

THE CASE OF MR. LUCRAFT

Attributed to Walter Besant and James Rice

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I HAVE more than once told the story of the only remarkable thing which ever happened to me in the course of a longish life, but as no one ever believed me, I left off telling it. I wish, therefore, to leave behind me a truthful record, in which everything shall be set down, as near as I can remember it, just as it happened. I am sure I need not add a single fact. The more I consider the story, the more I realise to myself my wonderful escape and the frightful consequences which a providential accident averted from my head, the more reason I feel to be grateful and humble.

I have read of nothing similar to my own case. I have consulted books on apparitions, witchcraft, and the power of the devil as manifested in authentic history, but I have found absolutely nothing that can in any way compare with my own case. If there be any successor to my Mr. Ebenezer Grumbelow, possessed of his unholy powers, endowed with his fiendish resolve and his diabolical iniquity of selfishness, this plain and simple narrative may serve as a warning to young men situated as I was in the year 1823. Except as a moral example, indeed, I see no use in telling the story at all.

I have never been a rich man, but I was once very Poor, and it is of this period that I have to write.

As for my parentage, it was quite obscure. My mother died when I was still a boy; and my father, who was not a man to be proud of as a father, had long before run away from her and disappeared. He was a sailor by profession, and I have heard it rumoured that sailors of his time possessed a wife in every port, besides a few who lived, like my mother, inland; so that they could vary the surroundings when they wished. The wives were all properly married in church too, and honest women, every one of them. What became of my father I never knew, nor did I ever inquire.

I went through a pretty fair number of adventures before I settled down to my first serious profession. I was travelling companion and drudge to an itinerant tinker, who treated me as kindly as could be expected when he was sober. When he was drunk he used to throw the pots and pans at my head. Then I became a cabin-boy, but only for a single voyage, on board a collier. The ship belonged to a philanthropist, who was too much occupied with the wrongs of the West Indian niggers to think about the rights of his own sailors; so his ships, insured far above their real value, were sent to sea to sink or swim as it might please Providence. I suppose no cabin-boy ever had so many kicks and cuffs in a single voyage as I had. However, my ship carried me safely from South Shields to the port of London. There I ran away, and I heard afterwards that on her return voyage the Spanking Sally foundered with all hands. In the minds of those who knew the captain and his crew personally, there were doubtless, as in mine, grave fears as to their ultimate destination. After that I became steward in an Atlantic sailing packet for a couple of years; then clerk to a bogus auctioneer in New York; cashier to a store; all sorts of things, but nothing long. Then I came back to England, and not knowing what to do with myself, joined a strolling company of actors in the general utility line. It was not exactly promotion, but I liked the life; I liked the work; I liked the applause; I liked wandering about from town to town; I even liked, being young and a fool, the precarious nature of the salary. Heaven knows mine was small enough; but we were a cheery company, and one or two members subsequently rose to distinction. If we had known any history, which we did not, we might have remembered that Molière himself was once a stroller through France. Some people think it philosophical to reflect, when they are hard up, how many great

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men have been hard up too. It would have brought no comfort to me. Practically I felt little inconvenience from poverty, save in the matter of boots. We went share and share alike, most of us, and there was always plenty to eat even for my naturally gigantic appetite. Juliet always used to reckon me as equal to four.

Juliet was the manager's daughter --- Julie Kerrans, acting as Miss Juliet Alvanley. She was eighteen and I was twenty-three, an inflammable and romantic time of life. We were thrown a good deal together too, not only off the stage but on it. I was put into parts to play up to her. I was Romeo when she played her namesake, a part sustained by her mother till even she herself was bound to own that she was too fat to play it any longer; she was Lady Teazle and I was Charles Surface; she was Rosalind and I Orlando; she was Miranda and I Ferdinand; she was Angelina and I Sir Harry Wildair. We were a pair, and looked well in love scenes. Looking back dispassionately on our performances, I suppose they must have been as bad as stage-acting could well be. At least, we had no training, and nothing but a few fixed rules to guide us; these, of course, quite stagey and conventional. Juliet had been on the stage all her life, and did not want in assurance; I, however, was nervous and uncertain. Then we were badly mounted and badly dressed; we were ambitious, we ranted, and we tore a passion to rags. But we had one or two good points --- we were young and lively. Juliet had the most charming of faces and the most delicious of figures --- mind you, in the year 1823, girls had a chance of showing their figures without putting on a page's costume. Then she had a soft, sweet voice, and pretty little coquettish ways, which came natural to her, and broke through the clumsy stage artificialities. She drew full houses; wherever we performed, all the men, especially all the young officers, used to come after her. They wrote her notes, they lay in wait for her, they sent her flowers; but what with old Kerrans and myself, to say nothing of the other members of the company, they might as well have tried to get at a Peri in Paradise. I drew pretty well too. I was --- a man of seventy and more may say so without being accused of vanity --- I was a good-looking young fellow; you would hardly believe what quantities of letters and billets-doux came to me. I had dozens, but Juliet found and tore them up. There they were; the note on rose-coloured note-paper with violet ink, beginning with "Handsomest and noblest of men", and ending with "Your fair unknown, Araminta". There was the letter from the middle-aged widow with a taste for the drama and an income; and there was the vilely spelled note from the foolish little milliner who had fallen in love with the Romeo of a barn. Perhaps ladies are more sensible now. At all events, their letters were thrown away upon me, because I was in love already, head over ears, and with Juliet.

Juliet handed over her notes to her father, who found out their writers, and made them take boxes and bespeak plays. So that an Juliet's lovers got was the privilege of paying more than other people, for the girl was as good as she was pretty --- a rarer combination of qualities on the stage fifty years ago than now. She was tall and, in those days, slender. Later on she took after her mother; but who would have thought that so graceful a girl would ever arrive at fourteen stone? Her eyes and hair were black --- eyes that never lost their lustre; and hair which, though it turned grey in later years, was then like a silken net, when it was let down, to catch the hearts of lovers. Of course she knew that she was pretty; what pretty woman does not? and of course, too, she did not know and would not understand the power of her own beauty; what pretty woman does? And because it was the very worst thing she could do for herself, she fell in love with me.

Her father knew it and meant to stop it from the beginning; but he was not a man to do things in a hurry, and so we went on in a fool's paradise, enjoying the stolen kisses, and talking of the sweet time to come when we should be married. One night --- I was Romeo --- I was so carried away with passion that I acted for once naturally and unconventionally. There was a full house; the performance was so much out of the common that the people were astonished and forgot to applaud. Juliet caught the infection of my passion, and for once we acted well, because we acted from the heart. Never but that once, I believe, has Romeo and Juliet been performed by a pair who felt every word they said. It was only in a long, low room, a sort of corn exchange or town hall, in a little country town, but the memory of that night is sacred to me.

You know the words:---

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See, how she leans her cheek upon her hand! O, that I were a glove upon that hand, That I might touch that cheek!

And these:—

"O, for a falconer's voice,
To lure this tassel-gentle back again!
Bondage is hoarse and may not speak aloud,
Else would I tear the cave where Echo lies,
And make her airy tongue more hoarse than mine
With repetition of my Romeo!"

Splendidly we gave them.

Why, even now, old as I am, the recollection of these lines and the thought of that night warm my heart still and fire my feeble pulses. I have taught them to my grandchild. She takes after my poor Juliet, and would succeed on the stage, if only her father would let her. But he is strait-laced. Ah! he should have seen the temptations which beset a girl on the stage in my time., We are Puritans now, almost —

And a good thing, too. It is time for me to own it.

Well — old Kerrans was in the front, looking after the money, as usual, and always with one eye on the stage, to see how his daughter was getting on. He was puzzled, I think, to make out the meaning of the unaccustomed fire, but he came to the conclusion that if Juliet was going to remain Miss Juliet, instead of becoming Mrs. Mortimer Vavasseur (my stage name), he had better interfere at once.

So after the play, and over the domestic supper-table, he had it out with his daughter. Juliet swore that nothing should induce her to marry another man.

"Bless the girl!" said her father; "I don't want you to marry anybody at all."

Juliet declared that she never, never would forget me.

"I don't want you to forget him," Mr. Kerrans replied. "Remember him as much as you like."

Juliet announced her intention of retiring from the stage and going into a convent. There were no convents in England in 1823, so that the threat was not so serious as it would be now.

Her father promised her that when the company passed by any respectable convent on the road, he would certainly knock at the door and inquire about the accommodation and the terms.

"Lor!" he said, caressing his weeping daughter, "do you think I want to be cruel to you, my pretty? Not a bit. Let young Lucraft go and prove himself a man, and he shall have you. But, you see, it wouldn't do to add to the expenses of the company just now, with business so bad and all, would it, my dear? Why, you might be confined in a twelvemonth, and laid by for half the year ever after, with a troop of young children. Where should we be then?"

The next day was Saturday. As usual, I went into the treasury to draw my money, and found the old fellow with rather a red face, and a hesitation in his manner.

He told me the whole story, just as I have told it to you. And then he gave me my dismissal.

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"Look here," he said, handing me the money, "you are a capital young fellow, Lucraft, and a likely actor. There's merit in you. But I can't have you spoiling my Juliet for the stage. So I'm going to put her up without you. After a bit I daresay I shall find another Romeo. You get away to London and find another engagement — there's a week's pay in advance — and when Juliet is married, or when you get rich, or when anything happens to make things different, why, you see, we shall all be glad to see you back. Go and make your farewells to Juliet, and don't be more sentimental than you can help. Good-bye, my boy, and good luck to you."

Good luck! Had he known the kind of luck which awaited me!

I sought my girl, and found her crying. I remember that we forgot all the fine verses of Shakespeare, and just put our faces close to each other and cried together.

It did seem hard upon both of us. We were really and truly in love, and that in a good, honest, determined way. To me there was no other girl in the world except Juliet. To her there was no other man besides Luke Lucraft. We had come to an understanding for three months, and had been quietly dropping deeper and deeper in love during all that time.

And now we were to part.

"Don't forget me, dear Luke," she sobbed. "There are lots of prettier and finer girls in the world than I am, who will try to take away your love from me. I wish I could kill the creatures!" she added, stamping her foot.

Juliet always had a high and generous spirit. I like women to have a high spirit.

"And will you have no admirers, Juliet?" I replied. "Why, half the town" — we were in Lancaster then — "half the town is at your feet already. I intercepted two love-letters yesterday, and I kicked the grocer's apprentice the day before for trying to get Mrs. Mould to give you a billet-doux from himself. Come, dear, we will trust one another. I will try and prove myself a man — get an engagement, make a name on the London stage, and come back with money and an offer to act Romeo to your Juliet at Drury Lane. Think of that, my dearest, and dry your eyes. Your father does not object to me, you know; he only wants me to make an income. Come, Juliet, let us say good-bye. It is only for a short time, and I shall come back with all sorts of reasons in my pocket for persuading your father's consent."

So we parted, with many more promises of trust and fidelity, and after breaking a sixpenny-bit between us. Juliet's piece is buried with her; mine is hanging at my heart, and will be, before long, buried with me beside her.

Oh! the weary journey to London in those days, especially outside the coach, and for a poor man not encumbered with too many wraps. However, I arrived at length, and found myself in the streets that are supposed to be paved with gold, with a couple of sovereigns in my pocket.

But I was brimful of hope. London was a kindly step-mother, who received adopted sons by the thousand, and led them to fame and wealth. I thought of Garrick, of Dick Whittington, and all the rest who came up to town poorer, far poorer than myself, and took comfort. I secured a lodging at a modest rent, and made my way to Drury Lane — the stage door.

I found no opening at Drury Lane; not even a vacancy for a supernumerary. There were not many London theatres in 1823, and I found the same thing everywhere — more applications than places to give.

I tried the Greenwich and the Richmond theatres with the same ill-success.

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Then I endeavoured to get a country engagement, but I even failed there. I had no friends to recommend me, and my single experience with Kerrans's strolling troupe did not tell so much in my favour as I had hoped.

My ambition naturally took a town flight. I had intended to make my appearance on the metropolitan stage as Romeo, my favourite part, and at once to take the town by storm. I was prepared to give them an intelligent and novel interpretation of Hamlet. And I was not unwilling to undertake Macbeth, Othello, or even Prince Hal.

When these hopes became evidently grounded on nothing but the baseless fabrication of a dream, I resolved on beginning with second parts. Horatio, Mercutio, Paris, were, after all, characters worthy the work of a rising artist.

Again there seemed no chance.

The stage always wants young men of general utility. I would go anywhere and take anything. I offered to do so, but although hopes were held out to me by the theatrical agent, somehow he had nothing at the moment in his gift. Nothing: not even a vacancy for a tragedian at Richardson's Show; not even a chance for Bartholomew Fair.

It took me a fortnight to run down the scale from Hamlet, say, to Francis the warder. While I passed through this descending gamut of ambition, my two sovereigns were melting away with a rapidity quite astonishing.

The rent took five shillings: that was paid in advance. Then I was extravagant in the matter of eating, and took three meals a day, finding that not enough to satisfy my vigorous appetite. Once or twice, too, I paid for admission to the pit, and saw, with a sinking heart, what real acting means. My heart failed, because I perceived that I had to begin all over again, and from the very bottom of the ladder.

Then I had to buy a new pair of boots. It was always a trouble to me, the rapid wearing out of leather.

And then there was something else; and then one morning I found myself without a sixpence in my pocket. And then I began for the first time to become seriously alarmed about the future.

I had one or two things which I could pawn — a watch, a waistcoat, a few odds and ends in the way of wardrobe, and a few books — on the proceeds of them I lived for a whole week; but at last, after spending twopence in the purchase of a penny loaf and a saveloy for breakfast, I found myself not only penniless, but also without the means of procuring another penny at all, because I had nothing left to pawn.

Many a young fellow has found himself in a similar predicament, but I doubt whether anyone ever became so desperately hungry as I did on that day. I recollect that, having rashly eaten up my sausage before eight o'clock, I felt a sinking towards twelve; it was aggravated by the savoury smell of roast meat which steamed from the cookshops and dining-rooms as I walked along the streets. About one o'clock I gazed with malignant envy on the happy clerks who could go in and order platefuls of the roast and boiled which smoked in the windows, and threw a perfume more delicious than the sweetest strains of music into the streets where I lingered and looked. And at two I observed the diners come out again, walking more slowly, but with an upright and satisfied air, while I — the sinking had been succeeded by a dull gnawing pain — was slowly doubling up. At half-past two I felt as if I could bear it no longer. I had been walking about, trying different offices for a clerkship. I might as well have asked for a partnership. But I could walk no more. I leaned against a post — it was in Bucklersbury — opposite a dining-room, where hares, fowls, and turkeys were piled in the window among a boundless prodigality and wealth of carrots, turnips, and cauliflowers, till my senses swam at the contemplation. I longed for a cauldron in which to put the whole contents of the shop front, and eat them at one Gargantuan repast. My appetite, already alluded to, was hereditary; one of the few

things I can remember of my mother was a constant complaint that my father used to eat her out of house and home. To be sure, from other scraps of information handed down by tradition, I have reason to believe that the word eating was used as a figure of speech — the part for the whole — and included drinking. I was good at both, and as a trencherman I had been unsurpassed, as I said above, in the company, the dear old company among whom I have so often eaten beefsteak and fried onions with Juliet. The door of the place opened now and then to let a hungry man enter or a full man go out, and I caught glimpse of the interior. Dining-rooms were not called restaurants in those days. They had no gilding, no bright paint, no pretty barmaids, and no silver-plated forks and spoons. Nor were they brilliant with gas. All London — that is, all working London — dined before four o'clock; the clerks from twelve to two, and the principals, except a few of the big wigs, from two to four. The cheaper rooms were like one or two places still to be found in Fleet Street. There were sanded floors; there were hard benches; you had your beer out of pewter, not plated tankards; there was no cheap claret, and the popular ideal of wine was a strong and fiery port. Also, candles stood upon the tables — not wax candles, but tallow, with long wicks which required snuffing. They dropped a good deal of mutton fat about the table, and it was not uncommon to find yourself eating a little tallow with your bread, which was not nice even to men of a strong stomach. Finally, you had steel forks, which are just as good, to my thinking, as plated silver, and more easily cleaned.

I stood by the post and watched with hungry eyes. From within I heard voices, stifled voices, as those sent up a pipe, calling for roast beef with plenty of brown, good heavens! plenty of brown; roast mutton, underdone — I loved my mutton underdone; boiled beef with suet-pudding and fat, I always took a great deal of pudding and fat with my boiled beef; roast veal and bacon with stuffing — a dish for the gods; calves' head for two — I could have eaten calves' head for a dozen; with orders pointing to things beyond my hungry imagination — hunger limits the boundaries of fancy — puddings, fish, soup, cheese, and such delicacies. Alas! I wanted the solids. I felt myself growing feebler; I became more and more doubled up; I had thoughts of entering this paradise of the hungry, and, after eating till I could eat no longer, calmly laying down my knife and fork and informing the waiter that I had no money. There was a farce in which I had once played where the comic actor sent for the landlord, after a hearty meal, and asked him what he would do in case a stranger, after ordering and eating his dinner, should declare his inability to pay. "Do, Sir?" cried the host; "I should kick him across the street." "Landlord," said the low comedian, and it always told — "Landlord," he used to rise up slowly as he spoke, and solemnly draw aside his coat-tails, turning his face in the direction of the street-door — "Landlord, I'll trouble you." I used to play the landlord.

It struck half-past three; the dead gnawing of hunger was followed by a sharp pain, irritating and much more unpleasant. The crowd of those who entered had been followed by the crowd of those who came out and the heaven of hungry men was nearly empty again. I gazed still upon the turkeys and the hares, but with a lacklustre eye, for I was nearly fainting.

Presently there came down the street an elderly gentleman, bearing before him, like a Lord Mayor in a French tale, his enormous abdomen: he had white hair, white eyebrows, white whiskers, and a purple face. He walked very slowly, as if the exertion might prove apoplectic, and leaned upon a thick stick. As he passed the shop he looked in at the window and wagged his head. At that moment I groaned involuntarily. He turned round and surveyed me. I suppose I presented a strange appearance, leaning against the post, with stooping figure and tightly-buttoned coat. He had big projecting eyes flushed with red veins, which gave him a wolfish expression.

"Young man," he said, not benignantly at all, but severely, "you look ill. Have you been drinking?"

I shook my head.

"I am only hungry," I said, telling the truth because I was too far gone to hide it, "I am only hungry; that is the matter with me."

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He planted his stick on the ground, supporting both his hands upon the gold head, and wagged his head again from side to side with a grunting sound in his throat like the sawing of bones.

Grunt! "Here's a pretty fellow for you!" Grunt! "Hungry, and he looks miserable." Grunt! "Hungry, and he groans." Grunt! "Hungry — the most enviable position a man can be in — and he dares to repine at his lot." Grunt! "What are the lower classes coming to next, I wonder? Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Aren't you a model of everything that is ungrateful and" — grunt! — "and flying in the face of Providence? He lives in a land of victuals. London is a gigantic caravan, full of the most splendid things, the most glorious things to eat and drink; it only wants an appetite; and he's got that, and he laments!"

"What is the use of an appetite if you have no money to satisfy it with?"

Grunt! "Is it a small appetite, as a rule, or is it a large appetite?"

"Large," I replied. "It is an awkward thing for a poor beggar like me to have such a devil of a twist. I was born with it. Very awkward just now."

"Come with me, young man," he grunted. "Go before me. Don't talk, because that may interfere with the further growth of your appetite. Walk slowly, and keep your mouth shut close."

He came behind me, walking with his chuckle and grunt.

"So. What a fine young fellow it is!" Grunt! "What room for the development of the Alderman's Arch! What a backbone for the support of a stomach! What shoulders for a dinner-table, and what legs to put under it! Heavens! what a diner might be made of this boy if he only had money." Grunt! "Youth and appetite — health and hunger — and all thrown away upon a pauper! What a thing, what a thing! This way, young man."

Turning down a court leading out of Bucklersbury, he guided me to a door, a little black portal, at which he stopped; then stooping to a keyhole of smaller size than was generally used in those days, he seemed to me to blow into it with his mouth; this was absurd, of course, but it seemed so to me. The door opened. He led the way into a passage, which, when the door shut behind us, as it did of its own accord, was pitch dark. We went up some stairs, and on the first landing the old gentleman, who was wheezing and puffing tremendously, opened another door, and led me into a room. It was a large room, resplendent with the light of at least forty wax candles. The centre was occupied by a large dining-table laid for a single person. Outside it was broad daylight, for it was not yet four o'clock.

"Sit down, young man, sit down," puffed my host. "Oh dear! oh dear! Sit down, do. I wish I was as hungry as you."

I sat down in the nearest chair, and looked round the room. The first thing I remarked was that I could not see the door by which we had been admitted. The room was octagonal, and on every side stood some heavy piece of furniture; a table with glass, a case of bookshelves, a sofa, but no door. My hear began to go round as I continued my observations. There was no window either, nor was there any fireplace. Then I felt a sudden giddiness, and I suppose I fell backwards on my chair. It was partly the faintness of hunger, but partly it was the strange room, and that old man glaring at me with his great wolfish eyes.

When I recovered I was lying on a sofa, and soft cold fingers were bathing my head, and pressing a perfumed handkerchief to my lips. I opened my eyes suddenly and sat up completely recovered. At the foot of the sofa stood my entertainer.

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"Easy with him, Boule-de-neige; make him rest for a moment. Perhaps his hunger has been too much for him."

I turned to see who Boule-de-neige was. He was a negro of the blackest type, an ancient and withered as some old ourang of tropical woods; his cheeks hung in folds, and his skin seemed too much for his attenuated body; his wool was white, and his gums were almost toothless; and his nose so flattened with age as to be almost invisible, looking at him as I was looking, in profile. His hands were as soft as any woman's, but icy cold; and his eyes were red and fiery.

"Boule-de-neige, what do you think of him?"

"Him berry fine young man, massa: him beautiful young man; got lubly abbatite develoffed, I tink; him last long time, much longer time dan last oder young man. Cluck" Him poor trash, dat young man; dam poor trash; use up and go to debbel in a month. Cluck! Dis young man got lovely stumjack, strong as bull. Cluck -- cluck! How much you tink him eat tonight?"

"We shall see, Boule-de-neige. We will try him with a simple dinner, and then pronounce on his performances. Young men do not always come up to their professions. But he looks well, and perhaps, Boule-de-neige -- perhaps -- ah!" He nodded with a deep sigh.

"What time massa dine himself?"

"I don't know," the old gentleman answered, with another heavy sigh, "Perhaps not till nine o'clock; perhaps not then. It all depends on this youth. Vanish, Boule-de-neige, and serve."

There was evidently something in my host's mind by the way he sighed. Why did it depend upon me? And did Boule-de-neige go through the floor? Did the table sink when he disappeared, and come up loaded with dishes? It seemed so.

I sprang from the couch. The sight and smell of the food brought back my raging hunger.

"Let me eat!" I cried.

"You shall. One moment first -- only a single moment. Young man, tell me again and explicitly the nature and extent of your appetite. Be truthful, oh, be truthful! our little tongues should never be for mutton-chop or apple-pie. You know the hymn. I hope you have been religiously brought up, and know that hymn."

"I've got a devil of an appetite. What is there to lie about?"

"My dear young friend, there are many kinds of appetites. Yours may be fierce at first and promise great things, and then end in a miserably small performance. I have known such, and mourned to see them. Is it a lasting appetite, now? Is it steady through a long dinner? Is it regular in its recurrence?"

"You shall see something of my performance," I laughed, insensate wretch. "You shall see. I never had a long dinner in my life, because I always made short work of mine. It is steady through a good many pounds of steak, and as regular as a clock."

"That is always something. Steak is as healthy a test as I know. Is it, secondly, an appetite that recovers itself quickly? That is very important. Is it a day-by-day or an hour-by-hour appetite? Is it good at all times of the day?"

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"Alas, I wish it were not!"

"Hush, young man; do not blaspheme! Tell me, if you eat your fill now — it is half-past four — when do you think you might be ready again?" His eyes glistened like a couple of great rubies in the candlelight, and his hands trembled.

"I should say about eight. But I might do something light at seven, I daresay. Just now I feel as if I could eat a mountain."

"He feels as if he could eat a mountain! Wonderful are the gifts of Providence! My dear young friend, I am very thankful — deeply Thankful — that I met you. Sit down, and let me take the covers off for you; I long to see you eat. This is a blessed day — a truly blessed day! I will wait upon you myself. No one else. Boule-de-neige, vanish!"

As he was about to take off the covers he stopped short.

"Stay. You are without occupation?"

"I can get none."

"You are of any trade?"

"I am an actor."

"A bad trade — an un-Christian trade. Actors are vagabonds by Act of Parliament. Actors can never be in a state of grace. I shall be happy in being a humble instrument in removing you from a calling fatal to the Christian warrior. Why did you leave your last situation? No dishonesty? No embezzlement? No tampering with accounts?"

"Sir, I have always been an honest man. And, besides, I have never been tempted by the handling of other people's money."

"Ha! You have got no wife?"

"No, Sir; I am unmarried."

"You have got no — I trust I am taking to my bosom no deceiver of women. You are not the father of an illegitimate offspring, I hope and pray."

"No, Sir; I am not."

"Young man, you are about to enter upon a most serious act, perhaps the most serious act of your life, and these questions may appear to you trivial and tedious. As a Christian, and a member of the congregation of Mr. — But never mind; — you are hungry now, and wish to eat. We will talk after dinner."

He took off the covers. The table was spread with a dozen different dishes, all served up together. Others I noticed, standing with bottles and decanters, on a large sideboard. As my generous benefactor removed the silver covers, his face, which had assumed during his questioning an austere gravity, suddenly lit up, and he laughed as the perfume of the hot food mounted to his nostrils. He seemed all at once a different man.

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"Gently, gently, my dear young friend. Here is a dinner fit for a king; fit for me, if I could eat it. Oh! my dainty Boule-de-neige! Ha! is it right to waste such a dinner upon a youth whose only dreams are of a sufficiency of steak? Young man, in after years — ahem! — in after days you will remember this dinner. You will recall every item in this delicious bill of fare which Boule-de-neige has set before you. Let me teach you to eat it properly. Weigh your morsels."

Heaven! how I cursed his delay. He kept one great hand between me and the dishes, for fear, I suppose, that I should pounce upon them and clear them off all at once.

"Patience, patience. Consider each mouthful. Try to be thankful that cooks have brought their divine art to such perfection. Carry back your thoughts to — grunt — to time when all mankind fed upon imperfectly cooked steak. Think that all the treasures of the East and West have been ransacked to furnish for me this meal, and that you will never, never, never see such a dinner again as long as you live."

At all events, I never saw such a meal again as long as he lived.

"We will now," he said, with a backward wave of his right hand, "consider dinner as a science."

"Oh, Sir!" I exclaimed, "I am so hungry."

"It's beautiful to see you hungry, but I must not let you hurry. Eat as much as you like when you begin, but gently, gently — easily and gently. Think of the future. Think of ME."

I stared at him in wonder.

"Think of you, Sir?"

"Why, what would happen to me if you really destroyed your appetite, or even yourself in swallowing a bone?"

I thought he must be mad.

"Young man," he went on, "you will say a grace before meat, if you remember one."

I did not.

"Then I will say one for you. Oh! wretched trade of stage acting. He does not even know a single grace before meat."

Then he began to help me — and we went on with dinner without further interruption. He kept up a running accompaniment of comment as I devoured the meal, and his manner gradually lost all its solemnity, until before I was more than half through the dinner he was dancing about, slapping his leg with delight, and laughing till he grew almost black in the face.

Why he was so pleased I could not tell. I was soon to learn.

"These are plovers' eggs. No better thing ever discovered to begin your dinner with. Alderman Stowport says oysters are better. That is rubbish. I do not despise oysters — Why, he has eaten the whole six! Bravo! bravo! an excellent beginning. Let me take away the plate, my dear Sir. Now we have turtle soup — gently, my young friend, gently. Ah, impetuous youth! More? Stay — green fat. Humour, humour your appetite; don't drive it; calipash and calipee. It's really sinful to eat so fast. He takes all down without tasting it. No — no

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more; you must give yourself a fair chance, and not spoil your dinner with too much turtle." He put the soup aside, and took the cover off another dish. "Salmon — with cucumber. Lobster — sauce — bless me, it's like a dream of fairyland! Fillet of sole — a beautiful dream to see him. Ho! ho! he's a Julius Cæsar the Conqueror. Croquet de volaille — gone like a cloud from the sky. Don't wolf the food, my friend; there is a limit to the cravings of nature imposed by the claims of art; taste it. Ris de veau — smiles of the dear little innocent, confiding calf — a little more bread with it? Mauviettes en caisse, larks in baskets — sweet, rapturous, singing larks, toothsome cockyolly larks. He eats them up, bones and all. Ha! ha! Pause, my dear sir, and drink something. Here are champagne, hock, and sauterne; never touch sherry, it's a made-up wine, even the best of it. Come, a little champagne."

"I generally take draught-beer, Sir," I replied, modestly. "That is the drink to which I have been accustomed and — not too much of it; but, if you please, a little fizz will be acceptable."

I drank three glasses in rapid succession, and found them good. He meanwhile nodded and winked with an ever-increasing delight which I failed to understand.

"Now, my Nero, my Paris of Troy, my Judas Maccabæus" — he mixed up his names, but it mattered nothing — "here is saddle of mutton, with potatoes, cauliflower, currant-jelly. More champagne? It's worth sums of money to see him. Curry? More champagne? Curry of chicken? Cabob curry of chicken, young Alexander the Great? Plenty of rice? Ho, ho, ho! Plenty of rice, he said; why, he is a Goliath — a Goliath of Gath, this young man!"

He really grew so purple that I thought he would have a fit of some kind. But the flattery pleased me all the same, and I went on eating and drinking as if I was only just beginning.

"Quail or bécassine — snipe, that is? He takes both, like Pompey. More champagne? Jelly, my Heliogabalus, my modem Caracalla, apricot-jelly? Cabinet pudding? He has two helpings of the pudding. King Solomon in all his glory never — More champagne? A little hock to finish with? He takes his hock in a, tumbler, this young Samson. Cheese — Brie — and celery. A glass of port with the cheese. He takes that in a tumbler too, like Og, King of Bashan."

I was really overwhelmed with the splendour of the dinner, the Classical and biblical flattery, and the extraordinary gratification which my really enormous hunger caused this remarkable old gentleman. He clapped his hands; he nodded his head; he slapped his legs; he winked and grinned; he smacked his lips; he evinced every sign of the most unbounded delight. When I had quite finished eating, which was not before we had got through the whole list of courses, he gave me a bottle of claret, and watched me while I rapidly disposed of it. Then he produced from a sideboard, where I certainly had not seen it a moment before, a small cup of strong black coffee with a tiny glass of liqueur. As for my own part, I hope I have made it clear that I dined extremely well; in fact, I had never even dreamed of such a dinner in my life. It was not only that I was half starved, but that the things were so good. Imagine the astonishment of a young strolling actor, whose highest dreams were of sufficient beefsteak, not of the primest part, at such a magnificent feed. I felt as if I had dropped unexpectedly into a fortune. I had.

"How do you feel now?" my host asked, a shade of anxiety crossing his brow.

* * * * *

There was still the strange look in my host's eyes — a sort of passionate and eager longing.

"I am very well, thank you, Sir, and more grateful than I can tell you."

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"Hang the gratitude! Tell me if you feel any sense of repletion? Does the blood seem mounting to the head? Are you quite free from any giddiness? No thickness in the speech? It's wonderful, it's providential, my finding you. Such a windfall; and just when I most wanted it. Our blessings truly come when we least expect them."

I as strange language, but the whole proceedings were so strange that I hardly noticed it. Besides, I was extremely comfortable after my dinner, and disposed to rest.

"Now," he went on, "while you are digesting — by the way, the digestion is, I trust, unimpaired by drink or excess? Quite so; and what I expected in so good and so gifted a young man. Like an ostrich, as you say. Ho, ho! ha! ha! like an ostrich! It is, indeed; too much. Tell me, now, something, gently and dispassionately, so as not to injure your digestion, about your history."

I told him all. While I related my simple story he interrupted now and then with some fresh question on the growth, the endurance, the regularity of my appetite, to which I gave satisfactory answers. When I had quite finished he went to the table — I noticed then that all traces of the dinner had disappeared — and laid out a document, by which he placed a pen. Then he drew a chair, sat down in front of me, and assumed a serious air.

"Come," he said, peremptorily, "let us get now to business."

I had not the smallest notion what the business was, but I bowed and waited. Perhaps he was going to offer me a clerkship. Visions of a large salary, to suit my expansive appetite, came across my brain.

"In your case," he began, "the possession of so great an appetite must be attended with serious inconveniences. You have no money, in a few hours you will be hungry again; you will endure great pain and suffering, greater than is felt by men less largely endowed with the greatest blessing — I mean with appetite."

"Yes," I said, "it is a great trouble to me, this twist of mine, especially when I am hard up."

He almost jumped out of his chair.

"Why, there," he cried, "what is the use of words? We are agreed already. Nothing could be more fortunate. Let us have no more beating about the bush. Young man, I will rid you of this nuisance; I will buy your appetite of you."

I only stared. Was the old gentleman mad?

"It is a strange offer, I know," he went on, "a strange offer, and you have probably never heard a more remarkable one. But it is genuine. I will buy your appetite of you."

"Buy my — buy my appetite?"

"Nothing easier. Read this."

He gave me the paper which he had laid on the table, prepared in readiness, I suppose, for me. It was as follows:

"I, Luke Lucraft, being in sound mind and in good health, and of the mature age of twenty-four, do voluntarily and of my own free will and accord agree and promise to resign my appetite entirely and

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altogether for the use of Ebenezer Grumbelow from the day and hour of the execution of this deed. In return whereof I agree to accept a monthly allowance of £30, also to date from the moment of signature, with a sum of £50, to be placed in my hands. I promise also that I will carefully study to preserve by regular habits and exercise the gift of a generous appetite; that I will not work immoderately, sit up late, practise vicious courses, or do anything that may tend to impair the regular recurrence of a healthy and vigorous hunger."

Then followed a place for the signature and one for the witnesses.

"You see," he went on, "I ask for no unpleasant condition. I give you a free life, coupled with the simple condition of ordinary care. Do you agree?"

"I hardly know; it is so sudden."

"Come, come" -- he spoke with a harshness quite new -- "come, let us have no nonsense of that sort. Do you agree?"

I read it over again.

"Give me a little time," I said. "Let me reflect till tomorrow morning."

"Reflect!" His face flushed purple, and his bloodshot eyes literally glared. "Reflect! what the devil does the boy want to reflect about? Has he got a penny, a friend, or a chance in the whole world? I will give you five minutes -- come." He rose up and stood before me. As I looked in his face a curious dimness came over my eyes; he seemed to recede before me; he disappeared altogether. When I heard him speak again his voice sounded far, far off, but thin and clear, as if it came through some long tube. "Luke Lucraft," it said, "see yourself."

Yes; I saw myself, and though outside of what I saw, I felt the same emotions as if I had been the actual performer in the scenes I witnessed.

I was standing where the old gentleman met me, starving still, and suffering pangs far worse than those under which I groaned at three o'clock. The day was advanced; the diners had all gone away, and the dining-room waiters were putting up the shutters. I spoke to one of them timidly. I told him I had eaten nothing since the morning, and begged for a plate of broken victuals. He looked in my face, called a brother-servant, and they kicked me from the door. People were rougher in London fifty years ago. Then I slunk away, and wandered somewhere among the winding streets and lanes of the old city. London at night was not so empty and deserted as it is now, and the streets had people in them. Some of them were well dressed -- the wealthy merchants had not, even then, all left off living in the city; some were clerks going home; some were women out for an evening's walk. The bells rang out the hours from the city clocks, and I crept along the walls wondering what would become of me, and how I should find an end of my present misery.

Then I begged. Took off my hat and held it in my hand while I asked for something -- anything -- the smallest coin that would get a piece of bread.

The men passed me by with pitiless and unbelieving eyes. Heavens! if they had been hungry once, only once, in all their lives, they would never again have refused the petition of a beggar, even though he was the most lying mendicant who ever disgraced the words of charity which passed his lips. But they gave me nothing.

The women edged away from me and passed on the other side if I timidly pressed my claim. They had nothing to fear from me. At last I asked a girl. She was more unfortunate than myself, but she was not hungry, and she gave me a shilling.

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Then I found a shop open, and bought a plate Of meat. That spent — I saw myself slinking ashamed and wretched again along the cold and empty street. "When I could walk no more I found myself in Covent Garden Market, and threw myself under shelter of a roof at least among the stalks and leaves and straw which littered the place.

I awoke early, and hungry again. I rose and resumed my miserable walk.

Hope by this time was dead within me; I could think of nothing but my intolerable hunger; could feel nothing but the pain which would not leave me; could look at nothing but food in the window.

I begged again, and begged all day without success.

It was a rougher time, that, than the present. More than one man laid his stick across my back with an impatient admonition to get to work, you lazy rogue. But I was too feeble to retaliate or remonstrate. Was there no charity in the world? I passed other beggars in the streets who looked fat and comfortable. People gave them money, but they would give me none. The time wore on, and my craving for food became irresistible.

I passed a shop which had a tray outside of baked potatoes. The owner had his back to me. I stole one. Yes, I stole one. No one saw me. He did not see me as I slunk past him with guilty face, and swiftly sped round the nearest corner to eat the stolen morsel.

What is the use of a single baked potato? Presently I returned to the same place with the intention of taking another. But they were all gone. I went on looking for another provision shop. I came to a place where hot smoking sausages were bubbling in a pan over a charcoal fire. The shop stood at a corner. There was only a girl minding it. I deliberately walked in, took a sausage from the pan, hot as it was, and stepped out again before her astonishment even prompted her to cry out.

The time seemed intolerably long. All these scenes Passed before me, not as the quick and steady flight of the rapidly falling moments, but as if the agony and the shame were deliberately lengthened out.

Then came a third time when I stole, maddened by the dream of hunger. This time I was detected, pursued, and apprehended. The misery and shame of the hour when I stood before the magistrate, in that horrible vision of a possible future, I cannot even yet forget. With this a constant sense of unsatisfied and craving hunger; a feeling as if hunger was the greatest evil in the whole world; a longing to get rid of it. Last scene of all, I was lying dead, starved to death with hunger and cold, in a miserable, bare, and naked garret.

By what black art did the old man delude my senses? It was a lie, and he knew it. I should have got some honest work, if only to wheel bricks or carry loads.

"There is your future, young man" — there came up from the distance the voice of the tempter — "a gloomy prospect: a miserable life: a wretched ending. Now look at the other side."

The scene changed. I saw myself, but in another guise. My hunger had vanished; I felt it no more.

This time I was happy, light-hearted, and cheerful. I remembered scenes of misery through which I had just passed, and the recollection added more sweetness to my present enjoyment. It seemed as if I should never be hungry any more, and never feel the want of food. I was like a Greek god in my exemption from the common weakness of humanity. I was rich, too, and knew that I had the command, somehow, of all that money could buy.

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I was sitting in a garden, and around me were troops of girls. I heard the rustle of their dresses, caught the laughter from their lips, watched the lustre of their eyes, saw the moonlight dance among their waving locks, as they ran and played among the trees and flowers. One of them sat by me and sang to a guitar:—

Life is made for love. Ah! Why
Should its sweetness e'er be marred?
List! the echoes will not die,
Still the sweet word "love" to guard.

Nought but love. Oh! Happy youth,
Free from need of baser thought,
Stay with us, and learn this truth,
Set with song, with music wrought.

Thine is love, an endless feast;
Beauty -- sweeter far than wine;
Joy, from lower cares released --
Never star rose bright as thine.

I knew, somehow or other, that this was allegorical, and, as if I expressed my thought, the scene changed, and I was in real life.

Chambers in London, such as I had read of, overlooking St James's Park. I sat in them in the midst of books and pictures. I had no business to call me away from my indolent ease; I had no anxiety about the future. I got up and strolled about the streets looking at the shops. If I fancied a thing I bought it. I went to picture galleries and saw the latest works of art; I went to the theatre and saw the performance from a comfortable box; I went riding in the park.

Then my fancy returned to my first love, and I saw myself walking in a country lane with Juliet. She was sweeter to look upon than ever, and more delightful in her frank and innocent love for me. We rambled along under the hedges while I gathered flowers for her, and talked of the happy, happy days when we should be one, soon now to arrive, and of the sweet, loving life which should be ours far away from the troubles of the world.

Dreams, idle dreams; but sweet to me, after the agony of the last, as a draught of water to a parched traveller on Sahara.

The pictures changed as fast as my fancy wandered from one thing to another. In all I was the same -- free from the downward and earthly pressure of want and hunger, relieved from anxiety, with plenty of money, and full of all sweet and innocent fancies.

Lies again. But by what power could this necromancer so cheat and gull my brain?

"Very different scenes these, my dear young friend," he said in a winning voice, "are they not? Now," he went on, and his voice was quite close to me, "you have had your five minutes."

The cloud passed from my eyes. I was sitting again in the octagonal room, the old man before me, watch in hand, as if he was counting the seconds.

"Five minutes and a quarter," he growled. "Now choose."

"I have chosen," I replied. "I accept your offer."

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The influence of the things I had seen was too strong upon me. I could neither reason nor reflect.

"I accept your offer."

"Why, that's brave," he said, with a gigantic sigh of relief. "That's what I expected of you. Boule-de-neige — Boule-de-neige!"

He clapped his hands.

Instantly the horrible old negro appeared behind his master's chair, as if he had sprung up from the ground. I believe he had. He looked more like a devil than ever, grinning from ear to ear, and his two eyes glowing in the candlelight like two great coals. The light fell, too, upon the seams and wrinkles of his face, bringing them out like the hills and valleys in a raised map. Strange as it all was to me, this ancient servitor produced the strangest effect upon me of anything.

"Boule-de-neige is witness for us," said the old gentleman.

"Boule-de-neige, this young gentleman, Mr. Luke Lucraft, is about to sign a little deed, to which, as a matter of form, we require your signature too as witness."

"Cluck!" said the negro. "Dis young gegleman berry lucky — him berry lucky. What time massa take him dinner?"

"When do you think you shall be fairly hungry again?" he asked me. "Now, no boastings — no false pretence and pride — because it will be the worse for you. Answer truthfully. It is now six."

"I should say that at nine I should be able to take some supper, and at ten I shall certainly be hungry again. As an ordinary rule I should be ready a great deal earlier, but I have taken such an immense dinner."

"Good." He turned to Boule-de-neige. "You see the young man is modest and promises fairly. I shall have supper — a plentiful supper — at ten punctually. Mr. Lucraft will now sign."

I advanced to the table and took up the pen, but there was no ink.

"Cluck!" said the infernal negro, with another grin — "cluck! Massa wait lilly bit."

He took my left hand in his soft and cold paw. I felt a sharp prick at my wrist.

"You will dip the pen," said the old gentleman, "in the blood. It is a mere form."

"Cluck!" said Boule-de-neige.

"A mere form because we have no ink handy."

"Cluck-cluck!"

I signed my name as desired, and, following the directions of the old gentleman, placed my finger on the red wafer at the margin, saying, "I declare this my act and deed."

Then I gave the pen to Boule-de-neige. He signed after me, in a firm flowing hand, "Boule-de-neige." As I looked, the letters seemed somehow to shape themselves into "Beezlebub." I looked at him with a kind of

terror. The creature grinned in my face as if he divined my thought, and gave utterance to one of his hideous "clucks".

Then I began to feel the same faintness which I had at first experienced. It mounted upwards from my feet slowly, so that I heard the old gentleman's voice, though I saw nothing. It grew gradually fainter.

'Supper at ten, Boule-de-neige," he was saying; "I feel getting hungry already. What shall I do with myself till ten o'clock? I am certainly getting hungry. I think I can have it served at half-past nine. Oh, blessed day! Oh, thankful, blessed day! Boule-de-neige, it must be supper for three -- for four -- for five. I shall have champagne -- the Perrier Jouet -- the curaçoa punch afterwards. Curaçoa punch -- I haven't tasted it for three months and more. Oh, what a blessed -- blessed -- blessed -- "

I heard no more because my senses failed me altogether, and his voice died away in my ears.

When I came to myself I was leaning against the post in Bucklersbury, where I had met the old man.

A whiff of stale cooked meat from the cook-shop, which caught me as I opened my eyes, produced a singular feeling of disgust.

"Pah," I muttered, "roast mutton!" and moved from the spot, my hunger was gone, that was quite certain. I felt a quietness about those regions, wherever they may be, which belong to appetite. I was almost dreamy in the repose which followed a morning so stormy. I walked quietly away homewards in a kind of daze, trying to make out something of what had happened. The first thing I found I could not remember was the name of the old gentleman. When that came back to me and under what circumstances I will tell you as we get along. Bit by bit I recalled the whole events of the afternoon, one after the other. I saw the old man, with his purple face and bloodshot eyes and white hair; I saw the wrinkled and seamed old negro; I saw the octagonal room without doors or windows; the splendid dinner; the host watching my every gesture; I remembered everything except the name of the man to whom I had sold -- my appetite.

It was so strange that I laughed when I thought of it. I must have been drunk; he gave me a good dinner and I took too much wine; but, then, how was it that I remembered clearly every, even the smallest, detail?

On the bed in the one room which constituted my lodging I found a letter. It was from a firm of lawyers, dated that evening at half-past six -- only half an hour after I signed the paper -- stating that they were empowered by a client, whose name was not mentioned, to give me the sum of £30 monthly, to begin from that day, and to be paid to me personally. How did they get their instructions then? And it was all true!

I was too tired with the day's adventures to think any more; and, though it was only nine o'clock, I went to bed and fell fast asleep. In an hour I awoke again, with a choking sensation, as if I was eating too much. I knew instantly what was going on, and by a kind of prophetic insight. The old man was taking his supper, and taking more than was good -- for me. I sprang from the bed, gasping for breath. Presently, as I gathered, he began to drink too much as well. My brain went round and round. I laughed, sang, and danced; and soon after, with a heavy fall, I rolled senseless on the carpet, and remembered nothing more.

It was early in the morning when I awoke, still lying on the floor. I had a splitting headache. I had fallen against some corner of the furniture and blackened one eye. I had broken two chairs somehow or other. I was cold, ill, and shaken. I got into bed, and tried to remember what had happened. Clearly I must have made a drunken beast of myself over the dinner, and reeled home with my head full of fancies and dreams; perhaps the dinner itself was a dream and a hallucination too; if so, the pangs of hunger would soon recommence. But they did not. Then I fell asleep, and did not awake again till the clock struck twelve. How ill and wretched I felt as I dressed! My hand shook, my eyes were red, my face swollen. Surely I must have been intoxicated. I

had been, up to that day at least, a temperate man, partly, no doubt, from the very wholesome reason which keeps so many of us sober — the necessity of poverty; but of course I had not arrived at four and twenty years and seen so much of the world without recognising the signs of too much drink. I had them, every one; and, as most men know too well, they are all summed up in the simple expression, "hot coppers". Alas! I was destined to become only too familiar with the accursed symptoms. Involuntarily, when I had dressed myself, I put my hands in my pockets, those pockets so often empty; there was money, gold—sovereigns — my pocket was full of them. I counted them in a stupor. Forty—nine, and one rolled into the corner — fifty; it was part of the sum for which I had sold my appetite; and on the table lay the letter from Messrs Cracked and Charges, inviting me to draw thirty pounds a month.

Then it was all true!

I sat down, and, with my throbbing temples and feverish pulse, tried to make it opt. Everything became plain except the name of the purchaser — Mr. — Mr. — I remembered Boule—de—neige, the house, the room, and the dinner, but not the name of that arch—deceiver, the whole of whose villainy I was far from realising yet; and until it was told me later on I never did remember the name.

It was strange. Men are said to have sold their souls to the devil for money, bartering away an eternity of happiness for a few years of pleasure; but as for me, I had exchanged, as it seemed at first sight, nothing but the inconvenience of a healthy appetite with nothing to eat for the means of living comfortably without it. There could be no sin in such a transaction; it was on a different level altogether from the bargain made by Faust. And there were the broad, the benevolent facts, so to speak — my pocket full of sovereigns; and the letter instructing me to call at an office for thirty pounds monthly.

Benevolent facts I thought them. You shall see. You think, as I thought, that no sin could be laid to my door for the transaction. You shall judge. You think, as I thought, that no harm could follow so simple a piece of business. You shall read. On my way out I met the landlady, who gave me notice to quit at the end of the week.

"I thought you were a quiet and a sober young man," she said. "Ah, never will I trust to good looks again. Me and the lodgers kept awake till two in the morning with your singing and dancing, let alone banging the floor with the chair. Not another hour after your week's up, if you was to pray on your knees, shall you stay. And next door threatening the constables; and me a quiet woman for twenty years."

My heart sank again. But, after all, perhaps it was I myself, not the good old gentleman, my kind patron and benefactor, at all, who was the cause of this disturbance. It was undoubtedly true that I had taken a great quantity of wine with my splendid dinner. I begged her pardon humbly, and passed out.

It was now nearly one o'clock, but I felt no desire for breakfast. That was an experience quite novel to me. Still, I went to a coffee—house, according to habit, and ordered some tea and a rasher. When they came I discovered, with a horrid foreboding of worse misfortune behind, that my taste was gone. Except that one thing was solid and the other liquid, I distinguished nothing. Nor did my sense of smell assist me: as I found later, my nose was affected agreeably or disagreeably, but it lost all its discriminating and critical Powers. Gunpowder, sulphuretted hydrogen gas, and tobacco offended my nose. So did certain smells belonging to cookery. On the other hand, certain flowers, tea, and claret pleased me, but I was unable to distinguish between them. Not only could I not taste them, but I had no gratification in eating them. I ate and drank mechanically, because I knew that the body must be kept going on something.

All this knowledge, however, and more, came by degrees. After making a forced breakfast I bent my steps to the lawyers', who had an office in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

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The letter was received by a conceited young clerk in shiny black habiliments, a turned up nose, and a self-satisfied manner.

"Ha!" he said, "I thought you would soon come round to us after the letter. Sign that. You haven't been long. None of them are."

It was a receipt; and I was on the point of asking if it was to be signed in blood, when he set9ed the question by giving me the ink.

"There, Luke Lucraft, across the eightpenny stamp. I'm not allowed to answer any questions you may put, Mr. Lucraft, nor to ask you any; so take your money, and good morning to you. I suppose, like the rest of them, you don't know the name of your benefactor, and would like to — yes; but you needn't ask me; and I've orders not to admit you to see either Mr. Charges or Mr Crackett. They'd trouble enough with the last but one. He broke into their office once, drunk, and laid about him with the ruler."

I burst into a cold dew of terror.

"However, Mr. Lucraft, I hope you will be more fortunate than your predecessors."

"Where are they? Who are they?"

"I do not know where they are, not for a certainty," he replied with a grin. "But we may guess. Dead and buried they are, all of them. Gone to kingdom come; all died of the same thing, too — DT. Delicious Trimmings killed them. Poor old gentleman! He's too good for this world, as everybody knows, and the more he's taken in the more he's deceived. Anyhow, he's very unlucky in his pensioners. He did say when the last went off that he would have no more; he wept over it, and declared that his bounty was always abused; but there never was such a benevolent old chap. I only wish he'd take a fancy to me."

"What did you say is his name, by the way?"

The clerk looked at me with a cunning wink.

"If you don't know, I am sure I do not," he said. "Here is the cheque, Mr. Lucraft, and I hope you will continue to come here and draw it a good deal longer than the other chaps. But there's a blight on all the pensioners. Lord, what a healthy chap Tom Kirby — he was a Monmouth man — looked when he first came for his cheques! As strong as a bull and as fresh as a lark."

"A good appetite had he?"

"No; couldn't eat anything after a bit; said he fancied nothing. Lost his taste entirely. He pined away and died in a galloping consumption before the third month was due. Nobody ever saw him drinking, but he was drunk every night, regular, like the rest. Perhaps it's only coincidence. Better luck to you, Mr. Lucraft."

This conversation did not reassure me, and I determined to go over to Bucklersbury at once and see my patron. I found the post against which I was leaning when he accosted me; there was no doubt about that, for the hares and cauliflowers were still in the shop-window, only they looked disgusting to me this morning. I found the street into which he had led me, and then — then — it was the most extraordinary thing, I could not find the door by which we entered. Not only was there no door, but there seemed no place where such a door as I remembered could exist in this little narrow winding street. I went up and down twice. I looked at all the windows. I asked a policeman if he had ever seen an old gentleman about the street such as I described, or such a negro as Boule-de-neige; but he could give no information. Only as I prowled slowly

along the pavement I heard distinctly — it gave me a nervous shock that I could not account for — the infernal "Cluck — cluck!" of the negro with the cold soft hands, the wrinkled skin, and the fiery red eyes. He was chuckling at me from some hiding-place of his own, where he was safe. He had done me no harm that I knew of, but I hated him at that moment.

I was by this time not at all elated at my good fortune. I even craved to have back again what I had sold. I felt heavy at heart, and had a presentiment of fresh trouble before me. I thought of the fate of those unknown and unfortunate predecessors, all dead in consequence of drink, evil courses, and DT. Heavens! was I too to die miserably with delirium tremens, after I had sold my taste, and could only tell brandy from water, like the cask which might hold either, by the smell?

At half-past one — the luncheon time for all who have appetites — the sense of being gorged came upon me again, but this time without the giddiness. I went to a tavern in the Strand and fell sound sleep. When I awoke at six the oppression had passed away. And now I began to realise something of the consequences of my act. I say something, because worse, far worse, remained behind. I was doomed, I saw clearly, to be the victim of the old man's gluttony. He would eat and I should suffer. Already, as I guessed from the clerk's statements, he had killed four strong men before me. I was to be the fifth. I went again to Bucklersbury, and sought in every house for something that might give me a clue. I loitered in the quiet city streets in the hope of finding my tormentor, and forcing him to give me back my bond. There was no clue, and I did not meet him. But I felt him. He began dinner, as nearly as I could feel, about seven o'clock; he took his meal with deliberation, judging from the gradual nature of my sensations; but he took an amazing quantity, and by eight o'clock the weight upon me was so great that I could scarcely breathe. How I cursed my folly! How I impotently writhed under the burden I had wantonly laid upon myself! And then he began to drink. The fiend, the scoundrel! I felt the fumes mount to my head; there was no exhilaration, no forgetfulness of misery; none of the pleasant gradations of excitement, hope, and confidence, through which men are accustomed to pass before arriving at the final stage, the complete oblivion, of intoxication. I felt myself getting gradually but hopelessly drunk. I struggled against the feeling, but in vain; the houses went round and round with me: my speech, when I tried to speak, became thick; the flags of the pavement flew up and struck me violently on the forehead, and I became unconscious of what happened afterwards.

* * * * *

In the morning I found myself lying on a stone bench in a small whitewashed room. My brows were throbbing and my throat was parched, and in my brain was ringing, I do not know why, the infernal "Cluck — cluck!" of the negro with derisive iteration. I had not long to meditate; the door opened, and a constable appeared.

"Now then," he said, roughly, "if you can stand upright by this time, come along."

It was clear enough to me now what had happened: I was in custody, in a police-cell and I was going before the magistrate. I dream of that ignominy still, though forty years have passed since I was placed in the dock and asked what I had to say for myself. "Drunk and disorderly."

I was charged by the constable — there were no police in 1823 — with being drunk and disorderly. Twenty other poor wretches were waiting their trial for the same offence; one or two for graver charges. My case came first, and had the honour of being reported in the papers. Here is the extract cut out of the Morning Chronicle:

A young man, who gave his name as Henry Luke, and said he was an actor by profession, was charged with being drunk and disorderly in the streets. The constable found him at ten o'clock lying on the pavement of Bucklersbury, too drunk even to speak, and quite unable therefore to give any account of himself. A cheque,

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signed by the well-known firm of Crackett and Charges, for £30 was found on his person. The magistrate remarked that this was a suspicious circumstance, and decided to remand the case till these gentlemen could be communicated with. One of the partners appeared at twelve, and deposed that the prisoner's real name was Luke Lucraft that he had been an actor, and that the cheque had been given him by the firm, acting for a client who wished to be anonymous, but whose motive was pure benevolence. The magistrate, on hearing the facts of the case, addressed the prisoner with a suitable admonition. He bade him remember that such an abuse of a good man's charity, as he had been guilty of, was the worst form of ingratitude. It appeared that on the very day of receiving a gift, which was evidently intended to advance him in life, or to find him the means of procuring suitable employment, the prisoner deliberately made himself so hopelessly drunk that he could neither speak nor stand — where, it did not appear. The magistrate could not but feel that this conduct showed the gravest want of moral principle, and he strongly advised Mr. Crackett to cancel the cheque till further orders. As, however, it was a first offence, and in consideration of the prisoner's youth, the fine inflicted would be a small one of ten shillings, with costs.

That was the newspaper account of the affair. On his way out of the court, Mr. Crackett stopped me.

"Young man," he said, shaking his head, "this is very dreadful. I warned my benevolent client against this act of generosity. You are the fifth young man whom he has assisted in this magnificent manner. The former, all four, took to drink, and died in a disgraceful manner. Take warning, and stop while it is yet time." I got away as fast as I could, and crept back to my lodging after the necessary miserable breakfast.

I am not ashamed to say that I sat down and cried. The tears would crowd into my eyes. It was too dreadful. Here I was, only twenty-four years of age, with my life before me, doomed, through my own folly, to a miserable ending and a disgraceful reputation. What good would come of having money under these dreadful conditions? Money, indeed! What had become of the fifty pounds given me only two days before? Gone. All gone but one single sovereign which served to pay my fine. Some one had robbed me. Perhaps the constables. Perhaps a street thief. It was gone. The sorry reward of my consent to the unholy bargain was clean swept away, and only the consequences of the contract remained.

In the afternoon, as I hastened home along the darkening streets, hoping to reach my lodging before the daily gorge began, a curious thing happened to me. On the other side of the street, in a dark comer, standing upright, and pointing to me with a finger of derision, I saw Boule-de-neige, the negro servant. I rushed at him, blind with rage. When I got to the spot I found nobody there. Was it a trick of a disordered brain? I had seen him, quite plainly, grinning at me with his wrinkled features. As I turned from the place I heard his familiar "Cluck — cluck".

Twice more on the way this strange phantom appeared to me; each time accompanied by the "cluck" of his voice. It was a phantom with which I was to become familiar indeed, before I had finished with Boule-de-neige and his master.

It was clear that the demon to whom I had sold myself was incapable of the slightest consideration towards me. He would eat and drink as much as he felt disposed to do, careless of any consequences that might befall me. It was equally evident that he intended to make the most of his bargain, to eat enormously every day, and to drink himself drunk every night. And I was powerless. Meantime it was becoming evident that the consequences to me would be as serious as if I were myself guilty of these excesses. One drop of comfort alone remained: my appetite would fail, and my tormentor would be punished where he would feel it most. I lay down and waited till luncheon time; no sense of repletion came over me; it was certain, therefore, that he was already suffering a vicarious punishment, so to speak, for yesterday's debauch.

The next day, however, I really did meet my negro.

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It was about five in the afternoon — the time when I was tolerably safe, because my owner, who took a plentiful luncheon at one, did not begin his nightly orgy much before seven. I was loitering about Bucklersbury, my favourite place of resort, in the hope of meeting the old man, when my arm was touched as I turned round. It was the negro. "Massa Lucraft," he said, "you come along o' me. Massa him berry glad to see you."

I declare that although the moment before I had been picturing such an encounter, although I had imagined myself with my fingers at his throat, dragging him off, and forcing him to tell me who and what he was, I felt myself unable to speak.

"Come along o' me, Massa Lucraft," he said; "this way — way you know berry well. Ho, ho! — Cluck —"

He stopped before the door I remembered, but had never been able to find, opened it with a little key, and led the way to the octagonal room.

There was no one in it, but the table was already laid for dinner.

"Massa come bymeby. You wait, young gegleman."

Then he disappeared somehow.

As before, I could see no door. As before, the first sensation which came over me was of giddiness, from which I recovered immediately. I walked round and round the room looking at the heavy furniture, the pictures, which were all of fruit and game, and the silver plate. Everything showed the presence of great wealth, and, I supposed, though I knew nothing about it, great taste. I was kept waiting for nearly two hours. That I did not mind, because every moment brought me, I thought, nearer to the hour of my deliverance. I was certain that I had only to put the case to Mr. Grumbelow — I remembered his name the moment I was back in that room — to appeal to his generosity, his honour, his pity, in order to obtain my release. Mr. Grumbelow — Ebenezer Grumbelow — he was the charitable client of Messrs. Crackett Charges, was he? Why, I might show him up to popular derision and hatred. I might tell the world who and what this great benefactor of young men really was.

Suddenly, as the clock struck seven, he stood upon the carpet before me, while Boule-de-neige stood at the table with a soup tureen in his hand. I declare that I did not see at any time anyone enter the room or go out of it. They appeared to be suddenly in it.

I do hope that the appearance of small details like the above, at first incredible, will not be taken as proof of want of veracity on my own part. I wish that I could tell the tale without these particulars, but I cannot. I must relate the whole or none.

"You here?" said Mr. Grumbelow, looking at me with an air of contempt. He seated himself at the table and unfolded his napkin. "Soup, Boule-de-neige."

"Massa hungry? Dat young debbel there he look berry pale already."

"Pretty well, Boule-de-neige, considering. You, sir, come here, and let me look at you." I obeyed. "Hold out your hand. It shakes. Let me look at your eyes. They are yellow. Do you know that your appetite seems to me to be failing already — already — and it is only the fourth day."

"It is not my fault," I said.

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"Nonsense. Don't talk to me, sir, because I will have none of your insolence. I say that you do not walk enough. I order you to walk twelve miles a day -- do you hear?"

"It is not in the contract," I replied, doggedly.

"It is in the contract. You are to use every means in your power to keep your faculties in vigour. What means have you used?"

He banged the spoon on the table and glanced at me so fiercely that I had nothing to say.

"Massa, soup get cold," said Boule-de-neige.

He gobbled it up, every now and then looking up at me with an angry grunt.

"Now then, you and your contract. This is pretty ingratitude, this is. Here's a fellow, Boule-de-neige, I pick up out of the gutter, starving; whom I keep expensively; whom I endow with an income; whom I deprive of the temptation to gluttony."

"Nebber see such a debbel in all my days," said the negro; "nebbber hear such a ting told nowhere."

"No nor ever will. Listen to me, sir. You will walk ten, twelve, or twenty miles a day, according to the dinner I have had. And, mark you, it will be the worse for you if you do not. Remember, if I cannot eat I can drink."

There was a fiendish glare in his blood-stained eyes as he spoke, and I trembled. My spirit was so completely gone that I had not even the pluck to appeal to his pity. Perhaps a secret consciousness of the uselessness of such an appeal deterred me.

"You will now," he said, "watch me making as large a dinner as your miserably languid appetite will allow."

"I have been drunk for four nights," I pleaded. "Then you have no business to get drunk so easily. Your head is contemptibly weak -- what did I take yesterday, Boule-de-neige."

"Big bottle champagne, big bottle port, eight goes whisky grog."

"I did -- and that was all. Why your predecessor stood double the quantity."

"Beg pardon, massa. Last young gegleman poor trash -- last but two -- him mighty strong head -- head like bull -- nebbber get drunk."

"Ah, we wasted him, Boule-de-neige; we fooled him away in one imprudent evening. I told you at the time that noyeau punch is a very dangerous thing."

"Ho, ho!" the diabolical negro laughed till his teeth showed like the grinning jaws of a death's head. "Ho, ho! him so blind drunk he tumble out of window -- break him neck. Ho, ho!"

This was a pleasant conversation for me to hear.

Then Mr. Grumbelow resumed his dinner.

He ate a good deal in spite of his grumbling, and then he began to drink port. I observed that the wine had a peculiar effect upon him. It made him redder in the face, but not thicker in speech. He drank two bottles,

talking to me all the time. I began to get drunk, he only got the more merrily fiendish.

"This is really delightful," he said, as I reeled and caught at a chair for support. I wonder I never thought of this before. It is quite a new pleasure to watch the effects of my own drink on another man's brain, I shall write a book about you. I shall call it 'The Young Christian deterred, or Leaves from Luke Lucraft's Wicked Life.' Ho, ha! Ha, ho! I saw the account in the Morning Post. Heigh, heigh!" — he nearly choked as he recalled the circumstance. "The magistrate admonishing the wicked drunkard. Ho, ho! it is like a farce. Stand up, sir, stand up. He can't stand up. Can you sing? Can you dance? He could not even dance a hornpipe. Do you feel a little thickness in your speech? Would you be able to explain to the worthy magistrate the circumstances, quite, beyond your own control, which brought you into that painful position in which you stood? It is the best situation that ever was put upon any stage. There's nothing like it in fiction. Nothing. Walter Scott never invented anything half so rich. Ho, ho, ho, he is really getting drunk already. What a poor creature it is!"

He paused for a moment and then went on.

"Boule-de-neige, coffee; brandy in it — plenty of brandy, and a glass of curaçoa afterwards. A large glass, sir! I'll have a night of it. Your health, Luke Lucraft, in this coffee; and you had better take care of it, or I'll pack you off with noyeau punch. Pleasant times you are having, eh? Might have been worse, you know. You might have been starving. What? Don't fall against the table in that way. Take care of the furniture. It cost a great deal more money than you are worth. So, sit down on the floor while I tell you about your predecessors, dead and gone, poor fellows.

"Let me see. The first was William Saunders, a poor devil of a clerk of mine. He disgraced himself in chapel one week-day prayer-meeting, the very evening of his signature; then he ran away, but Boule-de-neige found him out, and brought him back. He took to praying and crying. One day he died in St. Bartholomew's Hospital of delirium tremens. He lasted about six months.

"The next was Hans Hansen, a Dane. He only lasted about three weeks, because he became melancholy directly he found he could no longer taste brandy. I was disappointed with Hansen, and when he jumped off London Bridge into the Thames one night, his appetite having quite gone, I was really very sorry on account of the temporary inconvenience it put me to; and I determined to be very careful in his successor. I remember I had a good deal of trouble to find one.

"However, at last I got a third man, a stout Cumberland chap, son of a statesman. You poor, puny little strolling actor, I suppose that you will hardly believe that I once took four and twenty tumblers of Scotch whisky and water without affecting that brave fellow's appetite one bit. He used to take it out in swearing; and really he was almost too often in trouble with the magistrates. He never clearly understood that his safety lay in being home early in the evening. Once he nearly killed Mr. Crackett in his own office. Poor Crackett! that eminent Christian lawyer; I should never have forgiven myself had anything happened to the worthy Crackett. Well! he went too; at least, after a good tough twelvemonth. It was my own fault, and I ought not to grumble. That noyeau punch was strong enough to kill the devil."

"Cluck," said Boule-de-neige.

"Then we came to Tom Kirby. None of them looked so well or promised so much; none broke down so easily. A whining fellow too; a crying, sobbing, appealing rogue, who wanted to get off his bargain. However, de mortuis — Your health, Luke Lucraft. Hallo! hold up.

"I tell you what I mean to do after you're worked off, Luke Lucraft. I mean to have a brace of fellows. I shall go down to the London docks, or else to the railway stations, and find a couple of trusty young porters. They

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are the sort of men to have. Fine, strong, well-set-up rascals. Men with muscles like rigging ropes — don't clutch at the chair, Lucraft — if you can't sit up you may lie down — I shall make them come here — give them a blow out of steak — I wasted a splendid dinner on you — and then I shall make them sign.

"The great thing, then, will be to have the appetites of two men; twice as much to eat and twice as much to drink. I never thought of that before.

"And then to bring both the rogues up here of an evening and make them wait and see me eat; watch them gradually lolling and reeling about till they tumble over each other; go secretly and hear them curse me — me, their benefactor — Ho! ho! I think I shall not be long over you, Luke Lucraft. Hallo! keep your drunken legs away from the table. Boule-de-neige, roll this intoxicated log into the street."

* * * * *

When I came to my senses it was of course the next morning, and I was lying in my own bedroom, whither I had been carried by two strange men, the landlady afterwards told me, who said they were paid for the job. I had a splitting headache. I was sick and giddy; my limbs trembled beneath me when I tried to stand; my hands shook. I looked at myself in the glass. Swollen features and bloodshot eyes greeted me.

Less than a week had wrought this ruin.

The ordinary drunkard refreshes himself in the morning with tea. Nothing refreshed me, because I could taste nothing, and because my sufferings sprang from a different source, though they were the same in kind. I had to bear them as best I might.

I remembered the command which Mr. — Mr. — strange, I had forgotten his name again — gave me, to walk twenty miles after a "heavy night". I started to obey him.

Outside London, beyond Islington, where there are now rows of houses but were then fields, I saw a little modest cottage, standing alone in its garden. It was a cottage with four rooms only, covered over with creepers. On the board, standing at the gate, was an announcement that it was to let. A thought struck me: Here could be seclusion, at any rate. Here I could shut myself up every night, and await in comparative safety the dreadful punishment — fast becoming heavier than I could bear — which my tormenter inflicted upon me. Why should I not take the cottage, pay the rent in advance every month — for how many months should I have to pay it? — and so wait in patience and resignation the approach of my inevitable fate?

I made inquiries at once, and secured the place at a merely nominal rent. Then I moved in a little furniture, bought second hand in Islington High Street, and became the occupant, a lonely hermit, of the house. There were no houses within hearing, in case I should storm and rage in my drunken madness at night. The cottage stood removed from the road, and no callers were likely to trouble me. Within those walls I should be secure from some dangers at least. Here, night after night, I could await the attacks of surfeit and intoxication which regularly came; for my master knew no pity.

On the first evening I sat down at half-past six to prepare for what was coming. The day was drawing in, and a cold twilight — the month was March — covered the trees and shrubs in my little garden, as I opened the door and looked out.

Before me stood the negro.

My spirit was quite broken, and I could only groan.

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"Do you want me to go with you again?" I asked, thinking of the last entertainment at which I provided amusement for his master.

"Massa say him berry glad you come hyar. You walk the twenty mile ebbery day, else massa know the reason why. How you feel, Massa Lucraft? Heigh! heigh! cluck. Dat most fortunate day for you when you sign dat little paper."

He delivered his message and disappeared in the darkness. I heard his footsteps crunching the gravel in the road, and I longed, only now I had no courage or spirit left, to seize him and tear him limb from limb.

Then I shut myself in, lit one candle, and sat over the fire. I thought of the scenes by which my extravagant fancy had been excited; the garden full of lively girls — what were girls to me now? the country walks I was to have with Juliet — where was my passion for Juliet now? The ease and happiness, the lightness and innocence, of the life before me, drawn by an arch-deceiver, compared with my present, my actual misery, sitting alone, cut off from mankind, the slave and victim of a secret profligate and glutton, doomed to die slowly, unless it should please the murderer to kill me off quickly.

And then, because the first symptoms of the attack were coming on, I went to bed and stayed there.

So began my new life. A wretched life it was. There was no occupation possible for me — no amusement. I walked every day, in fair weather or foul, a measured twenty miles.

This in some degree restored vitality to my system. I never read; I took no interest in any politics. I sat by myself, and brooded.

As for my meals, I bought them ready prepared. They consisted almost wholly of bread and cold mutton. You may judge of the absolutely tasteless condition to which I was reduced, when I write calmly and truthfully that cold boiled mutton was as agreeable to me as any other form of food. I found, after repeated trials, that mutton forms the best fuel — it is better than either beef or pork — and keeps the human engine at work for the longest time. So I had mutton. As I discovered also that bulk was necessary, and that only a certain amount of animal food was wanted, I used to have cold potatoes always ready. I stoked twice a day, at eleven in the morning and about five in the afternoon. Thus fortified, I got through the miserable hours as best I could.

I look back on that period as one of unmitigated misery and despair. I was daily growing more bloated, fatter, and flabbier in the cheeks. My hands trembled in the morning. I seemed losing the power of connected thought. My very lips were thickening.

I hope I am making it clear what was the effect of my bargain on myself — I mean without reference to the sufferings inflicted on me by my tyrant. People, however, never can know, unless they happen to be like myself, which is unlikely, how great a part eating and drinking take in the conduct of life. Between the rest of the world and me there was a great gulf fixed. They could enjoy, I could not; they could celebrate every joyful event with something additional to eat; they could make a little festival of every day; they could give to happiness an outward and tangible form. Alas, not only was I debarred from this, but I was cut off even from joy itself; for, if you look at it steadily, you will find that most of human joy or suffering is connected with the senses. I had bartered away a good half of mine, and the rest seemed in mourning for the loss of their fellows. As for my pale and colourless life, it was as monotonous as the dock. If I neglected to stoke, the usual feebleness would follow. There was no gracious looking forward to a pleasant dinner; no trembling anticipations in hope and fear of what might be preparing, no cheerful contemplation of the joint while the carver sharpens his knife; no discussions of flavour and richness; no modestly hazarded conclusions as to more currants; no rolling of the wine-glass in the fingers to the light, and smacking of lips over the first sip

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— all these things were lost to me. Reader, if haply this memoir ever sees a posthumous light, think what would happen to yourself if eating and drinking, those perennial joys of humanity, which last from the infantine pap to the senile Revalenta Arabica, were taken away.

All things tasted alike, as I have said, and cold mutton formed my staple dish. As I could only distinguish between beer, wine, coffee, and tea by the look, I drank water. If I ventured, which was seldom, to take my dinner at a cookshop, I would choose my piece de résistance by the look, by some fancied grace in the shape, but not by taste or smell. The brown of roast beef might attract me one day and repel me the next. I was pleased with the comeliness of a game-pie, or tickled by some inexplicable external charm of a beefsteak-pudding. But three quarters of my life were gone, and with them all my happiness.

If you have no appetite for eating, you can enjoy nothing in the whole world. That is an axiom. I could not taste, therefore my eye ceased to feel delight in pleasant sights, and my ear in pleasant sounds. It was not with me as in the case of a blind man, that an abnormal development of some other sense ensued; quite the contrary. In selling one, I seem to have sold them all. For, as I discovered, man is one and inseparable; you cannot split him up; and when my arch-deceiver bought my appetite, he bought me out and out. A wine merchant might as well pretend to sell the bouquet of claret and preserve the body; or a painter the colour of his picture and preserve the drawing; or a sculptor the grace of his group and keep the marble.

As regards other losses I found I had lost the perception of beauty in form or colour. Why this was so I cannot explain. I was no longer, I suppose, in harmony with other men on any single point. Pretty women passed me unheeded; pictures had no charm for me music was only irritating to my nerves.

Then I found that I had lost the power of sympathy. I had formerly been a soft-hearted man — I remarked now that the sight of suffering found me entirely callous. There was a poor family living about half a mile from me, whose acquaintance I made through buying some of my supplies of them. They were in distress for rent; they applied to me ... there, I cannot bear to think of it. I had the money and I refused them. They were sold up, and I sat at my door and watched them on their way to London — the mother, the two girls, the little boy, had in hand, homeless and penniless, without a pang and without a single prompting of the heart to help them. God knows what became of them. May He forgive me for the hard-hearted cruelty with which I regarded their fate.

Had I, then, sold everything to this man?

I had been pretty religious in a way — a young man's way. Now I had lost all religious feeling whatever. I had once ambition and hopes, these were gone; I had once the capacity of love, that was gone; I had once a generous heart, that was gone; I once loved things worth loving, I felt no emotion now for anything. I was a machine which could feel. I was a man with the humanity taken out of him.

This time lasted for about four months. On the first of each month I went to receive my pay — the wages of sin — from the clerk, who surveyed me critically, but said nothing till the morning of the fourth month. Then, while he handed me my money, he whispered confidentially across the table:

"Look here, old fellow, you know; you're going it worse than poor Tom Kirby. Why don't you stop it? What is the good of a feller's drinking himself to death? The old gentleman was here yesterday, asking me how you looked, and if you continued steady. Pull up, old man, and knock it off."

I took the money in my trembling hands and slunk away abashed. When I got home again, I am not ashamed to say that I cried like a child.

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Delirium tremens! That would begin soon, and then the end would not be far off. It was too awful. Think of my position. I was but four—and—twenty. Not only was I deprived of the pleasure — mind you, a very real pleasure — of eating and drinking; I was the most temperate man in the world, though that was no great credit to myself, considering; and yet I bore in my face and my appearance, and felt in my very brain, all the marks and signs of confirmed drunkenness and the hopelessness of it. That hardened old voluptuary, that demon of gluttony, that secret murderer, would have no pity. He must have felt, by the falling—off of the splendid appetite which he was doing his utmost to ruin, that things were getting worse, and he was resolved — I had suspected this for some time — to kill me off by drinking me to death.

I believe I should have been dead in another week, but for a blessed respite, due, I afterwards discovered, to my demon being laid up with so violent a sore throat that he could not even swallow. What was my joy at being able to go to bed sober, to wake without a headache, to feel my bad symptoms slowly disappearing, to recover my nerves! For a whole fortnight I was happy — so happy that I even believed the improvement would last and that the old man was penitent. One day, after fourteen days of a veritable earthly paradise, I was walking along the Strand — for I was no longer afraid of venturing out — and met my old manager, Juliet's father. He greeted me with a warmth that was quite touching under all the circumstances. "My dear boy, I have been longing to know your whereabouts. Come and tell me all about it. Have you dined? Let us have some dinner together."

I excused myself, and asked after Juliet.

"Juliet is but so—so. Ah, do you know, Lucraft, sometimes I think that I did wrong to part you. And yet, you know, you had no money. Make some, my boy, and come back to us."

This was hearty. I forgot my troubles and my state of bondage and everything, except Juliet.

"I — I — I have money," I said. "I have come into a little money unexpectedly."

"Have you?" he replied, clasping me by the hand. "Then come down and see Juliet. Or — stay; no. The day after tomorrow is Juliet's ben. We are playing at Richmond. We have one of your own parts — you shall be Sir Harry Wildair. I will alter the bills. You are sure to come?"

"Sure to come," I said, with animation. "Capital! I know every line in the part. Tell Juliet an old friend will act with her."

We made a few new arrangements and parted — I bought a copy of the play at Lacy's and studied the part over again.

Next day I got over to Richmond in good time. The day was fine, I remember; my spirits were rapidly rising because it was the fifteenth day since I had had one of my usual attacks. I was in great hopes that the old man was really going to change his life and behave with consideration towards me. With the birth of hope, there revived in my heart some of my old feelings. I had a real desire to see Juliet again, but yet the old warmth seemed gone. It was a desire to see one in whom I had once been interested; the desire to awake old memories, which, I think, principally actuated me.

I found the dear girl waiting for me with an impatience which ought to have touched my heart, but which, somehow, only seemed to remind me of old times. My heart was gone — sold to my master with everything else. Mechanically I took her hands in mine, and kissed her on the lips as I used to do. She threw both arms round my neck, kissed me again and again, and burst into tears of joy.

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"Oh, Luke, Luke!" she said, "I have so longed to see you again. The time has been weary, weary, without you."

We sat together for half an hour, she all the time talking to me, and I, remembering what I used to be with her, wondering where the old feelings were gone, and trying to act as I used to.

"Luke, you are not growing cold to me, are you?" she asked, as some little gesture or word of hers passed me unnoticed.

"Cold, Juliet?" I replied. "What should make you think so?"

"I will not think so," she said. "It is too great happiness to meet again, is it not? And you are silent because you feel too happy to speak. Is not that so?"

Presently it became time to go and dress.

"Let me look at you, Sir Henry Wildair," she said. "Yes, we shall do it very well tonight. You are not looking, somehow, quite so well as you used, Luke dear. Is it that London does not agree with you? Are you working too hard? Your face is swollen and — fancy — Mrs. Mould says you look as if you had been drinking."

Mrs. Mould was the dresser.

If Mrs. Mould had seen me a fortnight before, she might well have said I had been drinking. A fortnight, however, of rest had done wonders for me.

I laughed, but felt a little uneasy.

We rang up at seven.

The house was quite full, because my Juliet was popular at Richmond.

I began with all my former fire and vigour, because I was acting again with her. The old life came back to me; I forgot my troubles; I was really happy, and I believe I acted well. At all events, the house applauded. Between the first and second acts a sudden terror seized me. I felt that the old man was eating again. That passed off, because he ate very little. But then he began to drink, and to drink fast.

It was no use fighting against it. I believe the villain must have been drinking raw brandy, because I was drunk in five minutes. I stammered and reeled about on the stage, I laughed wildly and sang foolishly, and then I tumbled down in a heap and could not get up again. The last thing I remember is the angry roar of poor old Kerrans, beside himself with passion, telling the carpenters to carry that drunken beast away and throw him into the road. I heard afterwards that they were obliged to drop the curtain, and that the éclat of poor Juliet's benefit was entirely spoiled. As for myself, the carpenters carried me out to the middle of Richmond—green, where they were going to leave me, only one of them had compassion, and wheeled me to his own house in a barrow.

In the morning I returned hastily to London, sought my cottage at Islington, and shut myself in with an agony of shame and humiliation.

I was quite crushed by this blow. For the first time I felt tempted to commit suicide and end it all. To be sure I ought to have foreseen this, and all the other dreadful things. Directly my master, my owner, got able to swallow, though he could not eat, he could drink, and ordered the most fiery liquor he could procure, with a

view to kill me off and begin with another victim.

But Providence ruled otherwise.

Then began a week of cruel suffering. My master sent me word by Boule-de-neige that he intended to finish me off. My appetite, he said, had been long failing, and was now perfectly contemptible. He complained that I had neglected my part of the contract, that I must have been practising intemperance — the horrible hypocrite — to have reduced so fine an appetite to nothing in a short four months. Therefore he felt obliged to tell me that in a week or two I should probably find the agreement ended. That was his ferocious way of putting it. He meant that in a week I should be dead. His words were prophetic, but not in the sense in which he meant them.

He drank brandy now. He drank it morning, noon, and night. He drank it, not because he liked it, but in hopes of despatching me. I was no sooner partially recovered from one drunken bout than I plunged into another.

I lost all power of walking. I could not move about. I lay the whole day sick and feverish on my bed, or, if I got up at all, it was only to change it for an easy chair. I could eat nothing.

Then I began to have visions and to see spectres in my loneliness and misery.

First I saw all over again the scenes of my early life — my poor deserted mother; the tramp who took charge of me; the sleep in which I nearly perished; the strolling actors with whom I wandered; the girl with whom I fell in love. Only among them all there hovered perpetually the ugly face of Boule-de-neige, spoiling the pleasant memories, and corrupting the current of my thoughts with his "Cluck — cluck", and his demoniac grin.

"How you do, Massa Lucraft? How you feel your stumjack this morning? Ole massa him berry fierce. Him gwine to make the noyeau punch tomorrow. Dat finish um off. Dat work um up. You wait till tomorrow, Massa Lucraft."

I could only groan.

"You nice young gegleman," he went on, with a grin. "You berry grateful young gegleman. Massa him gib you thirty pounds a month, and you spend it all in 'temperate courses. Bad; berry bad, dam bad. What you say when you die — eh? Ho! ho!"

The creature seemed always with me during this time. If I opened my eyes I had the feeling that he was hovering about my bed. If it was dark I thought I saw his eyes glaring at me from some corner. If I was asleep he would waken me with his "Cluck". What he did in my cottage I never knew. The room was filled with the visions which passed through my brain, succeeding each other again and again like the acts of a play repeated incessantly. I saw the octagonal room with the old gentleman eating and drinking. I saw myself at Richmond. I saw myself before the magistrates; and I looked on as an outsider, as a spectator of a tragedy which would end in death and horror.

It was two days before the period allotted to me by my master, at eight o'clock in the evening, as I was sitting in my lonely cottage, expectant of the usual drunken bout, when I felt a curious agitation within me, an internal struggle, as if through all my veins a tempestuous wave was surging and rushing. I lay down.

"This is some new devilry of the old man," I said to myself. "Let him do his worst; at least, I must try to bear it with resignation." I began to speculate on my inevitable and approaching end, and to wonder curiously, what proportion of the sin of all this drunkenness would be laid to my charge.

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To my astonishment nothing more followed. The tumult of my system gradually subsided, and I fell asleep.

In the morning I awoke late, and missed the usual headache. I had, therefore, I was surprised to find, actually not been drunk the night before. I rose with my customary depression, and was astonished to discover that my nerves were steadier and spirits higher than I had known for a long time.

I mechanically went to the cupboard and pulled out my cold mutton and potatoes. Who can picture my joy when I found that I could taste the meat again, and that it was nasty? I hardly believed my senses; in fact, I had lost them for so long that it was difficult to understand that they had come back to me. I tried the potatoes. Heavens, what a horrible thing to a well-regulated palate is a cold boiled potato!

At first, as I said, I could not believe that I had recovered my taste; then, as the truth forced itself upon me, and I found that I could not only taste, but was actually hungry, I jumped and danced, and was beside myself with joy. Think of a convict suddenly released, and declared guiltless of the charges brought against him. Think of a prisoner on the very ladder of the gallows-tree, with the rope round his neck, reprieved and pardoned. Think of one doomed to death by his physician receiving the assurance that it was all a mistake, and that he would gather up long years of life as in a sheaf. And think that such joy as these would feel, I felt — and more!

I went to the nearest coffee-shop and ordered bacon, eggs, and tea, offering up a short grace with every plate as it came. And then, because I felt sure that my old tormentor must be dead, I repaired to my lawyers', and saw the clerk.

"Ah," he said, "the poor old man's gone at last! Went out like the snuff of a candle. His illness was only twenty-four hours. Well, he's gone to heaven, if ever man did."

"What did he die of — too much eating and drinking?"

"Mr. Lucraft," said the clerk, severely, "this is not the tone for you to adopt towards that distinguished man, your benefactor. He died, sir — being a man of moral, temperate, and even abstemious life, though of full habit — of apoplexy."

"Oh!" I said, careless what the clerk said, but glad to be quite sure that the diabolical old villain was really dead. I suppose that never was such joy over the repentance of any sinner as mine over the death of that murdering glutton, for whom no words of hatred were too strong.

"I think you've got to see our senior partner," said the clerk. "Step this way."

He led me to a room where I found a grave and elderly gentle man sitting at a table.

"Mr. Lucraft?" he said. "I was expecting you. I saw your late patron's negro this morning. He told me that you would call."

I stared, but said nothing.

"I have a communication to make to you, on the part of our departed friend, Mr. Ebenezer Grumbelow. It is dated a few weeks since, and is to the effect that a sum of money which I hold was to be placed in your hands in case of his death. This, it appears, he anticipated, for some reason or other."

"Ebenezer Grumbelow". That was the name which had so long escaped my memory — "Ebenezer Grumbelow".

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I said nothing, but stared with all my eyes.

"My poor friend," the lawyer went on, "after remarking that unless you change your unfortunate habits you will come to no good, gave me this money himself -- here is the cheque -- so that it will not appear in his last will and testament."

I took it in silence.

"Well, sir" -- he looked at me in some surprise -- "have you no observation to make, or remark to offer, on this generosity?"

"None," I said.

"I do not know," he continued; "I do not know -- your signature here, if you please -- what reason Mr. Grumbelow had in taking you up, or what claim you possessed upon his consideration; but I think, Sir, I do think, that some expression, some sense of regret, is due."

I buttoned up the cheque in my pocket.

"Mr. Grumbelow was a philanthropist, I believe, Sir?"

"He was. As a philanthropist, as a supporter of charities, as a public donor of great amounts, Mr. Grumbelow's name stands in the front. So much we all know."

"A religious man, too?"

"Surely, surely; one of our most deeply religious men. A man who was not ashamed of his saintly profession."

"Cluck -- cluck!"

It was the familiar face of Boule-de-neige at the door.

"You know, I suppose," said the lawyer, "Mr. Grumbelow's body-servant, a truly Christian negro?"

"Was there," I asked, "any clause in Mr. Grumbelow's letter -- any conditions attached to this gift?"

"None whatever. It is a free gift. Stay, there is a postscript which I ought to have read to you. You will perhaps understand it. In it Mr. Grumbelow says that as to the services rendered by him to you, and by you to him, it will be best for your own sake to keep them secret."

I bowed.

The date of the cheque corresponded with the first illness of the old man -- his affection of the throat. Probably he was afraid that I should reveal his infamous story.

"I may now tell you, Mr. Lucraft, without at all wishing to break any confidence that may have existed between you and the deceased, that a friend of Mr. Grumbelow's -- no other, indeed, than the Rev. Jabez Jumbles, a pulpit name doubtless known to you -- intends to write the biography of this distinguished and religious man, as an example to the young. Any help you can afford to so desirable an end will be gratefully received. Particularly, Mr. Lucraft, any communication on the subject of his continual help given to young

men, who regularly disappointed him, and all, except yourself, died of drink."

I bowed again and retired.

Did anyone ever hear of such a wicked old man?

Outside the office I was joined by the negro.

"What have you got to say to me, detestable wretch?" I cried, shaking my fist in his withered old face.

"Cluck — cluck! Massa not angry with poor old Boule—de—neige. How young massa? Young massa pretty well? How de lubly abbadide of de young gegleman? How him strong stumjack? Cluck — cluck!"

He kept at a safe distance from me. I think I should have killed him if I had ever clutched him by the throat.

"Ole massa him always ask, 'How dat young debbel? Go and see, Boule—de—neige.' I go to young massa's cottage daraway, and come back. 'Him berry dam bad, Sir,' I say; 'him going to be debbel berry fast, just like dem oders. De folk all say he drink too much for him berry fine constitution.' Cluck — cluck! Ole massa he only say ebbery night, 'Bring de brandy, Boule—de—neige; let's finish him.' Cluck — cluck!"

Here was a Christian negro for you!

"Tell me, what did your master die of?"

"Apple perplexity, massa."

"Ah! what else? Come, Boule—de—neige, I know a good deal; tell me more."

"Massa's time up," he whispered, coming close to me. "Time quite up, and him berry much 'fraid. Massa Lucraft want servant? Boule—de—neige berry good servant. Cook lubly dinner; make massa rich, like Massa Grumbelow."

"I'd rather hire the devil!" I exclaimed.

"Cluck — cluck — cluck!" grinned the creature; and really he looked at the moment as much like the devil as one could wish. "Cluck! dat massa can do if massa like."

I rushed away, too much excited by the recovery of my freedom to regard what he said.

I was free! What next?

First the restoration of my shattered nerves.

There was no permanent injury done to my constitution, because, after all, the drink had not actually gone down my throat, nor was it I who had consumed the gallons of turtle soup, the tons of fish, the shiploads of cattle with which he had punished me for that woeful signature of mine.

The contract, in some inexplicable manner, affected me with the punishment of my purchaser's excesses by a kind of sympathy. I remained a strictly temperate man for a month. I recovered gradually the tone of my system; my features lost their bloated look. I became myself again.

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And then I sought the injured Kerrans.

It was no use trying to tell him a story which he never would have believed. I simply told him that I was taken suddenly and hopelessly ill on that fatal night. I asked him to remember, which is quite true, how I began the piece with a fire and animation quite impossible in a man who had been drinking; how I had certainly nothing between the scenes, during which intervals I was talking with him, and how the thing came upon me without any warning. If you try, you know, you can make yourself quite drunk with brandy in two minutes. This is just what Mr. Grumbelow did to me.

Kerrans, good fellow, outraged in his best feelings, was difficult to smooth down.

He had asked me to act with Juliet in the hope of restoring to the girl her lost good spirits. I came; the misfortune happened, and she was worse than ever. But he forgave me at last, and allowed me another chance. This time it was not Juliet who threw her arms around me; it was I who implored her forgiveness, and the renewal of her love. I was cold no longer. I left off remembering, and lived again in the present. I was a lover, and my girl was trembling and blushing, with her hand in mine.

It all happened more than fifty years ago. The only record which remains of the events I have described are on the tablet to the memory of Ebenezer Grumbelow in St. Rhadegunda's Church, City: and the little faded scrap from the Morning Chronicle, which I always carry in my pocket-book, and which tells the tale of my shame.

Juliet never believed my story, and I left off insisting on its truth.

She lies in Norwood Cemetery now, but we kept our golden wedding ere she died; and children and grandchildren live to bless her name.