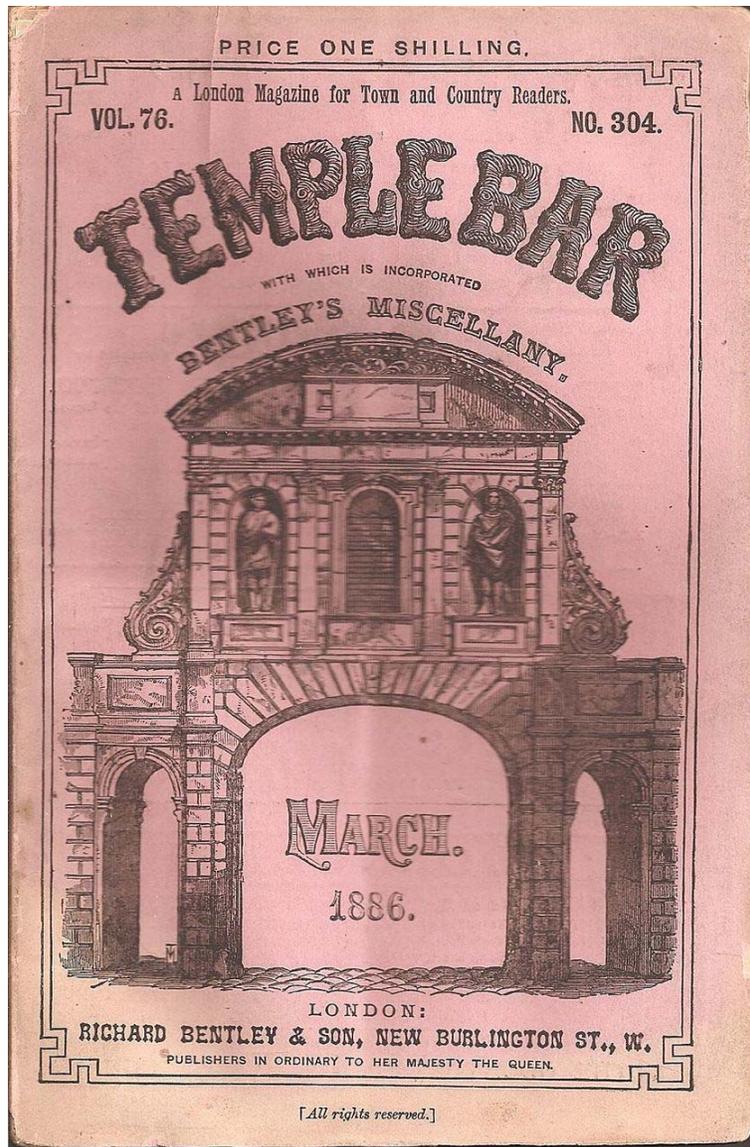


Our Midnight Visitor

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

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OUR MIDNIGHT VISITOR

I

On the western side of the island of Arran, seldom visited, and almost unknown to tourists is the little island named Uffa. Between the two lies a strait, or roost, two miles and a half broad, with a dangerous current which sets in from the north. Even on the calmest day there are ripples and swirls and dimples on the surface of the roost, which suggest hidden influences, but when the wind blows from the west and the great Atlantic waves choke up the inlet and meet their brethren which have raced round the other side of the island, there is such seething and turmoil that old sailors say they have never seen the like. God help the boat that is caught there on such a day!

My father owned one-third part of the island of Uffa, and I was born and bred there. Our farm, or croft, was a small one enough, for if a good thrower were to pick up a stone on the shore at Carracuil (which was our place) he could manage, in three shies, to clear all our arable land, and it was hardly longer than it was broad. Behind this narrow track, on which we grew corn and potatoes, was the homesteading of Carracuil—a rather bleak-looking graystone house with a red-tiled byre buttressed against one side of it, and behind this again the barren undulating moorland stretched away up to Beg-na-sacher and Beg-na-phail, two rugged knowes which marked the centre of the island. We had grazing ground for a couple of cows and eight or ten sheep, and we had our boat anchored down in Carravoe. When the fishing failed there was more time to devote to the crops, and if the season was bad, as likely as not the herring would be thick on the coast. Taking one thing with another, a crofter in Uffa had as much chance of laying by a penny or two as most men on the mainland.

Besides our own family, the McDonalds of Carracuil, there were two others on the island. These were the Gibbs of Arden and the Fullartons of Corriemains. There was no priority claimed among us, for none had any legend of the coming of the others. We had all three held our

farms by direct descent for many generations, paying rent to the Duke of Hamilton, and all prospering in a moderate way. My father had been enabled to send me to begin the study of medicine at the University of Glasgow, and I had attended lectures there for two Winter sessions, but, whether from caprice or from some lessening in his funds, he had recalled me, and in the year 1865 I found myself cribbed up in this little island with just education enough to wish for more, and with no associate at home but the grim, stern old man, for my mother had been dead some years, and I had neither brother nor sister.

There were two youths about my own age in the island, Geordie and Jock Gibbs, but they were rough, loutish fellows, good-hearted enough, but with no ideas above fishing and farming. More to my taste was the society of Minnie Fullarton, the pretty daughter of old Fullarton of Corriemains. We had been children together, and it was natural that when she blossomed into a buxom, fresh-faced girl, and I into a square-shouldered, long-legged youth, there should be something warmer than friendship between us. Her elder brother was a corn chandler in Ardrossan, and was said to be doing well so that the match was an eligible one, but for some reason my father objected very strongly to our intimacy and even forbade me entirely to meet her. I laughed at his commands, for I was a hot-headed, irreverent youngster, and continued to see Minnie, but when it came to his ears it caused many violent scenes between us, which nearly went the length of blows. We had a quarrel of this sort just before the equinoctial gales in the Spring of the year in which my story begins, and I left the old man with his face hushed and his great bony hands shaking with passion, while I went jauntily off to our usual trysting place. I have often regretted since that I was not more submissive, but how was I to guess the dark things which were to come upon us?

I can remember that day well. Many bitter thoughts rose in my heart as I strode along the narrow pathway, cutting savagely at the thistles

on either side with my stick. One side of our little estate was bordered by the Combera cliffs, which rose straight out of the water to the height of a couple of hundred feet. The top of these cliffs was covered with greensward and commanded a noble view on every side. I stretched myself on the turf there and watched the breakers dancing over the Winner sands and listened to the gurgling of the water down beneath me in the caves of the Combera. We faced the western side of the island, and from where I lay I could see the whole stretch of the Irish Sea, right across to where a long hazy line upon the horizon marked the northern coast of the sister isle. The wind was blowing freshly from the northwest, and the great Atlantic rollers were racing rerrily in, one behind another. dark brown below, light green above. and breaking with a sullen roar at the base of the cliffs. Now and again a sluggish one would be overtaken by its successor, and the two would come crashing in together and send the spray right over me as I lay. The whole air was prickly with the smack of the sea. Away to the north there was a piling up of clouds, and the peak of Goatfell in Arran looked lurid and distinct. There were no craft in the oiiing except one little eager, panting steamer making for the shelter of the Clyde, and a trim brigantine tacking along the coast. I was speculating as to her destination when I heard a light, springy footstep, and Minnie Fullarton was standing beside me, her face rosy with exercise and her brown hair floating behind her.

"Wha's been vexing you, Archie?" she asked with the quick intuition of womanhood. "The auld man has been spealing about me again; has no'?"

It was strange how pretty and mellow the accents were in her mouth which came so raspily from my father. We sat down on a little green hillock together, her hand in mine, while I told her of our quarrel in the morning.

"You see, they're bent on parting us," I said; "but, indeed, they'll find they have the wrong man to deal with if they try to frighten me away from you."

"I'm no' worth it, Archiie," she answered, slgling. "I'm ower hamely and simple for one like you that speaks well and is a scholar forbye."

"You're too good and true for any one, Minnie," I answered, though in my heart I thought there was some truth in what she said.

"I'll no' trouble any one lang," she continued, looking earnestly into my face. "I got my call last nicht; I saw a ghaist, Archie."

"Saw a ghost!" I ejaculated.

"Yes, and I doubt it was a call for me. When my cousin Steevie deed he saw one the same way."

"Tell me about it, dear," I said, impressed by her solemnity.

"There's no much to tell: It was last nicht about twelve, or maybe one o'clock. I was lying awake thinking o' this and that wi' my een fixed on the window. Suddenly I saw a face looking in at me through the glass—an awfu'-like face, Archie. It was na the face of any one on the island. I canna tell what it was like—it was just awfu'. It was there may be a minute looking tae way and tither into the room. I could see the glint o' his very een—for it was a man's face—and his nose was white where it was pressed against the glass. My very blood ran cauld and I couldna scream for fright. The it went awa' as quickly and as sudden as it came."

"Who could it have been?" I exclaimed.

"A wraith or a bogle," said Minnie, positively.

"Are you sure it wasn't Tammy Gibbs?" I suggested.

"Na, na, it wasna Tammy. It was a dark, hard, dour sort of face."

"Well," I said, laughing, "I hope the fellow will give me a look up, whoever he is. I'll soon learn who he is and where he comes from. But we won't talk of it, or you'll be frightening yourself to-night again. It'll be a dreary night as it is."

"A bad nicht for the puir sailors," she answered, sadly, glancing at the dark wrack hurrying up from the northward, and at the white line of breakers on the Winner sands. "I wonder what yon brig is after? Unless it gets roond to Lamlash or Brodick Bay it'll find itself on a nasty coast."

She was watching the trim brigantine which had already attracted my attention. She was still standing off the coast, and evidently expected rough weather, for her foresail had been taken in and her topsail reefed down.

"It's too cold for you up here!" I exclaimed at last, as the clouds covered the sun, and the keen north wind came in more frequent gusts. We walked back together, until we were close to Carracuil, when she left me, taking the footpath to Corriemains, which was about a mile from our bothy. I hoped that my father had not observed us together. but he met me at the door, foaming with passion. His face was quite livid with rage, and he held his shotgun in his hands. I forget if I mentioned that in spite of his age he was one of the most powerful men I ever met in my life.

"So you've come!" he roared, shaking the gun at me. "You great gowk—" I did not wait for the string of adjectives which I knew was coming.

"You keep a civil tongue in your head," I said.

"You dare!" he shouted, raising his arm as if to strike me. "You wanna come in here. You can gang back where you come frae!"

"You can go to the devil!" I answered, losing my temper completely, on which he jabbed at me with the butt end of the gun, but I warded it off with my stick. For a moment the devil was busy in me, and my throat was full of oaths, but I choked them down, and, turning on my heel, walked back to Corriemains, where I spent the day with the Fullartons. It seemed to me that my father, who had long been a miser, was rapidly becoming a madman—and a dangerous one to boot.

II

My mind was so busy with my grievance that I was poor company, I fear, and drank perhaps more whisky than was good for me. I remember that. I stumbled over a stool once and that Minnie looked surprised and tearful. while old Fullarton sniggered to himself and coughed to hide it. I did not set out for home till half-past nine, which was a very late hour for the island. I knew my father would be asleep, and that if I climbed through my bedroom window I should have one night in peace.

It was blowing great guns by this time, and I had to put my shoulder against the gale as I came along the winding path which led down to

Carracuil. I must still have been under the influence of liquor, for I remember that I sang uproariously and joined my feeble pipe to the howling of the wind. I had just got to the inclosure of our croft when a little incident occurred which helped to sober me.

White is a color so rare in nature that in an island like ours, where even paper was a precious commodity, it would arrest the attention at once. Something white fluttered across my path and stuck flapping upon a furze bush. I lifted it up and discovered, to my very great surprise, that it was a linen pocket handkerchief—and scented. Now, I was very sure that beyond my own there was no such thing as a white pocket handkerchief in the island. A small community like ours knew each other's wardrobes to a nicety. But as to scent in Uffa—it was preposterous! Who did the handkerchief belong to. then? Was Minnie right. and was there really a stranger in the island? I walked on very thoughtfully, holding my discovery in my hand and thinking of what Minnie had seen the night before.

When I got into my bedroom and lit my rushlight I examined it again. It was clean and new, with the initials "A.W." worked in red silk in the corner. There was no other indication as to who it might belong to, though from its size it was evidently a man's. The incident struck me as so extraordinary that I sat for some time on the side of my bed turning it over in my befuddled mind, but without getting any nearer a conclusion. I might even have taken my father into confidence, but his hoarse snoring in the adjoining room showed that he was fast asleep. It is as well that it was so, for I was in no humour to be bullied, and we might have had words. The old man had little longer to live, and it is some solace to me now that that little was unmarred by any further strife between us. I did not take my clothes off, for my brain was getting swimmy after its temporary clearness, so I dropped my head upon the pillow and sank into profound slumber. I must have slept about four hours when I woke with a violent start. To this day I have never known what it was that roused me. Everything was perfectly still, and yet I found all my faculties in a state of extreme tension. Was there some one in the room?

It was very dark, but I peered about, leaning on my elbow. There was nothing to be seen, but still that eerie feeling haunted me. At that moment the flying scud passed away from the face of the moon and a flood of cold light was poured into my chamber. I turned my eyes up instinctively, and—good God!—there at the window was the face, an evil, malicious face, hard-cut and distinct against the silvery radiance, glaring in at me as Minnie had seen it the night before. For one moment I tingled and palpitated like a frightened child; the next both glass and sash were gone and I was rolling over and over on the gravel path with my arms round a tall strong man—the two of us worrying each other like a pair of dogs. Almost by intuition I knew as we went down together that he had slipped his hand into his side pocket, and I clung to that wrist like grim death. He tried hard to free it, but I was too strong for him, and we staggered on to our feet again in the same position, panting and snarling.

"Let go of my hand, damn you!" he said.

"Let go that pistol, then" I gasped.

We looked hard at each other in the moonlight, and then he laughed and opened his fingers. A heavy, glittering object, which I could see was a revolver, dropped with a clink on to the gravel. I put my foot on it and let go my grip of him.

"Well, matey, how now," he said with another laugh. "Is that the end of a round or the end of a battle? You islanders seem a hospitable lot. You're so ready to welcome a stranger that you can't wait to find the door, but must; come flying through the window like infernal fireworks."

"What do you want to come prowling round people's houses at night for, with weapons in your pocket," I asked, sternly.

"I should think I needed a weapon," he answered, "when there are young devils like you knocking around, Hu! here's another of the family."

I turned my head and there was my father almost at my elbow. He had come round from the front door. His gray woolen night dress and grizzled hair were streaming in the wind, and he was evidently much excited. He had in his hand

the double-barreled gun with which he had threatened me in the morning. He put this up to his shoulder, and would most certainly have blown out either my brains or those of the stranger, had I not turned away the barrel with my hand.

"Wait a bit, father," I said, "let us hear what he has to say for himself. And you," I continued, turning to the stranger, "can come inside with us and justify yourself if you can. But remember we are in a majority, so keep your tongue between your teeth."

"Not so fast, my young bantam," he grumbled; "you've got my six-shooter, but I have a Derringer in my pocket. I learned in Colorado to carry them both. However, come along into this shanty of yours, and let us get the damned palaver over. I'm wet through, and most infernally hungry."

My father was still mumbling to himself and fidgeting with his gun, but he did not oppose my taking the stranger into the house. I struck a match and lit the oil lamp in the kitchen, on which our prisoner stooped down to it and began smoking a cigarette. As the light fell full on his face both my father and I took a good look at him. He was a man of about forty, remarkably handsome, of rather a Spanish type, with blue-black hair and beard, and sun-burned features. His eyes were very bright and their gaze so intense that you would think they projected somewhat, unless you saw him in profile. There was a dash of recklessness and devilry about them, which, with his wiry, powerful frame and jaunty manner, gave the impression of a man whose past had been an adventurous one. He was elegantly dressed in a velveteen jacket and grayish trousers of a foreign cut. Without in the least resenting our prolonged scrutiny, he seated himself upon the dresser, swinging his legs and blowing little blue wreaths from his cigarette. His appearance seemed to reassure my father, or perhaps it was the sight of the rings which flashed on the stranger's left hand every time he raised it to his lips.

"Ye munna mind Archie, Sir," he said in a cringing voice. "He was aye a fashious bairn, ower quick wi' his hands, and wi' mair muscle than brains. I was fashed mysel' wi' the sudden stour, but as tae shootin' at ye, Sir, that was a' an auld

man's havers. Nae doobt ye're a veesitor, or maybe it's a shipwreck—it's no' a shipwreck, is't?" The idea awoke the covetous devil in my father's soul, and it looked out through his glistening eyes, and set his long stringy hands a-shaking.

"I came here in a boat," said the stranger shortly. "This was the iirst house I came to after I left the shore, and I'm not likely to forget the reception you have given me. That young hopeful of yours has nearly broken my back."

"A good job too!" I interrupted hotly, "why couldn't you come up to the door like a man, instead of skulking at the window?"

"Hush, Archie, hush!" said my father imploringly; while our visitor grinned across at me as amicably as if my speech had been most conciliatory.

"I don't blame you," he said—he spoke with a strange mixture of accents, sometimes with a foreign lisp, sometimes with a slight Yankee intonation, and at other times very purely indeed. "I have done the same, mate. Maybe you noticed a brigantine standing on and off the shore yesterday?"

I nodded my head.

"That was mine," he said. "I'm owner, skipper, and everything else. Why shouldn't a man spend his money in his own way? I like cruising about and I like new experiences. I suppose there's no harm in that. I was in the Mediterranean last month, but I'm sick of blue skies and fine weather. Chios is a damnable paradise of a place. I've come up here for a little fresh air and freedom. I cruised all down the western isles, and when we came abreast of this place of yours it rather took my fancy, so I hauled the foreyard aback and came ashore last night to prospect. It wasn't this house I struck, but another further to the west'ard: however, I saw enough to be sure it was a place after my own heart—a real quiet corner. So I went back and set everything straight aboard yesterday, and now here I am. You can put me up for a few weeks, I suppose. I'm not hard to please, and I can pay my way; suppose we say ten dollars a week for board and lodging, and a fortnight to be paid in advance?"

He put his hand in his pocket and produced four shining napoleons, which he pushed along the dresser to my father, who grabbed them up eagerly.

"I'm sorry I gave you such a rough reception," I said rather awkwardly. "I was hardly awake at the time."

"Say no more, mate, say no more!" he shouted heartily, holding out his hand and clasping mine. "Hard knocks are nothing new to me. I suppose we may consider the bargain settled then?"

"Ye can bide as lang as ye wull, Sir," answered my father, still fingering the four coins. "Archie and me'll do a' we can to mak' your veesit a pleasant ane. It's no' such a dreary place as ye might think. When the Lamlash boats come in we get the papers and a' the news."

It struck me that the stranger looked anything but overjoyed by this piece of information. "You don't mean to say that you get the papers here," he said.

"O aye, the Scotsman an' the Glasgey Herald. But maybe you would like Archie and me to row ower to your ship in the morn, an' fetch your luggage?"

"The brig is fifty miles away by this time," said our visitor. "She is running before the wind for Marseilles. I told the mate to bring her round again in a month or so. As to luggage, I always travel light in that matter. If a man's purse is only full he can do with very little else. All I have is in a bundle under your window. By the way, my name is Digby—Charles Digby."

"I thought your initials were A.W.," I remarked.

He sprang off the dresser as if he had been stung, and his face turned quite gray for a moment. "What the devil do you mean by that?" he said.

"I thought this might be yours," I answered, handing him the handkerchief I had found.

"Oh, is that all!" he said, with rather a forced laugh. "I didn't quite see what you were driving at. That's all right. It belongs to Whittingdale, my second officer. I'll keep it until I see him again. And now suppose you give me something to eat, for I'm about famished."

We brought him out such rough fare as was to be found in our larder, and he ate ravenously, and tossed off a stiff glass of whisky and water. Afterward my father showed him into the solitary spare bedroom, with which he professed himself well pleased, and we all settled down for the night. As I went back to my couch I noticed that the gale had freshened up, and I saw long streamers of seaweed flying past my broken window in the moonlight. A great bat fluttered into the room, which is reckoned a sure sign of misfortune in the islands; but I was never superstitious, and let the poor thing find its way out again unmolested.

III

In the morning it was still blowing a whole gale, though the sky was blue for the most part. Our guest was up betimes, and we walked down to the beach together. It was at sight to see the great rollers sweeping in, overtopping one another like a herd of oxen, and then bursting with a roar, sending the Carracuil pebbles flying before them like grapeshot and filling the whole air with drifting spume.

We were standing together watching the scene, when, looking round, I saw my father hurrying towards us. He had been up and out since early dawn. When he saw us looking he began waving his hands and shouting, but the wind carried his voice sway. We ran towards him, however, seeing that he was heavy with news.

"The brig's wrecked, and they're all drowned!" he cried as we met him.

"What!" roared our visitor.

If ever I heard exceeding great joy compressed into a monosyllable it vibrated in that one.

"They're a' drowned and naething saved! repeated my father. "Come yoursel' and see."

We followed him across the Combera to the level sands on the other side. They were strewn with wreckage, broken pieces of bulwark and handrail, paneling of a cabin, and an occasional cask. A single large spar was tossing in the waves close to the shore, occasionally shooting up towards the sky like some giant's javelin, then sinking and disappearing in the trough of the

great scooping seas. Digby hurried up to the nearest piece of timber, and stooping over It examined it intently.

"By God!" he said at last, taking in a long breath between his teeth, "you are right. It's the Proserpine, and all hands are-lost. What a terrible thing!"

His face was very solemn as he spoke, but his eyes danced and glittered. I was beginning to conceive a great repugnance and distrust toward this man.

"Is there no chance of any one having got ashore?" he said.

"Na, na, nor cargo neither," my father answered with real grief in his voice. "Ye dinna ken this coast. There's an awful undertow outside the Winners, and it's a' swept round to Holy Isle. De'il take it, if there was to be a shipwreck what for should they no run their ship aground to the east'ard o' the point and let an honest mun have the pickings instead o' they rascally loons in Arran? An empty barrel might float in here, but there's no chance o' a sea chest, let alane a body."

"Poor fellows!" said Digby. "But there—we must meet it some day, and why not here and now? I've lost my ship, but, thank heaven, I can buy another. It is sad about them though—very sad. I warned Lamarck that he was waiting too long with a low barometer and an ugly shore under his lee. He has himself to thank. He was my first officer, a prying, covetous, meddling hound."

"Don't call him names!" I said. "He's dead."

"Well said, my young prig!" he answered.

"Perhaps you wouldn't be so mealy-mouthed yourself if you lost five thousand pounds before breakfast. But there—there's no use crying over spilt milk. Vogue la galère! as the French say. Things are never so bad but that they might be worse."

My father and Digby stayed at the scene of the wreck, but I walked over to Corriemains to reassure Minnie's mind as to the apparition at the window. Her opinion, when I had told her all, coincided with mine, that perhaps the crew of the brig knew more about the stranger than he cared for. We agreed that I should keep a close

eye upon him without letting him know that he was watched.

"But oh, Archie," she said, "ye munna cross him or anger him while he carries them awfu' weapons. Ye maun be douce and saft, and no' gainsay him."

I laughed, and promised her to be very prudent, which reassured her a little. Old Fullarton walked back with me in the hope of picking up a piece of timber, and both he an my father patrolled the shore for many days, without, however, finding any prize of importance, for the undercurrent off the Wiinners was very strong, and everything had probably drifted right round to Lamash Bay, in Arran.

It was wonderful how quickly the stranger accommodated himself to our insular ways, and how useful he made himself about the homesteading. Within a fortnight he knew the island almost as well as I did myself. Had it not been for that one unpleasant recollection of the shipwreck which rankled in my remembrance. I could have found it in my heart to become fond of him. His nature was a tropical one—fiercely depressed at times, but sunny as a rule, bursting continually into jest and song from pure instinct, in a manner which is unknown among us Northerners. In his graver moments he was a most interesting companion, talking shrewdly and eloquently of men and manners and his own innumerable and strange adventures. I have seldom heard a more brilliant conversationalist. Of an evening he would keep my father and myself spellbound by the kitchen fire for hours and hours, while he chatted away in a desultory fashion and smoked his cigarettes. It seemed to me that the packet he had brought with him on the first night must have consisted entirely of tobacco. I noticed that in these conversations, which were mostly addressed to my father, he used, unconsciously perhaps, to play upon the weak side of the old man's nature. Tales of cunning, of smartness, of various ways in which mankind had been cheated and money gained, came most readily to his lips, and were relished by an eager listener. I could not help one night remarking upon it, when my father had gone out of the room, laughing hoarsely, and vibrating

with amusement over some story of how the Biscayan peasants will strap lanterns to a bullock's horns and, taking the beast some distance inland on a stormy night will make it prance and rear so that the ships at sea may imagine it to be the lights of a vessel, and steer fearlessly in that direction only to find themselves on a rockbound coast.

"You shouldn't tell such tales to an old man," I said.

"My dear fellow," he answered very kindly, "you have seen nothing of the world yet. You have formed fine ideas, no doubt, and notions of delicacy and such things, and you are very dogmatic about them, as clever men of your age always are. I had notions of right and wrong once, but it has been all knocked out of me. It's just a sort of varnish which the rough friction of the world soon rubs off. I started with a whole soul, but there are more gashes and seams and scars in it now than there are in my body, and that's pretty fair, as you'll allow"—with which he pulled open his tunic and showed me his chest.

"Good heavens!" I said. "How on earth did you get those?"

"This was a bullet," he said, pointing to a deep bluish pucker underneath his collar bone. "I got it behind the barricades in Berlin in eighteen hundred and forty-eight. Langenback said it just missed the subclavian artery. And this," he went on, indicating a pair of curious elliptical scars upon his throat, "was a bite from a Sioux chief, when I was under Custer on the plains—I've got an arrow wound ou my leg from the same party. This is from a mutinous Lascar aboard ship, and the others are mere scratches—California vaccination marks. You can excuse my being a little ready with my own irons, though, when I've been dropped so often."

"What's this?" I asked, pointing to a little chamois leather bag which was hung by a strong cord around his neck. "It looks like a charm."

He buttoned up his tunic again hastily, looking extremely disconcerted. "It is nothing," he said brusquely. "I am a Roman Catholic, and it is what we call a scapular."

I could hardly get another word out of him that night, and even next day he was reserved and appeared to avoid me. This little incident

made me very thoughtful, the more so as I noticed shortly afterward, when standing over him, that the string was no longer around his neck. Apparently he had taken it off after my remark about it. What could there be in that leather bag which needed such secrecy and precaution! Had I but known it, I would sooner have put my left hand in the fire than have pursued that inquiry.

One of the peculiarities of our visitor was that in all his plans for the future, with which he often regaled us, he seemed entirely untrammelled by any monetary considerations. He would talk in the lightest and most offhand way of schemes which would involve the outlay of much wealth. My father's eyes would glisten as he heard him talk carelessly of sums which in our frugal minds appeared enormous. It seemed strange to both of us that a man who by his own confession had been a vagabond and adventurer all his life should be in possession of such a fortune. My father was inclined to put it down to some stroke of luck on the American gold fields. I had my own ideas even then—chaotic and half-formed as yet, but tending in the right direction. It was not long before these suspicions began to assume a more definite shape, which came about in this way. Minnie and I made the summit of the Combera cliff a favorite trysting place, as I think I mentioned before, and it was rare for a day to pass without our spending two or three hours there. One morning, not long after my chat with our guest, we were seated together in a little nook there, which we had chosen as sheltering us from the wind as well as from my father's observation, when Minnie caught sight of Digby walking along the Carracuil beach. He sauntered up to the base of the cliff, which was boulder-studded and slimy from the receding tide, but instead of turning back he kept on climbing over the great green slippery stones, and threading his way among the pools until he was standing immediately beneath us, so that we looked straight down at him. To him the spot must have seemed the very acme of seclusion, with the great sea in front, the rocks on each side and the precipice behind. Even had he looked up he could hardly have made out the two human faces which peered down at him from the

distant ledge. He gave a hurried glance around, and then slipping his hand into his pocket he pulled out the leather bag which I had noticed and took out of it a small object which he held in the palm of his hand and looked at long and, as it were, lovingly. We both had an excellent view of it from where we lay. He then replaced it in the bag, and shoving it down to the very bottom of his pocket picked his way back more cheerily than he had come. Minnie and I looked at each other. She was smiling; I was serious. "Did you see it?" I asked.

"Yon? Aye, I saw it,"

"What did you think it was, then?"

"A wee bit of glass," she answered, looking at me with wondering eyes.

"No," I cried excitedly, "glass could never catch the sun's rays so. It was a diamond, and, if I mistake not, one of extraordinary value. It was as large as all I have seen put together, and must be worth a fortune."

A diamond was a mere name to poor, simple Minnie, who had never seen one before, nor had any conception of their value, and she prattled away to me about this and that, but I hardly heard her. In vain she exhausted all her little wiles in attempting to recall my attention. My mind was full of what I had seen. Look where I would, the glistening of the breakers, or the sparkling of the mica-laden rocks, recalled the brilliant facets of the gem which I had seen. I was moody and distraught, and eventually let Minnie walk back to Corriemains by herself, while I made my way to the homesteading. My father and Digby were just sitting down to the midday meal, and the latter hailed me cheerily.

"Come along mate," he cried, pushing over a stool, "we were just wondering what had become of you. Ah! you rogue, I'll bet my bottom dollar it was that pretty wench I saw the other day that kept you."

"Mind your own affairs," I answered angrily.

"Don't be thin skinned," he said, "young people should control their tempers, and you've got a mighty bad one. my lad. Have you heard that I am going to leave you?"

"I'm sorry to hear it," I said frankly; "when do you intend to go?"

"Next week," he answered, "but don't be afraid; you'll see me again. I've had too good a time here to forget you easily. I'm going to buy a good steam yacht—250 tons or thereabouts—and I'll bring her round in a few months and give you a cruise."

"What would be a fair price for a craft of that sort?" I asked.

"Forty thousand dollars," said our visitor carelessly.

"You must very rich," I remarked, "to throw away so much' money on pleasure."

"Rich!" echoed my companion, his southern blood mantling up for a moment. "Rich; why, man, there is hardly a limit—but there, I was romancing a bit. I'm fairly well off, or shall be very shortly."

"How did you make your money?" I asked. The question came so glibly to my lips that I had no time to check it, though I felt the moment afterward that I had made a mistake. Our guest drew himself into himself at once, and took no notice of my query, while my father said:

"Hush, Archie laddie, ye munna speer they questions of the gentleman!" I could see, however, from the old man's eager gray eyes, looking out from under the great thatch of his brows, that he was meditating over the same problem himself.

During the next couple of days I hesitated very often as to whether I should tell my father of what I had seen and the opinions I had formed about our visitor; but he forestalled me by making a discovery himself which supplemented mine and explained all that had been dark. It was one day when the stranger was out for a ramble that, entering the kitchen, I found my father sitting by the fire deeply engaged in perusing a newspaper, spelling out the words laboriously and following the lines with his great forefinger. As I came in he crumpled up the paper as if his instinct were to conceal it, but then, spreading it out again on his knee, he beckoned me over to him.

"Wha d'ye think this chiel Digby is?" he asked. I could see by his manner that he was much excited.

"No good," I answered.

"Come here, laddie, come here!" he croaked. "You're a braw scholar. Read this tae me aloud—read it and tell me if you dinna think I've fitted the cap on the right heid. It's a Glasgey Herald only four days auld—a Loch Ranza feeshin' boat brought it in the morn. Begin frae here—'Oor Paris Letter.' Here it is. 'Fuller details;' read it a' to me."

I began at the spot indicated, which was a paragraph of the ordinary French correspondence of the Glasgow paper. It ran in this way:

"Fuller details have now come before the public of the diamond robbery by which the Duchesse de Rochevieuille lost her celebrated gem. The diamond is a pure brilliant weighing eighty-three and one-half carats, and is supposed to be the third largest in France and the seventeenth in Europe. It came into the possession of the family through the great-granduncle of the duchess, who fought under Bussy in India, and brought it back to Europe with him. It represented a fortune then, but its value now is simply enormous. It was taken, as will be remembered, from the jewel case of the duchess two months ago during the night, and though the police have made every effort, no real clue has been obtained as to the thief. They are very reticent upon the subject, but it seems that they have reason to suspect one Achille Wolff, an Americanized native of Lorraine, who had called at the chateau a short time before. He is an eccentric man, of bohemian habits, and it is just possible that his sudden disappearance at the time of the robbery may have been a coincidence. In appearance he is described as romantic-looking, with an artistic face, dark eyes and hair, and a brusque manner. A large reward is offered for his capture."

When I finished reading this my father and I sat looking at each other in silence for a minute or so. Then my father jerked his finger over his shoulder. "Yon's him," he said.

"Yes, it must be he," I answered, thinking of the initials on the handkerchief.

Again we were silent for a time. My father took one of the faggots out of the grate and twisted it about in his hands. "It maun be a

muckle stane," he said. "He canna hae it aboot him. Likely he's left it in France."

"No, he has it with him," I said, like a cursed fool as I was.

"Hoo d'ye ken that?" asked the old man, looking up quickly with eager eyes.

"Because I have seen it."

The faggot which he held broke in two in his grip, but he said nothing more. Shortly afterward our guest came in, and we had dinner, but neither of us alluded to the arrival of the paper.

IV

I heard our visitor give a great scream. I have often been amused, when reading stories told in the first person, to see how the narrator makes himself out, as a matter of course, to be a perfect and spotless man. All around may have their passions and weaknesses and vices, but he remains a cold and blameless nonentity, running like a colorless thread through the tangled skein of the story. I shall not fall into this error. I see myself as I was in those days, shallow-hearted, hot-headed and with little principle of any kind. Such I was, and such I depict myself.

From the time that I finally identified our visitor Digby with Achille Wolff, the diamond robber, my resolution was taken. Some might have been squeamish in the matter, and thought that because he had shaken their hand and broken their bread he had earned some sort of grace from them. I was not troubled with sentimentality of this sort. He was a criminal escaping from justice. Some providence had thrown him into our hands, and an enormous reward awaited his betrayers. I never hesitated for a moment as to what was to be done.

The more I thought of it the more I admired the cleverness with which he had managed the whole business. He was clear that he had a vessel ready, manned either by confederates or by unsuspecting fishermen. Hence he would be independent of all those parts where the police would be on the lookout for him. Again, if he had made for England or for America, he could hardly have escaped ultimate capture, but by choosing one of the most

desolate and lonely spots in Europe he had thrown them off his track for a time, while the destruction of the brig seemed to destroy the last clue to his whereabouts. At present he was entirely at our mercy, since he could not move from the island without our help. There was no necessity for us to hurry, therefore, and we could mature our plans at our leisure. But my father and I showed no change in our manner toward our guest, and he himself was as cheery and light-hearted as ever. It was pleasant to hear him singing as we mended the nets or calked the boat. His voice was a very high tenor and one of the most melodious I ever listened to. I am convinced that he could have made a name upon the operatic stage, but like most versatile scoundrels he placed small account upon the genuine talents which he possessed, and cultivated the worst portion of his nature. My father used sometimes to eye him sideways in a strange manner, and I thought I knew what he was thinking about—but there I made a mistake.

One day, about a week after our conversation, I was fixing up one of the rails of our fence, which had been snapped in the gale, when my father came along the seashore, plodding heavily among the pebbles, and sat down on a stone at my elbow. I went on knocking in the nails, but looked at him from the corner of my eyes as he pulled away at his short black pipe. I could see that he had something weighty on his mind, for he knitted his brows and his lips projected.

"D'ye mind what was in yon paper?" he said at last, knocking his ashes out against the stone.

"Yes," I answered shortly.

"Well, what's your opinion?" he asked.

"Why, that we should have the reward, of course!" I replied.

"The reward!" he said with a fierce snarl. "You would tak' the reward. You'd let the stane that's worth thousands an' thousands gang awa' back tae some furrin Papist, an a' for the sake o' a few pund that they'd fling till ye, as they fling a bane to a dog when the meat's a' gone. It's a clean flingin' awa o' the gifts o' Providence."

"Well, father," I said, laying down the hammer, "you must be satisfied with what you can get. You can only have what is offered."

"But if we got the stane itsel'," whispered my father, with a leer on his face.

"He'd never give it up," I said.

"But if he deed while he's here—if he was suddenly"

"Drop it, father, drop it!" I cried, for the old man looked like a fiend out of the pit. I saw now what he was aiming at.

"If he deed," he shouted, "wha saw him come, and wha wad speer where he'd ganged till? If an accident happened, if he came by a dud on the heid, or woke some nicht to find a knife at his trapple, wha wad be the wiser?"

"You mustn't speak so, father," I said, though I was thinking many things at the same time.

"It may as well be oot as in," he answered, and went away rather sulkily, turning around after a few yards and holding up his finger toward me to impress the necessity of caution.

My father did not speak of this matter to me again, but what he said rankled in my mind. I could hardly realize that he meant his words, for he had always, as far as I knew, been an upright, righteous man, hard in his ways and grasping in his nature, but guiltless of any great sin. Perhaps it was that he was removed from temptation, for isothermal lines of crime might be drawn on the map through places where it is hard to walk straight, and there are others where it is as hard to fall. It was easy to be a saint in the Island of Uffa.

One day we were finishing breakfast when our guest asked if the boat was mended (one of the tholepins had been broken). I answered that it was.

"I want you two," he said, "to take me round to Lamlash to-day. You shall have a couple of sovereigns for the job. I don't know that I may not come back with you—but I may stay."

My eyes met those of my father for a flash. "There's no' vera much wind," he said.

"What there is is in the right direction," returned Digby, as I must call him.

"The new foresail has no' been bent," persisted my father.

"There's no use throwing difficulties in the way," said our visitor angrily. "If you won't come,

I'll get Tommy Gibbs and his father, but go I shall. Is it a bargain or not?"

"I'll gang," my father replied sullenly, and went down to get the boat ready. I followed, and helped him to bend on the new foresail. I felt nervous and excited.

"What do you intend to do?" I asked.

"I dinna ken," he said irritably. "Gin the worst come to the worst we can gie him up at Lamlash—but oh, it wad be a peety, an awfu' peety. You're young an strong, laddie; can we no' master him between us?"

"No," I said, "I'm ready to give him up, but I'm damned if I lay a hand on him."

"You're a cooardly, white livered loon!" he cried, but I was not to be moved by taunts, and left him mumbling to himself and picking at the sail with nervous fingers. It was about two o'clock before the boat was ready, but as there was a slight breeze from the north we reckoned on reaching Lamlash before nightfall. There was just a pleasant ripple upon the dark blue water, and as we stood on the beach before shoving off we could see the Carlin's Leap and Goatfell bathed in a purple mist, while beyond them along the horizon loomed the long line of the Argyleshire hills. Away to the south the great bald summit of Ailsa Crag glittered in the sun, and a single white fleck showed where a fishing boat was beating up from the Scotch coast. Digby and I stepped into the boat, but my father ran back to where I had been mending the rails and came back with the hatchet in his hand, which he stowed away under the thwarts.

"What d'ye want with the axe?" our visitor asked.

"It's a handy thing to hae aboot a boat," my father answered with averted eyes, and shoved us off. We set the foresail, jib and mainsail and shot away across the Roost, with the blue water splashing merrily under our bows. Looking back I saw the coast line of our little island extend rapidly on either side. There was Carravoe which we had left, and our own beach of Carracuill, and the steep, brown face of the Coinbera, and away behind the rugged crests of Beg-na-phail and Beg-na-sacher I could see the red tiles of the byre of our homesteading, and across the moor a thin blue reek in the air which marked the

position of Corriemains. My heart warmed toward the place which had been my home since childhood.

We were about half way across the Roost when it fell a dead calm, and the sails flapped against the mast. We were perfectly motionless except for the drift of the current, which runs from north to south. I had been steering and my father managing the sails, while the stranger smoked his eternal cigarettes and admired the scenery; but at his suggestion we now got the sculls out to row. I shall never know how it began, but as I was stooping down to pick up an oar I heard our visitor give a great scream that he was murdered, and looking up I saw him with his face all in a sputter of blood leaning against the mast, while my father made at him with the hatchet. Before I could move hand or foot Digby rushed at the old man and caught him round the waist. "You gray-headed devil," he cried in a husky voice, "I feel that you have done for me; but you'll never get what you want. No— never! never! never!" Nothing can ever erase from my memory the intense and concentrated malice of those words. My father gave a raucous cry, they swayed and balanced for a moment, and then over they went into the sea. I rushed to the side, boathook in hand, but they never came up. As the long rings caused by the splash widened out, however, and left an unruffled space in the center, I saw them once again. The water was very clear, and far, far down I could see the shimmer of two white faces coming and going, faces which seemed to look up at me with an expression of unutterable horror. Slowly they went down, revolving in each other's embrace until they were nothing but a dark loom and then faded from my view forever. There they shall lie, the Frenchman and the Scot, till the great trumpet shall sound, and the sea give up its dead.

Storms may rage above them and great ships labor and creak, but their slumber shall be dreamless and unruffled in the silent green depths of the Roost of Uffa. I trust when the great day shall come that they will bring up the cursed stone with them that they may show the sore temptation which the devil had placed in their way as some slight extenuation of their errors while in this mortal flesh.

It was a weary and lonesome journey back to Carravoe. I remember tug- tugging at the oars as though to snap them in trying to relieve the tension of my mind. Towards evening a breeze sprang up and helped me on my way, and before nightfall I was back in the lonely homesteading once more, and all that had passed that Spring afternoon lay behind me like some horrible nightmare.

I did not remain in Uffa. The croft and the boat were sold by public roup in the market place of Androssan, and the sum realized was sufficient to enable me to continue my medical studies at the university. I fled from the island as from a cursed place, nor did I ever set foot on it again. Gibbs and his son, and even Minnie Fullarton, too, passed out of my life completely and forever. She missed me for a time no doubt, but I have heard that young McBane, who took the farm, went a-wooing to Corriemains after the white-fishing, and, as he was a comely fellow enough, he may have consoled her for my loss. As for myself, I have settled quietly down into a large middle-class practice in Paisley. It has been in the brief intervals of professional work that I have jotted down these reminiscences of the events which lead up to my father's death. Achille Wolff and the Rochevieille diamond are things of the past now, but there may be some who will care to hear of how they visited the Island of Uffa.