. Two words I caught, several times repeated; I am sure that they were *in abyssum*.

Then the muttering ceased; and I knew that the air had been full of unspeakable horror, and that it was clear again.

" What ever was it?" I cried in a high, shaky voice.

There was a pause; then the man said in a hoarse, rasping voice, "What was what?"

"The beast in your garden."

"There is no beast in my garden."

I lost my temper at the quibble, for my nerves were indeed on edge:

"Damn you!" I cried. "You've sent it back to the Abyss. See that it stops there, will you!"

"I don't know what you're talking about," said the man.

"Oh, yes, you do. Do you think I couldn't follow any of your bastard Latin? Keep the damned thing in the Abyss!"

"Bastard Latin, eh? You know a good deal for Hertford Park. But I don't think you'd better talk about it. There are lunatic asylums in Christian England," he jeered with a chuckle.

My gust of temper had blown itself out; and my curiosity was awakening. I hesitated; then I said: "What is the date of that Latin?"

"Ah, that's better. That's the true spirit of the scholar," he jeered. "But what's it doing in Hertford Park? Try the twelfth century."

He went into the house; and I heard the glass top of the dining-room door jingle as he shut it behind him.

I stood still for a minute or two, letting my whirling mind grow yet clearer. Then I became aware that a sickly, loathsome smell, a

smell I did not know and never wanted to know again, hung on the air of the garden. I turned a little sick; and I was wringing wet with cold sweat.

I walked down to the house; and as I passed the kitchen window Mrs. Ringrose looked out of it, with a half-peeled potato in her hand, and said: "They've bin burning rubbidge again at the top of the road – on a Sunday, too. It ought to be stopped, sir; it ought really."

I went into the house laughing hysterically.

# Chapter III
# The Roaring in the Night

BY THE time I had had a bath and changed into dry flannels I had grown rather ashamed of the extravagance of my emotions, though I was still aware that they had been quite beyond my controlling. All the way to the tennis club, at the tennis club, where I played very badly, and all that evening I pondered and debated the cause of my panic. I could not believe it groundless. The girl had cried out that there was something horrible in the garden; I had had an impression of a hideous, shapeless beast; my neighbor had seen it, or felt its presence, or he would not have set about driving it back to its lair, or to the Abyss by his adjuration. I could not have fancied it; at any rate I could not have fancied its loathsome, sickly smell, for Mrs. Ringrose had smelt it, too. There were also the flying sparrows and the rats.

What kind of a beast was it that filled human beings and animals with this unnerving terror, a terror independent of the understanding and the will? From what lair had it come? Whither had it gone? Was it dangerous or merely horrible? It must be dangerous, unspeakably malefic, to fill me with that panic terror. And what would happen if it came again when the man was out and the girl at home alone? It was a disquieting thought.

I tossed long on a sleepless pillow wrestling with these questions.

The next morning I awoke in a less confident state of mind. I was disposed to make more allowance for the flights of the

imagination. It seemed to me that my impression of a hideous, shapeless beast might very well be a mere fancy. But even so, something must have given it to me; there had been something in the garden of No. 19, to inspire that horror into me. Of that I was sure. It clung to me still; all day the memory of it kept interfering with my work; and I came home that night realizing that I had a new interest in life, to discover the cause of that horror.

Now the function of an interest is to be gratified, as Aristotle might have put it; and it soon grew clear to me that if I did not set about gratifying this interest it would trouble me. I had no scruples about gratifying it; I had indeed a very good right to do so. My neighbor had thrust it into my life in a very disturbing fashion; and there was no impertinence in my curiosity. He had no right whatever to have creatures in his garden which inspired panic terror into me when I was reading quietly in my own. I had every right to protect myself against such an invasion. I made up my mind to do my best to solve the mystery and set my mind at rest.

I began to keep a watch on the garden of No. 19. In the morning after I had dressed, in the evening when I returned from the office, and at night before going to bed I went to the window of the top room at the back of my house and examined my neighbor's garden carefully. Sometimes at night I would watch it for a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes at a time. In the bottom of my heart I wanted to see a beast, a real beast no matter how hideous or loathsome, a beast that you could touch. It was that, the possibility that it was a beast of another world, an intangible horror, which harassed me.

But I saw nothing. The garden of No. 19 shimmered peacefully in the sunlight, or was very still, its silence unbroken by a rustle in the moonlight. The escape of the beast from its cage, or its pen, or its lair, or from the Abyss had been an accident. It was an accident unlikely to happen again now that my neighbor had had his warning. My own garden remained quite pleasant to read in; no sense of horror troubled its air; no sickly stench poisoned it; the sparrows went their busy ways about it, unscared.

I would rather that it had not been so peaceful. If the horror had come again, I might have found some reasonable, comforting explanation of it. I would have cheerfully endured the horror to get rid of the haunting possibility of there existing an actual creature of the Abyss, needing a liturgical exorcism to drive it away.

It was some ten days later that I was awakened by a noise of roaring. I sat up in bed and found that it filled the air of the road. It was very hard to make out where it came from. I fancied that it came from the back of the house. It was a strange sound: I had never heard the like of it – a whirring roar, sinking now and again to a throbbing like the beat of wings, strong wings, then rising again to a monotonous, whirring roar.

Presently it struck me that there could only be one place in the Walden Road from which a strange sound would come, and that was the garden of No. 19. I slipped out of bed and stood hesitating. I turned my watch-stand, which stood on the little table beside my bed on which I lay the book I am reading at night when I am too sleepy to read any more, and by the strong light of

the full moon I saw that the hands pointed to three minutes past twelve. Then I opened the door; and the roar struck louder on my ears. It did come from the back of the house. It sounded very sinister and threatening; and the thought flashed on me that the beast might be about again. With a shiver I shut the door and slipped back into bed.

Two or three minutes later the roaring ceased suddenly. It almost seemed to stop with a jerk, if a sound could stop with a jerk. I lay trying to brace myself to go to the window at the top of the house to look down on the garden of No. 19. I failed; I could not bring myself to face the horror of the beast.

I lay awake for an hour, with straining ears. The roaring did not break out again; but once I thought I heard voices chanting.

Then I fell asleep and slept till morning. Of course, in the heartening daylight, I reproached myself for my lack of spirit in not trying to see what had roared in the garden of No. 19.

I dressed quickly and hurried down to my garden. In the morning sunlight it looked everything that a quiet suburban garden should be. But I had a feeling that I had come into an uncomfortable place. I put it down to my having expected to find something wrong with it – a mere fancy. But there were no sparrows in it, and the crumbs which Mrs. Ringrose had the night before scattered for them lay untouched. The air seemed uncommonly fragrant. I had a strong fancy that someone had been burning incense, but it might merely be the fragrance of some heavily scented flowers in the next garden. I tried for some time to find a peep-hole through the screen of leaves between my neighbor's

garden and mine. All the while I had a dim feeling that I was in an uncomfortable place, there was a strange oppression in the air. When at last I came into breakfast the feeling of relief of the lifting of the oppression as I came into the house was very distinct. It was odd.

When I came into the garden that evening on my return from the office the feeling of discomfort had gone from the air of the garden, and the sparrows had come back. After dinner, therefore, I brought out my easy chair and settled down in it to read.

I had been reading but a little while when I heard a rustling in the hedge of the garden of No. 19. I looked round quickly enough. Someone, or something, was climbing it. I jumped out of my chair, sniffing for the stench of the beast, prepared for some dreadful sight. Then the branches of a sycamore above the hedge parted and the charming face of my neighbor's niece appeared in their leafy frame.

My nerves had gone so tense that I gasped with relief, and we gazed at one another.

Then she said in a delightful tone of appeal, "Oh, Heine, can you climb?"

I was a little taken aback by the form of her address, but it made me smile.

"Climb?" I said. "What do you want me to climb?"

"Up in the top of this sycamore there is a piece of wood with a leather thong fastened to it. It broke and flew up there. Would you please try to get it down for me? My uncle told me to climb up and get it. But how can I – with you there, too?"

I looked at the top of the sycamore, but could see nothing for its thick leaves.

"I can't see it," I said. "But if I can get into the lower branches, I've no doubt that I can get it."

"If you get a pair of steps like those I'm standing on, it would be easier," she suggested.

"That's a good idea," I said. "I'll get them."

When I came back with the steps she still stood on hers, and I paused to look at the charming picture. Then I set the steps up against the paling close to her.

"It's a long time since I climbed a tree," I said with a sigh. "But I dare say I have some of my old skill left. Where is this piece of wood exactly?"

"I think it must be lying right on the top and you'll have to get your head right out above the leaves to see it."

"Here goes, then," I said.

I set my foot on the lowest branch of the sycamore and began to push my way upwards. It was easy enough climbing, but very

dirty; and I was glad that I was wearing flannels which could be washed. Presently I thrust out my head above the topmost branches, and lying on the broad leaves, not two feet from me, was the piece of wood with the leather thong. I took it up and looked at it carefully. It was a concave piece of wood about six inches long, smooth and polished inside and out. The leather thong was about a foot long, and old and frayed. Plainly it had broken off short. I wondered what on earth the thing could be used for.

"I've got it," I cried.

"Oh, thank you," she said.

I put it in my pocket and climbed down the tree. When I stood firmly on my steps, I handed her the piece of wood, and she thanked me again.

"What is it? What do you use it for?" I said, curious.

"I don't use it. It's my uncle's," she said smiling.

"Well, what does he use it for?

"Oh, I daren't talk about uncle's doings," she said, and the smile faded from her face. "Why, if he thought I'd been talking about him he might beat me."

"Beat you?" I said incredulously.

"Well, when I first came to live with him – years ago – he told me that if ever I talked to anyone about any of his doings, he'd whip me and send me to bed for a fortnight. Oh, you don't know uncle – Heine."

There was a faint mischievous challenge in the tone in which she uttered the word "Heine."

"I don't think I want to know your uncle. If he's the kind of man who would do such a barbarous thing he would plainly be a painful acquaintance," I said, smiling. "But why do you call me Heine?"

"You ought to know why from your looking-glass. You're the very image of Heine," she said, smiling again.

"Am I now? Oddly enough I don't remember ever having seen a portrait of him; and I don't believe I've ever read a word of his writings." And I sat down on the top of the steps to talk more comfortably. Her charming face was only about four feet away, and I could study it as we talked.

"Why, he's delightful!" she cried with enthusiasm. "I wish I had never read a word of his work and had it all to read for the first time."

"Well, it seems that I have that treat in store. Do you read much?"

"Yes. I have nothing else to do – except the housework and the cooking."

"And your sewing," I added.

"Yes. I have been doing a lot of sewing lately. I'm making myself a new dress," she said proudly.

"I have indeed an accomplished neighbor," I said. "You read Heine and keep house and sew and cook."

"Oh, I only cook very simple things – vegetables and porridge and omelettes of different kinds. And it does take me a long time to make a new dress," she said with a sigh. "But what's your real name – besides the Heine it ought to be?"

"Plowden – John Plowden. What's yours?"

"Pamela Woodfell. But I think I shall call you Heine if you don't mind," she said thoughtfully. "It suits you better than 'Mr. Plowden.' It does really."

"I'm charmed to hear it."

Her child's frankness charmed me, too; and I was indeed delighted to perceive that she regarded this meeting as the beginning of an acquaintance.

There came a pause in our talk; then I said: "By the way, what was that beast in your garden on the afternoon of the Sunday before last?"

"Wasn't it horrible – worse than usual?" she said quickly with a little shiver. "I didn't see it, though; I only knew that something

horrible was there. But we mustn't talk about it. That's uncle's business."

"Worse than usual? Do you mean to say that you continually have these – these visitants? Why, it gave me such a fright – such a sense of horror as I've never had in my life!" I cried.

"Oh, no; not continually. But I have seen – there have been – I've felt things sometimes – when uncle's friends have come – but he locks me in my bedroom now when they come at night – and I sleep in the front of the house," she said in quick confusion with a troubled air; and then she said earnestly, "But we mustn't talk about these things, we mustn't, really. They're uncle's business."

There was nothing to be gained by pressing her to tell me at the moment; I should only seal her lips.

"Well, of course, if you'd rather not – but it did give me a horrid fright," I said. "It came so suddenly – when I was sitting out here reading."

"Then you got more of it than I did. It must have been horrid," she said sympathetically.

"I can assure you it was."

She looked at me compassionately.

"And that roaring last night – that was rather terrifying," I said.

"Oh, that. There's no need to be terrified of that," she said quickly in a reassuring tone. Then she started and began to descend the steps. "Hush!" she said. "Uncle's moving about the house. There's no harm in my talking to you, of course; but he wouldn't like it. He'd be afraid of my telling you things." Her face was hidden behind the leafy screen. "Thank you for getting me that piece of wood. Good-by – Heine."

"Good-by – for the present," I said.

# Chapter IV
# At the New Bohemians

I CARRIED the steps into the house and came back to my easy chair and book. I did not read, however; I was in a considerable elation at having made the acquaintance of my charming neighbor and at finding her even more charming than her face had promised. I liked her child-like frankness of attitude to me. I saw no reason why we should not become friends. We seemed both of us lonely persons.

I pondered her confused admissions about the beast in the garden. She, too, had not seen the horror; like myself she had only felt it. I had had the impression that it had been on the little strip of lawn before the cupola. Plainly the shrubs hid that strip from the door of the dining-room of No. 19. I was more curious than ever about the doings of her uncle; and I was sure that she could throw a bright light on them, if she would. The natural curiosity of an intelligent girl would take a great deal of baulking; and Pamela seemed an uncommonly intelligent girl. Also she had plenty of leisure to devise methods of gratifying it. Probably she had learned most of what there was to learn before her uncle had taken thought to prevent her learning. It was odd that he should lock her in her bedroom on the nights on which his friends came. What did they come for? I made no doubt that she knew. I hoped that if we became friends she would tell me. I had the keenest desire to know.

The next evening I ate my dinner quickly to get the sooner into the garden; and when I came into it, I heard the clicking whir of the sewing-machine. I set my chair on the spot I thought nearest to it and said, not too loudly, "Good evening, Miss Woodfell."

The clicking whir ceased, and Pamela said, "Good evening, Heine."

"How is the dress getting on?" I said.

"Not very fast. But you mustn't talk too loud."

I said in a lower tone: "If you were to keep the sewing-machine going, it would blur the sound of our voices. It's a pity that your uncle's so— so—"

"Grumpy," said Pamela, setting the machine going.

"Grumpy be it. I have always thought it the duty of neighbors to be friendly. Don't you think so?"

"It depends on the neighbors, I should think," she said.

"It does indeed," I said. "And it seems to me that you and I are just the kind of neighbors who ought to be friendly. Have there been any more horrors in your garden?"

"Now, you mustn't ask questions about that – you mustn't really," she said quickly.

"I see. But I may ask questions about other things?"

"What other things?"

"Well, about you, for example."

About me? But what do you want to know about me?" she said in a tone of some wonder.

"Everything," I said quickly. "And you see if we start with a certain amount of knowledge of one another, we can talk so much more easily."

"Yes, we could. And I suppose I could ask questions about you."

"Of course – as many as you like. We can set about a mutual catechism and protract it. It would be interesting. I don't know about you. But I'm rather lonely and dull."

"I'm lonely, but I'm not dull – and you, you have plenty of books – at least you read a great deal," she said.

"That makes the human voice all the more pleasant a change."

"Oh, yes, it does," she said.

Without more ado I began to catechise her, and presently she was answering my questions and questioning me. I told her of my tedious life in London; and I learned that, like myself, she had spent her childhood in the country. When she was eleven her mother had died, and she had come to live with her uncle at No. 19. At first she had found her life unspeakably dreary; and its

dreariness had driven her to books. When she was fourteen, nearly four years ago, the old woman who kept house for her uncle had died, and he had told her that she must take her place. Probably the light housework had been good for her; it meant that she had to move about and use her muscles. Without it she might have spent all her time poring over books.

Woodfell of course played a considerable part in her story; and he stood out as an old curmudgeon. He was indeed a student; he would be silent, absorbed in his work, for weeks on end; then he would for a while display himself in a talkative mood and again sink back into his silence. He seemed to have never tried to brighten her dull life. I gathered, too, that he gave her very little money.

If my life had been dull, hers had been dreary; it was plainly my bounden duty to brighten it. I was in all conscience ready to do that duty. It chafed me that I could not see the play of expression on her charming face as she talked.

That was the first of many talks, talks after the manner of Pyramus and Thisbe, on the long, delightful summer evenings. They became the most important part of my life, a refreshment after the tedious labors of the office. I was greatly annoyed when a wet evening prevented our talking. That prosaic instrument, the sewing-machine, proved very useful; if I heard its clicking, we might talk; if it were silent, her uncle was not safely shut away in his study.

Sometimes we met outside, in Hertford Park; and my pleasure in talking with her was increased, for I could watch her face. I

remember very well our first meeting. I came out of the railway station one evening and turned to go up to my tobacconist's shop to buy cigarettes, and saw her ten yards away, peering wistfully into a sweet-shop.

My heart leapt in me, and I walked quickly to her and said: "Good evening, Miss Woodfell. Are you going to waste your pocket money on sweets?"

She turned to me, flushing and smiling, with shining eyes.

As we shook hands she said: "Yes; I'm very fond of sweets. I'm going to spend a penny on them."

"Let us go inside and look at them closer," I said.

We went into the shop. It had nothing exquisite to offer, but I found that she liked mixed chocolates better than anything; and I bought her two pounds of the best they had. She was beyond word delighted.

Then I took her to a confectioner's shop in the main street, and we ate ices. We spent an hour over those ices, talking.

Then we went home, and as we turned into the Walden Road I said: "I don't think we had better be seen arriving together – in view of your uncle's grumpiness. It might mean that he would forbid you to have anything more to do with me."

"That's just what I was thinking," she said uneasily.

"I don't like hiding our acquaintance from him, because any kind of secrecy is a bore. But the only way to deal with unreasonable people is to humor their unreasonableness. After all, there is no reason in the world why we shouldn't be friends."

No, there isn't," she said firmly. "And there is no use in giving uncle the chance of making himself disagreeable."

"I must try to make his acquaintance. Then it will be all right."

"I'm afraid you'll find it very hard – impossible," she said, shaking her head.

"One can but try," I said.

She went on, and I let her get home before I followed her.

It was the very next night, at a meeting of the New Bohemians, that I learned about the piece of wood I had brought down from the top of the sycamore. That distinguished society meets on one evening a week at a tavern and smokes and talks; also it drinks, for the good of the house, during the intervals in the conversation. Its talk is apt to be righteously fierce, and hardly a meeting passes without the floor being strewn with the mangled relics of the reputation of some literary, political or theological idol of the British public. It is composed of poets, artists, novelists, journalists and solicitors; and on that evening I was sitting between two novelists. One of them, Marks, of a sonorous voice and deeply ringing laugh, is known for his admirable prose to every cultivated Englishman. The other, Gibson, always seems to me anxious to draw from the other members of the society not so

much the honest expression of their real opinions on all matters as the most violent possible honest expression of their real opinions.

He and Marks had been talking about the Mysteries, a favorite subject with them, since Marks' novels are mystical and Gibson is interested in comparative religion. Gibson was maintaining that the *mystica vannus Iacchi,* of which Virgil speaks, was the bull-roarer. He was maintaining that the bull-roarer was probably used in the Bacchic Mysteries in the same way as it always has been used in the other Mysteries, as indeed it is used to day among the savage tribes which celebrate Mysteries. Marks was doubtful; the *vannus* was a winnowing-fan, and he thought that there was a good deal to be said for the view of the commentators that *mystica* meant only "carried in the Mysteries." Gibson said a few kind words about the commentators.

Then I said, "What is a bull-roarer?"

A bull-roarer is a small piece of wood hollowed out with a string attached to it. You whirl it round and it makes a roaring sound. It is used among savages to summon the initiates to the Mysteries and to warn women and children and the boys who have not yet been initiated to keep away," said Gibson.

"Why, then, that's what I found on the top of a sycamore!" I cried. "And that was the roaring I heard."

"You found a bull-roarer on the top of a sycamore?" said Gibson.

"Yes; the leather thong must have broken off short and it flew up into the tree. That explains why the roaring broke off short," I said.

"Where do you live?" said Marks quickly in an uneasy tone.

"At No. 20 Walden Road, Hertford Park," I said.

"At No. 20 Walden Road," Marks repeated, and the note of uneasiness in his voice was clearer than ever.

"Ah, I see you know Woodfell," I said.

He hesitated; then he said in his deep, sonorous voice, "Yes, I know Woodfell – a great student – a great student."

"He's my neighbor. But I don't know him," I said.

"A difficult man to know – very difficult," said Marks.

He might have gone on to say something more about him, but Gibson made one of his incurably trivial remarks to the chairman, and the storm burst. With great promptitude he dragged, or rather flung, Marks into it, and in the raging of the poets and Anglicans the subject dropped. But several times during the rest of the evening I caught Marks looking at me with very thoughtful, searching eyes.

When, at midnight, the meeting broke up, I came out with Marks, and we walked together towards the Tube station at Piccadilly Circus.

"I should be very pleased if you would not tell Woodfell that I came to the help of his niece and got the bull-roarer from the top of the sycamore for her," said I.

"Has Woodfell a niece? She doesn't live at No. 19?" said Marks, stopping short and looking at me with a troubled face.

"Yes, she does. Oughtn't she to live at No. 19?" I said quickly, troubled in my turn.

Marks went on in silence for a few steps; then he said: "Why not? Why not? But of course, I'll say nothing to Woodfell about the matter."

"Thank you. I think she finds him rather grumpy," I said.

"I've no doubt of it," said Marks. "He is short-tempered." He seemed to hesitate; then he added, "And I would rather you, too, didn't talk about that bull-roarer."

"Very good, I won't," I said.

We went on in silence, and half-way up the Haymarket he said: "I take it that Woodfell looks after his niece carefully."

"I don't think he looks after her at all. In fact, he neglects her," I said.

Marks frowned, but said no more, and in the station we parted to go to our different Tubes.

I had certainly food for thought. It seemed that the object I had found for Pamela was the bull-roarer used in the Mysteries; I had been awakened by its roaring in the night; the natural inference was that it had been used in the celebration of the Mysteries at No. 19.

I knew something of the Mysteries, as celebrated by the ancients, from my classical reading, but not much. I had an impression that the initiates had kept their secret well, and that the speculations of those who had studied them were very vague, and left the matter in the realm of conjecture. I was not greatly interested in the fact that Mysteries of a kind were celebrated at No. 19. But I was deeply interested in the fact that Marks had shown a genuine, deep uneasiness on hearing that Pamela was living at No. 19. I could not get it out of my mind that she was in peril; and it seemed likely that that peril was connected with the Mysteries they had celebrated.

It did seem absurd that a young girl living in a quiet, self-respecting suburb like Hertford Park should be in some obscure peril connected with the ancient Mysteries. The more I thought of it the more absurd it seemed. But I had not only Marks' uneasiness to strengthen my growing belief in her danger, I had also that strange, terrifying experience of the beast in the garden. I had almost persuaded myself that it had been chiefly fancy; but now I found myself again filling with the conviction that it had not been fancy. The coughing grunt, the brushing sound of a pendulous belly drawn over turf might have been fancy. Some curious rustling might have caused my ears to play me false, and even awakened in me that inexplicable, unnerving terror. But I assured

myself that the sickly, clinging smell had been no fancy, that it gave the lie to the belief that the rest had been fancy. Pamela might very well be in some great danger, all the greater for its obscurity.

That was reason enough for any action on my part; it justified any intrusion on Woodfell's privacy. I had only known Pamela a little while, but already I felt a strong sense of responsibility for her. I already felt her to be the most important person in my life. I would use every effort to protect her. I must keep a close watch on No. 19 and the mysterious doings of Woodfell.

I was in a very fortunate position to do this. I was up early next morning and set about turning my front room into my living room and study. I had been using the back room, the dining-room, as my living room and study, because of its outlook on to the garden and the pleasant green of the sycamores. I moved the furniture, the bookshelves and the books into the front room, and I was pleased with the change. The room was larger, airier, and better lighted; and the green trees above the garden well opposite gave it nearly as pleasant an outlook. I made the change in order that I might keep a watch on No. 19 from the front as well as the back. I had in my mind that Pamela might be in danger from some malefic practices of her uncle, she might also be in danger from his associates. I wanted to see them.

I began to keep a more careful watch on the garden of No. 19. As the impression of the horror of the beast had grown fainter, I had slackened in it. Now again, after it was dark, I would go up to the empty top room at the back of the house and look down into the suspect garden, straining my eyes and ears. Sometimes a rustling

would send a little chill down my back or set my scalp pricking. Sometimes the moonlight fell on the little cupola, and I wondered about it. I had a fancy that the little structure was the center of the mystery. Perhaps under its cup-shaped roof lay the entrance to that dark pathway to the Abyss up which the terrifying beast had come.

In the meantime I was strengthening my friendship with Pamela. On many fine evenings we talked through the leafy screen which separated the gardens. On wet evenings my new position in the front of the house enabled me to see her if she left No. 19 on some errand, and I was quick to sally out after her.

One evening as we were talking in the garden we had a narrow escape. She had been saying something to me, and the words had scarcely died on her lips when her uncle cried from the dining-room, "Who are you talking to, Pamela?"

I heard Pamela gasp; then she said cooly, "I was talking to Heine."

Her uncle's footsteps came crunching along the gravel; then he said in a jeering tone: "You and your Heine. That German Jew knew nothing – a man who believed that the old gods were so worn out and senseless that they muddled about in a monastery on the beastly Frisian coast. It's likely, isn't it?"

"Never mind, I like to talk to him," said Pamela, and I caught the subdued, mischievous glee in her tone.

"Oh, well, for all his ignorance he was a pretty writer," said Woodfell, who seemed in one of his rare expansive moods. "He

was the only great writer, outside metaphysics, Germany ever produced. And the German philosophers didn't know everything – not by any means. The reason only takes you halfway. Schopenhauer with a little more knowledge might have done great things. But he didn't know, and he never had the chance to know. Well, well, if you must admire a German, you might do worse than admire Heine, and he wasn't one."

He went back into the house.

I kept silence till I heard faintly the bang of his study door; then I said in a low voice, "That was an escape."

"Yes," said Pamela, laughing softly; "but uncle didn't know, and he didn't get the chance to know, and he's not going to get the chance to know. I like to talk to you, and I shall. Only for the future I shall talk with my face towards the house. I ought to have done it before."

I heard her shift her chair.

It was a few evenings after that that a happy thought came to me. As I was coming from the railway station I met her in the main road on her way to the shops, and was inspired to suggest that we should start in half an hour for Richmond and walk through the park. She accepted the suggestion with joy. We took a train to Richmond, a cab to the top of the hill, and went into the park.

We had not gone far when she said: "Let's get among the trees. I haven't been in a wood for years and years, and I used to love them so."

I found that she did indeed love them. Once among the trees, her steps lagged; her eyes were shining; her nostrils, drawing in the woodland scents, dilated; she seemed to more than ever wear the air of a wild, woodland creature.

"I know now what you are," I said softly. "I always knew that you were something, and I fancied that it was a shepherdess of Sicily. But I was wrong; you're a wood-nymph, a hamadryad."

"A wood-nymph? Oh, I wish I were!" she said. "Then – then, of course, I should be able to see Pan without going mad."

"You want to see Pan?" I said in some surprise at the odd fancy.

"Yes – I do," she said slowly. "But only of course if I didn't go mad. He's very terrible."

"Not so very terrible, surely," I said. "I must lend you *The Plea of Pan*. If you're interested in him, you'd like it."

"Oh, but he is terrible – truly terrible," she said. "I've seen a statue – a real statue of him, and it is terrible – and – and – fascinating."

"Where did you see it?" I said.

She shook her head, looked fearfully round the dusky thicket, and shrank a little closer to me. Some of her fearfulness seemed to pass into me, and of a sudden I filled with a sense that the thicket was a place of strange dangers. I slipped my arm through hers,

drew her quickly out of it into a broad stretch of turf flooded with the golden light of the setting sun, and breathed more freely.

We looked at one another with eyes in which that sudden fear still lingered.

"I caught your fear," I said.

"Fear's a horrid thing – especially when it comes on you suddenly," she said with a little shiver; and she spoke as one having had experience.

"You speak as if you'd been frightened again and again. Surely you've not been frightened often."

"Not often, thank goodness! But often enough," she said.

"As when you found that beast in the garden the other Sunday?"

"Yes," she said, and added in a thoughtful tone, "I wonder who it was?"

"Who? You don't suppose it was a person?" I cried.

"I don't think any animal could have frightened us like that.

"No, that's true. And of course an animal could not have understood your uncle's exorcism. It would have been wasted on an animal.

I stopped short, and faced her:

"B— B— But where d— d— does it l— l— land me?" I stammered as my first doubts and fears came thronging back.

She shook her head.

"Oh, but there was its smell. Human beings don't smell like that," I said confidently.

"Devils do," she said.

# Chapter V
# Marks Talks

I WAS indeed taken aback, and I think my mouth opened as I stared at her.

"Oh, don't let's talk about the horrid things! Let's enjoy this beautiful place," she said with a touch of petulance.

I pulled myself together and said, "Very well."

We wandered on through the park, but we were a long while recovering our earlier mode of untroubled delight. Pamela could not pass a thicket; she must go through it. As the dusk deepened they grew more and more doubtful, mysterious places. That night I acquired, stealing quietly through them with her, a new sense of the mystery of woods.

She grew weary after two hours or more wandering, and at last slipped her arm through mine and leaned heavily on it. She laughed at herself for her feebleness.

"I wasn't like this when I was a child in the country," she said. "In the summer I was on my feet all day, wandering through the woods."

When we came out of the park we rested on the terrace for a while, looking down on the moonlit reaches of the Thames. The rest made easier for her the walk to the station.

I had now and again been wondering at her saying about devils, and in the train I said: "Where did you learn about devils? You spoke as if you knew all about them."

"I learnt from some of my uncle's books – very interesting books about sorcery and magic. But I mustn't talk about them," she said.

She reached the Walden Road very weary; we made no bones about going down it together at that late hour. We stopped to say good night about ten yards from No. 19.

"Oh, I am deliciously tired. I shall sleep tonight," said Pamela.

"I seem to be hungry," I said.

"I'm hungry, too."

"Then come in and have some cake with me. There is a nice cake."

She hesitated a moment; then she said wistfully: "I should like to very much, and I don't see why I shouldn't. Most people are asleep at this hour, and I should think that the proprieties are, too."

"Not a doubt of it," I said. "But if they were not, I do not see what you and I have to do with the proprieties. We're too out of the world, too lonely."

"No, we have nothing to do with them," she said, smiling."

We found that her uncle's blinds were drawn, and she stole unseen into No. 20. She sat in my easy chair in a pleasant, blinking languor, and we ate cake and drank lemon squash.

At the end of it she said, "That's the nicest meal I've had for years."

"Doesn't your uncle feed you properly?" I said anxiously.

"Dry brown bread, porridge, eggs and vegetables are his diet. He has to keep it to that – on account of his work," she said. "But I have tea and butter with my bread and sometimes jam."

"That's no good for a growing girl," I said.

"It's quite nice food. I like it. I hate meat," she said.

Presently she rose and said that she could not keep awake any longer. She took with her *The Plea of Pan*. I stood at my door and heard her slip noiselessly into No. 19. Then I listened in my hail. I should hear through the wall the sound of voices, if her uncle discovered her late return. I heard nothing.

The next afternoon I came out of my office into a steady downpour of rain. I should get no talk with Pamela that evening. Quite disconsolate, I betook myself to the region of the book-shops and after some search found a book treating of the Mysteries, Pumber's *The Mysteries of the Ancients*. It was a solid, likely-looking volume, and after my dinner I settled down to read it with great expectation of interest and enlightenment. In the

shortest possible time I discovered that Mr. Pumber was a writer of an astonishing dullness. It seemed to me that the Mysteries should be a stimulating theme; I was soon forced to believe that Mr. Pumber could have written about boiled batter pudding with equal illumination. The book was thoughtfully and lavishly illustrated with such pictures as the embroidery round the hem of the robe of a priest of Isis.

I struggled painfully on through it, though at the end of seventy pages I found myself afflicted with the impression that the Dionysia were very like a perambulatory church service of the most tiresome kind. The impression was the more annoying because I felt that it was quite wrong. However, I learned one useful fact from my dullard which should be of service to me in my watch of No. 19; the Mysteries were for the most part celebrated at the new or full moon. If there were any connection between them and the practices of Woodfell, I must be especially watchful at those seasons. There was no mention of the bull-roarer, but Pumber declared that the *mystica vannus lacchi* was a winnowing-fan. His assertion convinced me that Gibson's theory that it was the bull-roarer was the right one.

When I reached Hertford Park the next evening it was plain that the garden would be too damp to sit in. I went therefore to the nearest ironmonger's shop and bought a strong pair of clippers. After dinner I went out into the garden and strolled up and down it whistling "Barbara Allen," one of the songs Pamela sang over her work. Presently I heard the door of the dining-room of No. 19 open and a light footstep on its garden path. I stopped whistling and Pamela took up the tune, humming it softly.

I called to her in a voice but little higher than a whisper to come down right to the end of the garden. I heard her brushing through the shrubs; and when she was right at the end, close to me on the opposite side of the hedge, I began to cut away the top of it above the paling. She was pleased indeed with my device.

I cut away the hedge till I could see her, in a green bower as it were through a thin screen of leaves on the further side of the hedge. I left that screen, so that did Woodfell chance to examine the hedge, he would not be likely to see that it had been thinned. Then we talked at our ease, for we were so near to one another that we needed no clicking whir of a sewing-machine to drown our voices.

She told me that she had read *The Plea of Pan,* and had found it, as I had promised, a delightful book.

"But the writer does not lay nearly stress enough on the terrible side of Pan – not nearly enough. He was a dreadful god – he was really. You should see the statue of him I see – I have seen – at least, you shouldn't," she said.

I noticed her slip into the present tense, and I said, "Where can I see it?"

"You can't," she said quickly. "It's kept hidden – in a secret place. Only a very few people see it."

I did not need to ask if it were at No. 19; I was sure of it. I only said, "That's a pity; I should like to see it very much."

We talked for some time about Pan. She seemed to take a great interest in him. I gathered that he inspired into her an equal dread and fascination. She talked oddly enough about him, as if he were a very present, existing creature of chiefly malefic activities. It should have sounded odd indeed to hear an English girl talk of that ancient god in this strain; but in her I did not find it very surprising. Then there came a heavy shower and drove us into our houses.

A spell of wet weather followed. On one evening I took her into town to dinner, and it was very pleasant. I found the other evenings very dull. But as I sat at my window reading, I saw some of Woodfell's friends. The first of them was a rich man. When one has devoted oneself to the law for some years in London, one can tell a rich man at sight. I can, at any rate. I do not know how I can tell that a man is rich – his clothes of course have nothing to do with it – there is something in his air. And this was a very rich man, a big, fat, sullen-looking, under-hung, heavily-jowled fellow of the domineering kind. Plainly he ate too much and drank too much, and gluttony and drunkenness were not the only deadly sins in which he indulged himself. He looked indeed noxious. If Woodfell numbered many fellows of that kidney among his visitors, I could well understand that Marks was uneasy at Pamela's living at No. 19.

Woodfell opened the door to him, and it seemed to me that there was more than a suspicion of contempt in the hoarse, jeering tone in which he said: "Hullo. Here you are – punctual to the minute."

I did not catch what the rich man answered as he went into the house. I heard him leave it two hours later after dark, and he went briskly down the street with his hands in his pockets, whistling, very like a school-boy released from school.

On the next evening I took Pamela to dine in town. On the night after two visitors came to No. 19 together. One was a clean-shaven man, who looked like a battered Apollo; the other was a middle-sized man, wearing a pointed beard, who walked with a mincing gait and spoke in a high, affected voice. They looked well-to-do, and were dressed by good tailors. I put them down as dilettanti of sorts, gentlemen of leisure with an inclination to the arts. But I did not like them; I thought them unsavory. It might have been pure fancy. I was, naturally, disposed to regard with suspicion visitors to No. 19.

Two evenings later I was not at all surprised to see Marks pass my window, enter the garden-gate of No. 19, and knock at its door. He knocked and rang three times, but no one opened the door to him. Woodfell was plainly out, and Pamela was forbidden to go to the door when anyone knocked after seven o'clock at night. I could understand the prohibition if many of Woodfell's friends were of the type of the first three I had seen.

At last Marks came slowly down the garden and out of the gate, frowning. As he was passing I leaned out of my window and invited him to come in. His face cheered at the sight of me; he accepted the invitation, and I brought him into my study and set him in my easy chair.

I mixed him a whisky and soda. He took from his pocket a giant briar, a gallant pipe, loaded it with a quarter of an ounce of a very black tobacco, and we fell to talking very pleasantly of the New Bohemians, literature and the arts.

The mention of Gibson's name reminded me of the bull-roarer, and I said, "By the way, touching his theory about the *mystica vannus Iacchi,* Pumber in his *Mysteries of The Ancients* says that it was a winnowing-fan."

"Pumber!" said Marks in a sudden, sonorous roar. "Have you been reading that half-baked charlatan? How *dare* he say anything? I cannot agree with the fellow! If *he* says that the *mystica vannus* was a winnowing-fan, it was most certainly nothing of the kind."

"I certainly never read a duller writer," I said. "But your discussion with Gibson made me wish to read something about the Mysteries. I saw the Pumber book in a bookseller's shop and bought it. It is certainly not illuminating."

"A monstrous work," said Marks.

"What is a good book on the Mysteries, then?"

"There is no good book on the Mysteries," said Marks. "There are plenty of books by crack-brained charlatans and German professors. I don't know which are the worse. The charlatan pretends to find some crack-brained significance in the Mysteries; the German professor gives you a multitude of facts and finds no significance at all. Of course there is a Kreisler, but he has the gun-god bee in his bonnet. No, there is no good book on the

Mysteries. Gibson says that they are the same, or very nearly the same as the mysteries which savages still celebrate all the world over. But he is too full of the spirit of vegetation, the Culture God. But he does not pretend to be an authority."

"What, do you think, is the significance of the Mysteries?" I said.

"I don't know. I have never worked at the ancient Mysteries. Perhaps I shall know – some day."

"Does anyone know?"

"Probably not. Your neighbor here, Woodfell, could tell you more about them than anyone alive probably. But Woodfell does not impart knowledge, he gathers it. Of one thing there is little doubt: there were inner Mysteries besides the great public ceremonials like the Dionysia and the Eleusinian. To these the ordinary initiate was not admitted, only the chosen. And those, I take it, were not only men of a certain spirit, but also they passed through a very severe training during their time of probation. Those are the Mysteries worth knowing."

"And Woodfell knows them?"

"I do not know," said Marks.

We were silent awhile, and as he puffed at his pipe, the serene content, which the name of Pumber had vanished, settled down again on his face.

Presently I said: "Isn't it dangerous to tamper with these things – with the occult?"

"Really to tamper with them seems to be one of the most dangerous things in the world – for those who have not passed through the training."

"Is that why you don't like the idea of Miss Woodfell's living at No. 19?" I said.

Marks rose and crossed the room to my bookshelves. "I never said so," he said uneasily.

"Well, to be quite frank with you, I take an interest in Miss Woodfell, and I don't like to think of her being in danger," I said. "What *is* the danger in these matters?"

Marks looked at me gravely, hesitating; then he said slowly: "Well, you see, the master is supposed to gain control, by a process or series of processes, of certain powers – some of them malefic, some beneficent. To gain, and still more to keep, that control he needs an enormous personal force. He paused, and then he added, "I'm only giving you the theory of the thing."

"Of course," I said.

"Well, if accident, or age, or self-indulgence weakens his personal force, he has, as it were, let them loose and can no longer keep them in hand."

He paused again; then added, frowning, as if speaking to himself, "Of course the powers don't matter so much, but if he gets at the principalities—"

He was silent, and I waited a minute or two for him to say more, but he stayed brooding.

Then I said: "And these powers? I take it that they are personalities – beings of a sort."

"I didn't say that," said Marks quickly.

"But they might be – they might be creatures of the Abyss," I said quietly.

He gave me a quick, searching, uneasy look, as if he wondered how much I knew. He opened his mouth in act to speak, shut it again, then drank some whisky and soda.

"Surely all this brings us to magic," I said.

"They used to call it magic. And magic was an attempt to get all the heart of things. But the sorcerers strayed – those about whom we know. But the mage has always existed – certainly in the east, probably in Europe."

"And Woodfell is a mage," said I.

"Woodfell is a student – a great student," said Marks.

I did not want to press a guest unduly, and after he had been silent awhile I turned the talk on to writers on the occult. I had gathered from his talk at the New Bohemians that he was an authority on them. Presently he had quite lost his air of constraint, and was holding forth, with vigorous scorn, on the attraction of the occult for half-baked writers. He advised me, if I could get it, to read a book called *The Horned Shepherd,* for from its hundred pages I could learn more about the Mysteries and their significance than from the ponderous volumes of any eleven German professors.

"But of course you won't be able to learn to do things from it," he said.

"Heaven forbid! I don't want to learn to do things of that kind," said I, thinking of the beast in the garden.

# Chapter VI
# The Rite in the Garden

WE TALKED no more of the Mysteries, but of literature, the arts and public affairs till past midnight.

When Marks bade me good night, I said: "Please don't tell Woodfell that I'm interested in his niece. She has a very poor time of it, and I'm trying to brighten it. He does not know."

"I shall say nothing to him about you," said Marks.

I had learned from him that night, but I had learned nothing reassuring, nothing to lessen my uneasiness about Pamela. My suspicion that Woodfell practiced strange arts was become a certainty, and my anxiety was deepened by what Marks had let slip about the danger of his letting loose these powers of the darkness with which he trafficked, and then finding himself grown too feeble to control them. I could not but think that the sudden appearance of the beast in the garden of No. 19 was a sign of such a loosened control. My fears for her kept Pamela more in my mind than ever – if that were possible.

On another night she and I wandered again through Richmond Park; and I found that my sense of the mystery of woods had deepened. But I was no longer, as on the first evening with her in the park, fearful in its thickets; I felt an odd expectation, now and again, of something wonderful about to happen. Often in a wood I feel it still. But Pamela had lost none of her fearfulness; in the

dusk of the trees she kept very close to me; and when presently I slipped her arm into mine she held it tight. But in spite of her fearfulness, they drew her into them with a fascination; she must go into them.

Once she said: "It must be the summer that makes them like this."

On another night I took her to the Hungarian Exhibition at Earl's Court. She enjoyed the water-chute with a whole-hearted delight; and we went down it seven times. But when we had done with it, and were wandering on through the crowd, she asked me to take her away.

"It's very silly of me," she said. "But it makes me very uncomfortable to be among all these people."

"It's not at all silly," I said. "It's how a hamadryad should feel. Come along."

When we came out of the gates of the Exhibition, I heard her breathe a little sigh of relief; then she said, "Why shouldn't we walk home – by some quiet way?"

I do not know the Kensingtons well; but I made in the direction of Hertford Park, keeping along quiet streets and through quiet squares. It was a long and devious walk, but we were hardly aware of its length.

The weather was fine again; and my tennis and my talks with Pamela in the garden prevented me from keeping my watch in my study, so that I saw little of Woodfell's visitors. Once I saw the

noxious rich man come to No. 19; and on another evening there came a shambling, red-haired man, with lack-lustre eyes of a pale green. No women came – at least I saw none.

The night of the new moon passed without event; and I had watched its waxing with a growing expectation. On the evening of the full moon I was expectant indeed. At nine o'clock I was in my garden talking to Pamela over the hedge to the accompaniment of her sewing-machine.

Of a sudden she said, "Hush! There's uncle!"

I was silent, and heard him open the door of his dining-room.

"It's time you were in bed, Pamela. I'm expecting some people, and I want you out of the way," he said in his hoarse voice.

I waited till she had gone into the house and the door was shut; then I went quietly to my study. I did not switch on the electric light; I sat down before the open window, back in the shadow, where no one in the road could see me, and began my watch.

I waited patiently for nearly two hours; then at a few minutes past eleven came the rich man, and the door of No. 19 opened at once to his knock. Marks came next. Then came the two dilettanti, not together; first came the man with the pointed beard and mincing gait, then the battered Apollo. They came some two minutes after one another; they might very well have come by the same train and separated at Hertford Park station. This secrecy of movement disquieted me.

For perhaps a quarter of an hour the brooding hush which lay on Walden Road was unbroken. Then came the shambling, redheaded man, and two minutes later a thick-set man with a white beard, wearing spectacles and a black soft hat. He was panting and brought home to me the fact that every one of them, even the shambling, red-headed man had come walking quickly as if eager to reach the meeting-place.

I waited another twenty minutes, but no more came. It was full time that I looked to the back of the house. I went quickly up to the top room at the back and, keeping in the shadow, looked down on the garden of No. 19. The moonlight fell brightly on the white cupola but the sycamores and the tall shrubs kept the garden dark. I could hear no sound of voice or movement in it. Woodfell and his friends had not yet come into it. I feared that they might not come at all, and I should learn nothing.

I went down to my bedroom and brought up a chair; then I sat waiting patiently, in a silence only broken by the steady, monotonous snore of Mrs. Ringrose in her bedroom on the other side of the landing, till the moon was nearly at the top of the sky, and the little square of turf in the middle of the garden was clear in its light.

Then the door into the garden opened, and there was a mutter of voices. A man came out; and the fluttering roar of the bull-roarer broke on the air. It startled and even daunted me a little; it indeed sounded a warning to pryers into the Mysteries to begone. Six figures followed the whirler of the bull-roarer down the garden path to the lawn in the middle, two of them swinging censers of incense; and when they came into the moonlight, I saw that they

were wearing robes and curious caps, or rather curious head-dresses, for they were larger than caps. It seemed to me that they were fitted with horns.

They halted at the end of the lawn before the cupola, and ranged themselves in a half-circle facing it, with their backs to me. For a while the bull-roarer roared on; then it ceased suddenly, and I heard the crackling of sticks. They had kindled a fire; and its smoke rose straight in the still air, before the cupola.

Then Woodfell's voice rose in a hoarse chanting, uttering an invocation or a prayer in a strange tongue. It was a while before I discovered that it was a barbarous Latin jargon. I caught Latin words and uncouth words I did not know mingled with them. I caught no whole sentence only a word now and again. Twice I caught the word *Abyssi;* and it seemed to me likely that he was making his prayer to the powers of the Abyss. Now and again the voices of the others rose as a chorus.

It was a long ritual and I could not follow it. Woodfell was not the chief celebrant of the rite all the while. The others seemed to take his place in turn. Sometimes the celebrant was out of my sight close to the cupola; and the smoke from the fire would thicken and another smell would mingle with the fragrance of the incense. But it was not till a smell of burnt toast reached my nostrils that I understood that they were making burnt offerings; meal had been thrown on the fire. Several times the flame of the fire shot up high and clear as if oil had been poured on it. All of them except Marks had bad voices and I caught but a few words of their prayers; when his deep, sonorous tones rose to me, I thought that now I should hear clearly; but he was using a tongue

quite strange to me. All I understood of his prayers was the name Adon, uttered many times.

All through the rites one or other of the celebrants would quit the group, come to the left-hand corner of the lawn, and presently go back again. For a long while I could not see what they did there. Then, with the moving moon, the shadow of a Wellingtonia moved along the lawn, and I saw that there was a great bowl in that corner; and they came to it and dipped in a shining cup in it and drank. The bowl looked to me as big as a bushel measure; but in that still air the smoke of the incense and the fire gathered and hung about the lawn till they were all in a magnifying mist and sometimes as big as giants.

For a long while the ritual was formal and mechanical; and I watched it, as you might watch a curious and rather pointless mummery, with an attention that sometimes flagged, for the prayers and the responses were expressionless. But after a long while, when the shadows thrown by the declining moon were falling across half the lawn, I became aware of a sudden that a new note had crept into their voices, a note of eagerness and expectancy. The prayers grew quicker, and louder, and more insistent; the responses were deeper. When one of the celebrants came to the bowl, he made haste to drink and get back to his place. My eyes grew more intent on them; and I found myself quivering once or twice, as if their eagerness was infecting me.

Woodfell was again the chief celebrant, and his muttering had risen to a hoarse chanting. It sounded like a series of adjurations. It was then I caught the names. Adon I caught, and Pan, and Moloch, and Mithras; and there was a name Nodens. I was sure it

was a name, though I did not know it. They came again and again louder and louder. A fierceness, a savagery had come into their tones; and it affected me oddly. I was quivering and tingling in an intense expectancy.

Of a sudden the fluttering roar of the bull-roarer broke on the air. It struck on my ear as a warning and a threat; and on the impulse of some other, under-self, I found myself on my feet in act to fly. I gripped the back of the chair and stood swaying, dazed.

There fell a sudden dead silence; and it was broken by the sharp bleat of a lamb.

On the instant Babel broke loose. All the celebrants were shouting together, each of them was shouting a different name, and adjuring the bearer of the name in a different tongue, and leaping and waving his arms, as he shouted. A thick cloud of smoke rolled over the lawn, as if handfuls of incense had been thrown on the fire, veiling them from my eyes. Then came a triumphant outcry and a victorious shouting and then the patter of dancing feet.

And as they cried out as they danced I could have sworn that their voices were changed. Or did other voices rise up to me from the veiled lawn? A puff of wind set the incense veil stirring for a moment; and my strained eyes seemed to see the lawn full of figures dancing, many more than seven. Once above the confused outcries, a woman's laugh came clearly, joyous and wanton: I could swear it. Yet it was not quite a woman's laugh, a human woman's laugh.

Suddenly, as I listened and stared down with straining eyes, there smote on my nostrils, stronger than the strong fragrance of the incense, the acrid odor of the goat.

On the instant, inexplicably, I filled with a panic terror. This trivial thing seemed to let loose that under-self which I had held down so long, and deliver me to it helpless. I dashed out of the room, rushed stumbling, staggering, striking against the banisters and the walls, down the stairs, out of the house, and up the Walden Road.

# Chapter VII
# The End of the Night

I WAS a hundred yards down the main road, running still, blindly, when the thought of Pamela pulled me up short. I found myself uttering panting sobs. Instinctively I gripped the railings of a garden gate at which I stood with all the force of my muscles, and, bowed over it, struggled to collect my panic-scattered wits and regain control of myself. In three or four minutes I turned and began to walk back, with my head lowered as though I pushed against a wind; and then I forced myself into a shambling trot.

Presently I began to marvel at myself, that I had endured the fierceness of the latter part of the ritual, its awe-inspiring savagery, and the tumult, only to be put to flight by such a trivial thing as the smell of the goat. My nerves must have been strained to breaking- point. I grew furious with myself, and came down the Walden Road as hard as I could run.

I found my front door wide open, as I had left it in my blind haste, and went quickly into the house. As I ran up the stairs I began to chill again with that unreasonable terror. But I was still under my own control, and going into the top front room, I looked out into the moonlit road. Its peacefulness reassured me. A broad, parapeted gutter runs along the front of my house; and at the end of it the partition wall between 19 and 20 rises some four feet high. It hid from me the window of Pamela's bedroom; and I slipped out of my window and went along the gutter to it. The window of her bedroom was open.

"Pamela! Pamela!" I called loudly in a shaky voice.

There was a stirring; and in a moment she put her head out of the window and stared at me with blinking, astonished eyes.

"Are you all right? You're not frightened?" I cried anxiously.

"Oh, no," she said a little drowsily, then seemed to awake and said clearly, "What is it? What's the matter? Oh! You've been watching the rites in the garden! What a shame it is. I'm shut up here!"

"Good heavens! You never want to see them!" I cried.

"Oh, but I do! They're exciting – thrilling. But I know that fright. It *is* a fright. No wonder you're so white. How long did you stand it? I've never got further than when the lamb bleats. And I've only got as far as that once. Did you get further than that?"

"Yes; I got further than that," I said; and I was indeed in an amazement that she, too, should have watched the rites.

"Did you? And what happens then?" she said eagerly.

"Lots of things," I said. "But what did you do when the fright struck you?"

"The first time I ran out of the house in my dressing-gown; and I got nearly to the end of the road before I knew what I was doing. And oh, it was hard to go back into the house! But after that, when the fright came, I bolted to my bedroom and locked the

door and pulled the bed-clothes right up over my head. I did feel horrid."

"I shall know what to do another time," I said. "But how on earth could you bring yourself to chance that fright a second time?" said I marveling at her courage.

"Oh, I might have learned wonderful things. But what are they doing now? They can't have finished," she said.

"I think they'd reached the climax when I ran."

"I *should* like to see," she said slowly. "Suppose I were to dress; I wonder if I could climb over that wall and come to your back window and look out."

"No, you don't," I said quickly. "Go to sleep again. Good-night." And I went hastily back, climbed into my window, and shut it loudly.

Pamela's fearlessness had stiffened me; I went into the room at the back; and looked down again on to the garden of No. 19.

The shadow of the sycamores lay across the lawn, but the cloud of smoke had thinned to a light mist, and I could see that it was empty. The odor of the goat still mingled, fainter, with the fragrance of the incense. It terrified me no longer; and it was more inexplicable than ever that it should have smitten me with so great a fear. I sat down in the chair and waited with eyes straining into the shadows. But I doubted that I should see anything more in the empty garden.

But was it empty? Either it was my strained fancy, or I heard stirrings and mutterings among the shrubs. I strained my ears to catch them more clearly. Once I was nearly sure that I heard a smothered laugh.

I must have been straining my ears and eyes for twenty minutes when I awoke to the fact that I was chilled to the marrow, that my clothes were wringing wet with sweat. I rose stiffly, went down to the bathroom, and turned on the taps. Then I went down to my dining-room, mixed myself a strong whisky and soda, and brought it up to the bathroom. I bathed, rubbed myself to a glow, put on flannels and my dressing-gown, drank off the whisky and soda, lighted my pipe, and came glowing back to my watch.

The garden seemed stiller; but I waited patiently. Half an hour later I heard clearly a rustling; then out of the shrubs came a figure and went to the great bowl and drank. I thought it was the rich man. He went back into the shrubs; and the garden looked empty again.

I knew now that the garden was not empty; and I grew surer that I really heard mutterings and stirrings. Suddenly my intentness flagged; and in the reaction from that nerve-shattering fright I turned very drowsy, nodding. Then I must have dozed off, for I fell off my chair. The shock of the fall awakened me for two or three minutes; then I began to nod again. I was thinking I might as well get to bed since I could not keep awake, when I heard, faint and far away, a cock crow.

At once there was a stir in the garden and a rustling. Woodfell came out on to the lawn from beyond the cupola, and plainly threw a handful of incense on the fire, for a cloud of smoke rose in the air. The other initiates came on to the lawn from among the bushes; and then their voices rose in a last adjuration.

Then they came along the garden to the house, talking to one another in voices that, to my ears, had a weary ring; and I saw that two or three of them came swaying and staggering. Assuredly the party wore a limp and bedraggled air.

Woodfell and Marks came last, a little behind the others; and I heard Woodfell say with a weary impatience: "I tell you I'm growing tired of this – always the same thing – no advance. I'm growing surer and surer that it's the lack of the feminine element that keeps us at a standstill."

"It may be – it may be," said Marks. "But I am against women in ritual. Only in the debased rituals has she played any part; the great rituals have done without her."

"I know," said Woodfell. "But all the same in the ritual of the Abyss—"

His voice was lost as he passed into the house; but he had given me the key-word.

I came downstairs to my bedroom, undressed quickly, and got to bed. I was just falling asleep when I heard the door of No. 19 open, and the voices of the initiates, or rather one of them.

"A shplendid time – a shplendid time – nimpsh for Teddy!" he cried thickly, slurring his words.

"I should like to take the drunken brute and drop him in the river," said Marks in a tone of disgust. "But after all his motor car takes us home comfortably."

"We can put him with the chauffeur," said another.

I took it that they spoke of the rich man.

The next day I had plenty to think of, but owing to a press of work, I had no leisure to think till the evening. Then it seemed best to me to discuss the matter with Pamela; she would be able to throw light on it.

I did not meet her, as I had hoped, on my way from the railway station; and when I reached home she was not in the garden of No. 19. I went therefore to the Lawn Tennis Club; and very badly I played. Lack of sleep and the shock my nerves had suffered from my fright spoiled my eye and my game. I came home and dined quickly. I had not been in the garden ten minutes after it when I heard her come out of No. 19. I called to her softly and asked her to come out for a walk that we might talk at our ease; and ten minutes later she joined me at the top of the Walden Road.

We went down to Kew Gardens on an electric tram; and on a bank by the side of the river we discussed the ritual of the Abyss. We agreed in our impression that it had moved in a crescendo; that, beginning from a formal, almost mechanical, repetition of adjurations and prayers, the religious ecstasy of the celebrants of

the rites had gathered force slowly till it rose to a fierce and fervid fury. The violence of their feelings had increased with the violence of their adjurations. I had heard it, as she never had, rise to the final frantic outburst after the sacrifice of the lamb.

But she added to my understanding of it, for having seen it four times it had grown clearer to her. She declared that there were seven Lords of the Abyss invoked by the seven celebrants in seven different tongues.

It struck me that the seven of them, working themselves up to this frenzy together, acting and reacting on one another, might attain a sevenfold compelling intensity of feeling.

Then she said, "And did the things really come – the things they were summoning?"

"I can't help thinking that they did, though I try not to. I thought I saw, when the smoke of the incense blew thin, many more than seven figures dancing on the lawn. But it might easily have been fancy; for the rites and the incense and the sacrifice had worked me up, too. My nerves were all tense; and my eyes and ears were strained. And if I fancied that the creatures of the Abyss had come to their summoning, you may be sure that the celebrants must have fancied it ten times as strongly. For they were in the thick of things, and striving with all their united wills to make them come." I paused and added in a fresh doubt. "But of course there was the laugh."

"What laugh?" she said quickly.

"Well, I thought I heard a woman's laugh – distinctly. Yet it wasn't a human woman's laugh. There was something about it – I can't explain it."

"Then they did come! Oh, I do wish I'd been there!"

When the thing was baldly stated like that, with conviction, I revolted: "I don't believe it!" I cried. "They didn't come! They couldn't come! It was fancy! It was the prayers and the incense and the moon. Why, at the full moon – some full moons one is mad."

She shook her head and said: "They came. You say they didn't come because you don't want to believe it. Why don't you want to believe it, Heine?"

"But don't you see? It changes our conception of the world."

"Not mine," she said.

I labored to convince her that they did not come, that they could not have come; but I labored in vain. My arguments, however, had quite convinced me when of a sudden I remembered the acrid odor of the goat. It confused the matter again.

When the time of the closing of the gardens came, it seemed early to go home; and we strolled along the moonlit tow-path towards Richmond. Our talk was fitful; and Pamela was now and again lost in a frowning thoughtfulness.

At last she said: "There will be another celebration of the rites at the August full moon. May I come and watch it with you? If there are two of us, we shan't be frightened. I'm sure I could climb over the partition wall between the two houses and get into your window. No one would see me. There's only that blank wall on the other side of the street; and no one could see me from below."

"Goodness, no, child!"

"But why not?" she said.

"There's no saying what we might fancy when that ritual had worked us up to the fancying point. You might get a horrible shock."

"No; I shouldn't. I'm sure of it – not with you there. We might learn something wonderful. And anyhow it will be thrilling."

"I won't chance it, I daren't," I said.

She smiled at me, and said softly, "We shall see."

# Chapter VIII
# Pamela Dances on the Lawn

PAMELA WAS not content to accept my first refusal to let her share my watch on the next celebration of the rites. Whenever we met or talked over the hedge between the two gardens, sooner or later she would try to shake my resolution; often she came to the assault primed with new arguments. Always I refused; but I admired her stubbornness, and even more I admired the courage with which she was ready to endure another of those nerve-racking frights.

For days after the celebration of the rites no visitors that I saw came to Woodfell, but I met Marks at a meeting of the New Bohemians. It was an uncommonly cheerful evening, full of battle. The poets fell foul of the Anglicans in the society; and the socialists fell foul of both. At the end of the meeting I invited Marks to come to smoke and talk with me on the Saturday evening; and he accepted with an eagerness which set me fancying that he might wish to learn if I knew that the ritual of the Abyss had been celebrated in the garden of No. 19. If he asked me I should make no bones about telling him that I did. I felt sure that I might trust him not to inform Woodfell.

He came; and we talked for a while about the Classics, of whom he is a fervent admirer, and then about the New Bohemians.

Then, after a pause in our talk, I said: "There's a thing you said the last evening you spent with me which has been sticking in my

mind and bothering me. You said that the sorcerer was all right as long as he was dealing with the powers, but that it was when he began to deal with the principalities that the trouble came. Is there a hierarchy of the Abyss?"

"I never said anything about the Abyss," he said quickly, a little startled.

"Well, of the empyrean, if you prefer it," I said carelessly. "But is there a hierarchy?"

"There is a spiritual hierarchy, undoubtedly," he said with conviction.

"In fact there are Milton's angelic hierarchy and demonic hierarchy?"

"Yes."

"Then as long as you are dealing with the lower ranks of the demonic hierarchy, the powers, you are fairly safe. But when you come to deal with the higher ranks, with the principalities, the real danger begins. That is to say the sorcerer might, for example handle the lesser gods of the Indian Pantheon without coming to harm, but when he came to Shiva himself it would be perilous."

"You've certainly worked it out," said Marks, smiling. "And you have it right. Of course you're rather talking in theological terms These powers may be merely the powers of Nature."

"I see," I said. "But anyhow the wise sorcerer would be content to deal only with the powers and leave the principalities alone?"

"Is there such a thing as a wise sorcerer?" he said, thoughtfully "The true sorcerer was before all things a seeker; and the seeker will not cease his search till he comes to the last secret."

"I suppose not," I said.

"You certainly have thought it out," said Marks looking at me curiously.

I saw that he suspected that I knew something of Woodfell's doings, and I said: "Well, what you said about a man's losing control of the powers he has evoked and about the greater danger of evoking the principalities; that, coupled with your evident uneasiness at hearing that Miss Woodfell was living at No. 19, has made me uneasy, too – not for myself, but for her."

"She is in no immediate danger."

"Will you tell me when she is?" I said quickly.

"If I can – if she is in danger – if there is really any danger. But it may be sudden." He paused, hesitating; then he said: "We may as well be open with one another. I see that you know something of Woodfell's – experiments; but I see too, that since you are interested in Miss Woodfell you are not likely to talk of them—"

"I have talked of them to no one but you; and I shan't," I interrupted.

"Good," he said. "Besides, it is little use talking of them; no one would believe you. But don't on any account let Woodfell learn of your interest in them."

"I won't," I said. "It is enough if you will give me the warning."

"I will if I can. But the danger may be sudden – always supposing that there is any real danger."

He fell silent, pondering with knitted brow.

I should have liked to have asked him what was Woodfell's purpose in importing the feminine element into the Mysteries. But I did not like to show so great a knowledge of what had been done at No. 19 on the night of the full moon.

Then he changed the subject of our talk with a decision which showed me plainly that he did not wish to talk any more of No. 19; and presently he was restored to his unusual genial content.

The garden of No. 19 remained peaceful and undisturbed. Woodfell's control over the creatures he had evoked if those creatures were not merely the children of my fancy, seemed to remain firm and unshaken; and there was no further unexpected, terrifying irruption from the Abyss.

Pamela never ceased her efforts to persuade me to let her share my watch on the next celebration of the rites; and I was hard put to it not to yield to her entreaties. But I did persist in my refusal; and my firmness increased, I thought, her liking for me.

Once after a failure to shake my resolve, she said: "Never mind, one of these days I shall learn these things for myself."

"How will you work it?" I said curiously.

"Never mind," she said.

Sometimes I tried to learn from her what she had learned from reading her uncle's books. But she was shy of telling me. My refusal to believe that the creatures of the Abyss had obeyed the summons to the garden of No. 19 on the night of the full moon, had inspired into her the fear that I should laugh at her. But I gathered from a slip of her tongue that she believed that devils, actively malefic, did exist.

I was nearly sure that nothing would happen in the garden of No. 19 before the night of the next full moon; but I did not slacken my watch on it at night. On the night of the new moon I left my reading three or four times to look down on it. It was a starry night and warm; and the garden was in a dim light. I went to bed at a few minutes to twelve.

I went into the back room for a last look, and lingered gazing down into the garden, wondering whether I had really seen the lawn full of dancing figures, whether I had really heard that half-human, wanton laugh, wondering what was under the cupola. Then I heard the door of No. 19 leading into the garden open softly, and I drew my head back into the shadow. A figure went down the path to the lawn; my eye had grown well used to the dim light, and to my surprise I saw that it was Pamela.

She was dressed in white, a white tunic; her arms were bare, and I was nearly sure that her legs and feet were bare, too.

A little way down the path she stopped and looked up at No. 20. Plainly she was looking to see if I were keeping my watch.

Then a whisper of "Heine" came floating up to me.

I was on the very point of answering, when I stopped myself. I wanted to see what she would do.

She went on down the garden, crossed the lawn, and went out of my sight towards the cupola. I heard a clinking of curtain-rings on a metal rod, as if she had drawn a curtain.

Then she came back to the lawn and began to dance, her face towards the cupola. I wished heartily that there was enough light for me to see her clearly. It was a slow dance with many movements of the arms in it; it reminded me of the dancing of a girl on Greek vases; even in that dim light I could see that it was a graceful, charming dance. Presently she stopped and stood, facing the cupola, uttering an invocation or a prayer. Then she danced again, singing very softly, so softly that I could not catch a word of the song. She danced for a long while, singing. When her dance came to an end she stood again before the cupola uttering another prayer.

Then she same slowly down the garden. I heard her panting softly as she drew near. And she passed into the house.

On the next evening we went down to Kew Gardens, early; and when we had seated ourselves on our bank by the river, I said, "I saw you dancing in the garden last night."

"You did?" she cried, flushing. "Didn't you hear me call up to you to find out if you were there?"

"Yes, but I wanted to learn what you were going to do."

"That was horrid of you!" she cried. "It was – it was just spying on me!"

"I'm afraid there's no other word for it," I said contritely. "But what was I to do? If I'm to look after you, as I mean to look after you, I must learn everything I can, mustn't I? I'm only bothering about your uncle's doings on your account. And don't you think I'm enough of a friend even to spy on you?"

"Still – still – I don't like it. It was rather horrid," she said in a milder tone.

"It was nothing of the kind. It was the most charming and delightful dance I ever saw."

"But like that," she said, blushing again.

"Oh, you needn't mind that. There wasn't enough light to see you clearly."

She breathed a gentle sigh of relief.

And what were you doing? It was by way of being a ritual dance, wasn't it?" I said.

"Yes," she said slowly. "It was an idea of mine. Why shouldn't I learn some of the secrets for myself?"

"I don't like it. I don't like your tampering with the forbidden things. I have the strongest feeling that they are very dangerous. Already they've given me the two worst frights I ever had in my life. And the worst of it is both those frights were inexplicable."

"But I do so want to know, and I've wanted to know for so long. I've had so little else to think about for years till lately – till since I've known you. You don't understand how much I want to learn the secrets. Oh, I *must* go on trying to find out."

"I don't like it," I said. "But if you must, I suppose you must. Only in that case you must take me into partnership in your search. Then we shall share the danger, and I may be able to help you."

"But why should you run into danger?" she said quickly. "You are not really eager to learn the secrets."

"No, I'm not. I have seen your uncle and I've seen his friends. None of them look as if they had any satisfaction from their search. But where you go, I go, too; and if we come to grief, we come to grief together."

"Oh, no – no! I don't want that. I don't want you to run into danger for me," she cried.

"You admit it is dangerous, then?" I said.

"No, I don't. Of course the ritual of the Abyss is dangerous. It must be, or we shouldn't have had such frights. But I don't believe that it is dangerous to dance before the statue; the Greek girl used to dance before it."

"Oh, there's a statue under the cupola, is there?" I said quickly.

"Yes, it's terrible; but, oh, it is fascinating – a statue of Pan."

# Chapter IX
# The Talisman

"ONLY A statue of Pan? I said with some relief.

"Only? You should just see it, and you wouldn't say 'only.' I tell you, it's terrible."

"But Pan – Pan was a god of the shepherds and guardian of their flocks, a beneficent god, as well as the god of the wild woods."

"I think that it was as god of the woods that he was terrible," she said thoughtfully.

"But if it is so terrible, I wonder you weren't afraid to dance before it – alone and at night?"

"But if the Greek girls did, why shouldn't I? And uncle assured me that they did. Once, when he was in a talkative humor, I asked him about the statue, and he told me that time and again a Greek girl must have danced before it in the moonlight, a girl who wanted a lover, or a man she loved to fall in love with her. And I wanted to see if anything would happen if I danced before it, and I wasn't very frightened.

"And did anything happen?" I said.

"Nothing the first two or three times I danced before it. But I liked doing it. And last night and the time before I had a curious fancy, once or twice, that eyes were on me."

"My eyes certainly were," I said.

"No, not your eyes – much nearer eyes – among the trees. Once I even fancied that there were creatures on the lawn, and twice I fancied that the statue itself was looking at me – it's terribly alive."

"You might fancy anything, alone, at night, and expecting something to happen. But whatever you do, don't go and raise Pan. You know that the sight of Pan drove people mad."

"Oh, yes; I know that. But there's no fear of my doing that."

"Who knows? If Pan would rise for anyone, he would rise for you," I said smiling. "But whom did you want him to make fall in love with you?"

"I didn't want anyone to fall in love with me!" she cried, blushing.

"That's all right," I said. "I don't want anyone to fall in love with you either."

We were silent a while; then she said: "If you're really going to help me try to learn the secrets, you'll let me watch the next celebration of the rites with you, won't you?"

"No, no; not that," I said quickly. "In any research of your own I'll help you. But the ritual of the Abyss is dangerous. I don't know whether it's owing to the people who celebrate it, or what the cause is, but I do know it's dangerous. It produced an emotional upheaval of my being which just racked my nerves. I couldn't work all next day. I'm afraid of it for you; I am, really. And I should so like to let you have your own way in a matter in which you are so keen. You know I should."

"It's the shortest way to the secrets," she said with a sigh.

We said no more about it that evening.

The more I considered this new fact I had learned, that under the cupola was a statue of Pan, the more I wondered at it. Pan did not seem to me the god to hold the chief place in the ritual of the Abyss. For though the early conception of the devil was probably drawn from Pan, I could not think that Woodfell and his friends would be at all affected by that. I wondered whether I ought not to change my view of the creatures of the Abyss invoked in the rites. Marks had let fall a phrase about the forces of nature. Were these creatures of the Abyss nature gods and not devils? It seemed probable. Yet among them was Moloch – I had heard him invoked – and surely Moloch was a devil. I was puzzled.

The days passed quietly. It was a good thing that I had acquired the power of keeping my life in two separate compartments. At home, and on my journeys to and fro in the tube between Hertford Park and my office, I pondered continually the ritual of the Abyss and the strange things I had heard, or seen, or fancied. They interfered with my reading. But once in my office I could put

all thoughts of them away; and I did my work, dull or interesting, with no increase of effort. In fact, I was doing my work much better; the coming of Pamela into my life, broadening and enriching it, seemed to have stimulated also my intelligence.

I gave no little thought to the matter of helping and protecting Pamela in her quest of a revelation. I did not believe that she would gain her end; but she was so eager to gain it that I had not the heart to discourage her. I could not indeed find a way of helping her, and I was chiefly concerned with protecting her in her quest. It was all very well for me to assure myself, and her, that the whole business was a matter of excited fancy; the terrors which had stricken both of us, more than once, were real indeed. Casting about for methods of protecting her, I thought, naturally, of amulets. If there were malefic powers, then there might be some grounds for the worldwide belief that amulets were a protection against them.

At the next meeting of the New Bohemians, therefore, when, thanks to a happy effort of Gibson, the general conversation was proceeding in an infuriated roar on the subject of Socialism, I drew Marks into a quiet backwater out of the roaring stream of talk by a question about amulets.

At once he displayed his frequent mood of a doubter who would fain believe, and declared that his mind was quite open on the matter. Amulets and talismans might work, and they might not. He had known talismans which, to all seeming, had worked admirably; he had known them fail utterly. For his part, he held that the true talisman was of the nature of a sacrament; it was an affirmation of a man's will, his protective will, just as sticking pins

into the wax figure of an enemy, to destroy him, was an affirmation of his malefic will. If his will to destroy were strong enough, that action might, in some way which passed our understanding, work injury. If a man's will to protect were strong enough, the affirmation of it, the crystallization of it, as it were, in the making of a talisman might work good. In themselves the wax figure and the talisman were nothing; as vehicles of the will they might be potent. It must, moreover, be borne in mind that the belief that the talisman was guarding you was very strengthening.

"I understand," I said. "And it seems to me a very interesting theory. In fact, I believe it's the truth of the matter. Besides, there may be these malefic powers of the underworld, though I always try to assure myself that they don't exist."

"I always try to assure myself that they do," said Marks dryly.

"Well, if they do, they work in a way obscure to us, and there is no reason why the talisman should not also work in an obscure way. I suppose you know how to make talismans."

"Oh, yes."

"Well, will you make me a talisman that will protect the wearer against the Lords of the Abyss? I don't want it for myself. I want it for Miss Woodfell. After all, if she does come to any harm from her uncle's tampering with the forbidden things, you will be a sharer in the responsibility."

"That's an excellent suggestion," said Marks warmly. "As you have guessed, I am uneasy that Miss Woodfell is living at No. 19, and I will certainly make her the approved talisman. I do share the responsibility, and you may be sure that it will be a strong affirmation of my will. What is her Christian name?"

I told him that it was Pamela, and I thanked him.

Three days later I received a letter from him, enclosing two smaller envelopes, sealed, Pamela's name on the one, mine on the other. His letter ran:

*"My Dear Plowden—*

I send you the talisman for Miss Pamela Woodfell and one for yourself.

They are the most potent. Should there be any call on their protective power, may they prove efficacious. On no account must the envelopes containing them be opened, at any rate, in the light of day. Opened, they are worthless. I shall probably be able to give you warning should any real peril seem to be imminent, and I will.

Yours sincerely,

AMBROSE MARKS."

I was really glad to have the talisman for Pamela. It sounds silly, doubtless, even barbarous. It will probably seem absurd to most men to be glad, in the twentieth century, to have a talisman. But then all the crude scientific notions, which are a part of the unconscious equipment of the twentieth century mind, had in my case been severely shaken. Even supposing, as I was trying to believe, that the beast in the garden and the figures on the lawn

at the end of the rites of the Abyss had been mere hallucinations of a disordered fancy, the talisman would be of service to me if it rendered any such disordered fancy in the future less discomfiting.

Pamela was far more pleased than I to have the talisman, as was only natural since she entertained no belief at all that she had been the victim of hallucinations. I was therefore assured that in any case it would be useful to her; her utter belief in its efficacy was a shield; at the least, she was fortified against fancies by a fancy.

A week before the full moon she gave me a very unpleasant surprise.

We were sitting on our bank in Kew Gardens, and I had been wondering why a smile of great content now and again flitted across her face. At last she said, "I'm going to watch the rites in the garden after all, Heine."

"You are? How?" I cried.

"I have another key to my bedroom door," she said. "I took the lock off it with a screwdriver and took it to Wharton, the ironmonger in High Street. He's made me another key. And I've been practicing turning the key round and pushing it out of the lock, so that if uncle does leave it in the door when he locks me in, that won't matter."

She told me this in a tone of triumph, smiling.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! You *are* a willful child. I do beg of you not to run into this danger."

She shook her head and said: "Oh, I must see them – I must, Heine. I do so want to. If you were to ask me to do anything else, I would do it. But this I can't."

I sat considering the matter for a while before I spoke; then I said: "Well, well; there's no help for it. A willful woman will have her way. Since you must watch them, you had better come and watch them with me."

"Oh, yes!" she cried. "I should like that better than anything!"

"Very well, that's settled, then. You'll certainly be much safer in my house. I'll help you over the partition wall, and we'll watch it from my back room."

"I've been thinking about it," she said gravely. "Why shouldn't we watch it from your garden? If I had those clippers of yours, I could cut away some of the branches on my side, and you could cut away the branches on yours. We could leave just a screen like we have to talk through at the bottom of the garden, and stand on a table up against your hedge and see everything."

"Good heavens, no!" I cried. "Up on the third floor in my house is every inch as near those rites as I want to be. It would be the very most foolhardy recklessness."

"Very well, if you think not," she said submissively; then, smiling mischievously, she added, "Ah, you believe ever so much more in the Lords of the Abyss than you admit."

"Be sure you don't forget to have your talisman with you," I said quickly.

"I shan't forget it," she said, laughing mischievously.

# Chapter X
# We Watch Together

IN SPITE of my strong desire that Pamela should be quite away from the celebration of the ritual of the Abyss, I could not help feeling glad that I should have a sharer of my watch. As the celebration drew near I filled with fresh, burning desire to get at the truth of the happenings at the end of the rites; and I hoped that two heads would prove better than one in the matter. I had also a strong hope that the two of us together would mutually fortify one another against the terror.

On the night of the full moon I waited to see Woodfell's assistants arrive; then I went upstairs and helped Pamela over the partition wall and into No. 20. She was excited, elate, and not at all fearful. We took up our post at the window of the empty room.

It was a still, hot night, and the oppressive darkness weighed on us. Moreover, we were too excited and expectant to talk much. Presently the door into the garden opened, the roaring of the bull-roarer rose on the throbbing air, and the celebrants in their strange ritual garb filed down the garden to the lawn, under the mist of smoke from the swinging censers. Pamela's hand stole into mine, and I clasped it firmly.

The ritual began, and as it went on I found that, seeing it for the second time, I could follow it with greater understanding. I could not, indeed, catch the meaning of the bulk of the symbolic

gestures, but I caught the meaning of some of them, and I grasped the form of the ritual as a whole.

Woodfell himself was plainly the chief celebrant of the whole of the earlier, formal part, which was conducted in the same mechanical, perfunctory fashion as before. It seemed to me to be of the nature of a general invocation of the Lords of the Abyss. In this earlier part the language in which the invocations were uttered changed; when I caught the name of Moloch, Woodfell was using a different language from that he was using when I caught the name of Mithras.

In the second part each of the seven became the chief celebrant in turn. Even if Pamela had not prompted me at the beginning of each, whispering, "The rite of Adonis," or "The rite of Nodens" or "The rite of Shiva," I think that I should have grasped this, but she made it quite plain to me. I observed that the tongues changed, that each celebrant performed his rite in a new tongue, from the formal and perfunctory celebration of the rite to a growing fervor and intensity. The change came when Woodfell left the general invocation and began to perform the special rite of Pan in a very barbarous Latin.

It was the first of the rites of a particular Lord of the Abyss. At the end of it Marks became the chief celebrant, performing the rite of Adonis in an unknown tongue. One after another the rest of them became the celebrant of a rite, and I perceived that in each not only the language but also the ceremonies and the symbolic gestures changed. The voices of the other celebrants were lower and less clear than the voices of Woodfell and Marks – all of them except the voice of the dilettante with the pointed beard, which

was shrill and womanish; I gathered that he was performing the rite of Mithras in yet another barbarous Latin.

All the while the fervor of the worshipers was growing more and more intense. They began to give forth the responses with a full-throated vigor, fiercely, with a deep, growling savagery of utterance. My nerves began to tingle sympathetically as their emotion and the ritual worked upon them. Pamela's hand tightened its clasp of mine. I could feel her quivering with eager expectancy or with dread, and I slipped my arm round her.

Then came the pause in the ritual, and in the silence I could hear Pamela's quick, excited panting. Then came the sharp bleat of the slaughtered lamb.

With a gasp Pamela struggled to her feet, drawing me up with her.

"Steady – steady," I muttered, tightening my clasp of her waist.

On my words the united adjuration to the Lords of the Abyss broke out, and the names came roaring up to us in a fierce tumultuous outcry, as the rolling clouds of incense veiled the lawn from our eyes.

"Look! Now look! And listen!" I cried sharply, and without thought I shook her to compel her attention.

The fierce tumult changed to a joyous, triumphant shouting, and there came the patter of dancing feet. We looked down, but the dancing forms were very faint and vague in the mist of the

incense, quite uncountable, and the veil was thickening. But it seemed to me that under the joyous shouting I heard an undertone of the soft laughter of women.

Pamela was trembling pitifully.

"Oh, who are they? Who are they?" she cried.

"Watch! Watch! Oh, listen!" I cried.

Then once more the odor of the goat floated up to my nostrils. This time it smote me with no panic; but a sudden surge of passion flooded my being. I forgot the rites; I could not see them; I could only see Pamela's pale face and starry, swimming eyes. The world faded; we were alone in the universe.

"I love you, Pamela! Oh, how I love you!" I cried, and I kissed her lips and eyes and hair.

She threw her arms round my neck, straining to me, and we rocked on our feet.

Then, in a flash, I knew the essence of the mystery, and with the knowledge came the revulsion and a fear. I knew that I must get her out of the house at once, on the instant. Through all the confusion of my mind and senses that was clear.

I drew her through the door clinging to me, panting and sobbing softly in an equal vehemence of emotion, into the front room, and through the window. I had to draw her through it, carry her along the gutter, and lift her over the partition wall.

Then, leaning over it, I kissed her and said, "I do love you so. Good night. Get to bed at once."

She threw her arms round my neck and kissed me and cried, "Oh, I can't let you go so soon!

"You must – you must, dear. The morning will soon be here; good night," I said.

"Good night, dear. Good night," she said faintly, and kissed me again, and loosed me, and turned.

"Be careful, oh, be careful how you go," I said anxiously; and, trembling, I watched her faltering passage to her window.

She climbed into it, heavily, looked out and said, "Good night, dear; good night."

"Good night, dear," I said; and turning by the most violent effort of will I have ever compassed, I turned myself and went along the gutter into my window.

I had had enough of the accursed rites; I banged to the door of the back room, and stumbled down the stairs to my study in a raging turmoil of emotion. I dropped into the easy chair before the open window. I lay back in it like a log, keeping myself inert by a strong, straining of my will, straining to get control of my emotions and draw myself from the clutches of the Abyss, while the beads of sweat rolled down my face.

How long I struggled I do not know, but the cool air from the street helped me. I grew quieter; then from quietness, in an extreme reaction, I fell into a drowsy stupor. How long it bound me I do not know; I was roused from it by the sound of voices at the door of No. 19.

Above them came the voice of Woodfell: "That's all very well as far as it goes," he said. "But next summer we will add the rite of Ashtaroth."

I heard the tramp of footsteps grow fainter down the street, and in the sky was the light of the false dawn.

# Chapter XI
# A Respite from the Rites

I DRANK a stiff whisky and soda, ate some biscuits with it, and went to bed. I awoke next morning languid, still shaken by the upheaval of my being the night before. The thought of Pamela, her transformed face, and her kisses was very restoring. The image of her passionate, moonlit face was very present to my mind; I filled with a burning eagerness to see her.

I could not wait till the evening. I was going out of London to take a proof of the evidence of a witness who lived at Chipperfield, in Hertfordshire. It was a surprise visit; I might not find him at home, be detained, and not reach home till late. Then I had the happiest thought: I would take Pamela with me.

I opened wide the door into my garden, and as I ate my breakfast – I found myself uncommonly hungry – I listened for her coming into the garden. I was sure, quite sure, that she would come. And when I heard the garden door of No. 19 open, my heart leapt.

I went out into the garden and half-way down it I called to her softly and she answered. I told her quickly of my plan, and she seemed to hesitate.

Then she said, and I caught a new note of shyness in her voice, "Yes, I'll come. I – I should love to. I'll put uncle's food ready for him, and then I can come."

"I will be ready in half an hour, then," I said, and I went back and finished my breakfast.

I did not go right to the end of the road to wait for Pamela. I waited at No. 16, in the middle of the block of empty houses. Presently she came on rather halting feet, with a fine flush in her cheeks, and shy eyes. I glanced up the road, saw it empty, and caught her to me and kissed her.

Then we turned to go up the road.

"You're all right after last night? Those rites are rather a nerve-racking business," I said.

"Oh, yes," she said; but when the flush faded from her cheeks, I saw that her pallor had lost some of its warmth.

"Well, last night you saw all of them that is to be seen, and now you're satisfied?" I said.

"Oh, don't let's talk about them," she said, with a shiver. "They're fascinating and thrilling. But they're horrid. I don't want to see them again."

"I'm glad of that," I said. "I'm sure that they are the forbidden thing. Certainly, the day after, they do seem on the appalling side."

"Oh, they are," she said.

"At the same time I suppose that there are hundreds of people who would give their ears to be thrilled as we were thrilled last night."

"Yes, we were thrilled," she said.

"And it was an extraordinary thrill. I don't suppose that many people in the whole course of their lives get worked up to such a pitch of emotion. I felt in a kind of ecstasy. But it was dangerous, too; and I think we're well out of it."

"Oh, we are," she said earnestly. "And, oh, I did learn a lot last night – not only about the Mysteries but about myself, too. But I want no more of them."

"What did you learn?" I said curiously.

She shook her head. Then with an enchanting smile she said, "Oh, Heine, dear, let's talk about the weather, and where we are going to."

I told her that we were going to Chipperfield, and then fortune brought an empty taxicab down the road, and it carried us swiftly to Euston station.

When our train had started I took my fill of kisses.

Then I said, "How old are you, Pamela?"

"I'm eighteen on the fourteenth of September."

"That's older than I thought you were. I'm afraid you're not old enough for us to get married at once. But I don't see why we shouldn't get married in about a year."

"Get married!" she cried, startled, and blushing.

"Of course. You will marry me, won't you?" I said, and kissed her again.

"I— I— never thought about it," she said.

"But you will? I do love you so; and if you won't, I shall be awfully unhappy."

She hesitated, and the flush deepened in her cheeks; then with her enchanting smile she said, "I couldn't make you awfully unhappy, could I, Heine?"

We spent a delightful day. We walked by field paths to Chipperfield, and I left her to stroll on the common while I did my business. We spent the rest of the day in the pine-wood on the common, only leaving it to have lunch and tea and dinner in the village inn. The enchanted hours passed swiftly.

After dinner we had an hour before we need start for our train, and we went back to the pine-wood. The shafts of bright moonlight smote down, here and there, through its dimness; but it had suffered a change since the setting of the sun and had grown full of mystery. Pamela seemed invaded by a vague uneasiness. We sat down at the foot of a great pine growing out of a round barrow, the tomb of some old-time chieftain. She

nestled close to me, and now and again she would draw herself upright and peer about, or seem to listen with intent ears. No uneasiness invaded me, though the sense of the mystery of the wood was strong on me.

At last she said, "What a place for the celebration of the rites, Heine!"

"It is indeed," I said and held her closer to me.

We were silent a while, and for my part I was abandoning myself freely to the influences of the place. I should have been very little surprised to see a nymph or a faun come stealing through the tall tree-trunks.

Then I said, and unconsciously I spoke in a hushed voice: "After all, I don't really know what happened last night. The incense was a thick veil. Were there other dancers on the lawn besides the celebrants of the rites?"

"I did not see them; I could not. But I knew that there were. I knew it well," said Pamela earnestly. "Oh, don't let's talk about them."

"We won't," I said, drawing her closer to me. "But I can't believe that all the creatures of the Abyss are harmful. Your sisters, the nymphs, now – if one of them came to us through the trees, I should not feel frightened in the least. Would you?"

"No; and the wood is full of them – and other things."

"It is mysterious, and you're not quite happy here. Let's go out into the moonlight," I said, and kissed her.

We had time and to spare to catch our train; and we walked very slowly across the moonlit fields.

We were a long while saying good-by in the Walden Road. When I came in I had the leisure to ponder the change I had observed in Pamela. I had not been able to make out what it was, and I puzzled over it. At last I understood what had happened; Pamela had become a woman. I did not know whether to be glad or sorry. I was too new to the change; and I had found her such a delightful child.

Then at last I began to enjoy a full life. Pamela broadened and widened it for me; she rounded it off. As far as the rest of the world went, we might, in the Walden Road, have been on a desert island. She fell into the way of slipping into No. 20 whenever the fancy took her. Her uncle, as long as he found his simple, spare meals ready for him when he chose to take them, troubled no more about her. He never asked how she had been spending her time, whether she had been in the house or out of it. Often she dined with me; often she came in after dinner. Sometimes we talked the evening through; sometimes she brought her sewing and sewed as we talked; sometimes we read, now and again laying down our books to talk. They were delightful evenings. Always she was reluctant to go; always I was reluctant to let her go.

In a few days our dread of the rites of the Abyss had begun to wear off. And for my part, as the dread wore off, I found that my

curiosity, my desire to know once and for all the truth of the matter began to return. Pamela confessed one evening that she, too, was beginning to grow curious again, but her curiosity was far weaker than mine, and I did nothing to foster its growth.

At the end of a fortnight I was in two minds whether to watch the next celebration of the rites; at the end of another week I had made up my mind that I would watch them.

On the fourth evening before the full moon Pamela had dined with me, and after dinner we were sitting in my study talking, when we heard a knocking on the door of No. 19. It was opened; we heard a mutter of voices: someone went in, and the door was shut.

"This is awkward," I said. "Suppose, just as you went into the house, your uncle and his visitor came out of his study and met you in the hall. You'd be called on to explain."

"There's no hurry for me to go. I can wait till the visitor leaves," said Pamela, and with a little sigh of content she settled herself down more comfortably.

"And after all, if he stays on and stays on, you can always return along the gutter into your bedroom."

"Yes, the window is open," she said.

We took up the broken thread of our talk.

It was rather more than an hour later when we heard the door of No. 19 open and a boot crunch the gravel of its garden path.

Then the voice of the rich man, deeply aggrieved, said: "You'll have to reconsider it; you will really, Woodfell. You can't let us down like this, hang it all!"

"I've told you forty times, and I tell you again that there will be no more celebration this year," said Woodfell; and his hoarse voice rang angry. "It's all very well for you three amateurs; you're content with what we have got. I'm not; it's child's play."

"I don't know what more a man could want," said the rich man almost in a whine of appeal.

"You don't; and you're not likely to. But I tell you what; you and Parmenter and Goskin can celebrate the rites by yourselves. I'll lend you the garden and the shrine – no, I won't; I'll hire them out to you – and you'll see what you'll get," jeered Woodfell.

"That's no use. You know it isn't. We must have *you,*" cried the rich man in a sorrowful voice.

"Well, you won't," said Woodfell. "I won't celebrate the rites again till I have added the rite of Ashtaroth; and her priestess will take long finding."

# Chapter XII
# Woodfell's Grip Slips

I WAS not greatly distressed that I had to wait a while before my desire to learn the secret of the Mysteries could be gratified, for I was relieved of my present anxieties for Pamela; and as soon as possible I would marry her and take her out of her dangerous home.

We settled down to a delightful life. She spent nearly every evening with me; and on Saturday afternoon and Sunday we went together to Richmond Park or into the country. I found our love an amazing stimulant. I did my work at the office infinitely better; once or twice it was of a brilliance which won me the compliments of the firm; and I have the authority of the New Bohemians for saying that the verses, which I sometimes read to them, had grown finer by far. The editors of two or three of the better magazines endorsed the judgment of the Society by publishing them.

The intellectual and emotional stimulation of which I was aboundingly conscious induced me to attempt fiction. It seemed to me that since I was about to marry I ought to add to my sources of income. I made a dismal failure of it. I tried to write short stories; I tried to write a novel; they were worthless – worthless that is in the eyes of every one but Pamela. She persisted in finding excellencies in them. I had no gift for the writing of fiction. It was disappointing; and it was curious. I think I may take it that my verses showed me not to lack imagination; and my training in

the new law had given me a considerable power of arranging facts, or perhaps I should say incidents, in their due order. I accepted my defeat and made up my mind that, for an income, I must rely on the law alone.

It was at the end of October that I saw that Pamela was wearing a troubled air. For three evenings running I observed that in the intervals of our talk her pretty brow was creased by a frown of anxious meditation.

On the third evening I said: "What's the matter? What's bothering you?"

"Oh, nothing," she said smiling.

"That won't do for the Argus-eyes of adoration," I said. "I observe you acquiring premature wrinkles; and you tell me it is nothing. I must insist on sharing this destruction secret."

"Well," she said, smiling. "It's winter clothes."

"Heavens! Am I to see you spoiling your smooth and beautiful brow for a matter of clothes? Tell me about them – tell me at once."

"Well, it's like this," she said sadly. "Uncle had given me £3 to buy them with; and I've got to make it do; and it won't do. It – it wouldn't matter; but I do so want to look nice when I go about with you."

"Now that is a nice thing to get wrinkles for," I cried. "You ought to have come flying to me at once with the tidings of your uncle's crustiness. I am going to buy those clothes."

"Oh! I can't let you do that," she cried.

"Not a word – not two words, or three. Here am I, dying to marry you out of hand – unable to do so merely because you insist on not being old enough. The least I can do in these unfortunate circumstances is to buy you winter clothes – the very least."

"Oh, I can't let you – you know I can't, Heine dear! Oh, I wish I hadn't told you!"

"No, what is the use of our being so delightfully out of the world if we are going to let its stale old conventions in the matter of money for us to pay any regard whatever to them. Besides, obedience is the first quality in a wife. You know it is. It would be too dreadful when we were married to find you unversed in that necessary art. You cannot do better than practice it. This is an excellent opportunity to begin – excellent. I bid, order, and command you to let me buy your winter clothes. You shall spend some of that £3 on nice wooly things to keep you warm; and I will deck you out in purple or scarlet attire, or in whatever colors suit you best. Besides, think how interesting the shopping will be."

"Oh, you are a dear, Heine!" she said. "And oh, I do so want to look nice when I go out with you! And I shan't want much."

"You shall have everything to make you gorgeous as – not the rainbow for it is not summer – as gorgeous as the Aurora borealis."

We did indeed enjoy buying those clothes. We debated colors and textures and patterns with untiring earnestness, and explored shop after shop in my resolve to find exactly the vesture Pamela's uncommon and exotic beauty demanded. I think that we succeeded.

The autumn wore through; and we never felt the tediousness of the declining year. Long walks with Pamela took the place of my lawn tennis; and I never missed it. In the fuller and healthier life she was enjoying she throve like a flower in its proper sunshine; her beauty and charm increased.

The rites, as Woodfell had promised, were not again that autumn celebrated in the garden of No. 19; at any rate the full rites were not. But some rites were celebrated in his study – at least so it seemed for three or four times he sent Pamela to bed early, and locked her in her room. I always had notice of this; and I kept watch. Always I found that Marks and the thick-set man with the white beard were his visitors; and I took it that they came to help him in some minor rite. Pamela reported him as working continuously, furiously. Often his undisturbed bed showed that he had worked the night through. I met Marks frequently at the New Bohemians; and several times we spent an evening together at my house, or at his northern flat. Sometimes we talked of the Mysteries, but never of Woodfell. Marks seemed to shrink from talking of him; and I spared him my curiosity.

It was on a dismal, foggy night in December that I made, in a somewhat startling way, Woodfell's acquaintance.

At half-past ten Pamela left me; and I stood on my doorstep till I had heard her slip into No. 19. Her passages out of it and into it had by practice become utterly noiseless.

I shut my front door, and went into my study. I had not had time to settle down in my easy chair, when there came a hurried knocking. I ran to the door, opened it, and found Pamela at the threshold, pale and trembling.

"Oh, Heine, something dreadful has happened!" she cried. "Uncle is lying on the floor of his study – I think he is dying – and the house is horrible!"

"Go into the study and wait; and I'll see about it," I said.

"No! no! no!" she cried. "I'll come with you. I won't let you go into that dreadful house alone. I heard him call to me, or moan, and I opened the study door and saw him on the floor. But I couldn't go in. The room is full of dreadful things – shapes." And she shuddered; and her teeth chattered. I could see her forehead shining wet in the light of the hall lamp.

"I expect your uncle's in a fit, or else one of his devils has got the better of him. I'll get some brandy and go to him. I'd better lose no time," said I.

She followed me into the study. I got the brandy, and hastily I made her drink a little.

"Now you sit still and recover. I shan't be long," I said.

"No, I'm going with you. You shan't go alone. The Abyss is loose," she said.

She was still trembling with terror; but her eyes shone with a resolution there was no shaking; and I saw its strength. It was no use wasting time on it. I kissed her, and said, "Come."

I took the bottle of brandy and a teaspoon from the sugar-basin and led the way. The door of No. 19 was open; and as I crossed the threshold I found the house horrible indeed; my scalp prickled; and the cold chills ran down my spine.

Pamela had left the door open; and I pushed into Woodfell's study. I pushed into it, pushed against some invisible, intangible force that strove to hold me back. The room should have been bright enough; two electric lights were burning. But it was dim. I thought that Woodfell was very careless about the globes. Then I saw, or perhaps I felt, that the room was full of waiting shadows. I had an impression of their forms, distorted, monstrous shapes. But my eye could not disentangle them one from another in the dimness.

I dropped on one knee beside Woodfell, poured brandy into the teaspoon, raised him, and poured it into his mouth. Then I laid him back, re-filled the teaspoon, gave him the brandy, and laid him back again. Pamela stood with a hand on my shoulder; and I could hear her teeth chattering. We watched him a minute, or a minute and a half. His face in that dim light looked blueish. His

faint breathing grew stronger; and I gave him more brandy. All the while fear unspeakable tore at my vitals.

In another minute, without opening his eyes, he whispered: "The medicine – on the table."

I looked up, saw a little bottle on the table, rose and stumbled to it on tottering feet. Pamela shifted her grip to my arm and came with me. On the label was written: "Dose, ten drops." With trembling, fumbling fingers, I uncorked the bottle and let the ten drops drip into the teaspoon. Then I stumbled back to Woodfell and gave them to him.

Pamela sank to the floor beside me, half-fainting. I turned to her, put my arm around her, and gave her brandy from the bottle. Then I drank myself. The raw spirit burnt my throat; and I looked round the room at the shadows which would not grow distinct with helpless, raging eyes. I was chilled to the marrow.

Suddenly the fear began to lift; and I looked at Woodfell. The blueness had gone out of his face and he was breathing easily. I watched him and saw him frown, and his lips tighten. His fingers moved; and his hands clenched. He seemed to be gathering himself for an effort.

Then he cried out, hoarsely and low, in a strange tongue.

There was a swirl of shadows; the room was bright; and the fear had gone.

I sat blinking; then lifting Pamela with me I rose to my feet and rubbed my eyes.

"Well, I'm damned!" I said softly; and Pamela burst out crying.

She was limp and helpless; I set her in a very dusty easy-chair, and began to sooth her. Presently she grew quieter, and lay back with her eyes closed.

I turned to Woodfell and lifted him on to a couch.

"Thanks," he muttered. "They nearly downed me that time, curse them! Give me some more brandy, please."

He stared round the room with truculent, savage eyes; then closed them again. I gave him some more brandy.

Pamela opened her eyes and smiled at me faintly, to reassure me.

"Ah, you're feeling better?" I said, keeping my voice as nearly as I could in tones of polite sympathy.

"Yes; thank you," she said.

"You must have a nerve," Woodfell broke in a tone of rather grudging admiration. "I suppose my niece fetched you. How came you to know of my attack, Pamela?

I observed that his voice had recovered its hoarse depth.

"I was in the hall; and I heard you call out," said Pamela. "I opened the study door and saw you lying on the floor. But I couldn't come in. The room was full of shadows – horrible shadows. So I ran for help."

"The room was full of shadows, eh? They are rather terrifying, though they are only shadows. That's why I wonder at your nerve, Mr.— Mr.—?"

"Plowden," I said.

"Mr. Plowden. You're a friend of Marks, I think. He has spoken to me about you," said Woodfell.

"Yes," I said.

"Well, you've done me a service; and I'm very much obliged to you. This is the second of these attacks – weak heart – and if you hadn't come to my help, I might not have come through it."

"I hope there's no danger of another tonight," I said.

"No, no; none whatever. I shouldn't have had this one, if I had got hold of the medicine twenty seconds sooner. I had plenty of time; but I was working, absorbed in it; and I let myself go too far. But it's all right now, thanks to you."

"I'm glad to hear it," I said. "Is there anything more I can do for you? Can I give you an arm up to your bedroom?"

"Thanks, if you would. These attacks leave me rather weak."

I gave him my arm, and helped him up the stairs to the back room on the first floor. He was indeed shaky. I was surprised by his extraordinary thinness, for, as I have said, his face was ruddy with the glow of health. It was the thinness of an ascetic who fasts often; and his bedroom was as bare as an ascetic's cell.

As I bade him good-night, he asked me to ask Pamela to bring him a glass of milk.

I came down stairs, and found Pamela nearly as shaky as her uncle.

I kissed her and said, "Your uncle wants a glass of milk, and then you must get to bed quickly, dear child."

"Wasn't it horrible?" she said. "I have never had such a fright. I never dreamt that I could be so full of terror. I never could have come back to uncle by myself. He would just have died. And what's more I don't believe that anyone could have gone into that room but you – no one in the world."

"It was horrible. And I don't believe that anyone could have gone into that room but you and I together," I said; and I kissed her.

# Chapter XIII
# Woodfell

FOR TWO or three days after this fright Pamela was nervous and shaken. I was careful to take her into the country for a good walk every evening; and her healthy nerves soon recovered their tone. If they had not, I would have married her out of hand and taken her away from No. 19. It would have meant a tussle with Woodfell; and he was likely to prove no mean fighter. But for that I did not care. I should have had every right, except, perhaps, a mere legal one, to take her from a house which was wrecking her health. But a week assured me that it was not wrecking it; the fright she had suffered had been the result of Woodfell's carelessness, and he would not be careless again. Several months had still to elapse before another celebration of the rites of the Abyss. It seemed safe to wait.

One evening a fortnight later Pamela and I were in my study after dinner; and there came a knocking at my front door. I went to the window, looked through the side of the blind and saw Woodfell. It was a startling sight.

"It's your uncle!" I said; and we looked at one another with some dismay.

Then I said, "Oh, it's all right. He hasn't come after you. If he had, he would have come sooner. He must be merely returning my visit."

"Yes; that must be it," said Pamela, but she looked scared enough.

"Well, you'd better go into the dining-room; and if I can get him into the study, you can slip out and into No. 19," I said quickly.

I opened the study door and stood still while she slipped along the wall of the hall behind me into the dining-room. Then I opened the front door.

"Good evening," said Woodfell. "I hope it isn't too late to pay you a visit. But I felt a strong need on me to talk to someone; and my niece has gone to bed."

"Not at all too late. I'm delighted that you came," I said cordially. And I was. I welcomed the opportunity of learning more of him.

I ushered him into my study; and he sat down in an easy chair

He looked about the room with approving eyes; sank back in the easy chair as if he found himself in a place to his liking, and said, "I've been wondering at your courage in coming into my study and staying in it that night. It must have required a strong effort of will – an uncommonly strong effort of will."

"It was uncomfortable," I said.

"Uncomfortable!" he said with a short laugh. "Devilishly uncomfortable, I should think."

"It was."

He nodded his head. "I've been wondering, too, how it affected you exactly, and what you saw."

"It affected me with a cold perspiration; and I saw shadows – shapeless shadows," I said.

"Ah, they were shapeless? I wondered," he said slowly.

He paused, thinking; then he said, "What did you think of them?"

"I thought they were devils," I said promptly.

He laughed his short laugh and said, "Well, perhaps it's as good a name for them as any other. Certainly they were called devils for a good many hundreds of years."

"Then there were things there," I said quickly.

"Things, or shadows of things – you saw."

"I felt even more than I saw," I said slowly. "But you – when you came to, you saw the things of which I only saw the shadows?"

"How does one know what one sees? Perhaps I saw shadows more clearly shaped – once beyond the tangible, the thing you can touch and handle, how can you say whether you see, or whether you fancy?"

"That's what I have thought myself," I said.

"Then you've certainly been talking to that skeptic Marks," he said smiling.

"Oh, yes," I said. "I have talked to him about these matters. But if your shadows took on flesh; then you would know."

He rose in a sudden restlessness, and walked across the room: "If they took on flesh for you in your sober senses, you might know. But suppose that a degree of nervous exultation, illumination, ecstasy, intoxication, call it what you will, were necessary to that incarnation. Then what can you say?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "You get results even then," I said.

"Results? Yes. But the question is not what you get, but what it's worth."

"I think – I think that you're not like Marks – you don't believe that it's all fancy," I said slowly.

"You're shrewd," he said in some surprise. "That shows insight. If I may ask, what is your business or profession?"

"I'm a lawyer."

"Heavens!" he said and laughed.

I laughed, too.

"Well, I like you," he said after a pause. "You said nothing to Marks about that other fancy of yours – the beast in my garden. I like a

man who can keep his mouth shut till he has a reason for speaking. Though it would have been safe enough to tell Marks. He is to be trusted – absolutely. And he knows."

"Does he know?" I said doubtfully.

"Yes; I tell you that Marks knows. He would never admit it; but deep down in his heart he knows."

"Well, he acts as if he knew; and after all that is the test," I said.

"It is," said Woodfell.

There was another pause; then I said, "Suppose you had died the other night, what would the shadows, or the devils, have done?"

"Vanished to their limbo," he said with assurance.

"You're sure of that? They wouldn't have worked havoc on anyone near them?"

"They would not. They would have vanished to their limbo. Perhaps they might have taken me with them." He made a wry face. "But I can assure you that no one else had anything to fear from them. They would not have wrecked your house or injured you."

"I wasn't thinking of myself," I said.

"I suppose you were thinking of my niece. If I had died, they would not have injured a hair of her head," he said.

It was a great relief to me to hear this. Heart disease kills suddenly; and I had been now and again harassed by a fear lest it should kill him in the night and Pamela become the helpless prey of the unchained powers of the Abyss.

I had been so interested in our talk that I had forgotten my duties of host; and I offered him a whisky and soda and a cigar.

He shook his head and said, "No, thank you. My quest forbids. I haven't smoked a cigar for twenty years; and as for liquor, I have tasted it five – no, six times, counting the brandy you gave me the other night, in the last year."

I guessed that he spoke of the wine at the celebration of the rites.

Our talk fell on Marks for a while; then he rose and said, "I must get back to my work. Our talk has refreshed me."

"By the way, what is the rite of Ashtaroth?" said I, rising.

"The rite of Ashtaroth?" he cried sharply, startled.

"Yes. One evening I was reading here, and through the window I heard you tell someone that you were going to try the rite of Ashtaroth."

"Oh, that," he said slowly. "I'm working out the rite of Ashtaroth; and I am of the opinion that the priests at Eleusis knew a good deal about it."

I went to the front door with him; and he took his leave. Pamela was not in the dining-room; and next morning I learned that she had slipped out of the house the moment my study door had closed on her uncle.

That was the first of several visits from Woodfell. He came at no regular intervals. Sometimes ten days passed between two visits, sometimes no more than four or five. It seemed to me that the restlessness which comes from the strain of work invaded him; and he came to me for refreshment. Naturally, therefore, we did not talk always, or even much, about the Mysteries; he came to me to get away from them. I gathered that he was working at them very hard indeed; and I conceived that to discover a true rite of Ashtaroth would indeed be the most laborious business.

But from his talk, and excellent talk it was, I gathered many things about him. He had been a guardsman and a great traveler in the wilder parts of the world. Often he had to carry things with a strong hand; and sometimes he told of his more dangerous adventures, adventures through which he had not come without shedding blood, with a fierce truculence which left me no doubts that at heart he was a very savage creature. But none the less I liked him; and little by little I began to understand his tampering so stubbornly with the forbidden things. He was the true seeker, seeking the ultimate revelation for the ultimate revelation's sake, with no thought or, at any rate, very little thought for the power which that knowledge might give him. But apart from that the danger of the search had the very strongest appeal for him. He loved it.

Once he said with full-hearted enthusiasm: "The forbidden things are the most dangerous things in the world."

But never an evening passed that he did not say something interesting.

One night we had been talking of the Mysteries, and since my mind was never quite at rest about Pamela's presence in No. 19, I said, "Is your house really a safe abode for your niece, with these terrifying shadows in it. You say that she would be quite safe, if you died, that the shadows would vanish with you. But is she safe when the shadows are about while you are still alive? Can they not then turn their malignant effort from you to her? I know that they're malignant, you know."

He frowned and tugged at his thick, coarse beard: "She's quite safe as long as I'm there," he said slowly. "And if I have to leave her to go somewhere, I take precautions."

"How can you take precautions against shadows?" I said.

"You can always set shadows to fight shadows," he said.

On another evening he had been walking restlessly about the room, with a strong suggestion of a tiger in a cage, as he talked; and now and again he had paused at my bookshelves and scanned the titles of the books.

At last, with a wave of the hand towards them, he turned and said: "Once I knew them all; and how far away it seems – great

writers about shadows. What an unsubstantial world they present!"

It was to dismiss human effort and human history, the whole human scheme in ten words; and it indeed took me aback. But he spoke with utter sincerity; and I knew that he at any rate did not believe that shadows danced in the garden of No. 19.

During most of his visits the name of Pamela at some time or other crept into our talk. I introduced it always, for I could not quite rid myself of my uneasiness about her safety.

One night he said suddenly, with very searching eyes on my face, "You seem to take a great interest in my niece."

"Yes; I do. Apart from the fact it makes one uneasy to see a young girl in danger. She's very pretty and charming."

"Charming? Then you see something of her?" he said quickly.

"Yes; I sometimes meet her on her way to the High Street to shop. And if I hear her in your garden, I talk to her over the wall."

It seemed to me unwise to tell him more.

"Pyramus and Thisbe," he said slowly and fell thoughtful.

Weighing the advantages and disadvantages of being open with him, I was two or three minutes making up my mind; then I said, "I should like to marry her."

"Marry her? I never thought of that. I suppose she is reaching the marriageable age," he said slowly.

"Yes; we could marry in a few months. I'm not a good match by any means. My salary is two hundred a year. I own this house and have a few hundred besides. But the firm for which I work, Stryke and Hodgson, are a good firm. They like my work; and Howard Stryke, the senior partner, is my cousin. I can safely look forward to a junior partnership in four or five years. I should insure my life for a thousand pounds, so that if anything happened to me she would not be left stranded."

"I suppose she is bound to marry," he said in a grumbling tone. "I suppose, too, that, buried as she is and without any money, some such match as this is the best she can expect. I like you, too. You would probably look after her well. But she's very useful to me. Working at these things, I need someone about me who will not talk – not that she knows anything to talk about." He was silent, frowning; then he went on. "Look here, after all this might be the best arrangement for me, if you would agree to let her go on looking after me after she was married. Indeed it would be much better than if someone else married her and took her away. Nothing must interfere with my work."

It was a selfish way of looking at it; but his selfishness was the selfishness of an enthusiast, hardly personal; and after all it was not for me to find fault with it, since it served my purpose.

"Yes; I would agree to that. She could look after you after cockcrow till sunset. I shouldn't object to that at all," I said.

"Yes; that would be quite safe. So far I am only dealing with the children of darkness. Why, hang it all! I believe I should prefer it to the present state of things; I shouldn't have to bother about her at all. Yes; it would suit me much better. Why shouldn't you marry her at once?"

I was sorely tempted to take him at his word. But after a moment's consideration, I said, "No, she is too young. I will marry her next autumn."

"Good," he said in a cheerful tone. "September is a very good month."

I did not thank him; there seemed no need for it. I was plainly doing him a service. In practical matters, which do not touch his enthusiasm, the enthusiast is often very easy to deal with.

# Chapter XIV
# Helen Ranger

IT WAS a matter of business, and not very pleasant business, which made me acquainted with Helen Ranger. The firm of Stryke and Hodgson, or rather the Strykes, for Hodgson only came to the firm ten years ago, have been the lawyers of the Dymchurch family for over a hundred years. They have drawn up their marriage settlements and wills and leases, bought and sold property, and conducted two right of way cases for them. One morning in November the present Lord Dymchurch, a young man of twenty-five who enjoys the reputation of leading a somewhat rackety life, came to the office, gave his name, and told the clerk that he particularly wanted to see the youngest member of the firm. I am not a member of the firm; but the clerk brought him to me. I took it that my cousin had sent him.

"Good morning," he said, shaking hands with me with uncommon cordiality. "I didn't want to see any of the old jossers, because it's rather an awkward business – in fact it's a woman."

He sat down; and his looks did not give me a pleasant impression of him. He was a fat young man with pink cheeks, thick lips, a turned-up nose, and close-set, rogue's eyes.

"It's like this – rather a mess," he said pulling nervously at his neat little black mustache. "I'm going to marry my cousin, Miss Littlestone; and as soon as the engagement is announced, another girl, her name's Helen Ranger, will cut up rough and

make a devil of a fuss – bring a breach of promise case, or something of that kind. I know she will. That means that my marriage with my cousin will be queered. She won't stand that kind of thing at all."

"And you wish me to arrange the matter?"

"Yes; I want you to handle her for me. She must be kept quiet – bought off. You see, marrying my cousin means another ten thousand a year," he said ingenuously.

I liked him less than ever. I marveled that there should be two women in the little brute's life; and I thought very poorly of, at any rate the judgment, of both of them.

"What sum am I commissioned to offer her?" I said.

His face fell as he said, "There's no way out of buying her off I'm afraid. You can't see any way, can you? There are some silly letters of mine, written when I first knew her – a year ago. And I've given myself away in them hopelessly. I was awfully gone on her. But can't you see any other way?"

"Not at present. I have not seen the lady. But you tell me that she is the kind of woman who will bring an action for breach of promise."

"Oh, she is. She has a great deal of character. But I want to pay her as little as possible; I'm not gone on her now."

I began to admire his simple directness and to desire the pleasure of kicking him.

"If she is still attached to you, it would probably make a difference to the amount you would have to pay," I said.

"Oh, she's attached to me all right. It's I who've cooled off," he said with a fatuous air.

"You say she has lots of character. You had better tell me about her. The more I know about her the more effectually can I deal with the matter."

"Well, she is the daughter of a farmer at Glyde Park, my Somersetshire property, you know. Her people have been tenants of ours for ages. They're a red-headed lot; and they've always given our agents plenty of trouble; and they don't get on well with their neighbors. They're pretty wild – terrors, you know. And when I was down at Glyde a year ago, in September, I came across her. And we used to meet on the quiet, in the woods – the usual thing, you know. And I got awfully gone on her. She could have been Lady Dymchurch, if she hadn't been so ignorant. I would have married her; upon my soul, I would. But she didn't know the ropes; and I say that life's like bridge, if you don't know the game you're bound to lose. The end of it was, when I left Glyde – I stayed a month longer there than I meant to – she came up to London to me three days later."

"I suppose she came up to get married," I said.

"That was what *she* thought," he said with a cunning leer.

He was certainly a shameless young blackguard.

I dare say that my face told him that he had given me some such impression of himself; for he said hastily, "Of course, she's had a very good time. I've spent a couple of thousand on her, if I've spent a penny."

"What sort of a temper has she?" I said after a pause.

"The usual red-headed temper. She just blazes if she's crossed," he said.

"That's better than a sulky, vindictive one. How old is she?"

"She's twenty-three."

"And up to how much am I to go?" I said.

He wriggled in his chair; then he said unhappily, "Up to five thousand if you want."

It seemed to me that I had all the information the intelligence of my client was likely to afford me; and I told him that I would call on the lady and endeavor to make terms with her.

He took his leave; and I was uncommonly glad to see his back.

Later in the morning I told my cousin of our interview and my instructions. He said that he had not given orders that Lord

Dymchurch was to come to me; but that since I had begun on the matter I had better go though with it.

"I'm beginning to think, John, that we shall have to give you more of this delicate work in which we have to deal with ladies," he said with a grin.

"You have not yet received your wooden sword," I said.

"Wooden sword?"

"Yes; they presented the Roman veteran with a wooden sword when they retired him," I said.

"Ah, the Classics," said Howard in an indulgent tone.

Being an unpleasant business, the sooner I carried out Lord Dymchurch's instructions the better. Accordingly that afternoon I took a taxicab to Camden Hill, where Helen Ranger lived. The house was a little villa, of as decorous an appearance as any of its neighbors. A trim maid opened the door, and showed me into a drawing-room furnished with all the luxury the exuberant imagination proper to the expensive upholsterer can suggest. I sat down in a comfortable easy chair and waited in considerable discomfort for a very tiresome quarter of an hour. I had had very little experience in negotiations of the kind I was about to attempt.

At last Miss Helen Ranger came into the room; and the sight of her was an agreeable surprise. She had red hair, indeed, very red hair, a mass of it; but it was silken and lustrous. She had the clear skin

which generally goes with red hair; her green eyes were large and full of light under their dark eyelashes; her mouth was rather large with full lips; her forehead was low and very white; her nose was a little turned-up but well shaped with delicately cut nostrils. She was rather above middle height with an admirable figure. She seemed to me to diffuse a strong glow of vigorous life. Indeed, with her voluptuous air she set me thinking that, could Venus be red-haired, here was, for painter or sculptor, a very model of the goddess.

She greeted me in a low, soft voice; and as gently as I could I told her my unpleasant business.

Her nostrils dilated, an angry flash covered her white cheeks, and her eyes sparkled as I unfolded it; and at the end she cried, "The little beast! The miserable little beast and liar! So this is the end of all his promises. Promises? Why, he has sworn to marry me again and again. He's actually written to me, 'I swear I'll marry you' – more than once."

"Lord Dymchurch does not deny that," I said.

"Deny it? He couldn't – the miserable little beast. And this is all it comes to, all his swearing. He wants his neck wringing. Oh, if I hadn't quarreled with my brother!"

She paused; and I said nothing. We should talk to the point only when her anger had abated a little.

She rose and went to the window and looked out of it for two or three minutes. Twice she muttered, "Why couldn't he leave me alone? Why couldn't he leave me alone?"

Then she dabbed at her eyes with a scrap of a handkerchief and turned to me: "I won't let the little beast play fast and loose with me. He promised to marry me; and he shall," she said in a calmer tone.

"It is so hard to make anyone marry anybody if they don't want to. And honestly I don't think that there is any chance of Lord Dymchurch's marrying you," I said in a quiet, meditative tone.

"But I can bring an action against him. I can let the whole world know what a lying blackguard he is," she said. "Oh, I knew nothing – nothing – when he persuaded me to come to London; but I've learnt a good deal since. Oh, I can make it hot for him; and I will."

"You can make it very unpleasant indeed," I said. "But is it worth while?"

"You seem to forget that if I did have the law of him, my brothers would learn all about it; and they'd kill him – they would, truly. Why, they'd most likely kill me, too."

"That would be a great pity. And with regard to Lord Dymchurch too, if you care enough for him to marry him, you can hardly want him killed," I said.

"Want to marry him? I'm sick of the little beast – sick to death. And I've known for weeks that this was coming," she cried; and thereupon she burst into a storm of weeping.

It made me extremely uncomfortable; and I said all the soothing things I could think of. They were not many.

At last she grew calmer, and still sobbing she said, "I ought to marry him – sickening little beast as he is."

"I'm afraid it's no good talking of it," I said.

"It isn't. I know him," she said.

"Well, wouldn't it be better to make the best of a bad job?" I said. "You can certainly, as you say, make it hot for Lord Dymchurch. But what will you gain by it?"

She declared that she hated to be "bested," that she could not bear to let the miserable little beast crow over her, that she *would* punish him. I dwelt on the injury she would do herself by publishing her wrongs, so much greater really than the injury she would do him; that she would have heavy law costs to pay and would lose money. She said that she did not care about that.

The maid brought in tea and over it she grew quieter.

At last I thought her quiet enough to tell her that Lord Dymchurch was prepared to repair handsomely the wrong he had done her, as far as money could repair it.

"Well," she said slowly with a vindictive air. "It will hurt the little beast to make him pay. He hates spending money on anyone but himself."

"He thought three thousand pounds," I said; for I felt bound to do my best for my client, though my sympathies were entirely with this beautiful creature.

"Then he thought wrong – quite wrong," she said sharply. "I will have five thousand and this house and the furniture, all for my own. I have learnt enough in the last year to know that this is the least a breach of promise case would cost him. Oh, his friends have taught me a lot of things in the last year; and so has he."

"Five thousand pounds is a great deal of money," I said solemnly.

"Three thousand?" she said thoughtfully. "He would never have offered as much as that without some extra reason for getting rid of me. Three hundred more like – I know him. There must be something I don't know of. I tell you what; you tell him that next week I shall want six thousand and the week after seven. That'll buck the little beast up."

I said all the usual things that the interests of my client demanded, but I did not stir her from her position. Indeed, in the struggle to maintain it – I pressed her hard – she forgot her mortification and disappointment; and in the end she bade me good-by with her face flushed with smiling triumph.

I came away from her, thinking what a pity it was that a miserable little beast, as she so aptly called Lord Dymchurch, should have

gone so far to spoil the life of so fine a creature. I did not indeed think that he had done her irremediable harm – as yet. But she was certainly stranded; whether with the five thousand pounds she would certainly have from him, she would get out again into the open sea of life and make a fair and prosperous voyage was doubtful. With a better training, the training of a gentle-woman, she would indeed have been a glorious creature.

I did not go back to the office; and I did not write to Lord Dymchurch that night. I went home and took Pamela down to Richmond.

The next morning Lord Dymchurch rang me up on the telephone; and when I told him that I had seen Helen Ranger, he said that he would come down at once and hear the result of my negotiation.

When he was ushered into my office, he greeted me curtly, and said, "I suppose she was furious."

"She was very angry at first," I said.

"And afterwards she was cut up. Poor girl; it is hard on her; but hang it all a man must look after himself," he said with an air of fatuous self-satisfaction.

"She naturally regrets losing you," I said dryly. "But I found that she had formed a very sound estimate of the strength of her position. She is not greatly inclined to make terms; she is rather inclined to bring an action against you, and injure you by the publicity entailed by it."

"I told you she had a beast of a temper," he said, pulling nervously at his mustache.

"Well, in the end I persuaded her to make terms. She will compromise the matter for £5,000 in cash and the house in which she is living just as it stands, furniture and all."

He swore like a groom; he grumbled and groused; declaring that he would not pay her a penny more than five thousand pounds.

I let him grouse his fill; then I said, "Well, my lord, it's for you to decide; but Miss Ranger said that her price would go up a thousand pounds a week. I think that she meant it; but of course you know her better than I. Doubtless it would be better to let the matter rest for a day or two; and I will see her again. Or perhaps you would like to see her yourself. Since she is fond of you, you may be able to beat her down."

"I'm hanged if I see her!" he cried. "Why, I've been expecting her to come and see me – all last night and this morning."

"Well, I will see her myself on Thursday. At the same time I feel bound to tell you that I have very little hope of getting her to make easier terms."

He swore again. Then he flung out of the office, declaring that he would not pay a penny more than five thousand.

I thought that he would. It lay with Helen Ranger to fix the price; and seeing that he had this match with his wealthy cousin in view, he would be wise to accept the terms offered. I even

thought that if he slept on her proposal, he would accept it without further delay. As a matter of fact he had to sleep on it twice. On the third morning I received a packet from him by express messenger. It contained a letter from him instructing me to settle the matter out of hand, his check for £5,000, and the title-deeds of the house. He had employed another firm, a shady firm, to buy it for him; and I observed, not without pleasure, that they had made him pay through the nose for it.

I wired to Helen Ranger that her terms were accepted, that I would call on her with the documents that afternoon; and I had them drawn up at once. In the afternoon I took them to her. They were duly signed and witnessed; she gave me the letters; and I gave her the check.

Then she said, smiling a little ruefully, "Well, that's a good riddance anyhow. You'd never believe that less than a year ago I fancied myself in love with the little beast."

"Doubtless he has his charms," I said gravely.

"His charm! His fiddlesticks!" she cried. "You're laughing at me. But of course his title has. I thought it would be a great thing to be Lady Dymchurch. But, my word, what a price to pay! To have that little beast always hanging about."

"Well, our business being finished, I don't mind admitting that I think you're well out of it," I said, smiling.

"Oh, I am," she said. "But now, tell me what I am to do with this money."

I drew her up a list of safe investments, and explained to her what her income would be. She asked me several questions which showed her of a better intelligence than I had suspected.

When at last I bade her good-bye, she said, "You're too good for a lawyer, and much too good-looking."

I was pleased to leave her in such a cheerful temper; and it did not seem to me likely that I should ever see her again.

# Chapter XV
# The Priestess of Ashtaroth

FOR A few days Helen Ranger's beautiful face kept rising often in my mind. I think indeed that had not Pamela filled my thoughts, I should not have so easily let the acquaintance drop. But after a few days I thought of her seldom.

The winter wore on; and for Pamela and me it was not tedious. Now that her uncle knew that I wished to marry her, it was far easier for us to meet. I could take her to Town to dine, or to the theater as often as we wished. We did not indeed tell him that she spent so many of her evenings with me in my house. He shared our contempt for the conventionalities, so necessary to dishonorable folk; and he would have seen quickly enough that in our out-of-the-way world those conventionalities did not really exist. But it was a matter on which it was better not to lay stress, since if the practice were formally brought to his knowledge, he might feel bound to protest. But we were no longer at any pains to hide it from him; and we had no doubt that he knew.

Sometimes Pamela and I talked of the rites of the Abyss; Woodfell, as I have said, sometimes paid me a visit in the evening and sometimes we talked of the Mysteries; four or five times Marks spent an evening with me, or I went to his flat; and we talked of the Mysteries. But during the winter there was no further irruption from the Abyss.

Pamela's curiosity to see again the celebration of the rites and learn wonderful things was beginning to burn afresh; and mine was growing keener than ever it had been. The talk of Woodfell and Marks had stimulated keenly my desire to know the heart of the Mysteries, to have the ultimate revelation. One night Woodfell said to me that at present, as far as men went, his circle of searchers was complete, but that if one of them fell out of it, I might have his place. I thanked him; and I did not refuse the offer; but I doubted that, if the chance came, I would accept it. If I had been free, with my curiosity at its present height, I should not have shrunk from tampering with the forbidden things; but there was Pamela.

She now and again urged me to let her watch with me the next celebration of the rites. But I was against it; I wanted to watch them alone. It was far safer. At the same time it was growing harder and harder for me to refuse her anything on which her heart was set.

Easter fell early and cold. There was a celebration of some rites at No. 19, for Pamela was sent to bed early and locked in her room. But it took place in Woodfell's study, not in the garden. From the low noise of the chanting which came through the wall I believe that all the seven celebrants were present.

A few evenings later I was indeed surprised. At about nine o'clock I was in my study, working before the window, when the door of No. 19 opened and Woodfell came out; but how changed a Woodfell! He was wearing evening dress; his overcoat was of the latest fashion; his gloves were white kid; his boots were of shining patent leather; he was wearing an opera hat; his hair which had

hung over his ears had been cut short; and his unkempt beard had been clipped to a point. I was indeed amazed. What new circle did he propose to adorn?

For the next fortnight he went out in this dress every other night at about the same hour. One night Marks came to see me; and I could not forbear telling him how odd I found it that Woodfell should have returned to the social circles of the guardsmen. He smiled somewhat oddly; but he threw no light on the matter. Two nights later I had taken Pamela to a comedy at one of the theaters in the Charing Cross Road; and as we walked along from it to the station of the Piccadilly Tube, we came into the stream of people coming out of the Empire.

"Why, there's my uncle!" cried Pamela.

And sure enough out of the entrance to the Empire stalls came Woodfell.

I was indeed taken aback. Then, on the instant, I guessed: Woodfell, in an opera hat and patent-leather boots was seeking the priestess of Ashtaroth at the Empire.

During the last week of April there came to London from the North an important client, a shipbuilder. It fell to me to entertain him during his stay. It was annoying, for it robbed me of my evenings with Pamela. It was tiresome, for he proved the most tedious person in the world. One night after an excellent dinner – I must admit that the dinners he gave me were excellent – we went to the Empire. For a while he watched the entertainment in

a heavy beatitude. Then to my joy during the interval he was recognized by a Northern friend; and they forgathered, burring.

I slipped away from them, and leaning over the plush-covered parapet of the promenade, watched the next turn. Then I saw, also leaning over it, twenty feet away, Helen Ranger. It gave me a disagreeable shock to see her there. But I stopped watching the turn and watched her instead; she was better worth watching, by far the most beautiful and interesting creature in the music-hall. Presently I perceived that she was expecting someone, for she watched the stage but listlessly, and kept turning and looking towards the entrance. Twice men spoke to her; and from her expression of insolent scorn and their mortified faces I gathered that she repelled their advances with some discourtesy.

Then as she looked round, I saw her face brighten; and Woodfell came to her through the crowd. They talked eagerly and with animation for some minutes; then they moved away to one of the bars and sat down at a table. I could see them plainly from where I stood; and I watched them. With the same eagerness and animation they talked for nearly an hour. Or rather, Woodfell talked; and she listened, absorbed. Now and again I could see, from her expression, that she asked him a question.

Then they came out of the bar. Woodfell shook hands with her, raised his hat, and left the music-hall. She came straight to me. I had not thought that she had seen me.

"How are you?" she said. "I never expected to see you here."

"Nor I you," I said.

"Oh, that's all right," she said easily. "I only come here because it's nice and bright and amusing. That little beast Dymchurch used to bring me here often; and I've got into the way of it. I'm always sure of finding some one here to talk to. There's no harm in that. Besides, I've made some jolly friends here, though they all bother me to leave off coming."

"I expect they do," I said gravely.

"There's no need. I can take care of myself. I've had my lesson. And if it amuses me—" she threw out her hands.

There was a pause; then I said, "That was an interesting old man I saw you talking to."

"Oh, he is interesting! The things he tells me!" she cried. "But you'd never believe them if I told you."

"Try me," I said.

"No, no. I mustn't talk about them," she said gravely.

"It's an odd place to talk about interesting things in," I said.

"That's what I like about it. You never know what is going to happen to you here, or what you may hear, or who you will meet."

"You have the romantic spirit," I said.

"Oh, romance! I've had enough of romance, thank you," she said scornfully.

"Only of the *Family Herald* kind," I said. "You've just assured me that you are a seeker after real romance, the unexpected, wonderful adventure."

"Oh, that – if that's the real romance, she said thoughtfully.

"It is," I said. "And how has the world been treating you since our last meeting?"

She plunged into the relation of her doings, with a cheerful gusto; and I was pleased to learn that the lesson she had had was bearing useful fruits. She was forearmed. She was leading a joyous, unconventional, but quite reputable life.

"You'll be surprised to hear that I could marry two men, quite nice men, if I wanted to," she said.

"Nothing could be less surprising. You'd better do it – marry one of them, that is."

"No; I don't care enough about either of them," she said.

"That's a pity. But I dare say that you will presently," I said.

"It's quite likely; but there's no hurry. I have enough to live on. I'm a very good housekeeper," she said.

I looked at her a while; then I said, "I fancy that you were born lucky – one of those whom the gods love."

"Don't say that, or I shall die young," she said laughing.

"All the same, I think that the country, not London is your proper place."

"You're quite right," she said. "I was thinking of spending all the summer in the country. I love it. But it seems now that I may have to be in London."

I wondered if Woodfell had anything to do with her change of plan.

"You could always have a cottage near London, and come up when you wanted to," I said.

"So I could. I never thought of that. That is a good idea," she cried.

We talked for a while about the country round London; and I suggested to her that she should try to get a cottage at Chipperfield. She said that she would. Then she said that she must be going, that she had been invited to a supper-party. My shipbuilder had disappeared with his Northern friend; and I came out with her and put her into a cab.

Before it started she leaned forward and said, "If I do go into the country, you will come down and spend the day with me sometimes?"

"I shall be charmed," I said, raising my hat.

I came home in no little content to find that she was so well on her way to repair the injury Lord Dymchurch had done her. I wondered too if I should, one full moon, see her in the garden of No. 19, priestess of Ashtaroth.

I was destined to see her again before any celebration of the rites of the Abyss. At the end of the first meeting in May of the New Bohemians I walked with Marks up to the top of Regent Street and came home along the Central Tube. When I reached Shepherd's Bush, the warm moonlit air tempted me to walk home, and I had gone halfway down the Goldhawk Road, when I saw a woman in front of me walking with a somewhat swaying, uncertain gait. I caught her up, and as I passed I glanced at her face. To my surprise it was Helen Ranger.

I stopped short and said, "How do you do, Miss Ranger?"

She stared at me for a moment, not recognizing me; and I saw that her face was flushed and her eyes were shining very bright.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Plowden," she said, holding out her hand. "I've lost my way, at least I haven't lost it. I've forgotten where I'm going to. I want No. 19; but I can't remember the name of the street."

She spoke quickly and rather huskily, slurring her words. Plainly she had looked on the wine when it was red. It is not an

infrequent occurrence in the joyous, unconventional life; and I was rather vexed than shocked.

"It's very silly not to remember," she went on, speaking quickly. "But it's all the fault of that stupid champagne. And I did not drink much either – only three glasses. I ought to stop at two. I know I ought. But I like it so."

Three glasses of champagne are not a heinous crime; and I said cheerfully, "Hadn't you better let me put you in a cab and send you home? You'll remember the name of the street tomorrow; and that will be soon enough."

"No, no! Tonight! I will go tonight!" she cried. "I will find it. I shall find it. I feel that I am going right. Something seems – seems to be drawing me. I've felt it drawing me – for two days. And now I must go – I must."

It was an odd feeling. It seemed as if Woodfell had acquired an influence on her.

"Come along then, I'll help you find it," I said. "Take my arm; it will counteract the champagne. But it's late to make a call – it's past twelve."

"Any time up till one in the morning, the old gentleman said."

She took my arm; and we walked on. She talked quickly about the impulse on her to go to No. 19.

Presently I said, "You're sure that No. 19 is in a street, not in a road?"

"Of course, it's in a road! It's in the Walden Road," she cried.

"Then I can take you straight to it. I live in the Walden Road," I said.

"You live in it?" she cried. "Then you were sent – certainly you were sent – to show me the way."

It looked like it.

The walk seemed to clear her head of the fumes of the champagne, for when we reached Hertford Park, she was talking quite clearly, no longer slurring her words.

Just before we came to the Walden Road I said, "And what are you going to No. 19 for?"

She shook her head, saying, "I'm not to talk about it."

We turned into the Walden Road and walked down it to No. 19. At the garden gate she thanked me and bade me good night.

I went into my own garden; and she knocked at the door of No. 19. As I fitted my latch key into the lock, I heard the door open to her.

"So you have come," said Woodfell.

"Yes; I have come. I want to know," she said; and she went in.

I was assured that Woodfell had found the priestess of Ashtaroth.

# Chapter XVI
# The Rich Man's Lesson

THAT WAS the first of Helen Ranger's visits. After it she came often. I do not know how often; but in one week I saw her come on two evenings; and I had little doubt that she was in training to become the priestess of the goddess of the Abyss. Surely it would take time and careful teaching to learn to perform her elaborate rite. Surely, too, Woodfell had been fortunate in finding a beautiful creature whose abounding womanliness would add to the rites the feminine element in its fullest intensity.

But the Spring had come, warm and inspiring; and out of my office I gave little thought to anyone or anything but Pamela. In the stimulation of love in Spring she bloomed like an unfolding rose. I wished, often and often, that we were to be married in the summer; the autumn seemed far off.

It was only natural that I should yield to her desire to watch with me the celebration of the rites; but we were prevented from watching the celebration on the night of the May full moon. Two days before it I was summoned suddenly to Northumberland on the business of the firm, to make the will of a dying client.

When I told Pamela that I must go, she was disappointed; but she said with a resigned air, "Never mind, Heine. We must wait till the full moon in June."

"I was going to ask you not to watch the rites without me," I said.

"Oh, I wouldn't," she said with a shiver. "I couldn't."

I left the window of my front room open, that if by any chance the Abyss broke loose, she might escape into No. 20 and through it to the street. I had indeed no great fear; but I was anxious. And when I returned on the morrow of the full moon, I greeted her with no little relief. She lost no time in slipping into No. 20 to reassure me.

There had been a celebration; for she had been locked in her room; and the fragrance of incense still hung on the air of the garden. She had slept peacefully through it; no terror had awakened her, so that we thought that at this celebration again the gates of the Abyss had opened no wider. There was no saying whether Helen Ranger had taken part in it. For my part I thought it unlikely that she had. It would take longer than a fortnight to learn a rite of the Abyss.

On the night of the new moon in June I watched the garden of No. 19.

On the morrow I said to Pamela, "You didn't dance before the statue last night."

"Why should I?" she said, smiling at me.

"It would indeed have been unnecessary," I said.

"Besides, I daren't go into the garden after dark any more – not even if I wanted to, she said. "It has grown more dreadful."

A week later a mischance fell.

Pamela met me as I came from the station with a faint flush on her cheeks and an angry sparkle in her eyes.

"What's the matter?" I said.

"Oh, nothing. It's very silly of me," she said. "But just as I came out of the house one of uncle's friends was coming into the garden; and as I passed him, he raised his hat and said 'Good evening,' in a perfectly horrid way. I can't explain it; but he made me feel horrid. It was rather silly perhaps."

"Which of them was it?" I said.

She described to me the rich man.

"I know him by sight. He is an offensive brute. I'm sure of it," I said.

The matter passed from both our minds. Then, three days later, Pamela set out with me to dine in Town; and after we had greeted one another and turned to go to the station, she said, "I've seen that horrible man again, that friend of Uncle's I passed in the garden. He spoke to me when I was shopping this afternoon, and insisted on talking to me. He came nearly to our gate with me, talking all the time, telling me that I was a pretty girl, and asking me to dine with him in Town one night soon. I did not say a word to him; I did not even look at him; but he kept on talking."

"There is no doubt about what he wants. He wants horsewhipping; and he'll get it," I said.

"He does deserve it," said Pamela.

That was the beginning of a persecution. Either the rich man had the leisure to watch No. 19 continuously, or he chose his hours luckily. Twice during the next ten days he contrived to find Pamela shopping in the High Street and came nearly to No. 19 talking to her, begging her to dine with him, or come for a drive in his motor car.

She had no chance of handing him over to a policeman, for in the daytime there are few policemen about Hertford Park, though at night it is plentifully policed to protect it from burglars. I came home from the office one afternoon early in the hope of catching him. We gave him every chance. Pamela walked up and down the High Street for an hour; and I kept thirty yards behind her; but he never came.

We were not eager to tell Woodfell of this persecution because he had always shown so little interest in her that we were doubtful how he might take it. He might laugh at the whole business and refuse to interfere. It would not be out of keeping with our impressions of his character.

Then yet a third time the odious brute forced himself on her. She dined with me that night; and we discussed at length what course we should take. We had not found one, and were still in the middle of the discussion, when there came a knock at my front door, and looking through the blind, I saw that it was Woodfell.

"Here's your uncle," I said. "I will tell him about it. He's the proper person to stop it."

"We can only try," she said without any great hope in her tone, kissed me, and slipped into the dining-room.

I brought Woodfell into my study and as soon as he had settled himself comfortably in an easy chair, I said, "I've been wanting to see you. One of your friends has been persecuting Pamela in the most shameless way." And I told him what the rich man had done and described him.

As I told my tale Woodfell's ruddiness deepened to an angry crimson; and his eyes were glowing.

"And if you will be so good as to give me his address, I will call on him and horsewhip him till he's cured of these habits for good and all," I ended.

"The hound!" said Woodfell; and his voice rang jarring with a hoarse, husky ferocity. "He dared? Doesn't he know yet? He'd dare to molest *my* niece – *my* niece! I'll teach the wretched tradesman. I'll make him understand. I'll give him a lesson. I'll give him hell – unmitigated, literal hell!"

He jerked on to his feet and stamped up and down the room in a black rage. I have never seen so black a rage. I had a vivid vision of Woodfell the traveler forcing his way to some end of the earth. But I felt that this anger was not for Pamela, not at the insult to her; it was at the insult to himself, that one of his own circle, a

man who knew him, should have dared to persecute his niece; that was the affront, that enraged him.

Twice he muttered, "The impudence of it! The damned impudence! That dirty tradesman!" Then he said, "Would you mind my writing a letter? I must tell him what he's going to get."

He spoke with the same husky ferocity.

I gave him pen, ink, and paper; and he sat down at my table and wrote a short letter. As he closed the envelope, I rang for Mrs. Ringrose to take it to the post.

"You want a stamp," I said, rising to get him one.

"Stamp! I'm not going to waste a stamp on the dog!" he snapped.

Mrs. Ringrose took the letter; and as the door closed on her I said, "What are you going to do to him?"

"Did you ever hear of the Porro men?" he said with a smile that bared his great teeth.

"No," I said.

"No one has ever heard of anything in this god-forsaken country," he growled.

I waited for him to tell me. But he dropped heavily into his easy chair and stared at me.

"I can't conceive how you kept your hands off him," he said with a sour look.

"I didn't catch him. I tried."

His face cleared a little.

"Why didn't Pamela come to me?" he said.

"She didn't like to," I said. "She didn't know how you would take it. She had little hope of help from you."

"She was wrong – quite wrong – a thing like that. But I suppose it was natural," he added in a tone of indifference. "I've only been an average uncle to her. I can't help it. I don't like women."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Rather below the average," I said.

He jerked himself upright, gripping the arms of his chair; his lips set; and his eyes sparkled. I looked at him; and on the very verge of the outburst, he checked himself.

He dropped back in his chair and said, "Well, yes; below the average. I might have treated her better, seeing that she's my only kith and kin. But there, I don't like women. You must make up for the poor life she has had. I've no doubt you will. By the way, have you never thought of becoming a wild-beast tamer?"

"No," I said, laughing.

"You've a good deal of their quiet way. You're wasted in a lawyer's office. It would be better fun; and it would pay you better."

"It's too late to begin life afresh."

"You might take it on as an evening job. I knew you reminded me of some one – it's Haskell. We went about East Africa together – a good deal of East Africa – the parts white men don't go about much. He drank himself to death later."

"Thank, you," I said.

"Oh, you should have seen him handle niggers – and me. I tell you what, come and help me get the ultimate revelation. I'll kick this fat brute out and give you his place in the circle. I'm going to get it soon; I give you my word I am. I've found the missing element."

"Thank you; but the offer comes too late. I have Pamela to look after now. But what are you going to do to this brute?"

"I'm going to give him hell," he said firmly. "Let's talk about something else."

He told me the story of an expedition in East Africa, through forests untrodden by white feet, forests full of battle, murder, and sudden death.

"But I got the information I wanted, at last – and Haskell got his beetle," he said.

He had grown quite serene when he left me, but he said with quiet menace as he bade me good-night, "Before I go to sleep, I shall put things in train to teach that impudent tradesman what the Porro men can do."

Three evenings later the quiet of the Walden Road was broken by the throbbing of the engine of a big motor car. It drew up opposite the garden gate of No. 19; and out of the tonneau crawled the rich man. I was on the point of rushing for a stout cane I had bought against our meeting, when his air arrested me.

I have said that he crawled out of the motor car. He tottered across the pavement to the garden gate; and I saw his face plain. The change in it was ghastly. It had lost its fat, rounded contours, and was drawn, lined, and wrinkled. The ash-gray skin bagged under the half-closed, scared eyes and fell in a pendulous fold along the bottom of the jaw-bone. Never have I seen such a face of a haunted, hunted man. I stood still, staring at it.

He tottered feebly, like a very old man, up the garden path; knocked feebly at the door; and leaned against the door-post with his eyes shut. I could see his lips twitch and twitch.

Either Woodfell had not heard his feeble knock, or he was deliberately letting him wait. Presently, keeping his eyes shut, he groped along the door with his left hand for the knocker, found it, and rapped twice, louder.

There was another pause; then the door was flung wide; and Woodfell stood on the threshold.

"So you've come to heel, you dog!" he said in his hoarse, jeering voice.

"The face, Woodfell! Save me from it! Take it away!" cried the rich man in a gasping whine.

Woodfell bent forward a little, gloating over him with merciless eyes.

"Save you, you dog? I'm going to teach you," he said savagely. "I'm going to teach you that I stand no impudence from you. You're getting a lesson you won't forget; and you'll get another twenty four hours of it, a good twenty-four hours. You can stand it; and I don't care if you can't."

With that he slammed the door on him.

The rich man uttered a lamentable, piercing cry. Then he went distraught. He hammered and hammered on the door with his bare fists, howling, "Take it away! Take it away! Take it away! The face, Woodfell! The face! The face! Take it away! I'll give you a thousand pounds to take it away! The face! Woodfell! A thousand pounds! The face! A thousand pounds! A thousand pounds! The face! A thou—"

The word broke in a horrible shriek: "My God, I've gone and hit it now!" he cried shrilly; and fell backwards full length on the garden path. Only his hat saved him from cracking his skull on the asphalt.

The chauffeur jumped from the car, ran to him, dropped on one knee, and raised him against the other.

The door opened again and Woodfell stood in the doorway looking down on them.

"Here, guv'ner, you've got no call for ter go an' treat a man like this. It's crool. That's what it is – crool. Let up on it now. Tyke the bloomin' fyce awye, whatever it is," said the chauffeur in a scared, shaking voice.

"Bring the dog in," said Woodfell curtly.

The chauffeur struggled to lift the senseless man; failed; then clasped him under the arms, and went into the house backwards, dragging him along. Woodfell made no movement to help him; he shut the door.

Ten minutes later the chauffeur came out of No. 19, climbed into mopped his brow with his handkerchief, lighted a cigarette, mopped his brow again, and sat smoking with a very thoughtful air. Presently he set the car going and turned it round.

I sat down at my table and went on polishing some verses. The sight of the rich man's terror proved no stimulant. Twenty minutes later the door of No. 19 opened; and the rich man came out. He seemed still very shaky, and slunk down the path like a whipped hound. But he moved less feebly.

Woodfell stood, frowning, and watched him get into the car. The chauffeur started it; and it ran up the road. Woodfell stood quiet

for a minute, still frowning; then he took a check from his pocket, unfolded it, and looked at it smiling greedily.

As he put it back into his pocket, he looked round, and saw me at my table.

"Good evening," he cried. "Did you see what the Porro men can do?"

"I saw," I said.

The dog won't be impudent again in a hurry," he said triumphantly, and went into his house.

# Chapter XVII
# The Circle Breaks

WHEN I told Pamela that her uncle had put an end for good and all to the rich man's persecution, she was pleased indeed.

"It was horrid, because it made me feel so horrid," she said. "It was good of uncle to take the trouble."

Truly, she had learned to expect little of Woodfell.

But the affair seemed to have brought about a change in his attitude to her, awakening his sense of responsibility.

A few days later she said, "Uncle is growing quite nice to me – he is hardly grumpy at all."

A week later she came to dine with me, very joyful.

"Uncle is going to make me an allowance – twenty pounds a year – think of that!" she cried.

"I think it's quite time that he did," I said. "But I congratulate you all the same."

"It begins on the 30th June," she said.

"The time has also come for you to buy summer frocks. There is no use putting off one's winter wear, though one may modify it, before the middle of June. Tomorrow we will go shopping."

She protested; she wished to wait till her quarter's allowance came in. But I would not hear of it; and shopping we went. It was very pleasant; and when the frocks were finished, light and flimsy frocks, Pamela was more than ever a delight to the eye.

A week before the full moon I saw the rich man again; he came in the evening to visit Woodfell. His face had lost its haggardness, and was filling out; it would soon be plump again. But he had lost much of the assured air which comes of great wealth. He walked more humbly. Woodfell had put fear into him; and it had chastened him. On three evenings I saw Helen Ranger come to No. 19.

I made a half-hearted effort to dissuade Pamela from watching the celebration of the rites with me; but I did not hold out long against her pleading. I had a half-thought that if, by the addition of the feminine element to the rites from which Woodfell expected so much, they did get the ultimate revelation, Pamela ought to be present.

On the night of the full moon, half an hour after Woodfell had locked her in her room, I helped her over the partition wall and through the window of my front room. I saw no need to watch the arrival of the celebrants; and we went into the dining-room that we might talk at our ease, with no fear of their hearing her voice as they came past the house and along the path to the door of No. 19.

At half-past eleven we went upstairs to the back room. I sat on a chair by the window and took Pamela on my knee; she put her arm round my neck; and talking softly, we waited for the moon to reach the Zenith.

At last the door into the garden of No. 19 opened; the celebrants came out. They were all in the garden when a woman's laugh low and excited, rose to our ears. It was the laugh of Helen Ranger.

"The priestess of Ashtaroth," I whispered.

I saw that Helen Ranger, like the others wore a robe and the horned headdress. The roaring of the bull-roarer broke throbbing on the still air; and they filed down the garden to the lawn.

The ritual had hardly begun when I observed a change in it. The first, formal part was no longer performed in the earlier mechanical fashion; there was a new earnestness, a solemnity in it. Woodfell's voice was louder, clearer, and graver in the opening invocation; the responses were louder and more earnest; there was a new, keener expectancy in the voices of the celebrants.

Pamela observed it too, for presently she whispered, "They're much more earnest tonight."

In due order came the celebration of the rite of each of the seven gods of the Abyss and the sacrifices to each. I had expected that by now, the third time of watching them, I should be more used to them and less affected. It was not so; my tingling nerves grew tenser and tenser, as the fierce note in the voices of the celebrants

grew fiercer; and every time the full volume of their full-throated responses surged up to us, I felt Pamela quiver in every limb and heard her short, gasping sigh.

The seventh rite of the gods of the Abyss was performed; then came the rite of the goddess. The priestess of Ashtaroth stood before the altar; and her clear, bell-like voice rose, adjuring, in a strange tongue. She had thrown off her robe, and was wearing a short tunic. Now and again, when she moved in some symbolic gesture, a shaft of moonlight, falling through the tops of the sycamores, struck her bare limbs. The priests of the gods roared their responses in a furious enthusiasm. At the end of the rite she danced a slow, symbolic dance, chanting.

There was an extraordinary, solemn, compelling tone in her voice as she chanted. It seemed to string up my nerves to the last tenseness; and Pamela clung to me, hardly breathing. Never had Ashtaroth such a priestess.

The chant ceased; and it seemed to leave all the world quivering. The bleat of the sacrificed lamb broke the silence; and the veiling clouds of incense rolled over the lawn.

Out of the clouds rose a clear, piercing cry, "Ashtaroth! Ashtaroth! Ashtaroth!"

The world hung poised on the dying note; and then came the outburst of the final, frenzied adjuration, each man yelling to his god. I rose from my chair and, with Pamela gripped to me, leaned out of the window with straining eyes. In the midst of the

tumultuous uproar a sudden bright light shone out as if the fire on the altar had blazed up; and it thinned the veil.

There came a shrill scream of terror, a man's scream; terrified outcries echoed it; four howling, jostling figures, with a fifth on their heels, raced down the garden, and bolted into the house.

The bright light died down swiftly, as if the fire had been snuffed out; and there was only a gray cloud of incense eddying slowly in the moonlight.

I gasped; and Woodfell's voice rose loud and hoarse in furious, incoherent imprecations, then grew clear, crying, "The swine – the cowardly swine! They've spoilt it! They've spoilt it! May they rot on earth and shrivel in hell!"

Three figures came staggering out of the cloud and stopped at the end of the path.

"It moved! I saw it move! And its eyes were open, black eyes! What a shame to run away," cried Helen Ranger in a quick, excited voice.

"Confound the cowardly fools!" growled Marks. "We were on the verge – the very verge – at last."

His deep voice quavered as though he had been badly shaken.

"Yes; we were on the verge of something new, something big," said Woodfell in a quieter but still savage voice. "It might have convinced even you, Marks."

"It's the most – the most disturbing thing I have ever seen," said Marks. "I was not looking for that – none of us were. It wasn't a mere trick of the mind. No one of us suggested it to the rest."

"You'll probably persuade yourself by tomorrow that it might have been a trick of the mind," said Woodfell savagely.

"But it couldn't have been. I saw it," broke in Helen Ranger.

"Well, where we have been we can go again," said Woodfell, leading the way down to the garden. "I believe myself that we took the last step and saw the ultimate veil beginning to lift; and then those swine – those cowardly swine! Another month's waiting. Well, never mind, I've found out that I was right; we did need the feminine element. To think that I've been all this time guessing it. The woman is the key of the ultimate lock."

They passed into the house.

I eased my grip on Pamela.

"What a pity it was spoiled!" she cried. "That time it was going to happen; and we should have known."

"What?" said I.

"Wonderful things. All there is to know. I felt it," she said softly.

# Chapter XVIII
# Marks Talks Again

WITH THE light of day came doubt again. Nothing real had happened the night before; there had only been illusion. All of us, watchers and celebrants alike, had been strung up by the ritual to the highest pitch of emotion. At that height of emotion, that tenseness of the nerves any illusion, the most complete hallucinations were possible – hallucinations not only of the sight but of all the senses.

Again, why had the flight of some of the celebrants prevented, or checked, the revelation? Was it necessary that all of them should be present, united in a single effort of all their wills, in order to let loose a Lord of the Abyss? Or was it that the presence of all of them, acting and reacting on one another, was necessary to the fullness of illusion?

Again and again I assured myself that that was the truth of the matter, that the final result of this process of stimulating the emotions to an ecstasy was only illusion. Yet in spite of the vigor and perseverance with which I assured myself of this, I could not bring myself to believe it. In my heart of hearts I believed that I had twice seen the loosing of the creatures of the Abyss, that at this last celebration of the rites I had nearly seen the loosing of one of its Lords.

When the next evening I found Pamela white and listless after the stress of emotion, I set vigorously about assuring her that nothing

had really happened, or been about to happen; there had been nothing but illusion.

She would have none of it.

"No, no," she said. "It wasn't illusion; it wasn't hallucination. A wonderful real thing nearly happened; and it would have happened if those cowards hadn't run away."

There was no moving her from this position; she at any rate was convinced. Her conviction would have had more weight with me had she not lived so long in the atmosphere of No. 19.

I wanted the opinion of Marks on the matter, if I could get it. He had been in the very midst of it all. He had seen whatever had happened. And I could trust his sceptical judgment to give me the truth of the matter as far as the human mind could. But I doubted that he would give me his opinion; and I thought that if I invited him to spend the evening with me, he might come to his guard, with sealed lips. I might get it from him by a careless question.

This summer I had been to very few meetings of the New Bohemians. I had preferred to spend the evenings with Pamela. It seemed to me that I was most likely to find him off his guard there.

On the Sunday I found, or fancied I found, a new and somewhat pressing reason for getting the truth of the matter. I found that I could no longer read in my garden; I could not even walk about in it in any comfort. An inexplicable but very real uneasiness invaded me. I had not sat in my chair five minutes when a sudden cold

chill ran down my back; and my scalp prickled. I started up, looked about, and listened. I looked to hear the brushing sound of the beast dragging its pendulous belly over the lawn of No. 19. There was no sound. Then it flashed on me that there was indeed no sound. The sparrows had gone. No flutter of wings, no twitter, no chirp came to my ears from all the length of the gardens. The brooding hush which so often hung over the Walden Road at night, had fallen on the gardens in the daylight. I listened and listened. Far away I heard the faint rattle of an electric train; I heard nothing nearer. I listened for three or four minutes, striving to hear a reassuring sound from one of the empty gardens. I heard none; then from one of the gardens at the top of the road came a short, uneasy howl of a dog.

It gave me a most unpleasant thrill; and my scalp prickled again. I stood waiting, very still, expectant of I knew not what; and as I waited the silent garden grew more and more oppressive with a vague sense of horror. At last I could endure it no longer, and I went into the house.

Half an hour later I called for Pamela to take her to Richmond. She had nearly recovered from the last celebration of the rites, and came out smiling with shining eyes. I did not tell her of my fancy about my garden, that its air was charged with oppression. There was no use making her uneasy. But in the train she fell thoughtful, frowning.

"What's the matter?" I said presently.

"There's something gone wrong with the garden," she said. "It's grown uncomfortable – horrible. I can't stay in it."

This was bad hearing indeed. I was not alone in my impression.

"Do you think there's going to be an irruption from the Abyss? Is that beast, or whatever it was, coming again?" I said.

"It doesn't feel like that – as if something were coming. It feels as if the horror were already there," she said slowly, with knitted brow. "Besides, I felt it first yesterday morning; and if the beast had been coming, it would have come and gone by now."

"That's probable. But I tell you what; the garden hasn't yet recovered from the rites," I said in a cheering tone.

"It isn't that," she said. "It's grown worse since yesterday."

It continued to grow worse; and even more disquieting, the oppression and the sense of horror began to spread. It invaded No. 19. Pamela said that the house was growing horrible; it made her shiver as she went about it. Only her bedroom was not infected; in it she was untroubled. Naturally she fell into the way of spending all her time not devoted to household service, in her bedroom; all the time, that is, she was in the house. At my suggestion – she needed no urging – she spent most of her time out of doors, taking her book or her sewing to one of the green open spaces which adorn Hertford Park, or even to Kew Gardens.

Then the oppression of horror invaded the road itself. At night the brooding hush, grown deeper, always rested on it now, save when a strong wind blew, and the rustling and creaking of the trees in the big garden on the other side of the road broke it. I

came to crave for strong winds, though they spoiled my tennis. When I came half-way down the road after sunset, the oppression fell on me. I felt that I was drawing nearer to some awful, malefic presence. I never knew when I should reach my gate with the cold chills racing down my back. Sometimes I bolted into my house.

It is odd, and inexplicable, that the horror never invaded my house or Pamela's bedroom. It disposed of a suspicion I had been inclined to entertain that she and I were the cause of one another's horror. That having grown so close to one another, we infected one another in some obscure way, with our fancies. Together in the road the sense of lowering horror weighed on us in all its fullness; together in my house we were quite free from it. I grew impatient indeed for the meeting of the New Bohemians that I might consult Marks.

On the Thursday morning Mrs. Ringrose added the crowning touch. She brought in my bacon, and instead of bustling out of the room, she stood looking at me uneasily, and shuffled her feet.

"Well, Mrs. Ringrose, what do you want to say to me?" I said smiling at her.

"It's the garden, sir," she said, and paused, rolling up her hands in her apron.

"Well, what about the garden?" I said.

"It gives me the creeps – when I go out into it," she said; and she looked at me with an air of apology for her folly.

"Does it?" I said.

"It's bad enough in the daytime, sir. But at night it's that horrible. Of course you'll think as it's an old woman's fancies; but I never had no such fancies before," she added quickly.

"Fancies are very distressing things," I said. "I tell you what; if you will put all the rubbish into a pail at night, I'll empty it into the dustbin myself. Then you needn't go into the garden after dark."

Her face brightened, but she said, "I don't like to trouble you, sir – I don't really."

"Oh, that's all right. I don't mind. There's no reason why you should be distressed, even if it is fancy."

She thanked me; and we let it go at that.

Marks came late to the New Bohemians; indeed, I had almost given up hope of his coming. When he came, he seemed to me to have lost something of his usual firm serenity. He was absentminded, apt to fall into deep thought, and his sonorous laugh only rang out once during the rest of the meeting.

When it came to an end, I came out with him, and asked him to walk with me to the top of Regent Street, for I wanted to talk to him.

We walked to the middle of Trafalgar Square in silence; then I said abruptly, "Has Woodfell been raising one of those principalities of the Abyss you talked about?"

"I don't know – I don't know," he said slowly and rather wearily. "One is worked up to such a stress of emotion that one doesn't know – one can't know. The intelligence – the reasoning powers are in the abeyance."

"Well, I believe he has. There has always been something wrong – an uncanniness – about the Walden Road; now it is growing unbearable. It's full of horror."

"What's this? What's this?" he said quickly. "Oh, you'd better come home with me and thresh the matter out quietly!"

"I had rather you come to my place. I don't like to be away from it at night, because of Miss Woodfell. I didn't want to leave it tonight; but I had to come to the New Bohemians to find you.

"Very good; let's go to your place. I shall feel this horror for myself – or I shan't."

With that I hailed a taxicab; we got into it, and drove to the Walden Road.

As I paid the cabman, he said with a shiver, "This is a rum neighborhood, guv'ner – shivery I calls it." And he swung round his cab and went off at full speed.

Marks stood still with his head raised as if he were abandoning himself to an impression.

"You were right about the horror," he said, and followed me hastily into the house.

"Why it isn't here," he said in the hall.

"No, it hasn't invaded this house yet," I said; and we went into my study.

I mixed whisky and soda; he stood by the mantelpiece, and filled his giant pipe.

Then he sat down in an easy chair, and said, "We'd better begin by clearing the ground. How much do you know of our attempts to get to the heart of the Mysteries?"

I began by telling him of the beast in the garden; then I told him of my watch upon the celebration of the rites – of course I did not tell him that Pamela had watched them with me – then I told him of the rich man's lesson.

I ended by saying, "And I believe that now Woodfell has unloosed one of the principalities of the Abyss."

"It may be," he said slowly. "But where is the Abyss? Is it in ourselves – in each of us? Is it outside us – in the heart of Nature? There is very little in what you have told me against its being inside us; for, look you, it is not only the tricks that the human mind plays itself, it is also the tricks that human mind can play on human mind. Take the matter of the beast in the garden. Woodfell wanted no neighbor. At that time he certainly wanted no neighbor, though now he has grown reconciled to your

presence next door to him, as is plain from what he has said to me about you, and from his visits."

"Also he has given his consent to my marriage with Miss Woodfell," I said.

"Indeed? Accept my congratulations," said Marks gravely. "But at the time of your vision, or as you call it exactly your impression, of this beast in the garden of No. 19, he wanted to get rid of you. Your terror was so utter that, had you been the average man, he would have succeeded. Now, as you must have observed, Woodfell has acquired an extraordinary power of imposing his mind on the minds of others. No really open-minded man of science nowadays denies the existence of that power. I tell you that Woodfell could have sat in his study and imposed the impression of that beast on your mind. A human mind playing a trick on a human mind."

"Oh, but the rats, the sparrows! And Miss Woodfell called him to the garden!" I cried.

"Yes; but we are dealing with a force of whose working we know very little. The effort which imposed the impression on you may also have imposed it on every sentient being near. And Woodfell has cultivated the power to an extraordinary degree."

"Ah, but you should have heard his voice – the uncertainty in it – when he began his exorcism," I said.

"Yes; there is that," he said thoughtfully. "But Woodfell wanted to frighten you away; and he may be a better actor than we dream."

"That I don't believe," I said, thinking of his outspoken rages.

"I don't say that he is. I am putting forward the explanation that the Abyss is within us," said Marks.

"The beast in the garden is but one thing," I said. "What about this growing, threatening horror?"

"That is new to me – quite new, said Marks knitting his brow. "But again we all of us suffered a great shock the other night. Five of us were terrified beyond words. They got to the end of the road in their robes before Blumenthal recovered himself and pulled them up. In all their minds that horror lingers; and their thoughts are continually on this place. Why shouldn't that horror infect us? Besides, you and I witnessed the celebration of the rites; our minds are open to it. Why should not that be it?"

"You heard what the cabman said."

"Yes; I heard," said Marks with a sigh.

"And my housekeeper, a very deaf old woman with a failing mind, feels the horror and daren't go into the garden."

"Is that so?"

"Yes; and why doesn't the horror invade this house, or Miss Woodfell's bedroom?"

He shook his head: "That is indeed inexplicable," he said.

We were silent a while.

"Look here," I said. "What did happen on the night of the full moon? Tell me."

"I don't know – upon my soul! I don't know. Either we were on the verge of the final revelation or the final illusion."

"Well, I'll tell you what I believe," I said gloomily. "I believe that the Abyss is surging behind a very frail barrier – surging to get at us. And the barrier is growing frailer."

"I don't know," said Marks heavily.

We were silent again. I rose and filled our glasses, which had long been empty.

Then I said, "What do you advise me to do?"

"If I were you, I should clear out. I should really – and at once," he said firmly.

"That's all very well," I said. "But I'm not a rich man. I can't afford to buy another house; and if I could, I shouldn't find one to suit me like this – not one within my means – even if I could sell this one; and that I should not be justified in doing."

"Never mind, clear out. What shall it profit a man?" said Marks stubbornly.

"Is it as bad as that?" I said.

"I don't know. These are the forbidden things."

"But there is also Miss Woodfell. I can't leave her," I said.

"Get her away, too; and be quick about it."

"I doubt that she would leave her uncle in this danger. And would he let her go? She is useful to him," I said.

"He would not. He never lets anything interfere with his quest. He won't want a change now," said Marks with conviction. Then he added thoughtfully. "But after all you are safe till the full moon."

Marks was wrong.

# Chapter XIX
# Marks Fortifies No. 20

I HAD drawn little comfort from Marks, for I could not persuade myself that his explanation, that we were victims of illusion, was the true one. I could indeed believe that it was illusion when I was in the bustling city. It seemed incredible enough that under the vaults of the Bank was the seething Abyss, full of malefic powers and principalities; human energy in action and the results of human energy held the mind. But when I came, half-way down the Walden Road, into a heavy air charged with horror and menace it was a very different matter.

And the horror was spreading and deepening. By the end of the next week I entered its chill at the very beginning of the road. Of course I had come to look for it; and it may have been that my fancy found what I looked for. But I observed that whereas on my way from the station in the evening I had been used to find half a dozen children, from the inhabited houses at the top of it, playing up and down the quiet *cul-de-sac,* I now never found one. They were either in the main road or indoors. It seemed to me, too, that the women in those inhabited houses were oftener at the windows, and that they looked at me as I passed with eyes eloquent with a nervous questioning.

No. 19 itself was growing more and more intolerable with the deepening horror. Pamela was careful to get all her housework done early in the day, to set her uncle's meals ready for him, and get out of the house. When she went back at night, she raced

along the hall and upstairs to her bedroom as hard as she could go.

In her bedroom she escaped from the horror. That room and the whole of my house, fortunately, but for no reason that we could hit on, remained free from its oppression.

And oh, the emptying of that rubbish into the dust-bin at night! I-low I loathed it! On the first two nights I emptied the pail in the dark. Then I bought a lantern and set it outside the back-door. That made it a little better; I was quicker about it. But the horrible things I felt lurking beyond the circle of its light!

Naturally enough this horror was wearing on our nerves; but Pamela bore it with admirable courage. Only on the Sunday night did she fail. We had cleared our minds of these fancies and terrors by a long day in the country; so clear had we got them that when we came into Walden Road the horror seemed to have lifted a little. I came with her to the door of No. 19; we bade one another goodnight and she opened the door.

"I'll shut it," I said. "You make your dash upstairs."

The light in the hall was low; she made a few swift steps down it, turned, ran back to me, and clutched my arm.

"The shadows! The shadows again!" she cried.

I looked over her head; and I saw that indeed the light in the hall was darkened by shapeless shadows.

I shut the door sharply.

"What's to be done now? Has something happened to your uncle?" I said; and I rapped at the window of his study.

We heard the reassuring sound of footsteps crossing the floor; Woodfell opened the window with a jerk and looked at us with an impatient frown on his face. The lights in the room were burning clear enough.

"The shadows have come back. The hall is full of them," I said.

"Oh, those night-birds. They don't matter. For goodness' sake, don't you young people interrupt me!" And he shut the window.

"He hasn't slept in his bed for a week. He's working – working – working," said Pamela.

"But what's to be done about you? You may have to go through those dreadful shadows all the way," I said.

Pamela shivered.

"I'd better come with you to the door of your room. No; I have it! Why on earth didn't we think of it before? You can go to bed without having to pass through these horrors at all – along the gutter."

"Of course I can," said Pamela in a tone of great relief.

We went into No. 20, and talked for half an hour in my study. Then we went up to the top of the house, out of the window, and along the gutter.

I helped her over the partition wall, and said, "Make sure that there are no shadows in your room."

She climbed into the window; and presently she put out her head and said, "It's all right. There are no shadows here, nor any horror. Besides, I shouldn't be frightened of them now that uncle says that they don't matter."

I was glad that she was at her ease; but I was not at ease myself. They might not be harmful to Woodfell with his powers, and yet harm others less gifted.

After bringing in my breakfast next morning Mrs. Ringrose lingered, fidgeting about the room, straightening the curtains; then she said: "I know you'll think me a silly old woman, sir; but I can't stummick that garden at any price. I must dry my washing in the kitchen, sir."

"Send it all to the laundry," I said.

"No, no, sir. I couldn't bring myself to do that. It's part of my work; and I'll do it. But into that garden I cannot go; and that's a fac'."

"Well, well, manage as best you can without going into it. It will grow all right again soon."

"Thank you, sir," she said, and left me.

After breakfast Pamela came in to walk with me, as she often did, to the station.

"There are no shadows this morning, Heine dear. So you needn't worry about me at all today. They're only night-birds, as uncle said," she said cheerfully.

"That's good hearing, at any rate," I said. "But I take it that the horror hasn't lifted."

"It's uncomfortable enough. But I shall soon be out of it and off to Kew," she said.

"You ought to go away. Marks advised me to get you away from No. 19 at once. It's the best thing to do."

"Oh, it would be nice!" she cried with a great sigh of relief at the thought. Then her face fell; and she added slowly, "But it's impossible. I can't leave uncle just now, Heine dear. I can't indeed. No one would stay in the house an hour. I must look after him."

It was true. No one would stay in that house an hour. I could not bid her desert him.

Then the solution of this difficulty flashed on me: "Then we won't wait till the autumn. We'll get married at once; and you can look after him from this house. We'll get married on the morning of the full moon. You will be safe till then."

She protested a little, flushing, that it was too soon; but presently she yielded; and so it was decided.

That evening I tried to see Woodfell to tell him what we proposed to do; but he would not see me, declaring that he could not spare a minute from his work. It fell therefore to Pamela to tell him; and she told him next morning when he came into his dining-room to eat his breakfast.

He gave her half an ear, and said quickly, "Yes, yes; do as you like. But don't bother me about it."

But now that the matter was arranged I filled with a greater anxiety about Pamela than ever. I filled with a racking dread that the cup of my happiness should be dashed from my lips even as I raised it to them.

I began to watch the garden of No. 19 at nights after Pamela had gone back into it along the gutter. It was no wonder that, with my nerves thus on edge, that it should seem to me full of strange sounds, that creatures murmured and whispered to one another under the sycamores. One night I could have sworn that I heard a snigger – snigger is the only word for it – at the bottom of the garden. As I watched, the belief grew and grew that the cupola was the very center of the spreading horror, that under it lay the mouth of the Abyss.

In my anxiety I turned to Marks for help. I went round to his rooms on my way home from the office one evening, and by good fortune found him at home.

When I had told him of the deepening of the horror and the coming of the shadows, I said: "I've come to see whether you can't make it safer for us, for Miss Woodfell and myself. We believe that the amulets you gave us have proved potent. Is there no way of making us safe against the irruption of any of the greater powers of the Abyss? These amulets may not hold them in check. Is there any way you could make my house safe against them?"

Marks pondered for a couple of minutes; then he said, "We know nothing about the principalities of the Abyss. Once unloosed – of course I'm taking it that the Abyss is not within us – there may be no holding them. One can only try; and since I'm in part responsible, I'll do all I can. But can't you get away and get Miss Woodfell away, at any rate for a time?"

"We're going to be married on the morning of the full moon; and we shall be out of the Walden Road that night," I said.

"That's good; that's good," said Marks with an air of relief.

"But couldn't you make my house immune in the meantime? I should be awfully obliged if you could. My feeling that the Abyss is surging against a very frail barrier grows stronger and stronger; and I'm afraid, very much afraid for Miss Woodfell.

"Yes; yes; it's natural. I'll try my best. Where there is a process there is always a counter-process. And even if the counter-process should in itself be ineffectual, it will give you and Miss Woodfell more confidence; and that is always a gain."

"A thousand thanks," I said.

"I'll come round tomorrow afternoon, if that will suit you – at four o'clock."

"I'll leave the office at 3:00 and be there," I said.

"And I think it would be a good thing, if you and Miss Woodfell were to put those amulets under your pillows at night, or better still, if you were always to wear them. There is some way of sewing documents in oilskin bags to wear them."

"I'll see to it," I said.

"Of course, I'm assuming in all this that the Abyss is outside us."

"Yes; I understand that," I said. "And I believe, or at any rate I nearly believe that it is. Whether it is, or not, I want to be on the safe side."

"There's no harm in that. And for my part, I believe that before the setting of the next full moon, I shall know. Woodfell is going to tighten his grip on our friends. There will be no more running away."

I thanked him and left him. It was raining when I left his rooms; and when I reached home, I found that Pamela was in my study, reading; for we had arranged that if it rained she should not go to No. 19 for shelter, but at once take refuge in my house. After dinner it was fine again; and we strolled to the High Street and bought some oilskin, of which she made two bags to hold the

amulets. We arranged that she should come to meet Marks on the morrow.

Marks came at four o'clock; and I introduced him to Pamela. After we had talked awhile of the oppression of horror and menace which had fallen on the Walden Road, we went out into the garden, all three of us, that he might experience it in its full intensity. The oppression was heavy indeed, even in the bright sunshine. In spite of the three of us being in the garden together and talking – in hushed voices – I at any rate had the strongest sense of a threatening horror in its air, and two or three times my scalp prickled. Pamela held my arm, tightly; and once I saw Marks shiver: Marks who should have been hardened, by many celebrations of the rite of the Abyss to such a sensation.

"You feel it?" I said.

"I feel it. There is indeed a menace in the air," he said gravely.

"Surely no human minds working on ours could impose on them a sensation as strong as this," I said.

"There are dreadful creatures about. Can't you feel them?" said Pamela quickly.

"The human mind plays strange tricks on the human mind; and our friends who ran away were horribly frightened," said Marks stoutly.

"Let's go in," said Pamela with a little shiver; and her face was rather white.

We walked quietly back into the house. I could have bolted into it; and I am not ashamed to confess it.

I shut the door; and I shut the horror out.

"This is the odd thing, that this house should be free from the menace, that a mere physical barrier like this door should shut it out."

"The powers of the Abyss are not interested in this house, thank goodness," I said. "None the less I should be glad to have it fortified against them."

"Well, I've thought it over; and I am of the opinion that considering that this Lord of the Abyss seems to be inclined to manifest himself in a physical form, it should be enough to fortify the paths of access to the house, the windows and the doors on the ground floor. And didn't you say that there is an access along the gutter to the windows at the top?"

"Yes; in front," I said.

"Well, we will bar that, too. But besides, I will make you an inner citadel, in the form of a circle whose circumference no power of darkness can cross – according, that is, to those who spent their lives in the practice of the occult art."

With that he set about his task, beginning with the door into the garden. Muttering an adjuration or a prayer, in a Latin I could not follow, though I caught the words *"Reges Abyssi"* three times, and

the names of the Archangels, and accompanying the adjuration with certain symbolic gestures, he drew with chalk on the threshold three mystical figures, one of which was the pentacle. The others I did not know.

"This chalk will not rub out easily," he said as he rose. "It is the chalk with which lithographers draw on their stones."

The figures are still on my thresholds, fainter, but plain enough.

He went next to the front door, repeated the adjuration and drew again the figures; and in my study, at the windows, he did the same. Then he went upstairs and fortified the windows of the two front rooms which give out on to the gutter, the path to No. 19.

"I am of the opinion that that is sufficient," he said when he had done. "But in these matters it is foolish indeed to take any chances. Where shall I draw the impregnable circle?"

We decided that my study was the best place since we could most easily escape from it into the road. We went down to it; I drew the carpet which covered the middle of it; and after the same adjuration and gestures he drew a circle ten feet across. He then drew lines which divided it into seven parts; and in each part he drew mystical figures.

"There, in that you are safe. All the powers of darkness may rage round that circle, but they cannot cross its rim. What is more the influence of no human mind can pass into that circle to influence yours."

He spoke gravely, even with solemnity; and for my part I believed that he had indeed made us a citadel, either by some occult power or by his will.

I thanked him, heartily; and he turned to Pamela and said: "But lose no time getting into this house, Miss Woodfell. If you are invaded by any sudden, inexplicable terror, lose no time getting into this house and into this circle. Use all your will to get out of your uncle's house into this one."

"I will; I will indeed," said Pamela.

"Of course you would only be frightened, not harmed physically; but a severe fright is a dangerous thing. Therefore lose no time. Don't let the terror get its full grip on you."

"I will be very quick," she said.

I asked him whether I could roll the carpet over the circle; and he said that it might well be covered up during the daytime, but that it would be wiser to have it uncovered, an instant refuge, between sunset and cock-crow. It was a great relief to my anxiety about Pamela, in spite of his firm belief that we were safe till the night of the full moon, to have this safe asylum ready to our need.

Marks dined with us; and he talked little about the occult. Plainly he wished to divert Pamela's mind from the terrors that surrounded us. He did not know her steady courage. At ten o'clock she went to bed; and when I returned to him he

congratulated me on my good fortune in being about to marry such a charming girl.

We talked for a while; then he said, "I should like to examine your garden again before I go. I want to know how bad it is at night."

I took him into the dining-room and opened the door into the garden. He stood on the threshold for a couple of minutes; then he said in a satisfied tone, "The oppression does not pass the signs."

He walked a few steps down the garden and stood still. I did not follow him; I had my fill of the oppression.

Presently he came back quickly, with a troubled face: "It is bad – very bad," he said. "But of course it *would* be worse at night."

"It seems to me that it is very likely to help spoil the celebration of the rites at the full moon," I said. "If these timid friends of yours have to begin them in this horror, their nerves will be all to pieces long before the culmination of the rite; and they'll bolt again."

"The wine of the feast will strengthen them for one thing; and for another Woodfell will have them in his grip," said Marks.

# Chapter XX
# The Eve of the Full Moon

TWO EVENINGS later Pamela came in wearing a very cheerful air: "Uncle has done something to the house," she said. "He has driven the shadows and the horror out of it. When I came home this afternoon, before I came in here, I went into it to get my sewing; and I found it quite clear and comfortable. He had been burning incense; and the house was full of its scent."

"Good," I said. "He has performed some ceremony of purification and purged the house. I wish to goodness he'd purify the garden and the road – drive the shadows right back into the Abyss."

"Yes; the road is bad," she said.

I think that Woodfell had purged No. 19 to make it bearable to the other initiates; for during the next week not an evening passed without one or other of them coming to No. 19. Sometimes two of them came in an evening, but never two of them together. The rich man, the bearded dilettante, and the man like a battered Apollo seemed to feel the oppressive menace in the air of the road deeply; for they came down it on halting feet with anxious faces, looking about them with frightened eyes.

Two others did not show signs of fright; but they seemed to find the road uncomfortable enough, for they came down it at a brisk pace, frowning. The red-headed man came down it at a

shambling trot. Even Helen Ranger came down it with a troubled air.

Pamela said that her uncle was working and working, that he hardly ever left his study, and slept, if indeed he did sleep, on the sofa in it. It seemed to me very unwise of him to put this strain on himself; surely he would need all his strength for the celebration of the rites.

One evening as I was coming from the station I met Helen Ranger at the top of the Walden Road.

We stopped and greeted one another; and I said, "You've become quite a frequent visitor to this neighborhood."

"Oh, yes; Mr. Woodfell and I are great friends. But he does make me work hard," she said, smiling.

"Makes you work? What at?" I said.

She hesitated; then she said, "At rehearsing."

Rehearsing what?" I said.

"Ah, that would be telling," she said, smiling. "But I say, what a creepy road this is. I wonder you can bear to live in it. Don't you find it awfully wearing?"

"You find it creepy, do you?" said I.

"Yes; I do. And it grows worse every time I come. I am glad to get out of it."

"I've noticed something of the kind myself," I said. "So you haven't taken that cottage in the country after all."

"Oh, yes; I have. I've taken one at Chipperfield as you advised. I've furnished it; and next week I shall get away to it. Oh, I shall be glad to be in the country again! But I must hurry home; I've a lot of work to do tonight." And smiling, she bade me goodbye, and hurried up the road.

I was glad that she had found something to fill her time and her mind, even though it were this tampering with the forbidden things. Work is so good for women; it keeps them, even more than it keeps men, out of mischief.

It had never occurred to me that so much work as this attached to the office of a celebrant of one of the rites; but after what she had said it grew plain enough that there must be. Each of them would not only have to learn, in a strange tongue, the actual rite which he celebrated; but he would have to be able to follow roughly the general invocation and make his responses in the other rites also in strange tongues. I could not see any good reason for celebrating the rites each in a different tongue; it seemed to me to mean a mere increase of work and a needless increase. I resolved to ask Marks the reason of it.

On the eve of the full moon and of our marriage Pamela dined with me as usual; and after dinner when we came into my study, I did not trouble to switch on the electric light; but we sat in the

twilight talking. The wind was rising and blowing up heavy clouds. We did not talk much; we were too full of the morrow, expectant and joyful.

Once I said that I wished that I were taking her away for our honeymoon, for a month, or at any rate for a week. She said that it would have been delightful, but it was impossible for her to leave her uncle at this crisis; and at any rate it would be very nice to stay at the Hyde Park Hotel and then come back to No. 20 and not to No. 19.

"At any rate we will have a month out of London in September," I said.

It was at half past nine that we heard footsteps come down the street and go into the garden of No. 19. There was a knock at its door; and we heard it open.

"Here I am, punctual to the minute," said the voice of the rich man. "It's the last rehearsal; and I believe I have it pat at last."

"Yes; thank heavens! It *is* the last rehearsal. It's weary work – in this strain, too," said Woodfell. "Come in."

His hoarse voice rang weary, utterly weary; and I thought with some disquiet of what Marks had said of the sorcerer growing too weak to hold in check the powers he had let loose.

"Your uncle's voice sounds as if he were very tired," I said.

"Oh, he *is* tired. He looks utterly worn out," said Pamela.

"They must need a great deal of coaching in those rites – seven or eight strange tongues. Oh, I shall be glad when the full moon has come and gone and this is all over!" I said.

"If it is all over. They may fail tomorrow night, and have to try again. But it won't matter to us whether they fail or succeed," she said.

"Not directly, thank goodness," I said, and I kissed her.

At ten o'clock she went to bed, going to her bedroom along the gutter, since she did not wish to risk meeting the rich man in the hall of No. 19. When I opened the window of my front room the sky was dark; and the wind was roaring in the trees of the big garden opposite.

"I do hope that it won't be too wet to celebrate the rites tomorrow night," said Pamela.

"They'll celebrate the rites tomorrow night wet or fine," I said.

I helped her through the window and over the partition wall; kissed her; and watched her climb safely through her window. She called out goodnight to me; I came back; and went down to my study.

I read, or rather read and dreamed of Pamela, till a few minutes to twelve. Then I put away my book, wheeled my easy chair, carelessly enough, into the middle of the magic circle, switched off the light, and came out of the room. The wind seemed to have

died down. I went into my dining-room, and feeling a little hungry, took a biscuit out of the tin, and began to eat it.

It was very still on this side of the house; and I had just finished the biscuit when I heard heavy footsteps come crunching along the gravel path in the garden of No. 19. They were too heavy to be Woodfell's. They must be the footsteps of the rich man; and I thought to myself that he must have a great deal more pluck than I had given him credit for, to be out in that garden at night. Also I thought that, judging from the heaviness of his tread, he must weigh nearly eighteen stone.

I put away the biscuit tin, switched off the light, and came out into the hall. Through the wall there came, muffled, the sound of the heavy footsteps in the hall of No. 19.

"Why, the man *does* weigh eighteen stone," I said to myself, pausing. I stood still at the foot of the stairs, disquieted, listening with all my ears, uneasy.

The footsteps came back down the hail and began to mount the stairs, slowly. An odd fancy seized me that there was something wrong about them, something sinister in their muffled fall.

Without thinking, I kept pace with them up my own stairs. I had come to the top of the first flight, with my uneasiness growing, when on a sudden I filled with the sense, the certainty rather, that something was very wrong indeed – appallingly wrong.

I did not stop to consider what it might be; I rushed up the rest of the stairs as hard as I could go; scrambled out of the window and along the gutter to the partition wall.

"Pamela! Pamela!" I cried in a high shrieking voice. "Pamela! Pamela!"

Almost on the instant she was leaning out of her window, a white blur on the darkness.

"What is it?" she cried in a scared voice. "What is that coming up the stairs?"

"Quick! Get out! Come along! Just as you are! Don't bother about a dressing-gown! Quick! Oh, be quick!"

She was out of her window and, under the spur of fear, ran along the gutter. I half lifted, half dragged her over the partition wall; and as I did it, I heard the door of her bedroom crash in.

I carried her along the gutter; slipped her through my window; scrambled in after her without a glance behind me; drew the window to, and fastened it. Then we ran out of the room and down the stairs. Half-way down them I heard the clash of a broken pane.

"The circle!" I cried.

"Your ulster!" cried Pamela.

I snatched it from its peg as we ran through the hall; and we were inside the circle.

With an arm round Pamela, clasping her tight to me, I strained my ears for the sound of the sinister feet coming down the stairs. The house was silent.

"What are we to do? Oh, what are we to do?" muttered Pamela with a little sob.

"Wait," I said. "Wait and listen. The mystic signs may hold it back;" and I gripped her tighter to me.

We waited. My mouth was very dry; and my heart was hammering against my ribs. We stood for what seemed years – I dare say it was five minutes – straining our ears. Twice I could have sworn I heard stealthy, slinking feet on the stairs; and my heart leaped to my mouth.

Then I did hear a noise; through the wall of the hall came muffled the sound of the slow footfall, coming down the staircase of No. 19.

"Thank heaven, the signs hold! The house is safe!" I cried. With a gasp of relief Pamela sank into the easy chair.

The footsteps came along the hall and passed into Woodfell's study.

"Heavens, what an escape!" I said. "If I had been fifteen seconds later!"

"I had just awakened and heard the footsteps on the stairs when you called," said Pamela.

I wiped the sweat from my forehead; then I said, "You won't leave this circle before morning. But I don't see why we should sit in darkness."

"The ulster – have you got the ulster?" said Pamela quickly.

"Here it is," said I. She stood up; and I slipped it on her.

Then I switched on the electric light; and Pamela was blushing. Her little bare feet peeped out from under the bottom of the ulster.

We listened again.

"It's gone into Uncle's study," said Pamela.

"It? Why do you say it? It's he – that big, fat, offensive blackguard, the rich man," I said.

Pamela shook her head.

"It must be," I said. "And I can't for the life of me conceive how he came to give us this kind of fright. But I must wrap you up warm."

I did not at the moment feel inclined for a discussion; my heart was beating too quickly. I took the rug from the couch and wrapped it round her knees. Then I fetched the biscuits from the

next room, for I was resolved that she, at any rate, should not leave the circle before the dawn. I drew another easy chair beside hers and set a little table also in the circle and put brandy and soda on it and the biscuits. Every few seconds I stopped to listen with all my ears. There were faint sounds in No. 19; it seemed to me that the door of Woodfell's study was open.

I had just arranged everything for our comfort, when there came the sound of a hurried knocking at the front door of No. 19.

I ran to the window; and in spite of Marks' injunction to keep it closed from sunset to cock-crow, I threw it open and leaned out. I saw dimly that a woman stood at the door of No. 19.

"Don't go in! For God's sake, don't go into that house tonight! There's something wrong – something horribly wrong in it!" I cried.

"Oh, it's all right, Mr. Plowden," said the voice of Helen Ranger. "I'm not frightened. Mr. Woodfell will see that *I* don't come to any harm."

"Nevertheless don't go in – not tonight. Wait till tomorrow," I entreated.

"Oh, I assure you it's all right. I know all about it," she said a little impatiently.

The door of No. 19 opened; and she stood smiling at me in the blaze of light.

"Pan is not dead," said Woodfell in a thick voice; and he laughed an odd, vacant laugh. It chilled me.

"You see; it's all right," cried Helen Ranger gaily; she went into No. 19; and the door was shut.

I shut the window; stepped quickly back into the circle; and held my breath, listening.

A sudden, shrill cry came through the wall.

"What are we to do? What on earth are we to do?" I cried, wringing my hands.

"There's nothing to be done – nothing," said Pamela with a sob.

"The police?" I said.

"They could do nothing," said Pamela in a hopeless voice.

I sank heavily into the easy chair beside her, trying to think of some hopeful action to take. I could think of nothing. I could not bring myself to leave Pamela and go to No. 19. I could not. Besides, either my going would be useless, or there was no reason to go at all.

We sat straining our ears, muttering now and again speculations about what was happening in No. 19. We heard no sound. Woodfell must have shut the door of his study.

After a while I began to try to reassure Pamela and myself, urging that after all, if something had, as seemed probable from the rich man's daring, happened to Woodfell himself, Helen Ranger had nothing to fear from the rich man; I was quite sure that she was more than a match for him.

But Pamela only said, "It wasn't the rich man."

The sense of our helplessness was wearing indeed; and it was a weary watch. No sound came from No. 19. In the middle of our match I made Pamela drink some weak brandy and soda and eat some biscuits; and I did the same myself.

Soon afterwards she fell asleep; and I sat, listening still, in a heavy depression, the sense of dreadful fatality heavy on me, helpless, bound to my chair by the necessity of not leaving Pamela unprotected.

At last the window blinds began to glimmer. I rose, stiff and cold, drew one of them up, opened the window, and leaned against it, letting the fresh air of the dawn blow on my face. The road was quiet but for the twittering of the waking birds in the tree-tops above the opposite wall.

I turned to Pamela; she was sleeping easily, half a smile on her face. I was smiling myself to see her, when far away a cock crowed.

On the instant there was a loud crash in No. 19, a crash which shook both houses.

"What was that?" cried Pamela, starting awake.

"I think it is the end. Listen."

All was still.

# Chapter XXI
# In No. 19

FOR A while we listened without stirring; then I said, "You must go to bed."

"But I couldn't close my eyes in that house," she cried.

"Oh, not in your own house – here – in my room," I said; and I took her upstairs.

"I'm afraid this means that we shan't get married today," I said ruefully, at the door of my bedroom.

"Poor Heine, never mind," she said; and I kissed her.

I came downstairs and gave her time to fall asleep. Then I went to No. 19 find knocked at the door. No one came. I waited a while and knocked again, louder. No one came. As I waited I observed suddenly that the oppression and the menace had gone from the air of the road.

No one came to my knocking; and I considered what to do. I made up my mind that I would not fetch a policeman and break in. I have a lawyer's objection to the police; and if we could do without them, so much the better. It was plain that their coming could do no real good. Whatever had happened had happened; the harm was done; they would be too late.

It seemed to me that I had better have Marks with me when I did enter No. 19; and I looked at my watch. It was half-past four. Nothing can be done at half-past four in the morning. I went back to my study, pulled the rug over me, and lay quiet, full of heavy forebodings. Presently I fell asleep.

When I awoke the sun-rays were streaming in at the window. It was half-past six. I went up to the top of the house and found Mrs. Ringrose stirring. I came down and wrote a note to Marks bidding him come with all speed. When Mrs. Ringrose came downstairs, I gave her the note and some money, bade her take the first cab she came across, drive to Marks flat and bring him back with her.

Then, having seen her start, I lighted the kitchen fire that she might lose no time getting breakfast when she returned. When it had kindled, I went into the dining-room and looked out into the garden. Half-a-dozen sparrows were fluttering about the path, picking up the crumbs Mrs. Ringrose was used to throw out of the kitchen window for them. I opened the door and went out. I no longer stepped into the region of nightmare; the oppression and the menace had gone.

I looked up at the blank windows of No. 19, and felt that the passing of the horror was a very bad sign.

I went into the house and had a bath. When I came downstairs, the kettle was boiling and I made myself some tea. It was nearly half-past seven when a hansom clattered down the road, and Marks arrived.

I took him into my study and told him the events of the night. He listened with a very grave face, and heard me to the end without a question.

Then he said, "It looks bad – very bad."

"We can get into No. 19 whenever we want to along the gutter and through Miss Woodfell's room," I said.

"The sooner the better," said Marks. "But we may as well try the front door again first."

"Come along then," I said.

I knocked loudly at No. 19; and to my surprise heard a stir within. There was a shuffling footstep in the hall; the door opened; and Woodfell stood on the threshold, blinking as if just awakened.

He looked at us with vacant, unrecognizing eyes; said in a thick, slurring voice, "Pan is not dead;" and laughed a toneless, empty, silly laugh.

The man was mad.

We looked at one another blankly; he moved aside; and we went in. A faint, rank smell struck on my nostrils – the odor of the goat. I laid my hand on the handle of his study door; and with a shuffling run he stumbled half-way up the stairs and stopped, mowing and gibbering at me.

With an effort I turned the handle; we went into the study; and stopped short. Sprawled across the middle of the room, in the glare of the electric light, lay the great gray bulk of a statue; and underneath it, at right angles to it, lay the body of a woman, Helen Ranger. In the corner opposite the door lay the rich man, a huddled heap. The room smelt like a goat-pen.

I stepped forward with a startled cry, and dropped on my knees beside Helen Ranger. There was a smile on her white face; one arm lay outstretched on the floor, the other was round the statute, and her clenched fist rested on its back. There was no need to feel if her heart beat; a look assured me that she was quite dead. The heavy marble had toppled over on to the top of her, crushing in her chest, and killed her on the instant.

I rose and looked at Marks. He was staring somberly down on the fallen figures.

"The forbidden things," I said in a hushed voice.

He nodded.

I tried to push the statue off the dead girl. The hoofs and hairy legs and haunches showed it a statue of Pan. I could not stir it till Marks came to my help; and we rolled it clear of her. Then we raised her and laid her on the sofa.

My eyes fell on the face of the statue; and I shuddered. The sculptor, a great artist, had set himself to carve the face of the Pan of panic terror, the Pan who drove mad with fear those who beheld him; and he had not failed. An unspeakable, malign

fierceness veritably blazed from the carven features. Even in the cold stone it was beyond words terrible.

"Dreadful," I said softly. "Dreadful."

A wrap of Helen Ranger's lay over the back of the sofa. I picked it up; laid it over the face of the statue; and heaved a sigh of relief that it was veiled.

I crossed the room to the body of the rich man. His left arm covered his face; and from the attitude in which he lay, it looked to me as if he had crouched against the wall with his arm raised to shield his face and slowly slipped down, dead. I tried to lay him straight along the floor, but he had stiffened as he lay; then I saw his face. It was distorted into a mask of terror, utter, unspeakable terror.

I rose and faced Marks: "What are we to do?" I said.

"We must let his friends know at once," said Marks. "I suppose there will have to be an inquest and a scandal."

"There will have to be an inquest on Helen Ranger. But about this man, I don't know. I heard Woodfell say that he was a millionaire," I said thoughtfully.

"He is. He's Edward Murthwaite, head of the firm of Murthwaite, Carroll, and Murthwaite," said Marks.

"Then if we can get his friends here quickly, there should be no scandal," I said.

I stooped down, felt in the breast pocket of the dead man's coat, and found a pocket book. We came out of the room and left it to its silent occupants.

We went into the dining-room; and I searched the pocket book. I found Murthwaite's visiting cards, but better still I found a letter signed "Your affectionate brother, Reginald Murthwaite."

"Here's his brother's address. I'll wire to him at once. I must go into my own house for a form. Will you come, or will you wait here?" I said.

"I'll wait here," said Marks quickly.

I went into my own house, wrote out the wire: "Bad accident to Edward Murthwaite. Come at once, and bring first-class doctor. Plowden."

I despatched Mrs. Ringrose to the Post Office with it, and went back into No. 19. I called out to Marks; but he did not answer. I called again, and went into the dining-room. The door into the garden was open and Marks was at the end of the path, stamping heavily on the gravel. I watched him a moment; I took it that he might be stamping out mystic signs along the path to the altar. Then I went out, and said, "I've sent the wire."

"Good," said Marks.

I walked down the path. All the way down it were Marks' heel-marks, stamped into the gravel. I walked across the lawn and at

last stood before the cupola. It crowned a little building, some twelve feet high, a half-circle in stone, open towards the house. Drawn aside was a heavy leather curtain; and in the half-circle stood the statue's broad pedestal. Before it stood a little square altar two feet high. Looking closer I saw that on the wall behind the statue were carved strange symbols.

"There will be no more rites of the Abyss," I said.

"No," said Marks gravely.

We came back into the house and found Woodfell in the dining-room.

"Pan is not dead," he said in the same thick, slurring voice, and laughed the same vacant laugh.

"What happened last night?" I said in a clear voice, but with very little hope of an answer.

He looked at me with empty eyes, and said nothing.

"It's no use questioning him, I fear," said Marks.

"I fear not," said I.

Woodfell followed us upstairs. The rooms on the first floor were undisturbed. The large room in front was also furnished as a study; there was a large safe in one corner; the room at the back was Woodfell's bedroom. We went on upstairs. All up the staircase I observed the rank, musky smell, though the rooms on

the first floor were free of it. At the top of the stairs the door of Pamela's bedroom faced us. It had been driven in; and the lock was smashed.

"I should never have dreamed that Murthwaite was as strong as that," I said, turning to Marks.

"Murthwaite?" he said, looking at me oddly. "He was a big man, you know – a big man."

"Look here, for a man to do this kind of thing without hurting himself, he must be drunk. Yet Murthwaite was sober enough when he came. His voice was clear when he spoke to Woodfell," I said.

"There are more kinds of drunkenness than one. He may have been inspired – possessed – frenzied," said Marks.

Pamela's clothes lay, neatly folded, on a chair by the bed. I rolled them up in the coverlet; and we went downstairs.

In the hall I said, "There's nothing to be done till Murthwaite's friends come. We had better breakfast. I expect that we have a busy day before us."

"It would be as well," said Marks.

We came gloomily out of the house; the dreadful sight in Woodfell's study heavy on our minds.

In the garden I said, "This might have happened tonight. You've just missed it."

"Thank heaven!" said Marks fervently.

# Chapter XXII
# Marks Is Reticent

AS WE ate our breakfast I became aware that something in the nature of a veil had fallen between me and Marks. He was very grave, absorbed in his own thoughts. At first he could scarcely give me his attention at all. He ate as one in a dream; and at times his face wore an air of rapt amazement.

I set about trying to reconstruct the tragedy of the night; and at first I could not get him to listen to my suggestions and surmises.

But at last he seemed to be listening; and I said, "I can't understand what happened to Murthwaite. Did Woodfell suddenly turn weak and lose control? And was there a terrifying irruption of the Abyss? Or did Murthwaite get worked up to a state of frenzy by the rehearsal of the rite and take advantage of Woodfell's having turned weak to smash in the door of Miss Woodfell's room? He did persecute her rather a little while ago; but Woodfell stopped it."

"It's all very obscure," said Marks uneasily, as if he did not want to discuss the matter.

"I suppose we may take it that, in the overwrought state of their nerves, the horrible sight of the statue falling on that unfortunate girl drove Woodfell mad, and gave Murthwaite a shock which killed him."

"That's the most reasonable explanation," said Marks eagerly.

I paused, thinking, then I said, "Was it necessary to have the statue in the study when the initiates were rehearsing their rites? Was it always there?"

"Not always," said Marks reluctantly. "It has not been there when I've rehearsed my rite with Woodfell; but then I've never needed it. I've always known my rite."

"Well, how did it get there? Of course it's just possible that in the strength of frenzy Murthwaite and Woodfell carried it into the house from the garden; but you felt its weight yourself."

Marks had awakened from his absorption, and was giving me his full attention, but with a very uneasy air:

"It's possible – it's possible," he said slowly. "A madman's strength is said to be sometimes superhuman. But on the other hand the statue may have been in Woodfell's study for two or three days. Miss Woodfell has not been into it for some time; neither has she been into the garden so as to see that it was still on its pedestal. Woodfell may have had some of these furniture people move it into his study. It may have been part of his process of getting a firm grip on the initiates. He may have been getting them used to the statue."

It was possible; but I had an uneasy sense that he was keeping something back from me, that he had found the explanation which eluded me.

"That's an explanation," I said, in a tone of no great satisfaction[1] "But oh, it's all very obscure. Why did Murthwaite's footsteps strike me as being incredibly sinister? Why did they frighten Miss Woodfell so terribly?"

"If he were possessed," said Marks.

"Do you mean that the Abyss broke loose in him and that he became a vessel, as it were, charged with malefic power, and so sinister?"

"Something of the kind is possible," said Marks.

"And then what was Helen Ranger doing all that time? She was in No. 19 from about half-past twelve? The statue toppled over and crushed her at cock-crow. We heard it."

"There is only one man who can enlighten us, who really knows what happened; and that is Woodfell. And madness seals his lips," said Marks; and he said it in a tone which seemed to show him not sorry that it should be so.

I was silent, racking my mind for the explanation. At last I said, "I suppose we may take it that it was this final rehearsal which loosened Woodfell's control, and brought about this climax."

"The rehearsal on the eve of the full moon. Possibly, too, the approach of the full moon had something to do with Woodfell's mind giving. You know that many people are a little off their balance at the full moon; and he was suffering from a terrible strain of work," said Marks.

"It may be. But the more I think of it, the more obscure I find it. I don't think that there is much chance of Woodfell's recovering to tell us. We shall never know."

"No; we shall never know, " said Marks.

He spoke with no conviction in his tone; and the more strongly than ever I felt that he was keeping something back from me, that he could have given me another explanation of the tragedy. I was a little hurt by his reticence; surely he might have trusted me.

We finished our breakfast; I went up and listened at the door of Pamela's room, and found that she was still sleeping. I told Mrs. Ringrose to take her up breakfast when she awoke; and taking some breakfast on a tray for Woodfell, we went back into No. 19. The fresh air blowing in from the garden had cleared the hail and staircase of the musky smell.

As we entered, Woodfell came out of the dining-room. In the same thick, slurring voice, with the same empty laugh, he said, "Pan is not dead."

It flashed on me that, could I but understand it, this repeated saying of his might give me the key to the mystery.

"What does he mean?" I said to Marks.

"If we knew that, we should know everything," said Marks, echoing my thought.

I set the tray on the table; and we watched Woodfell eat his breakfast hungrily. He had just finished it when we heard a motor car come down the street and stop at the house.

Marks did not move; I went to the front door, opened it, and found two men getting out of a big motor car. I recognized one of them as Murthwaite's brother, from his likeness to the dead man.

He came up the garden path to me, and said, "You're Mr. Plowden? I'm Reginald Murthwaite. What has happened to my brother?"

His anxious face showed him ready to hear bad news; and I said, "I'm afraid I have very bad news for you. Your brother is dead."

"Dead?" he cried. "How? When? What did he die of?"

"I don't know. He died suddenly – in the night."

He turned to the other man and said, "This is Sir Erasmus Blomfield, my doctor. Your wire told me to bring a first-class man. Take us to my brother."

I unlocked the study door; they went in; and stopped short staring at the gruesome scene with amazed, shocked faces.

"What – what has happened?" said Reginald Murthwaite.

I told them as much as I thought fit of what had happened the night before; that I had heard the crash of the falling statue, had come to the house before breakfast to enquire if any accident had

happened, had found my friend Woodfell mad, Helen Ranger crushed by the statue, and Edward Murthwaite lying dead in the corner.

When I had finished Sir Erasmus Blomfield went to the dead man, knelt down beside him, and examined him carefully. Then he rose frowning, gave me a curious, searching glance, and said, "Your brother has been dead some hours, Murthwaite. The cause of death is evidently heart-failure. Perhaps it was caused by the shock of seeing this lady crushed by the statue."

I thought I heard a faint sigh of relief from Reginald Murthwaite.

"Then there won't have to be an inquest," he said.

"No – no. I see no reason for one. The cause of death is quite plain – heart-failure. I can give a certificate," said Sir Erasmus.

"Thank goodness," said Reginald Murthwaite, and paused. Then he added, "Couldn't he be taken home?"

"Yes; there is no reason why he shouldn't be. Would you like me to make the arrangements for you? I can easily do it on the way back."

"If you would – if you would – I'm upset – badly upset," said Reginald Murthwaite.

"Yes; you must be. Look here, you go and sit in your car while I talk it over with Mr. Plowden," said Sir Erasmus.

Reginald Murthwaite went heavily out of the room; and as the door shut Sir Erasmus turned to me, and nodding towards the dead man, he said, "He died of fear, abject, absolute fear which stopped his heart. What frightened him?"

"The statue falling on the lady, when his nerves were overwrought. I know that they were engaged in some occult practices; and something happened, but I don't know what," I said.

"I knew it! I knew it when I saw the statue!" he cried. "This damned occult is cropping up constantly, ruining my patients' nerves but I've never had a case as bad as this. What did they do?"

"We shall never know," I said. "There were three people in the house; two of them are dead; one is mad."

His frown deepened; and he went to the sofa and examined the body of Helen Ranger.

"Poor girl, she at any rate was not frightened; and she died instantly," he said. "This statue must weigh nearly a ton; it's close on eight feet long." He unveiled it. "What a face! Hideous!" And he scowled at it. "I should like to see the owner of the house, Woodfell."

"He's in the dining-room with a friend of his I wired for," I said, and led the way to it.

I introduced Marks to him; and after watching Woodfell, who sat without a movement at the table before the empty breakfast tray, he began to ask him questions. He got no answers from him; and presently we went out into the hall.

"It's a hopeless case," he said.

"Is there *no* chance of his recovery?" I said.

"There is no saying for certain so soon after the shock; but I can give you no hope."

"Then we shall never know what happened," I said.

"It's most unlikely. Are you an intimate friend of his?"

"I'm engaged to be married to his niece."

"Then that simplifies matters," he said; and his face cleared. "You can act for him. The Murthwaites will want no fuss in the newspapers, both for private and business reasons. A mysterious death will do the firm no good. And I take it that you want as little fuss as possible too."

"I'm a solicitor," I said.

"Good; that does simplify matters. Well, by removing Edward Murthwaite's body at once to his house and burying him from there, it will considerably lessen any fuss the newspapers may be inclined to make about the accident to this unfortunate girl."

"Yes; it will. It will simplify matters considerably."

"Then I will make the arrangements for the removal at once," he said. "And I must be quick about it."

"And you can leave the inquest and the reporters to me," I said.

"Very good; I will tell Murthwaite; and you will find him quite ready to pay handsomely for your services. I'll be off at once. The sooner you are free to inform the coroner of the accident the better."

He shook hands with me and drove off in the motor car.

I locked the study door again; and then after a vain attempt to induce Woodfell to come out of No. 19, Marks and I went back to my study. I sent off a wire to the office to say that I was detained; and then Pamela came down, looking very little the worse, thanks to her long sleep, for the terrors of the night.

She was shocked, naturally, to hear of the misfortune which had befallen her uncle; and I was thankful that she was not bound to him by any strong tie of affection. As we waited for the coming of the men to remove Murthwaite's body, we talked fitfully of the events of the night. Marks asked her some questions, chiefly about the sinister footsteps; and she asserted again her odd belief that they had not been the footsteps of Murthwaite.

I expected that money and the name of Murthwaite would quicken the removal of the body; but I was surprised when a carriage from a leading firm of undertakers came for it within an

hour of the departure of the motor car. The men were quick about the removal; and not a single spectator watched them carry the coffin to the carriage. The oppression of horror which had brooded over the road served at any rate the useful purpose of keeping it clear at this juncture.

Marks and I watched the carriage go down the road.

"Now I can inform the coroner of the accident," I said.

"And I must let the others know that there will be no celebration of the rites tonight," said Marks.

"I wonder whether there will be anything dreadful, an irruption of the Abyss tonight again," I said.

"No; there will not," he said firmly.

"Well, I shall take no chances. I shall see that Miss Woodfell sleeps in Town."

"That's just as well," he said; "but it's a most significant fact that with the extinction of Woodfell's mind the horror passed – the Phantasmagoria vanished."

"The horror passed at cock-crow," I said.

# Chapter XXIII
# We Find a Paradise

I CAME back to Pamela; and we talked over the matter of our wedding. This was no day for a wedding; and we were not long making up our minds to put it off for a while, till I had straightened things out a little, and till our minds were lighter. The tragedy of the night weighed heavily on them.

Then I had a busy day of it. I informed the coroner of the death of Helen Ranger myself, and made arrangements for the inquest. That done I went down to the office, dealt with my work there, and also put matters in train for Pamela's becoming the administratrix of her uncle's affairs.

I came back home at six o'clock and found that she had spent most of the day in No. 19, looking for her uncle. He had been very quiet. Four hours he had sat in the dining-room, looking out on the garden; now and again he had gone into it, mooned about for a little while, aimlessly, and then come back to his chair. He was quite tractable; he was not even distressing; he seemed merely to be in a state of suspension of being.

If anything roused him, he said in the thick, slurring voice "Pan is not dead," and laughed the vacant laugh.

My resolve to take no risk was unchanged; Pamela should not suffer again from an irruption of the Abyss; she should sleep in Town. We tried to induce Woodfell to come into No. 20, that he

might spend the night there; but it only seemed to distress him; and in the end we made him as comfortable as we could, and left him. I had very little fear for him. The air of No. 19 was quite clear of any oppression of horror; and I believed that not the Abyss itself could stir him from his lethargy. We dined and slept in Town; and when we returned on the morrow all was well.

We decided that Pamela should sleep at No. 20; and I should make the concession to the proprieties of sleeping at No. 19. During the days that followed its air was serene; no uncanny sight, or sound, or feeling troubled us. The gates of the Abyss were again barred.

The inquest on Helen Ranger passed off without any trouble; there were only a few short paragraphs in the newspapers about the strange manner in which the unfortunate girl had met her death. Thanks to the promptitude with which Murthwaite's body had been removed from No. 19, his death was quite dissociated from hers; and we were spared a great newspaper mystery.

I had paid a visit to her house, found out the address of her family, and informed them of her fate. Two of her brothers came up from Yorkshire to the inquest and her funeral. They were, naturally, curious to learn about her life since her disappearance from her home. They could learn nothing. She had lately changed her servant; she had kept no letters which threw any light on her reasons for leaving home, or on her life since she had left it. I apparently could not have known anything about her before her death at No. 19; and I did not offer any information. It would have served no good purpose. They went home with their curiosity unsatisfied, leaving the winding-up of her affairs in my hands.

She was buried on the Friday; and on the Saturday Pamela and I set about the examination of Woodfell's affairs. We found the top of the big safe in his second study on the first floor, full of ancient manuscripts. Three of them were in Latin, one in Greek, and the rest in Eastern tongues I did not know. Indeed, I could only read the Latin and Greek manuscripts with great difficulty, for they were late, and the pure classic tongues had grown barbarous, obscure, and corrupted by many words from other languages. I gathered however that they dealt with ritual and sorcery, and had no doubt that they had been the foundation of Woodfell's knowledge.

I put them back in their order; and opened one of the drawers. It held £5,000 in gold and £5,000 in five-pound notes. It was indeed surprising to find so large a sum, stored away, bearing no interest. I sat staring at it, pondering; and it flashed on me suddenly that Woodfell had been prepared against the necessity of sudden flight from England.

"What a lot of money!" said Pamela in a hushed voice.

"There seems to have been no need in the world for him to have kept you so hard up," I said a little bitterly; and I opened the next drawer.

It held the title-deeds of a house in Hertfordshire, and half a dozen letters. I looked through the letters and found that they were written by a George Hind. He seemed to be care-taker and gardener. The last one was only a fortnight old; the writer gave

some account of the condition of the garden, and ended his letter by saying that he had bought two more black lambs.

"Your uncle has a house in Hertfordshire it seems," I said to Pamela.

"I've never heard anything about it," she said.

I opened the drawer beneath. It held £5,000 in coupon-bearing securities. Woodfell undoubtedly kept his money in the least traceable, most easily handled forms. It seemed likely that he had been living on the two hundred a year that these securities brought in; for his bank-book lay on the top of the scrip, and it showed that he had only paid into his bank two hundred a year for the last three years. I noticed that George Hind had received every month a check for £5.

I opened the fourth drawer. It held four thick leather-bound volumes. I opened one of them and found that it was a record of Woodfell's researches, written in a very neat, close handwriting.

"This is a find!" I cried. "Now we can learn all that is to be known about the Mysteries."

Pamela shook her head; "I'm frightened of them," she said.

I locked up the safe; and we went to the desk which stood before the windows. I unlocked drawer after drawer, and in each I found what seemed to be rough drafts of the rites of the Abyss. There must have been some fifty of these drafts of the different rites, corrected and again corrected, the strange tongues translated

into English, and the words of them written out in English letters, that the initiates, ignorant of the tongues themselves, might be able to learn them. Truly Woodfell had been a worker.

I locked up the drawers, and looked at Pamela.

"If ever the fancy takes us, we can form a circle and celebrate the rites of the Abyss ourselves," I said.

"We never will," she said quickly.

"You've lost your curiosity to learn wonderful things?" I said.

"They're too dreadful," she said.

"I believe that they are the forbidden things," I said.

We were silent a while. She looked tired; plainly in the strain that had been on her she was missing our walks in the country.

"How would it be if we went down to Hertfordshire tomorrow and saw your uncle's house? Or rather it is practically your house," I said.

"Oh, it would be delightful! I should like to get out of London for a day," she cried; and her face brightened.

"We will go," I said; and rising, I slipped my arm round her waist and kissed her. Then we went back to No. 20.

The next morning the summer sun was blazing in a cloudless sky; and leaving Woodfell in charge of Mrs. Ringrose, we caught an early train to Chorley Wood. Pamela was looking her old delightful, untroubled self; I had never seen the sun shine so brightly before. But it was not till we had left the station and were among the woods that we realized in what a nightmare we had been living, what a joy it was to be at last free from it.

We came through the woods, crossed the valley of the Chess, and mounted the ridge on which Sarrat stands. A quarter of a mile along its edge we found Woodfell House, such a house as I had dreamed of dwelling in only in my most extravagant dreams, an old, roomy, red-brick house in a walled garden.

An old woman, in her Sunday best, opened the door to us, and when she learned who Pamela was, welcomed her joyfully, and called George Hind her husband, an upright, square-shouldered soldierly man, from the kitchen. Pamela recognized him, and he her; he was the man who years ago had brought her from her home to No. 19. He was as pleased to see her as his wife had been; but his pleasure was dashed by the news of the misfortune which had befallen Woodfell. He had been Woodfell's body-servant for twenty years, first in his regiment, then on his travels. Of late years, since Woodfell had lived at No. 19, he had seen very little of him; but the old attachment still subsisted.

We talked to them for a while about their master – he had not set foot in the house for three years, and then he had only come for a few hours to get some papers. Then we set about exploring the house; and they left us to ourselves, busying themselves with the cooking of our dinner. It was an admirable house, the house of a

dream. The furniture was old; Chippendale Heppelthwaite, and Louis Seize; there were some fine pictures on the walls; a good library, its shelves loaded with fine eighteenth century editions of the Classics and the great English and French writers, and holding also many curious books on magic and sorcery, books which Woodfell had outgrown. In the room he had used as a study was a collection of the implements of sorcery, many of them, doubtless, brought back from his travels, an astrolabe, crystal spheres, bullroarers of different shapes, amulets, the whole outfit of a Congo witch-doctor and an American Indian Medicine Man. I fancied that they marked an earlier stage of his researches.

After an hour in the house we went out into the garden. There was no doubt that George Hind's heart was in his work. The closely cut, smooth lawns were of the deep green which comes of plentiful watering; a thousand roses and all the flowers of the season filled the air with fragrance. The hedge of yew which divided them from the vegetable garden was clipped to a nicety, and rose into fantastic arches over the paths which broke it.

Pamela wandered about the garden with charmed eyes, bemused by its beauty: "It's a paradise – truly a paradise," she said.

"Out of which you have been shut too long. You are its proper Eve," said I.

The fresh air had made us hungry for our dinner; and we indeed enjoyed it. Mrs. Hind proved an excellent cook of the simple country fare; she gave us a vegetable soup, a roast duckling with potatoes and peas fresh from the garden, a gooseberry tart, and a great dish of strawberries and cream. Before dinner Hind took me

down into a well-stocked cellar; and with it we drank an old Haute Sauterne, which had kept its fragrance, a charming summer wine.

The afternoon passed as a delightful dream; we wandered about the house, we wandered or rested in the garden. The sense of having at last come to a haven after storm and stress was strong on us, multiplying our delight. We supped under a cedar in the garden; and after supper, with infinite reluctance, we tore ourselves away to catch a train.

Half-way down the slope Pamela paused and looked back at the house: "Oh, it *is* hard to leave it," she said.

"Well, shall we get married and come to it for our honeymoon – on Wednesday?"

"Oh, yes," she said.

The next morning I went to my cousin and told him that I wished to have a week of my holiday at once since I proposed to get married on the Wednesday and to take my wife into the country.

"But this is very inconvenient," he said, his face clouding. "We are full up with important work. Who are you going to marry?"

"Miss Pamela Woodfell. She has fifteen thousand pounds and a charming house in Hertfordshire."

As I had expected Howard's face cleared; some vision of my buying a partnership in the firm, at a good price, floated before his mind.

"I congratulate you – heartily," he said. "But you are a reticent chap – always were. Of course it must be managed; and you only want a week you say. After all you'll only do it once. My wife must call on Miss Woodfell."

I had no difficulty in postponing that call till after we were married.

I had been keeping Marks informed by letter of what was happening in the matter of the inquest. That night he came to see me to learn the full details and to assure himself that the gates of the Abyss were truly barred.

We sat, with Pamela, in the garden of No. 19 for an hour; and when she had gone to bed, we reviewed again the happenings on the eve of the full moon. He talked about them easily enough now; but he made no attempt to account for them.

At last I said, "You're keeping something back from me. What is it? Surely *I* have a right to know."

He looked at me gravely, and said slowly, "Yes; I made a discovery – on that morning. And I hid it at once. I wanted to think it over. I have thought it over carefully; and I'm going to keep it a secret. These are the forbidden things; and the knowledge of them is forbidden. At what a price even the initiate may learn them, Woodfell's fate, and the deaths of Helen Ranger and Murthwaite have taught you. I have a fear that my own knowledge will sooner or later bring me misfortune, or at least that it would bring me

misfortune if I revealed it. Really it is more than a fear – it is a conviction."

"I understand," I said. "But you do know?"

"I think *now* that I know," he said. "But shall I know in a year – when the memories and the facts are blurred, or shall I doubt again? After all the closing of the Abyss coincides with the extinction of Woodfell's mind."

I pondered his words a little while; then I said, "What was it you stamped out in the garden path?"

He shook his head.

We left the garden, and No. 19, and settled ourselves down in my study. We had no desire to sit in Woodfell's, where that statue with the appalling face still lay along the floor. I asked him what would the other celebrants do now that they had lost Woodfell's guidance.

"I don't know. What can they do? Without him they can do nothing. They'll get no help from me. I have had my fill of the forbidden things."

I turned the talk to the pleasanter theme of my coming marriage and asked him to be one of our witnesses at the registrar's.

He consented cheerfully and said, "It is a happy event which will help blur the painful memories of that horrible morning."

# Chapter XXIV
# Woodfell's Record

THE NEXT morning we were married. Marks came with us to the registrar's office, lunched with us at the Savoy, and accompanied us to the station. We reached Woodfell House at five o'clock, and entered our paradise. During the next week we lived in an intoxication, an ecstasy; we came as near supreme happiness as human beings can; and we had earned it by the tension and the terror we had endured. We were in a natural, delightful reaction from them, together, alone, and in the country.

At the end of the week we would not return to the Walden Road. A bicycle carried me to the station early enough to get to the office in good time for a day's work. Mrs. Ringrose had moved into No. 19 and was looking after Woodfell in a quite satisfactory fashion; he needed so little care. There was no change in him; it was indeed early to look for it. One afternoon I brought an alienist of the first rank to see him.

As always when I came to see him; he said at the sight of us, in the thick slurring voice, laughing the vacant laugh, "Pan is not dead."

The alienist spent nearly an hour with him, watching him, studying him, trying to get him to speak. He only said, twice, "Pan is not dead."

Then we went into the study. The alienist looked at the statue of Pan which still lay along the floor; for it would have needed four

or five men to set it up; and I had been too busy to see to it. He asked if he might see its face. I uncovered it; and when he had come to the end of expressing his admiration of it, he talked to me about Woodfell. He told me that I must entertain no hope whatever of his recovery; that it was only possible that his mind would return just before he died; that it was improbable that he would live very long.

At the end he was silent for a minute or two; then he said, "It's curious that his only words are, 'Pan is not dead;' for there is a peasant in the Naples asylum who says those very words. He was brought in from the hills, where he had been wandering about for eighteen months; and the authorities have never been able to find out to what village he belongs, or what shock wrecked his mind. He's far less worn out than Mr. Woodfell and will live longer. I've seen him." He paused, thoughtful again; then he added looking at me with keen, searching eyes, "You think that the sight of the statue falling on that unfortunate girl was the shock which robbed him of his reason."

"What else should it have been?" I said. "But now I come to think of it – it never occurred to me before – I heard him, when he opened his door to let Miss Ranger in, say 'Pan is not dead,' in the same tone and with the same laugh, two hours at least before I heard the fall of the statue."

"The devil you did?" he said sharply. "It's odd – very odd. It's perfectly devilish – the face of that statue."

And when he went away, his brow was still knitted in a frowning thoughtfulness.

That night I told Pamela of the alienist's judgment; and we decided to try the effect of the country on her uncle. I hired a motor car; and Hind and I brought him down to Woodfell House. We had great difficulty in inducing him to leave No. 19, and when he reached Woodfell House, he was very restless. We thought that he might presently settle down; but he did not. He remained restless; he could not sleep; he would not eat. At the end of forty-eight hours we took him back to No. 19. At once he grew peaceful; he slept at night; and his appetite returned. He seemed linked to the scene of his researches by some subtle, inexplicable bond.

At the beginning of September the rest of my holiday began; and the fancy took me to bring down with me the four volumes in which Woodfell had recorded his quest of the ultimate revelation. In the happy peace of the country our fear of the Abyss had died; and we had grown curious to read it.

We read it in the evenings, together, in a big easy chair. Pamela sat on my knee with an arm round my neck. I held the book; and she turned the pages.

The record began:

"I left my regiment, the Xth Lancers, on June 1st, 1878."

He plainly left the army in order to devote himself to his quest; for the beginning of the first volume tells of his dealings with mediums, clairvoyants, and astrologers in the European capitals. Most of them had proved charlatans; and sooner or later he had

discovered their trickery. There is a succinct entry, "Fined 40/ – and costs for caning Cantor." Cantor seems to have been a Parisian medium who for a while enjoyed considerable fame in spiritist circles in London. But among many charlatans he found three or four persons of indisputable sincerity and integrity; and he left this line of research with a very strong conviction that after making all possible allowances for conscious and unconscious fraud, there was a residuum of most important truth.

Then he came to the conclusion that the truth was most likely to be found in the wilder parts of the world among men unsophisticated; with minds unspoiled by civilization, in closer touch with the very heart of Nature. Half the first volume, all the second, and half the third record his wanderings at the ends of the world, seeking the key to the mystery in the primitive rites, the primitive magics, and the primitive minds of the wild peoples.

They are fascinating, thrilling reading, full of amazing adventures, dreadful privations endured, and dreadful perils encountered. I reckon that, on different journeys, Woodfell cannot have himself killed less than thirty men. They are full too of facts to gladden the heart of the ethnologist and student of folk-lore. Now and again, too, he saw wonderful, inexplicable happenings.

An accident set him on the final lines of his quest. In 1900 he was at Dresden, resting after a journey through New Borneo before setting out to search among the tribes at the sources of the Amazon. He was in correspondence with many students of the occult in different parts of Europe; and from one of them he learned that a German gentleman, excavating, at his private cost,

a Roman station on his estate on the Western bank of the Elbe, had found a MS. of the rite of Mithras. Woodfell bought the MS. much against its owner's will – it was the Latin MS. labeled No.1 in the safe – and with the aid of one of the Professors of the Weimar university, had set about studying it. It had turned his attention to the powers of the Abyss and the ceremonial magic of the true Mysteries.

Then he set about hunting for more MSS. of rites; and two inquiries into the occult set him hunting in Thibet. In 1902, in a Thibetan monastery, he found, along with some MSS. treating of sorcery, a MS. of the rite of Adonis.

These two rites were the beginning of his ritual of the Abyss. Celebrating them, he had found the path, or at any rate he believed himself to have found the path, to a realm of wonder; and the idea had come to him that the way to attain his goal was to elaborate and as it were intensify the ritual. He set about forming other rites of other gods of the Abyss on the model of the two he had found.

He formed the opinion that it is necessary to adjure the powers of the Abyss in the very tongues in which they were adjured ages ago. At the end of the Third volume he gives his reasons at length for this belief. He was not sure indeed that there was more than one god of the Abyss, known to the nations and worshiped by them under many names; but none the less he believed in the efficacy of approaching that power or powers, by the different old paths.

With his amazing pertinacity he had set about learning the very tongues, or the probable tongues, in which they had been worshiped, using all the resources of modern scholarship to help him, and paying handsomely the great experts in these obscure tongues for their aid. It had meant years of work; but he had found himself justified of his beliefs; for with the accession of each fresh rite, he found the bars of the Abyss loosening, as the wonders, or the illusions, grew.

The fourth volume is filled with the rites, in the actual tongues used; then the words of each prayer, or adjuration, or response are written in English letters, with an English translation beneath this, to aid the celebrants to learn them. There are also records of celebrations and of the growth of Woodfell's power over the lower creatures of the Abyss. The first celebration of all the seven rites was on the night of the full moon of July 1906. The book ends with the rite of Ashtaroth. There is no record of what happened at the celebration when the celebrants fled.

But before the rite of Ashtaroth there is a second rite of Moloch, not the rite they actually used, which is fourth in the book. In this later one human sacrifice is to be substituted for the sacrifice of the lamb. From his recorded complaint, immediately before it, that the seven rites had only released the lower and less powerful creatures of the Abyss – he declares that this was no illusion, and that Marks alone was doubtful – and from his complaint that there were no signs that they were advancing any further, I believe that he would have celebrated this other rite of Moloch, had he not turned aside to try the effect of the introduction of the feminine element. I think that he had had in mind for some years the substitution of human sacrifice for the sacrifice of the lamb,

and that he had the £10,000 and the coupon-bearing securities under his hand in case discovery should compel him to try to save himself by flight.

Pamela and I read and re-read this record, and we have discussed it many times. In the end we have made up our minds that some day I shall write, out of the earlier volumes, the story of Woodfell's wanderings and discoveries – at any rate in ethnology, folk-lore, and comparative religion. But about the fourth volume we differ. We are agreed, indeed, that it would be wrong that such an admirable monument of human endeavor should be wasted; we are agreed that nothing will ever induce us to essay the forbidden things ourselves; and we think it not unlikely that a band of men, working with a single-hearted purpose to learn the truth, might unbar again the gates of the Abyss without any great danger to themselves. Some of Woodfell's associates were manifestly not such men. But if we are approached by students of the occult – and we shall be, since Woodfell's work must be known to many of them – Pamela wishes to *give* them the ritual of the Abyss; but I think it would be better to *sell* it to them at a good price, to insure that it does not fall into the hands of trifling dilettanti but into the hands of serious workers, who will really take up Woodfell's work in earnest. We shall assuredly make the stipulation that we are informed of the result of their efforts. They may finally settle the question for us – a question on which we are in disagreement – whether it was not all the illusion of strained nerves, or illusion thrown upon all our minds from the powerful mind of Woodfell.

When the autumn came we returned to the Walden Road, to No. 20. Pamela urged me to give up the law and devote myself to writing so that we might live at Serrate. But I would not; I had no

desire to live on her money. We content ourselves with spending the weekends at Woodfell House. On our return to the Walden Road Pamela, who had not seen her uncle since our wedding-day, declared that he had grown very much feebler. I, seeing him as I did at least once every week, had not observed the change.

There was one thing that weighed on my mind somewhat, the statue of Pan. I had a feeling that it was a center of malefic influences. I had no doubt that it had been; and I could not rid my mind of the fancy that it was still. Sometimes its malefic face came into my dreams.

I told Pamela of this fancy, and she said, "Oh, yes. Do let's get rid of it. I always feel that it's there – close to me."

Marks also said that it would be well to be rid of it; and I lost no time inviting a well-known art-critic to see it. After he had admired it, he suggested that since the British Museum was poor, I had better offer it to the Berlin Museum. I took his advice, and sent a photograph and description of the statue to the chief curator at Berlin. Three days later he arrived at the Walden Road himself. He saw the statue, and offered me £5,000 for it. A week later I sold it to him for £6,500. During one of our discussions on the subject of the price he should pay for the statue, I showed him the MSS. in the safe. He showed himself interested in them; and a fortnight after I had dispatched the statue to Berlin came a letter offering me £3,000 for the MSS. Pamela was all for selling them; and since Woodfell had as it were drained them dry and transferred their substance to his ritual of the Abyss; we let them go – for £4,200. It is probable that the officials of the Berlin

Museum ascribe my bargaining powers to greed; I ascribe them to patriotism.

Sometimes it distressed us that we could do so little for Woodfell. We could only see to it that he had all comforts and luxuries – had his mind returned, he would not have recognized No. 19 – but we were doubtful that he was even alive to the difference between delicacies and the plainest fare. Now and again we tried to rekindle a spark of mind in him, but in vein. Slowly he grew frailer and frailer; and in the middle of December he could no longer rise from his bed. The doctors could do nothing.

On the first Wednesday in January his nurse told me that she did not think that he would last through the night; and when the doctor came he said that that was his opinion. I did not tell Pamela; I would not have her distressed. But when she had gone to bed, I came into No. 19, and took up my watch. The long hours of the night passed very slowly; I tried to read, but could find no book on which I could keep my mind.

It was morning when the nurse called me, and said, "There is a change – and – and something is happening."

Her voice was uneasy.

I went up quickly to his bedroom. As I came into it I was aware of dimness; the flames of the big fire were dull; and the electric lights seemed to be shining through dirty globes. The shadows were coming back.

With a little shiver I turned to the bed. Woodfell lay with closed eyes; and his faint breathing hardly raised his chest.

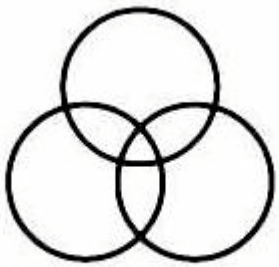
I laid my hand on his, and stood waiting. The dimness deepened; the nurse slipped out of the room and I heard her rustling down the stairs. I could hardly see Woodfell's face. Oddly enough, I felt none of the old fear, not even when the room became one dim mass of moving, shapeless shadows.

On a sudden, out of the dimness, came Woodfell's voice – his old, hoarse, strong voice: "Who – what is that in the house?" he said sharply.

There was a pause; then he cried in tones in which triumph blended strangely with fear, "Pan is not dead!"

He quivered, gasped, and the room went swiftly bright.

His dead face was illumined by a triumphant exaltation.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