The Man Who Was Thursday

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Cover image

THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY

A NIGHTMARE

G. K. CHESTERTON

To Edmund Clerihew Bentley

A cloud was on the mind of men, and wailing went the weather,

Yea, a sick cloud upon the soul when we were boys together.

Science announced nonentity and art admired decay;

The world was old and ended: but you and I were gay;

Round us in antic order their crippled vices came--

Lust that had lost its laughter, fear that had lost its shame.

Like the white lock of Whistler, that lit our aimless gloom,

Men showed their own white feather as proudly as a plume.

Life was a fly that faded, and death a drone that stung;

The world was very old indeed when you and I were young.

They twisted even decent sin to shapes not to be named:

Men were ashamed of honour; but we were not ashamed.

Weak if we were and foolish, not thus we failed, not thus;

When that black Baal blocked the heavens he had no hymns from us

Children we were--our forts of sand were even as weak as eve,

High as they went we piled them up to break that bitter sea.

Fools as we were in motley, all jangling and absurd,

When all church bells were silent our cap and bells were heard.

Not all unhelped we held the fort, our tiny flags unfurled;

Some giants laboured in that cloud to lift it from the world.

I find again the book we found, I feel the hour that flings

Far out of fish?shaped Paumanok some cry of cleaner things;

And the Green Carnation withered, as in forest fires that pass,

Roared in the wind of all the world ten million leaves of grass;

Or sane and sweet and sudden as a bird sings in the rain--

Truth out of Tusitala spoke and pleasure out of pain.

Yea, cool and clear and sudden as a bird sings in the grey,

Dunedin to Samoa spoke, and darkness unto day.

But we were young; we lived to see God break their bitter charms.

God and the good Republic come riding back in arms:

We have seen the City of Mansoul, even as it rocked, relieved--

Blessed are they who did not see, but being blind, believed.

This is a tale of those old fears, even of those emptied hells,

And none but you shall understand the true thing that it tells--

Of what colossal gods of shame could cow men and yet crash,

Of what huge devils hid the stars, yet fell at a pistol flash.

The doubts that were so plain to chase, so dreadful to withstand--

Oh, who shall understand but you; yea, who shall understand?

The doubts that drove us through the night as we two talked amain,

And day had broken on the streets e'er it broke upon the brain.

Between us, by the peace of God, such truth can now be told;

Yea, there is strength in striking root and good in growing old.

We have found common things at last and marriage and a creed,

And I may safely write it now, and you may safely read.

G. K. C.

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CHAPTER I

THE TWO POETS OF SAFFRON PARK

THE suburb of Saffron Park lay on the sunset side of London, as red and

ragged as a cloud of sunset. It was built of a bright brick throughout;

its sky?line was fantastic, and even its ground plan was wild. It had

been the outburst of a speculative builder, faintly tinged with art,

who called its architecture sometimes Elizabethan and sometimes Queen

Anne, apparently under the impression that the two sovereigns were

identical. It was described with some justice as an artistic colony,

though it never in any definable way produced any art. But although its

pretensions to be an intellectual centre were a little vague, its

pretensions to be a pleasant place were quite indisputable. The

stranger who looked for the first time at the quaint red houses could

only think how very oddly shaped the people must be who could fit in to

them. Nor when he met the people was he disappointed in this respect.

The place was not only pleasant, but perfect, if once he could regard

it not as a deception but rather as a dream. Even if the people were

not "artists," the whole was nevertheless artistic. That young man with

the long, auburn hair and the impudent face--that young man was not

really a poet; but surely he was a poem. That old gentleman with the

wild, white beard and the wild, white hat--that venerable humbug was

not really a philosopher; but at least he was the cause of philosophy

in others. That scientific gentleman with the bald, egg?like head and

the bare, bird?like neck had no real right to the airs of science that

he assumed. He had not discovered anything new in biology; but what

biological creature could he have discovered more singular than

himself? Thus, and thus only, the whole place had properly to be

regarded; it had to be considered not so much as a workshop for

artists, but as a frail but finished work of art. A man who stepped

into its social atmosphere felt as if he had stepped into a written

comedy.

More especially this attractive unreality fell upon it about nightfall,

when the extravagant roofs were dark against the afterglow and the

whole insane village seemed as separate as a drifting cloud. This again

was more strongly true of the many nights of local festivity, when the

little gardens were often illuminated, and the big Chinese lanterns

glowed in the dwarfish trees like some fierce and monstrous fruit. And

this was strongest of all on one particular evening, still vaguely

remembered in the locality, of which the auburn?haired poet was the

hero. It was not by any means the only evening of which he was the

hero. On many nights those passing by his little back garden might hear

his high, didactic voice laying down the law to men and particularly to

women. The attitude of women in such cases was indeed one of the

paradoxes of the place. Most of the women were of the kind vaguely

called emancipated, and professed some protest against male supremacy.

Yet these new women would always pay to a man the extravagant

compliment which no ordinary woman ever pays to him, that of listening

while he is talking. And Mr. Lucian Gregory, the red?haired poet, was

really (in some sense) a man worth listening to, even if one only

laughed at the end of it. He put the old cant of the lawlessness of art

and the art of lawlessness with a certain impudent freshness which gave

at least a momentary pleasure. He was helped in some degree by the

arresting oddity of his appearance, which he worked, as the phrase

goes, for all it was worth. His dark red hair parted in the middle was

literally like a woman's, and curved into the slow curls of a virgin in

a pre?Raphaelite picture. From within this almost saintly oval,

however, his face projected suddenly broad and brutal, the chin carried

forward with a look of cockney contempt. This combination at once

tickled and terrified the nerves of a neurotic population. He seemed

like a walking blasphemy, a blend of the angel and the ape.

This particular evening, if it is remembered for nothing else, will be

remembered in that place for its strange sunset. It looked like the end

of the world. All the heaven seemed covered with a quite vivid and

palpable plumage; you could only say that the sky was full of feathers,

and of feathers that almost brushed the face. Across the great part of

the dome they were grey, with the strangest tints of violet and mauve

and an unnatural pink or pale green; but towards the west the whole

grew past description, transparent and passionate, and the last red?hot

plumes of it covered up the sun like something too good to be seen. The

whole was so close about the earth, as to express nothing but a violent

secrecy. The very empyrean seemed to be a secret. It expressed that

splendid smallness which is the soul of local patriotism. The very sky

seemed small.

I say that there are some inhabitants who may remember the evening if

only by that oppressive sky. There are others who may remember it

because it marked the first appearance in the place of the second poet

of Saffron Park. For a long time the red?haired revolutionary had

reigned without a rival; it was upon the night of the sunset that his

solitude suddenly ended. The new poet, who introduced himself by the

name of Gabriel Syme was a very mild-looking mortal, with a fair,

pointed beard and faint, yellow hair. But an impression grew that he

was less meek than he looked. He signalised his entrance by differing

with the established poet, Gregory, upon the whole nature of poetry. He

said that he (Syme) was poet of law, a poet of order; nay, he said he

was a poet of respectability. So all the Saffron Parkers looked at him

as if he had that moment fallen out of that impossible sky.

In fact, Mr. Lucian Gregory, the anarchic poet, connected the two

events.

"It may well be," he said, in his sudden lyrical manner, "it may well

be on such a night of clouds and cruel colours that there is brought

forth upon the earth such a portent as a respectable poet. You say you

are a poet of law; I say you are a contradiction in terms. I only

wonder there were not comets and earthquakes on the night you appeared

in this garden."

The man with the meek blue eyes and the pale, pointed beard endured

these thunders with a certain submissive solemnity. The third party of

the group, Gregory's sister Rosamond, who had her brother's braids of

red hair, but a kindlier face underneath them, laughed with such

mixture of admiration and disapproval as she gave commonly to the

family oracle.

Gregory resumed in high oratorical good humour.

"An artist is identical with an anarchist," he cried. "You might

transpose the words anywhere. An anarchist is an artist. The man who

throws a bomb is an artist, because he prefers a great moment to

everything. He sees how much more valuable is one burst of blazing

light, one peal of perfect thunder, than the mere common bodies of a

few shapeless policemen. An artist disregards all governments,

abolishes all conventions. The poet delights in disorder only. If it

were not so, the most poetical thing in the world would be the

Underground Railway."

"So it is," said Mr. Syme.

"Nonsense! " said Gregory, who was very rational when anyone else

attempted paradox. "Why do all the clerks and navvies in the railway

trains look so sad and tired, so very sad and tired? I will tell you.

It is because they know that the train is going right. It is because

they know that whatever place they have taken a ticket for that place

they will reach. It is because after they have passed Sloane Square

they know that the next station must be Victoria, and nothing but

Victoria. Oh, their wild rapture! oh, their eyes like stars and their

souls again in Eden, if the next station were unaccountably Baker

Street!"

"It is you who are unpoetical," replied the poet Syme. "If what you say

of clerks is true, they can only be as prosaic as your poetry. The

rare, strange thing is to hit the mark; the gross, obvious thing is to

miss it. We feel it is epical when man with one wild arrow strikes a

distant bird. Is it not also epical when man with one wild engine

strikes a distant station? Chaos is dull; because in chaos the train

might indeed go anywhere, to Baker Street or to Bagdad. But man is a

magician, and his whole magic is in this, that he does say Victoria,

and lo! it is Victoria. No, take your books of mere poetry and prose;

let me read a time table, with tears of pride. Take your Byron, who

commemorates the defeats of man; give me Bradshaw, who commemorates his

victories. Give me Bradshaw, I say!"

"Must you go?" inquired Gregory sarcastically.

"I tell you," went on Syme with passion, "that every time a train comes

in I feel that it has broken past batteries of besiegers, and that man

has won a battle against chaos. You say contemptuously that when one

has left Sloane Square one must come to Victoria. I say that one might

do a thousand things instead, and that whenever I really come there I

have the sense of hairbreadth escape. And when I hear the guard shout

out the word Victoria,' it is not an unmeaning word. It is to me the

cry of a herald announcing conquest. It is to me indeed Victoria'; it

is the victory of Adam."

Gregory wagged his heavy, red head with a slow and sad smile.

"And even then," he said, "we poets always ask the question, And what

is Victoria now that you have got there ?' You think Victoria is like

the New Jerusalem. We know that the New Jerusalem will only be like

Victoria. Yes, the poet will be discontented even in the streets of

heaven. The poet is always in revolt."

"There again," said Syme irritably, "what is there poetical about being

in revolt ? You might as well say that it is poetical to be sea?sick.

Being sick is a revolt. Both being sick and being rebellious may be the

wholesome thing on certain desperate occasions; but I'm hanged if I can

see why they are poetical. Revolt in the abstract is--revolting. It's

mere vomiting."

The girl winced for a flash at the unpleasant word, but Syme was too

hot to heed her.

"It is things going right," he cried, "that is poetical! Our

digestions, for instance, going sacredly and silently right, that is

the foundation of all poetry. Yes, the most poetical thing, more

poetical than the flowers, more poetical than the stars--the most

poetical thing in the world is not being sick."

"Really," said Gregory superciliously, "the examples you choose--"

"I beg your pardon," said Syme grimly, "I forgot we had abolished all

conventions."

For the first time a red patch appeared on Gregory's forehead.

"You don't expect me," he said, "to revolutionise society on this lawn

?"

Syme looked straight into his eyes and smiled sweetly.

"No, I don't," he said; "but I suppose that if you were serious about

your anarchism, that is exactly what you would do."

Gregory's big bull's eyes blinked suddenly like those of an angry lion,

and one could almost fancy that his red mane rose.

"Don't you think, then," he said in a dangerous voice, "that I am

serious about my anarchism?"

"I beg your pardon ?" said Syme.

"Am I not serious about my anarchism ?" cried Gregory, with knotted

fists.

"My dear fellow!" said Syme, and strolled away.

With surprise, but with a curious pleasure, he found Rosamond Gregory

still in his company.

"Mr. Syme," she said, "do the people who talk like you and my brother

often mean what they say ? Do you mean what you say now ?"

Syme smiled.

"Do you ?" he asked.

"What do you mean ?" asked the girl, with grave eyes.

"My dear Miss Gregory," said Syme gently, "there are many kinds of

sincerity and insincerity. When you say thank you' for the salt, do you

mean what you say ? No. When you say the world is round,' do you mean

what you say ? No. It is true, but you don't mean it. Now, sometimes a

man like your brother really finds a thing he does mean. It may be only

a half?truth, quarter?truth, tenth?truth; but then he says more than he

means--from sheer force of meaning it."

She was looking at him from under level brows; her face was grave and

open, and there had fallen upon it the shadow of that unreasoning

responsibility which is at the bottom of the most frivolous woman, the

maternal watch which is as old as the world.

"Is he really an anarchist, then?" she asked.

"Only in that sense I speak of," replied Syme; "or if you prefer it, in

that nonsense."

She drew her broad brows together and said abruptly--

"He wouldn't really use--bombs or that sort of thing?"

Syme broke into a great laugh, that seemed too large for his slight and

somewhat dandified figure.

"Good Lord, no!" he said, "that has to be done anonymously."

And at that the corners of her own mouth broke into a smile, and she

thought with a simultaneous pleasure of Gregory's absurdity and of his

safety.

Syme strolled with her to a seat in the corner of the garden, and

continued to pour out his opinions. For he was a sincere man, and in

spite of his superficial airs and graces, at root a humble one. And it

is always the humble man who talks too much; the proud man watches

himself too closely. He defended respectability with violence and

exaggeration. He grew passionate in his praise of tidiness and

propriety. All the time there was a smell of lilac all round him. Once

he heard very faintly in some distant street a barrel?organ begin to

play, and it seemed to him that his heroic words were moving to a tiny

tune from under or beyond the world.

He stared and talked at the girl's red hair and amused face for what

seemed to be a few minutes; and then, feeling that the groups in such a

place should mix, rose to his feet. To his astonishment, he discovered

the whole garden empty. Everyone had gone long ago, and he went himself

with a rather hurried apology. He left with a sense of champagne in his

head, which he could not afterwards explain. In the wild events which

were to follow this girl had no part at all; he never saw her again

until all his tale was over. And yet, in some indescribable way, she

kept recurring like a motive in music through all his mad adventures

afterwards, and the glory of her strange hair ran like a red thread

through those dark and ill?drawn tapestries of the night. For what

followed was so improbable, that it might well have been a dream.

When Syme went out into the starlit street, he found it for the moment

empty. Then he realised (in some odd way) that the silence was rather a

living silence than a dead one. Directly outside the door stood a

street lamp, whose gleam gilded the leaves of the tree that bent out

over the fence behind him. About a foot from the lamp?post stood a

figure almost as rigid and motionless as the lamp?post itself. The tall

hat and long frock coat were black; the face, in an abrupt shadow, was

almost as dark. Only a fringe of fiery hair against the light, and also

something aggressive in the attitude, proclaimed that it was the poet

Gregory. He had something of the look of a masked bravo waiting sword

in hand for his foe.

He made a sort of doubtful salute, which Syme somewhat more formally

returned.

"I was waiting for you," said Gregory. "Might I have a moment's

conversation?"

"Certainly. About what?" asked Syme in a sort of weak wonder.

Gregory struck out with his stick at the lamp?post, and then at the

tree. "About this and this," he cried; "about order and anarchy. There

is your precious order, that lean, iron lamp, ugly and barren; and

there is anarchy, rich, living, reproducing itself--there is anarchy,

splendid in green and gold."

"All the same," replied Syme patiently, "just at present you only see

the tree by the light of the lamp. I wonder when you would ever see the

lamp by the light of the tree." Then after a pause he said, "But may I

ask if you have been standing out here in the dark only to resume our

little argument?"

"No," cried out Gregory, in a voice that rang down the street, "I did

not stand here to resume our argument, but to end it for ever."

The silence fell again, and Syme, though he understood nothing,

listened instinctively for something serious. Gregory began in a smooth

voice and with a rather bewildering smile.

"Mr. Syme," he said, "this evening you succeeded in doing something

rather remarkable. You did something to me that no man born of woman

has ever succeeded in doing before."

"Indeed!"

"Now I remember," resumed Gregory reflectively, "one other person

succeeded in doing it. The captain of a penny steamer (if I remember

correctly) at Southend. You have irritated me."

"I am very sorry," replied Syme with gravity.

"I am afraid my fury and your insult are too shocking to be wiped out

even with an apology," said Gregory very calmly. "No duel could wipe it

out. If I struck you dead I could not wipe it out. There is only one

way by which that insult can be erased, and that way I choose. I am

going, at the possible sacrifice of my life and honour, to prove to you

that you were wrong in what you said."

"In what I said?"

"You said I was not serious about being an anarchist."

"There are degrees of seriousness," replied Syme. "I have never doubted

that you were perfectly sincere in this sense, that you thought what

you said well worth saying, that you thought a paradox might wake men

up to a neglected truth."

Gregory stared at him steadily and painfully.

"And in no other sense," he asked, "you think me serious? You think me

a fl�neur who lets fall occasional truths. You do not think that in a

deeper, a more deadly sense, I am serious."

Syme struck his stick violently on the stones of the road.

"Serious! " he cried. "Good Lord! is this street serious? Are these

damned Chinese lanterns serious? Is the whole caboodle serious? One

comes here and talks a pack of bosh, and perhaps some sense as well,

but I should think very little of a man who didn't keep something in

the background of his life that was more serious than all this

talking--something more serious, whether it was religion or only

drink."

"Very well," said Gregory, his face darkening, "you shall see something

more serious than either drink or religion."

Syme stood waiting with his usual air of mildness until Gregory again

opened his lips.

"You spoke just now of having a religion. Is it really true that you

have one?"

"Oh," said Syme with a beaming smile, "we are all Catholics now."

"Then may I ask you to swear by whatever gods or saints your religion

involves that you will not reveal what I am now going to tell you to

any son of Adam, and especially not to the police? Will you swear that!

If you will take upon yourself this awful abnegations if you will

consent to burden your soul with a vow that you should never make and a

knowledge you should never dream about, I will promise you in return--"

"You will promise me in return?" inquired Syme, as the other paused.

"I will promise you a very entertaining evening." Syme suddenly took

off his hat.

"Your offer," he said, "is far too idiotic to be declined. You say that

a poet is always an anarchist. I disagree; but I hope at least that he

is always a sportsman. Permit me, here and now, to swear as a

Christian, and promise as a good comrade and a fellow?artist, that I

will not report anything of this, whatever it is, to the police. And

now, in the name of Colney Hatch, what is it?"

"I think," said Gregory, with placid irrelevancy, "that we will call a

cab."

He gave two long whistles, and a hansom came rattling down the road.

The two got into it in silence. Gregory gave through the trap the

address of an obscure public?house on the Chiswick bank of the river.

The cab whisked itself away again, and in it these two fantastics

quitted their fantastic town.

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CHAPTER II

THE SECRET OF GABRIEL SYME

THE cab pulled up before a particularly dreary and greasy beershop,

into which Gregory rapidly conducted his companion. They seated

themselves in a close and dim sort of bar?parlour, at a stained wooden

table with one wooden leg. The room was so small and dark, that very

little could be seen of the attendant who was summoned, beyond a vague

and dark impression of something bulky and bearded.

"Will you take a little supper?" asked Gregory politely. "The p�t� de

foie gras is not good here, but I can recommend the game."

Syme received the remark with stolidity, imagining it to be a joke.

Accepting the vein of humour, he said, with a well?bred indifference--

"Oh, bring me some lobster mayonnaise."

To his indescribable astonishment, the man only said "Certainly, sir!"

and went away apparently to get it.

"What will you drink?" resumed Gregory, with the same careless yet

apologetic air. "I shall only have a cr�me de menthe myself; I have

dined. But the champagne can really be trusted. Do let me start you

with a half?bottle of Pommery at least?"

"Thank you!" said the motionless Syme. "You are very good."

His further attempts at conversation, somewhat disorganised in

themselves, were cut short finally as by a thunderbolt by the actual

appearance of the lobster. Syme tasted it, and found it particularly

good. Then he suddenly began to eat with great rapidity and appetite.

"Excuse me if I enjoy myself rather obviously!" he said to Gregory,

smiling. "I don't often have the luck to have a dream like this. It is

new to me for a nightmare to lead to a lobster. It is commonly the

other way."

"You are not asleep, I assure you," said Gregory. "You are, on the

contrary, close to the most actual and rousing moment of your

existence. Ah, here comes your champagne! I admit that there may be a

slight disproportion, let us say, between the inner arrangements of

this excellent hotel and its simple and unpretentious exterior. But

that is all our modesty. We are the most modest men that ever lived on

earth."

"And who are we?" asked Syme, emptying his champagne glass.

"It is quite simple," replied Gregory. "We are the serious anarchists,

in whom you do not believe."

"Oh!" said Syme shortly. "You do yourselves well in drinks."

"Yes, we are serious about everything," answered Gregory.

Then after a pause he added--

"If in a few moments this table begins to turn round a little, don't

put it down to your inroads into the champagne. I don't wish you to do

yourself an injustice."

"Well, if I am not drunk, I am mad," replied Syme with perfect calm;

"but I trust I can behave like a gentleman in either condition. May I

smoke?"

"Certainly!" said Gregory, producing a cigar?case. "Try one of mine."

Syme took the cigar, clipped the end off with a cigar-cutter out of his

waistcoat pocket, put it in his mouth, lit it slowly, and let out a

long cloud of smoke. It is not a little to his credit that he performed

these rites with so much composure, for almost before he had begun them

the table at which he sat had begun to revolve, first slowly, and then

rapidly, as if at an insane s�ance.

"You must not mind it," said Gregory; "it's a kind of screw."

"Quite so," said Syme placidly, "a kind of screw. How simple that is!"

The next moment the smoke of his cigar, which had been wavering across

the room in snaky twists, went straight up as if from a factory

chimney, and the two, with their chairs and table, shot down through

the floor as if the earth had swallowed them. They went rattling down a

kind of roaring chimney as rapidly as a lift cut loose, and they came

with an abrupt bump to the bottom. But when Gregory threw open a pair

of doors and let in a red subterranean light, Syme was still smoking

with one leg thrown over the other, and had not turned a yellow hair.

Gregory led him down a low, vaulted passage, at the end of which was

the red light. It was an enormous crimson lantern, nearly as big as a

fireplace, fixed over a small but heavy iron door. In the door there

was a sort of hatchway or grating, and on this Gregory struck five

times. A heavy voice with a foreign accent asked him who he was. To

this he gave the more or less unexpected reply, "Mr. Joseph

Chamberlain." The heavy hinges began to move; it was obviously some

kind of password.

Inside the doorway the passage gleamed as if it were lined with a

network of steel. On a second glance, Syme saw that the glittering

pattern was really made up of ranks and ranks of rifles and revolvers,

closely packed or interlocked.

"I must ask you to forgive me all these formalities," said Gregory; "we

have to be very strict here."

"Oh, don't apologise," said Syme. "I know your passion for law and

order," and he stepped into the passage lined with the steel weapons.

With his long, fair hair and rather foppish frock?coat, he looked a

singularly frail and fanciful figure as he walked down that shining

avenue of death.

They passed through several such passages, and came out at last into a

queer steel chamber with curved walls, almost spherical in shape, but

presenting, with its tiers of benches, something of the appearance of a

scientific lecture-theatre. There were no rifles or pistols in this

apartment, but round the walls of it were hung more dubious and

dreadful shapes, things that looked like the bulbs of iron plants, or

the eggs of iron birds. They were bombs, and the very room itself

seemed like the inside of a bomb. Syme knocked his cigar ash off

against the wall, and went in.

"And now, my dear Mr. Syme," said Gregory, throwing himself in an

expansive manner on the bench under the largest bomb, "now we are quite

cosy, so let us talk properly. Now no human words can give you any

notion of why I brought you here. It was one of those quite arbitrary

emotions, like jumping off a cliff or falling in love. Suffice it to

say that you were an inexpressibly irritating fellow, and, to do you

justice, you are still. I would break twenty oaths of secrecy for the

pleasure of taking you down a peg. That way you have of lighting a

cigar would make a priest break the seal of confession. Well, you said

that you were quite certain I was not a serious anarchist. Does this

place strike you as being serious?"

"It does seem to have a moral under all its gaiety," assented Syme;

"but may I ask you two questions? You need not fear to give me

information, because, as you remember, you very wisely extorted from me

a promise not to tell the police, a promise I shall certainly keep. So

it is in mere curiosity that I make my queries. First of all, what is

it really all about? What is it you object to? You want to abolish

Government?"

"To abolish God!" said Gregory, opening the eyes of a fanatic. "We do

not only want to upset a few despotisms and police regulations; that

sort of anarchism does exist, but it is a mere branch of the

Nonconformists. We dig deeper and we blow you higher. We wish to deny

all those arbitrary distinctions of vice and virtue, honour and

treachery, upon which mere rebels base themselves. The silly

sentimentalists of the French Revolution talked of the Rights of Man!

We hate Rights as we hate Wrongs. We have abolished Right and Wrong."

"And Right and Left," said Syme with a simple eagerness, "I hope you

will abolish them too. They are much more troublesome to me."

"You spoke of a second question," snapped Gregory.

"With pleasure," resumed Syme. "In all your present acts and

surroundings there is a scientific attempt at secrecy. I have an aunt

who lived over a shop, but this is the first time I have found people

living from preference under a public?house. You have a heavy iron

door. You cannot pass it without submitting to the humiliation of

calling yourself Mr. Chamberlain. You surround yourself with steel

instruments which make the place, if I may say so, more impressive than

homelike. May I ask why, after taking all this trouble to barricade

yourselves in the bowels of the earth, you then parade your whole

secret by talking about anarchism to every silly woman in Saffron

Park?"

Gregory smiled.

"The answer is simple," he said. "I told you I was a serious anarchist,

and you did not believe me. Nor do they believe me. Unless I took them

into this infernal room they would not believe me."

Syme smoked thoughtfully, and looked at him with interest. Gregory went

on.

"The history of the thing might amuse you," he said. "When first I

became one of the New Anarchists I tried all kinds of respectable

disguises. I dressed up as a bishop. I read up all about bishops in our

anarchist pamphlets, in Superstition the Vampire and Priests of Prey. I

certainly understood from them that bishops are strange and terrible

old men keeping a cruel secret from mankind. I was misinformed. When on

my first appearing in episcopal gaiters in a drawing?room I cried out

in a voice of thunder, Down! down! presumptuous human reason!' they

found out in some way that I was not a bishop at all. I was nabbed at

once. Then I made up as a millionaire; but I defended Capital with so

much intelligence that a fool could see that I was quite poor. Then I

tried being a major. Now I am a humanitarian myself, but I have, I

hope, enough intellectual breadth to understand the position of those

who, like Nietzsche, admire violence--the proud, mad war of Nature and

all that, you know. I threw myself into the major. I drew my sword and

waved it constantly. I called out Blood!' abstractedly, like a man

calling for wine. I often said, Let the weak perish; it is the Law.'

Well, well, it seems majors don't do this. I was nabbed again. At last

I went in despair to the President of the Central Anarchist Council,

who is the greatest man in Europe."

"What is his name?" asked Syme.

"You would not know it," answered Gregory. "That is his greatness.

Caesar and Napoleon put all their genius into being heard of, and they

were heard of. He puts all his genius into not being heard of, and he

is not heard of. But you cannot be for five minutes in the room with

him without feeling that Caesar and Napoleon would have been children

in his hands."

He was silent and even pale for a moment, and then resumed--

"But whenever he gives advice it is always something as startling as an

epigram, and yet as practical as the Bank of England. I said to him,

What disguise will hide me from the world? What can I find more

respectable than bishops and majors?' He looked at me with his large

but indecipherable face. You want a safe disguise, do you? You want a

dress which will guarantee you harmless; a dress in which no one would

ever look for a bomb?' I nodded. He suddenly lifted his lion's voice.

Why, then, dress up as an anarchist, you fool!' he roared so that the

room shook. Nobody will ever expect you to do anything dangerous then.'

And he turned his broad back on me without another word. I took his

advice, and have never regretted it. I preached blood and murder to

those women day and night, and --by God!--they would let me wheel their

perambulators."

Syme sat watching him with some respect in his large, blue eyes.

"You took me in," he said. "It is really a smart dodge."

Then after a pause he added--

"What do you call this tremendous President of yours?"

"We generally call him Sunday," replied Gregory with simplicity. You

see, there are seven members of the Central Anarchist Council, and they

are named after days of the week. He is called Sunday, by some of his

admirers Bloody Sunday. It is curious you should mention the matter,

because the very night you have dropped in (if I may so express it) is

the night on which our London branch, which assembles in this room, has

to elect its own deputy to fill a vacancy in the Council. The gentleman

who has for some time past played, with propriety and general applause,

the difficult part of Thursday, has died quite suddenly. Consequently,

we have called a meeting this very evening to elect a successor."

He got to his feet and strolled across the room with a sort of smiling

embarrassment.

"I feel somehow as if you were my mother, Syme," he continued casually.

"I feel that I can confide anything to you, as you have promised to

tell nobody. In fact, I will confide to you something that I would not

say in so many words to the anarchists who will be coming to the room

in about ten minutes. We shall, of course, go through a form of

election; but I don't mind telling you that it is practically certain

what the result will be." He looked down for a moment modestly. "It is

almost a settled thing that I am to be Thursday."

"My dear fellow." said Syme heartily, "I congratulate you. A great

career!"

Gregory smiled in deprecation, and walked across the room, talking

rapidly.

"As a matter of fact, everything is ready for me on this table," he

said, "and the ceremony will probably be the shortest possible."

Syme also strolled across to the table, and found lying across it a

walking?stick, which turned out on examination to be a sword?stick, a

large Colt's revolver, a sandwich case, and a formidable flask of

brandy. Over the chair, beside the table, was thrown a heavy?looking

cape or cloak.

"I have only to get the form of election finished," continued Gregory

with animation, "then I snatch up this cloak and stick, stuff these

other things into my pocket, step out of a door in this cavern, which

opens on the river, where there is a steam?tug already waiting for me,

and then--then--oh, the wild joy of being Thursday!" And he clasped his

hands.

Syme, who had sat down once more with his usual insolent languor, got

to his feet with an unusual air of hesitation.

"Why is it," he asked vaguely, "that I think you are quite a decent

fellow? Why do I positively like you, Gregory?" He paused a moment, and

then added with a sort of fresh curiosity, "Is it because you are such

an ass?"

There was a thoughtful silence again, and then he cried out--

"Well, damn it all! this is the funniest situation I have ever been in

in my life, and I am going to act accordingly. Gregory, I gave you a

promise before I came into this place. That promise I would keep under

red?hot pincers. Would you give me, for my own safety, a little promise

of the same kind? "

"A promise?" asked Gregory, wondering.

"Yes," said Syme very seriously, "a promise. I swore before God that I

would not tell your secret to the police. Will you swear by Humanity,

or whatever beastly thing you believe in, that you will not tell my

secret to the anarchists?"

"Your secret?" asked the staring Gregory. "Have you got a secret?"

"Yes," said Syme, "I have a secret." Then after a pause, "Will you

swear?"

Gregory glared at him gravely for a few moments, and then said

abruptly--

"You must have bewitched me, but I feel a furious curiosity about you.

Yes, I will swear not to tell the anarchists anything you tell me. But

look sharp, for they will be here in a couple of minutes."

Syme rose slowly to his feet and thrust his long, white hands into his

long, grey trousers' pockets. Almost as he did so there came five

knocks on the outer grating, proclaiming the arrival of the first of

the conspirators.

"Well," said Syme slowly, "I don't know how to tell you the truth more

shortly than by saying that your expedient of dressing up as an aimless

poet is not confined to you or your President. We have known the dodge

for some time at Scotland Yard."

Gregory tried to spring up straight, but he swayed thrice.

"What do you say?" he asked in an inhuman voice.

"Yes," said Syme simply, "I am a police detective. But I think I hear

your friends coming."

From the doorway there came a murmur of "Mr. Joseph Chamberlain." It

was repeated twice and thrice, and then thirty times, and the crowd of

Joseph Chamberlains (a solemn thought) could be heard trampling down

the corridor.

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CHAPTER III

THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY

BEFORE one of the fresh faces could appear at the doorway, Gregory's

stunned surprise had fallen from him. He was beside the table with a

bound, and a noise in his throat like a wild beast. He caught up the

Colt's revolver and took aim at Syme. Syme did not flinch, but he put

up a pale and polite hand.

"Don't be such a silly man," he said, with the effeminate dignity of a

curate. "Don't you see it's not necessary? Don't you see that we're

both in the same boat? Yes, and jolly sea?sick."

Gregory could not speak, but he could not fire either, and he looked

his question.

"Don't you see we've checkmated each other?" cried Syme. "I can't tell

the police you are an anarchist. You can't tell the anarchists I'm a

policeman. I can only watch you, knowing what you are; you can only

watch me, knowing what I am. In short, it's a lonely, intellectual

duel, my head against yours. I'm a policeman deprived of the help of

the police. You, my poor fellow, are an anarchist deprived of the help

of that law and organisation which is so essential to anarchy. The one

solitary difference is in your favour. You are not surrounded by

inquisitive policemen; I am surrounded by inquisitive anarchists. I

cannot betray you, but I might betray myself. Come, come! wait and see

me betray myself. I shall do it so nicely."

Gregory put the pistol slowly down, still staring at Syme as if he were

a sea-monster.

"I don't believe in immortality," he said at last, "but if, after all

this, you were to break your word, God would make a hell only for you,

to howl in for ever."

"I shall not break my word," said Syme sternly, "nor will you break

yours. Here are your friends."

The mass of the anarchists entered the room heavily, with a slouching

and somewhat weary gait; but one little man, with a black beard and

glasses--a man somewhat of the type of Mr. Tim Healy--detached himself,

and bustled forward with some papers in his hand.

"Comrade Gregory," he said, "I suppose this man is a delegate?"

Gregory, taken by surprise, looked down and muttered the name of Syme;

but Syme replied almost pertly--

"I am glad to see that your gate is well enough guarded to make it hard

for anyone to be here who was not a delegate."

The brow of the little man with the black beard was, however, still

contracted with something like suspicion.

"What branch do you represent?" he asked sharply.

"I should hardly call it a branch," said Syme, laughing; "I should call

it at the very least a root."

"What do you mean?"

"The fact is," said Syme serenely, "the truth is I am a Sabbatarian. I

have been specially sent here to see that you show a due observance of

Sunday."

The little man dropped one of his papers, and a flicker of fear went

over all the faces of the group. Evidently the awful President, whose

name was Sunday, did sometimes send down such irregular ambassadors to

such branch meetings.

"Well, comrade," said the man with the papers after a pause, "I suppose

we'd better give you a seat in the meeting?"

"If you ask my advice as a friend," said Syme with severe benevolence,

"I think you'd better."

When Gregory heard the dangerous dialogue end, with a sudden safety for

his rival, he rose abruptly and paced the floor in painful thought. He

was, indeed, in an agony of diplomacy. It was clear that Syme's

inspired impudence was likely to bring him out of all merely accidental

dilemmas. Little was to be hoped from them. He could not himself betray

Syme, partly from honour, but partly also because, if he betrayed him

and for some reason failed to destroy him, the Syme who escaped would

be a Syme freed from all obligation of secrecy, a Syme who would simply

walk to the nearest police station. After all, it was only one night's

discussion, and only one detective who would know of it. He would let

out as little as possible of their plans that night, and then let Syme

go, and chance it.

He strode across to the group of anarchists, which was already

distributing itself along the benches.

"I think it is time we began," he said; "the steam?tug is waiting on

the river already. I move that Comrade Buttons takes the chair."

This being approved by a show of hands, the little man with the papers

slipped into the presidential seat.

"Comrades," he began, as sharp as a pistol?shot, "our meeting to?night

is important, though it need not be long. This branch has always had

the honour of electing Thursdays for the Central European Council. We

have elected many and splendid Thursdays. We all lament the sad decease

of the heroic worker who occupied the post until last week. As you

know, his services to the cause were considerable. He organised the

great dynamite coup of Brighton which, under happier circumstances,

ought to have killed everybody on the pier. As you also know, his death

was as self-denying as his life, for he died through his faith in a

hygienic mixture of chalk and water as a substitute for milk, which

beverage he regarded as barbaric, and as involving cruelty to the cow.

Cruelty, or anything approaching to cruelty, revolted him always. But

it is not to acclaim his virtues that we are met, but for a harder

task. It is difficult properly to praise his qualities, but it is more

difficult to replace them. Upon you, comrades, it devolves this evening

to choose out of the company present the man who shall be Thursday. If

any comrade suggests a name I will put it to the vote. If no comrade

suggests a name, I can only tell myself that that dear dynamiter, who

is gone from us, has carried into the unknowable abysses the last

secret of his virtue and his innocence."

There was a stir of almost inaudible applause, such as is sometimes

heard in church. Then a large old man, with a long and venerable white

beard, perhaps the only real working?man present, rose lumberingly and

said--

"I move that Comrade Gregory be elected Thursday," and sat lumberingly

down again.

"Does anyone second?" asked the chairman.

A little man with a velvet coat and pointed beard seconded.

"Before I put the matter to the vote," said the chairman, "I will call

on Comrade Gregory to make a statement."

Gregory rose amid a great rumble of applause. His face was deadly pale,

so that by contrast his queer red hair looked almost scarlet. But he

was smiling and altogether at ease. He had made up his mind, and he saw

his best policy quite plain in front of him like a white road. His best

chance was to make a softened and ambiguous speech, such as would leave

on the detective's mind the impression that the anarchist brotherhood

was a very mild affair after all. He believed in his own literary

power, his capacity for suggesting fine shades and picking perfect

words. He thought that with care he could succeed, in spite of all the

people around him, in conveying an impression of the institution,

subtly and delicately false. Syme had once thought that anarchists,

under all their bravado, were only playing the fool. Could he not now,

in the hour of peril, make Syme think so again?

"Comrades," began Gregory, in a low but penetrating voice, "it is not

necessary for me to tell you what is my policy, for it is your policy

also. Our belief has been slandered, it has been disfigured, it has

been utterly confused and concealed, but it has never been altered.

Those who talk about anarchism and its dangers go everywhere and

anywhere to get their information, except to us, except to the fountain

head. They learn about anarchists from sixpenny novels; they learn

about anarchists from tradesmen's newspapers; they learn about

anarchists from Ally Sloper's Half?Holiday and the Sporting Times. They

never learn about anarchists from anarchists. We have no chance of

denying the mountainous slanders which are heaped upon our heads from

one end of Europe to another. The man who has always heard that we are

walking plagues has never heard our reply. I know that he will not hear

it tonight, though my passion were to rend the roof. For it is deep,

deep under the earth that the persecuted are permitted to assemble, as

the Christians assembled in the Catacombs. But if, by some incredible

accident, there were here to?night a man who all his life had thus

immensely misunderstood us, I would put this question to him: When

those Christians met in those Catacombs, what sort of moral reputation

had they in the streets above? What tales were told of their atrocities

by one educated Roman to another? Suppose' (I would say to him),

suppose that we are only repeating that still mysterious paradox of

history. Suppose we seem as shocking as the Christians because we are

really as harmless as the Christians. Suppose we seem as mad as the

Christians because we are really as meek."'

The applause that had greeted the opening sentences had been gradually

growing fainter, and at the last word it stopped suddenly. In the

abrupt silence, the man with the velvet jacket said, in a high, squeaky

voice--

"I'm not meek!"

"Comrade Witherspoon tells us," resumed Gregory, "that he is not meek.

Ah, how little he knows himself! His words are, indeed, extravagant;

his appearance is ferocious, and even (to an ordinary taste)

unattractive. But only the eye of a friendship as deep and delicate as

mine can perceive the deep foundation of solid meekness which lies at

the base of him, too deep even for himself to see. I repeat, we are the

true early Christians, only that we come too late. We are simple, as

they revere simple--look at Comrade Witherspoon. We are modest, as they

were modest--look at me. We are merciful--"

"No, no!" called out Mr. Witherspoon with the velvet jacket.

"I say we are merciful," repeated Gregory furiously, "as the early

Christians were merciful. Yet this did not prevent their being accused

of eating human flesh. We do not eat human flesh--"

"Shame!" cried Witherspoon. "Why not?"

"Comrade Witherspoon," said Gregory, with a feverish gaiety, "is

anxious to know why nobody eats him (laughter). In our society, at any

rate, which loves him sincerely, which is founded upon love--"

"No, no!" said Witherspoon, "down with love."

"Which is founded upon love," repeated Gregory, grinding his teeth,

"there will be no difficulty about the aims which we shall pursue as a

body, or which I should pursue were I chosen as the representative of

that body. Superbly careless of the slanders that represent us as

assassins and enemies of human society, we shall pursue with moral

courage and quiet intellectual pressure, the permanent ideals of

brotherhood and simplicity."

Gregory resumed his seat and passed his hand across his forehead. The

silence was sudden and awkward, but the chairman rose like an

automaton, and said in a colourless voice--

"Does anyone oppose the election of Comrade Gregory?"

The assembly seemed vague and sub?consciously disappointed, and Comrade

Witherspoon moved restlessly on his seat and muttered in his thick

beard. By the sheer rush of routine, however, the motion would have

been put and carried. But as the chairman was opening his mouth to put

it, Syme sprang to his feet and said in a small and quiet voice--

"Yes, Mr. Chairman, I oppose."

The most effective fact in oratory is an unexpected change in the

voice. Mr. Gabriel Syme evidently understood oratory. Having said these

first formal words in a moderated tone and with a brief simplicity, he

made his next word ring and volley in the vault as if one of the guns

had gone off.

"Comrades!" he cried, in a voice that made every man jump out of his

boots, "have we come here for this? Do we live underground like rats in

order to listen to talk like this? This is talk we might listen to

while eating buns at a Sunday School treat. Do we line these walls with

weapons and bar that door with death lest anyone should come and hear

Comrade Gregory saying to us, Be good, and you will be happy,' Honesty

is the best policy,' and Virtue is its own reward'? There was not a

word in Comrade Gregory's address to which a curate could not have

listened with pleasure (hear, hear). But I am not a curate (loud

cheers), and I did not listen to it with pleasure (renewed cheers). The

man who is fitted to make a good curate is not fitted to make a

resolute, forcible, and efficient Thursday (hear, hear)."

"Comrade Gregory has told us, in only too apologetic a tone, that we

are not the enemies of society. But I say that we are the enemies of

society, and so much the worse for society. We are the enemies of

society, for society is the enemy of humanity, its oldest and its most

pitiless enemy (hear, hear). Comrade Gregory has told us

(apologetically again) that we are not murderers. There I agree. We are

not murderers, we are executioners (cheers)."

Ever since Syme had risen Gregory had sat staring at him, his face

idiotic with astonishment. Now in the pause his lips of clay parted,

and he said, with an automatic and lifeless distinctness--

"You damnable hypocrite!"

Syme looked straight into those frightful eyes with his own pale blue

ones, and said with dignity--

"Comrade Gregory accuses me of hypocrisy. He knows as well as I do that

I am keeping all my engagements and doing nothing but my duty. I do not

mince words. I do not pretend to. I say that Comrade Gregory is unfit

to be Thursday for all his amiable qualities. He is unfit to be

Thursday because of his amiable qualities. We do not want the Supreme

Council of Anarchy infected with a maudlin mercy (hear, hear). This is

no time for ceremonial politeness, neither is it a time for ceremonial

modesty. I set myself against Comrade Gregory as I would set myself

against all the Governments of Europe, because the anarchist who has

given himself to anarchy has forgotten modesty as much as he has

forgotten pride (cheers). I am not a man at all. I am a cause (renewed

cheers). I set myself against Comrade Gregory as impersonally and as

calmly as I should choose one pistol rather than another out of that

rack upon the wall; and I say that rather than have Gregory and his

milk?and?water methods on the Supreme Council, I would offer myself for

election--"

His sentence was drowned in a deafening cataract of applause. The

faces, that had grown fiercer and fiercer with approval as his tirade

grew more and more uncompromising, were now distorted with grins of

anticipation or cloven with delighted cries. At the moment when he

announced himself as ready to stand for the post of Thursday, a roar of

excitement and assent broke forth, and became uncontrollable, and at

the same moment Gregory sprang to his feet, with foam upon his mouth,

and shouted against the shouting.

"Stop, you blasted madmen!" he cried, at the top of a voice that tore

his throat. "Stop, you--"

But louder than Gregory's shouting and louder than the roar of the room

came the voice of Syme, still speaking in a peal of pitiless thunder--

"I do not go to the Council to rebut that slander that calls us

murderers; I go to earn it (loud and prolonged cheering). To the priest

who says these men are the enemies of religion, to the judge who says

these men are the enemies of law, to the fat parliamentarian who says

these men are the enemies of order and public decency, to all these I

will reply, You are false kings, but you are true prophets. I am come

to destroy you, and to fulfil your prophecies.' "

The heavy clamour gradually died away, but before it had ceased

Witherspoon had jumped to his feet, his hair and beard all on end, and

had said--

"I move, as an amendment, that Comrade Syme be appointed to the post."

"Stop all this, I tell you!" cried Gregory, with frantic face and

hands. "Stop it, it is all--"

The voice of the chairman clove his speech with a cold accent.

"Does anyone second this amendment?" he said. A tall, tired man, with

melancholy eyes and an American chin beard, was observed on the back

bench to be slowly rising to his feet. Gregory had been screaming for

some time past; now there was a change in his accent, more shocking

than any scream. "I end all this!" he said, in a voice as heavy as

stone.

"This man cannot be elected. He is a--"

"Yes," said Syme, quite motionless, "what is he?" Gregory's mouth

worked twice without sound; then slowly the blood began to crawl back

into his dead face. "He is a man quite inexperienced in our work," he

said, and sat down abruptly.

Before he had done so, the long, lean man with the American beard was

again upon his feet, and was repeating in a high American monotone--

"I beg to second the election of Comrade Syme."

"The amendment will, as usual, be put first," said Mr. Buttons, the

chairman, with mechanical rapidity.

"The question is that Comrade Syme--"

Gregory had again sprung to his feet, panting and passionate.

"Comrades," he cried out, "I am not a madman."

"Oh, oh!" said Mr. Witherspoon.

"I am not a madman," reiterated Gregory, with a frightful sincerity

which for a moment staggered the room, "but I give you a counsel which

you can call mad if you like. No, I will not call it a counsel, for I

can give you no reason for it. I will call it a command. Call it a mad

command, but act upon it. Strike, but hear me! Kill me, but obey me! Do

not elect this man." Truth is so terrible, even in fetters, that for a

moment Syme's slender and insane victory swayed like a reed. But you

could not have guessed it from Syme's bleak blue eyes. He merely

began--

"Comrade Gregory commands--"

Then the spell was snapped, and one anarchist called out to Gregory--

"Who are you? You are not Sunday"; and another anarchist added in a

heavier voice, "And you are not Thursday."

"Comrades," cried Gregory, in a voice like that of a martyr who in an

ecstacy of pain has passed beyond pain, "it is nothing to me whether

you detest me as a tyrant or detest me as a slave. If you will not take

my command, accept my degradation. I kneel to you. I throw myself at

your feet. I implore you. Do not elect this man."

"Comrade Gregory," said the chairman after a painful pause, "this is

really not quite dignified."

For the first time in the proceedings there was for a few seconds a

real silence. Then Gregory fell back in his seat, a pale wreck of a

man, and the chairman repeated, like a piece of clock?work suddenly

started again--

"The question is that Comrade Syme be elected to the post of Thursday

on the General Council."

The roar rose like the sea, the hands rose like a forest, and three

minutes afterwards Mr. Gabriel Syme, of the Secret Police Service, was

elected to the post of Thursday on the General Council of the

Anarchists of Europe.

Everyone in the room seemed to feel the tug waiting on the river, the

sword?stick and the revolver, waiting on the table. The instant the

election was ended and irrevocable, and Syme had received the paper

proving his election, they all sprang to their feet, and the fiery

groups moved and mixed in the room. Syme found himself, somehow or

other, face to face with Gregory, who still regarded him with a stare

of stunned hatred. They were silent for many minutes.

"You are a devil!" said Gregory at last.

"And you are a gentleman," said Syme with gravity.

"It was you that entrapped me," began Gregory, shaking from head to

foot, "entrapped me into--"

"Talk sense," said Syme shortly. "Into what sort of devils' parliament

have you entrapped me, if it comes to that? You made me swear before I

made you. Perhaps we are both doing what we think right. But what we

think right is so damned different that there can be nothing between us

in the way of concession. There is nothing possible between us but

honour and death," and he pulled the great cloak about his shoulders

and picked up the flask from the table.

"The boat is quite ready," said Mr. Buttons, bustling up. "Be good

enough to step this way."

With a gesture that revealed the shop-walker, he led Syme down a short,

iron?bound passage, the still agonised Gregory following feverishly at

their heels. At the end of the passage was a door, which Buttons opened

sharply, showing a sudden blue and silver picture of the moonlit river,

that looked like a scene in a theatre. Close to the opening lay a dark,

dwarfish steam-launch, like a baby dragon with one red eye.

Almost in the act of stepping on board, Gabriel Syme turned to the

gaping Gregory.

"You have kept your word," he said gently, with his face in shadow.

"You are a man of honour, and I thank you. You have kept it even down

to a small particular. There was one special thing you promised me at

the beginning of the affair, and which you have certainly given me by

the end of it."

"What do you mean?" cried the chaotic Gregory. "What did I promise

you?"

"A very entertaining evening," said Syme, and he made a military salute

with the sword?stick as the steamboat slid away.

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CHAPTER IV

THE TALE OF A DETECTIVE

GABRIEL SYME was not merely a detective who pretended to be a poet; he

was really a poet who had become a detective. Nor was his hatred of

anarchy hypocritical. He was one of those who are driven early in life

into too conservative an attitude by the bewildering folly of most

revolutionists. He had not attained it by any tame tradition. His

respectability was spontaneous and sudden, a rebellion against

rebellion. He came of a family of cranks, in which all the oldest

people had all the newest notions. One of his uncles always walked

about without a hat, and another had made an unsuccessful attempt to

walk about with a hat and nothing else. His father cultivated art and

self?realisation; his mother went in for simplicity and hygiene. Hence

the child, during his tenderer years, was wholly unacquainted with any

drink between the extremes of absinth and cocoa, of both of which he

had a healthy dislike. The more his mother preached a more than Puritan

abstinence the more did his father expand into a more than pagan

latitude; and by the time the former had come to enforcing

vegetarianism, the latter had pretty well reached the point of

defending cannibalism.

Being surrounded with every conceivable kind of revolt from infancy,

Gabriel had to revolt into something, so he revolted into the only

thing left-- sanity. But there was just enough in him of the blood of

these fanatics to make even his protest for common sense a little too

fierce to be sensible. His hatred of modern lawlessness had been

crowned also by an accident. It happened that he was walking in a side

street at the instant of a dynamite outrage. He had been blind and deaf

for a moment, and then seen, the smoke clearing, the broken windows and

the bleeding faces. After that he went about as usual--quiet,

courteous, rather gentle; but there was a spot on his mind that was not

sane. He did not regard anarchists, as most of us do, as a handful of

morbid men, combining ignorance with intellectualism. He regarded them

as a huge and pitiless peril, like a Chinese invasion.

He poured perpetually into newspapers and their waste?paper baskets a

torrent of tales, verses and violent articles, warning men of this

deluge of barbaric denial. But he seemed to be getting no nearer his

enemy, and, what was worse, no nearer a living. As he paced the Thames

embankment, bitterly biting a cheap cigar and brooding on the advance

of Anarchy, there was no anarchist with a bomb in his pocket so savage

or so solitary as he. Indeed, he always felt that Government stood

alone and desperate, with its back to the wall. He was too quixotic to

have cared for it otherwise.

He walked on the Embankment once under a dark red sunset. The red river

reflected the red sky, and they both reflected his anger. The sky,

indeed, was so swarthy, and the light on the river relatively so lurid,

that the water almost seemed of fiercer flame than the sunset it

mirrored. It looked like a stream of literal fire winding under the

vast caverns of a subterranean country.

Syme was shabby in those days. He wore an old-fashioned black

chimney?pot hat; he was wrapped in a yet more old?fashioned cloak,

black and ragged; and the combination gave him the look of the early

villains in Dickens and Bulwer Lytton. Also his yellow beard and hair

were more unkempt and leonine than when they appeared long afterwards,

cut and pointed, on the lawns of Saffron Park. A long, lean, black

cigar, bought in Soho for twopence, stood out from between his

tightened teeth, and altogether he looked a very satisfactory specimen

of the anarchists upon whom he had vowed a holy war. Perhaps this was

why a policeman on the Embankment spoke to him, and said "Good

evening."

Syme, at a crisis of his morbid fears for humanity, seemed stung by the

mere stolidity of the automatic official, a mere bulk of blue in the

twilight.

"A good evening is it?" he said sharply. "You fellows would call the

end of the world a good evening. Look at that bloody red sun and that

bloody river! I tell you that if that were literally human blood, spilt

and shining, you would still be standing here as solid as ever, looking

out for some poor harmless tramp whom you could move on. You policemen

are cruel to the poor, but I could forgive you even your cruelty if it

were not for your calm."

"If we are calm," replied the policeman, "it is the calm of organised

resistance."

"Eh?" said Syme, staring.

"The soldier must be calm in the thick of the battle," pursued the

policeman. "The composure of an army is the anger of a nation."

"Good God, the Board Schools!" said Syme. "Is this undenominational

education?"

"No," said the policeman sadly, "I never had any of those advantages.

The Board Schools came after my time. What education I had was very

rough and old-fashioned, I am afraid."

"Where did you have it?" asked Syme, wondering.

"Oh, at Harrow," said the policeman

The class sympathies which, false as they are, are the truest things in

so many men, broke out of Syme before he could control them.

"But, good Lord, man," he said, "you oughtn't to be a policeman!"

The policeman sighed and shook his head.

"I know," he said solemnly, "I know I am not worthy."

"But why did you join the police?" asked Syme with rude curiosity.

"For much the same reason that you abused the police," replied the

other. "I found that there was a special opening in the service for

those whose fears for humanity were concerned rather with the

aberrations of the scientific intellect than with the normal and

excusable, though excessive, outbreaks of the human will. I trust I

make myself clear."

"If you mean that you make your opinion clear," said Syme, "I suppose

you do. But as for making yourself clear, it is the last thing you do.

How comes a man like you to be talking philosophy in a blue helmet on

the Thames embankment?

"You have evidently not heard of the latest development in our police

system," replied the other. "I am not surprised at it. We are keeping

it rather dark from the educated class, because that class contains

most of our enemies. But you seem to be exactly in the right frame of

mind. I think you might almost join us."

"Join you in what?" asked Syme.

"I will tell you," said the policeman slowly. "This is the situation:

The head of one of our departments, one of the most celebrated

detectives in Europe, has long been of opinion that a purely

intellectual conspiracy would soon threaten the very existence of

civilisation. He is certain that the scientific and artistic worlds are

silently bound in a crusade against the Family and the State. He has,

therefore, formed a special corps of policemen, policemen who are also

philosophers. It is their business to watch the beginnings of this

conspiracy, not merely in a criminal but in a controversial sense. I am

a democrat myself, and I am fully aware of the value of the ordinary

man in matters of ordinary valour or virtue. But it would obviously be

undesirable to employ the common policeman in an investigation which is

also a heresy hunt."

Syme's eyes were bright with a sympathetic curiosity.

"What do you do, then?" he said.

"The work of the philosophical policeman," replied the man in blue, "is

at once bolder and more subtle than that of the ordinary detective. The

ordinary detective goes to pot?houses to arrest thieves; we go to

artistic tea?parties to detect pessimists. The ordinary detective

discovers from a ledger or a diary that a crime has been committed. We

discover from a book of sonnets that a crime will be committed. We have

to trace the origin of those dreadful thoughts that drive men on at

last to intellectual fanaticism and intellectual crime. We were only

just in time to prevent the assassination at Hartle pool, and that was

entirely due to the fact that our Mr. Wilks (a smart young fellow)

thoroughly understood a triolet."

"Do you mean," asked Syme, "that there is really as much connection

between crime and the modern intellect as all that?"

"You are not sufficiently democratic," answered the policeman, "but you

were right when you said just now that our ordinary treatment of the

poor criminal was a pretty brutal business. I tell you I am sometimes

sick of my trade when I see how perpetually it means merely a war upon

the ignorant and the desperate. But this new movement of ours is a very

different affair. We deny the snobbish English assumption that the

uneducated are the dangerous criminals. We remember the Roman Emperors.

We remember the great poisoning princes of the Renaissance. We say that

the dangerous criminal is the educated criminal. We say that the most

dangerous criminal now is the entirely lawless modern philosopher.

Compared to him, burglars and bigamists are essentially moral men; my

heart goes out to them. They accept the essential ideal of man; they

merely seek it wrongly. Thieves respect property. They merely wish the

property to become their property that they may more perfectly respect

it. But philosophers dislike property as property; they wish to destroy

the very idea of personal possession. Bigamists respect marriage, or

they would not go through the highly ceremonial and even ritualistic

formality of bigamy. But philosophers despise marriage as marriage.

Murderers respect human life; they merely wish to attain a greater

fulness of human life in themselves by the sacrifice of what seems to

them to be lesser lives. But philosophers hate life itself, their own

as much as other people's."

Syme struck his hands together.

"How true that is," he cried. "I have felt it from my boyhood, but

never could state the verbal antithesis. The common criminal is a bad

man, but at least he is, as it were, a conditional good man. He says

that if only a certain obstacle be removed--say a wealthy uncle--he is

then prepared to accept the universe and to praise God. He is a

reformer, but not an anarchist. He wishes to cleanse the edifice, but

not to destroy it. But the evil philosopher is not trying to alter

things, but to annihilate them. Yes, the modern world has retained all

those parts of police work which are really oppressive and ignominious,

the harrying of the poor, the spying upon the unfortunate. It has given

up its more dignified work, the punishment of powerful traitors the in

the State and powerful heresiarchs in the Church. The moderns say we

must not punish heretics. My only doubt is whether we have a right to

punish anybody else."

"But this is absurd!" cried the policeman, clasping his hands with an

excitement uncommon in persons of his figure and costume, "but it is

intolerable! I don't know what you're doing, but you're wasting your

life. You must, you shall, join our special army against anarchy. Their

armies are on our frontiers. Their bolt is ready to fall. A moment

more, and you may lose the glory of working with us, perhaps the glory

of dying with the last heroes of the world."

"It is a chance not to be missed, certainly," assented Syme, "but still

I do not quite understand. I know as well as anybody that the modern

world is full of lawless little men and mad little movements. But,

beastly as they are, they generally have the one merit of disagreeing

with each other. How can you talk of their leading one army or hurling

one bolt. What is this anarchy?"

"Do not confuse it," replied the constable, "with those chance dynamite

outbreaks from Russia or from Ireland, which are really the outbreaks

of oppressed, if mistaken, men. This is a vast philosophic movement,

consisting of an outer and an inner ring. You might even call the outer

ring the laity and the inner ring the priesthood. I prefer to call the

outer ring the innocent section, the inner ring the supremely guilty

section. The outer ring--the main mass of their supporters-- are merely

anarchists; that is, men who believe that rules and formulas have

destroyed human happiness. They believe that all the evil results of

human crime are the results of the system that has called it crime.

They do not believe that the crime creates the punishment. They believe

that the punishment has created the crime. They believe that if a man

seduced seven women he would naturally walk away as blameless as the

flowers of spring. They believe that if a man picked a pocket he would

naturally feel exquisitely good. These I call the innocent section."

"Oh! " said Syme.

"Naturally, therefore, these people talk about a happy time coming';

the paradise of the future'; mankind freed from the bondage of vice and

the bondage of virtue,' and so on. And so also the men of the inner

circle speak-- the sacred priesthood. They also speak to applauding

crowds of the happiness of the future, and of mankind freed at last.

But in their mouths"-- and the policeman lowered his voice--"in their

mouths these happy phrases have a horrible meaning. They are under no

illusions; they are too intellectual to think that man upon this earth

can ever be quite free of original sin and the struggle. And they mean

death. When they say that mankind shall be free at last, they mean that

mankind shall commit suicide. When they talk of a paradise without

right or wrong, they mean the grave.

They have but two objects, to destroy first humanity and then

themselves. That is why they throw bombs instead of firing pistols. The

innocent rank and file are disappointed because the bomb has not killed

the king; but the high-priesthood are happy because it has killed

somebody."

"How can I join you?" asked Syme, with a sort of passion.

"I know for a fact that there is a vacancy at the moment," said the

policeman, "as I have the honour to be somewhat in the confidence of

the chief of whom I have spoken. You should really come and see him. Or

rather, I should not say see him, nobody ever sees him; but you can

talk to him if you like."

"Telephone?" inquired Syme, with interest.

"No," said the policeman placidly, "he has a fancy for always sitting

in a pitch-dark room. He says it makes his thoughts brighter. Do come

along."

Somewhat dazed and considerably excited, Syme allowed himself to be led

to a side?door in the long row of buildings of Scotland Yard. Almost

before he knew what he was doing, he had been passed through the hands

of about four intermediate officials, and was suddenly shown into a

room, the abrupt blackness of which startled him like a blaze of light.

It was not the ordinary darkness, in which forms can be faintly traced;

it was like going suddenly stone?blind.

"Are you the new recruit?" asked a heavy voice.

And in some strange way, though there was not the shadow of a shape in

the gloom, Syme knew two things: first, that it came from a man of

massive stature; and second, that the man had his back to him.

"Are you the new recruit?" said the invisible chief, who seemed to have

heard all about it. "All right. You are engaged."

Syme, quite swept off his feet, made a feeble fight against this

irrevocable phrase.

"I really have no experience," he began.

"No one has any experience," said the other, "of the Battle of

Armageddon."

"But I am really unfit--"

"You are willing, that is enough," said the unknown.

"Well, really," said Syme, "I don't know any profession of which mere

willingness is the final test."

"I do," said the other--"martyrs. I am condemning you to death. Good

day."

Thus it was that when Gabriel Syme came out again into the crimson

light of evening, in his shabby black hat and shabby, lawless cloak, he

came out a member of the New Detective Corps for the frustration of the

great conspiracy. Acting under the advice of his friend the policeman

(who was professionally inclined to neatness), he trimmed his hair and

beard, bought a good hat, clad himself in an exquisite summer suit of

light blue-grey, with a pale yellow flower in the button?hole, and, in

short, became that elegant and rather insupportable person whom Gregory

had first encountered in the little garden of Saffron Park. Before he

finally left the police premises his friend provided him with a small

blue card, on which was written, "The Last Crusade," and a number, the

sign of his official authority. He put this carefully in his upper

waistcoat pocket, lit a cigarette, and went forth to track and fight

the enemy in all the drawing?rooms of London. Where his adventure

ultimately led him we have already seen. At about half-past one on a

February night he found himself steaming in a small tug up the silent

Thames, armed with swordstick and revolver, the duly elected Thursday

of the Central Council of Anarchists.

When Syme stepped out on to the steam?tug he had a singular sensation

of stepping out into something entirely new; not merely into the

landscape of a new land, but even into the landscape of a new planet.

This was mainly due to the insane yet solid decision of that evening,

though partly also to an entire change in the weather and the sky since

he entered the little tavern some two hours before. Every trace of the

passionate plumage of the cloudy sunset had been swept away, and a

naked moon stood in a naked sky. The moon was so strong and full that

(by a paradox often to be noticed) it seemed like a weaker sun. It

gave, not the sense of bright moonshine, but rather of a dead daylight.

Over the whole landscape lay a luminous and unnatural discoloration, as

of that disastrous twilight which Milton spoke of as shed by the sun in

eclipse; so that Syme fell easily into his first thought, that he was

actually on some other and emptier planet, which circled round some

sadder star. But the more he felt this glittering desolation in the

moonlit land, the more his own chivalric folly glowed in the night like

a great fire. Even the common things he carried with him--the food and

the brandy and the loaded pistol--took on exactly that concrete and

material poetry which a child feels when he takes a gun upon a journey

or a bun with him to bed. The sword?stick and the brandy?flask, though

in themselves only the tools of morbid conspirators, became the

expressions of his own more healthy romance. The sword?stick became

almost the sword of chivalry, and the brandy the wine of the

stirrup-cup. For even the most dehumanised modern fantasies depend on

some older and simpler figure; the adventures may be mad, but the

adventurer must be sane. The dragon without St. George would not even

be grotesque. So this inhuman landscape was only imaginative by the

presence of a man really human. To Syme's exaggerative mind the bright,

bleak houses and terraces by the Thames looked as empty as the

mountains of the moon. But even the moon is only poetical because there

is a man in the moon.

The tug was worked by two men, and with much toil went comparatively

slowly. The clear moon that had lit up Chiswick had gone down by the

time that they passed Battersea, and when they came under the enormous

bulk of Westminster day had already begun to break. It broke like the

splitting of great bars of lead, showing bars of silver; and these had

brightened like white fire when the tug, changing its onward course,

turned inward to a large landing stage rather beyond Charing Cross.

The great stones of the Embankment seemed equally dark and gigantic as

Syme looked up at them. They were big and black against the huge white

dawn. They made him feel that he was landing on the colossal steps of

some Egyptian palace; and, indeed, the thing suited his mood, for he

was, in his own mind, mounting to attack the solid thrones of horrible

and heathen kings. He leapt out of the boat on to one slimy step, and

stood, a dark and slender figure, amid the enormous masonry. The two

men in the tug put her off again and turned up stream. They had never

spoken a word.

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CHAPTER V

THE FEAST OF FEAR

AT first the large stone stair seemed to Syme as deserted as a pyramid;

but before he reached the top he had realised that there was a man

leaning over the parapet of the Embankment and looking out across the

river. As a figure he was quite conventional, clad in a silk hat and

frock?coat of the more formal type of fashion; he had a red flower in

his buttonhole. As Syme drew nearer to him step by step, he did not

even move a hair; and Syme could come close enough to notice even in

the dim, pale morning light that his face was long, pale and

intellectual, and ended in a small triangular tuft of dark beard at the

very point of the chin, all else being clean-shaven. This scrap of hair

almost seemed a mere oversight; the rest of the face was of the type

that is best shaven--clear?cut, ascetic, and in its way noble. Syme

drew closer and closer, noting all this, and still the figure did not

stir.

At first an instinct had told Syme that this was the man whom he was

meant to meet. Then, seeing that the man made no sign, he had concluded

that he was not. And now again he had come back to a certainty that the

man had something to do with his mad adventure. For the man remained

more still than would have been natural if a stranger had come so

close. He was as motionless as a wax?work, and got on the nerves

somewhat in the same way. Syme looked again and again at the pale,

dignified and delicate face, and the face still looked blankly across

the river. Then he took out of his pocket the note from Buttons proving

his election, and put it before that sad and beautiful face. Then the

man smiled, and his smile was a shock, for it was all on one side,

going up in the right cheek and down in the left.

There was nothing, rationally speaking, to scare anyone about this.

Many people have this nervous trick of a crooked smile, and in many it

is even attractive. But in all Syme's circumstances, with the dark dawn

and the deadly errand and the loneliness on the great dripping stones,

there was something unnerving in it.

There was the silent river and the silent man, a man of even classic

face. And there was the last nightmare touch that his smile suddenly

went wrong.

The spasm of smile was instantaneous, and the man's face dropped at

once into its harmonious melancholy. He spoke without further

explanation or inquiry, like a man speaking to an old colleague.

"If we walk up towards Leicester Square," he said, "we shall just be in

time for breakfast. Sunday always insists on an early breakfast. Have

you had any sleep?"

"No," said Syme.

"Nor have I," answered the man in an ordinary tone. "I shall try to get

to bed after breakfast."

He spoke with casual civility, but in an utterly dead voice that

contradicted the fanaticism of his face. It seemed almost as if all

friendly words were to him lifeless conveniences, and that his only

life was hate. After a pause the man spoke again.

"Of course, the Secretary of the branch told you everything that can be

told. But the one thing that can never be told is the last notion of

the President, for his notions grow like a tropical forest. So in case

you don't know, I'd better tell you that he is carrying out his notion

of concealing ourselves by not concealing ourselves to the most

extraordinary lengths just now. Originally, of course, we met in a cell

underground, just as your branch does. Then Sunday made us take a

private room at an ordinary restaurant. He said that if you didn't seem

to be hiding nobody hunted you out. Well, he is the only man on earth,

I know; but sometimes I really think that his huge brain is going a

little mad in its old age. For now we flaunt ourselves before the

public. We have our breakfast on a balcony--on a balcony, if you

please-- overlooking Leicester Square."

"And what do the people say?" asked Syme.

"It's quite simple what they say," answered his guide.

"They say we are a lot of jolly gentlemen who pretend they are

anarchists."

"It seems to me a very clever idea," said Syme.

"Clever! God blast your impudence! Clever!" cried out the other in a

sudden, shrill voice which was as startling and discordant as his

crooked smile. "When you've seen Sunday for a split second you'll leave

off calling him clever."

With this they emerged out of a narrow street, and saw the early

sunlight filling Leicester Square. It will never be known, I suppose,

why this square itself should look so alien and in some ways so

continental. It will never be known whether it was the foreign look

that attracted the foreigners or the foreigners who gave it the foreign

look. But on this particular morning the effect seemed singularly

bright and clear. Between the open square and the sunlit leaves and the

statue and the Saracenic outlines of the Alhambra, it looked the

replica of some French or even Spanish public place. And this effect

increased in Syme the sensation, which in many shapes he had had

through the whole adventure, the eerie sensation of having strayed into

a new world. As a fact, he had bought bad cigars round Leicester Square

ever since he was a boy. But as he turned that corner, and saw the

trees and the Moorish cupolas, he could have sworn that he was turning

into an unknown Place de something or other in some foreign town.

At one corner of the square there projected a kind of angle of a

prosperous but quiet hotel, the bulk of which belonged to a street

behind. In the wall there was one large French window, probably the

window of a large coffee?room; and outside this window, almost

literally overhanging the square, was a formidably buttressed balcony,

big enough to contain a dining?table. In fact, it did contain a

dining?table, or more strictly a breakfast?table; and round the

breakfast?table, glowing in the sunlight and evident to the street,

were a group of noisy and talkative men, all dressed in the insolence

of fashion, with white waistcoats and expensive button?holes. Some of

their jokes could almost be heard across the square. Then the grave

Secretary gave his unnatural smile, and Syme knew that this boisterous

breakfast party was the secret conclave of the European Dynamiters.

Then, as Syme continued to stare at them, he saw something that he had

not seen before. He had not seen it literally because it was too large

to see. At the nearest end of the balcony, blocking up a great part of

the perspective, was the back of a great mountain of a man. When Syme

had seen him, his first thought was that the weight of him must break

down the balcony of stone. His vastness did not lie only in the fact

that he was abnormally tall and quite incredibly fat. This man was

planned enormously in his original proportions, like a statue carved

deliberately as colossal. His head, crowned with white hair, as seen

from behind looked bigger than a head ought to be. The ears that stood

out from it looked larger than human ears. He was enlarged terribly to

scale; and this sense of size was so staggering, that when Syme saw him

all the other figures seemed quite suddenly to dwindle and become

dwarfish. They were still sitting there as before with their flowers

and frock?coats, but now it looked as if the big man was entertaining

five children to tea.

As Syme and the guide approached the side door of the hotel, a waiter

came out smiling with every tooth in his head.

"The gentlemen are up there, sare," he said. "They do talk and they do

laugh at what they talk. They do say they will throw bombs at ze king."

And the waiter hurried away with a napkin over his arm, much pleased

with the singular frivolity of the gentlemen upstairs.

The two men mounted the stairs in silence.

Syme had never thought of asking whether the monstrous man who almost

filled and broke the balcony was the great President of whom the others

stood in awe. He knew it was so, with an unaccountable but

instantaneous certainty. Syme, indeed, was one of those men who are

open to all the more nameless psychological influences in a degree a

little dangerous to mental health. Utterly devoid of fear in physical

dangers, he was a great deal too sensitive to the smell of spiritual

evil. Twice already that night little unmeaning things had peeped out

at him almost pruriently, and given him a sense of drawing nearer and

nearer to the head?quarters of hell. And this sense became overpowering

as he drew nearer to the great President.

The form it took was a childish and yet hateful fancy. As he walked

across the inner room towards the balcony, the large face of Sunday

grew larger and larger; and Syme was gripped with a fear that when he

was quite close the face would be too big to be possible, and that he

would scream aloud. He remembered that as a child he would not look at

the mask of Memnon in the British Museum, because it was a face, and so

large.

By an effort, braver than that of leaping over a cliff, he went to an

empty seat at the breakfast?table and sat down. The men greeted him

with good-humoured raillery as if they had always known him. He sobered

himself a little by looking at their conventional coats and solid,

shining coffee?pot; then he looked again at Sunday. His face was very

large, but it was still possible to humanity.

In the presence of the President the whole company looked sufficiently

commonplace; nothing about them caught the eye at first, except that by

the President's caprice they had been dressed up with a festive

respectability, which gave the meal the look of a wedding breakfast.

One man indeed stood out at even a superficial glance. He at least was

the common or garden Dynamiter. He wore, indeed, the high white collar

and satin tie that were the uniform of the occasion; but out of this

collar there sprang a head quite unmanageable and quite unmistakable, a

bewildering bush of brown hair and beard that almost obscured the eyes

like those of a Skye terrier. But the eyes did look out of the tangle,

and they were the sad eyes of some Russian serf. The effect of this

figure was not terrible like that of the President, but it had every

diablerie that can come from the utterly grotesque. If out of that

stiff tie and collar there had come abruptly the head of a cat or a

dog, it could not have been a more idiotic contrast.

The man's name, it seemed, was Gogol; he was a Pole, and in this circle

of days he was called Tuesday. His soul and speech were incurably

tragic; he could not force himself to play the prosperous and frivolous

part demanded of him by President Sunday. And, indeed, when Syme came

in the President, with that daring disregard of public suspicion which

was his policy, was actually chaffing Gogol upon his inability to

assume conventional graces.

"Our friend Tuesday," said the President in a deep voice at once of

quietude and volume, "our friend Tuesday doesn't seem to grasp the

idea. He dresses up like a gentleman, but he seems to be too great a

soul to behave like one. He insists on the ways of the stage

conspirator. Now if a gentleman goes about London in a top hat and a

frock?coat, no one need know that he is an anarchist. But if a

gentleman puts on a top hat and a frock?coat, and then goes about on

his hands and knees--well, he may attract attention. That's what

Brother Gogol does. He goes about on his hands and knees with such

inexhaustible diplomacy, that by this time he finds it quite difficult

to walk upright."

"I am not good at goncealment," said Gogol sulkily, with a thick

foreign accent; "I am not ashamed of the cause."

"Yes you are, my boy, and so is the cause of you," said the President

good-naturedly. "You hide as much as anybody; but you can't do it, you

see, you're such an ass! You try to combine two inconsistent methods.

When a householder finds a man under his bed, he will probably pause to

note the circumstance. But if he finds a man under his bed in a top

hat, you will agree with me, my dear Tuesday, that he is not likely

even to forget it. Now when you were found under Admiral Biffin's

bed--"

"I am not good at deception," said Tuesday gloomily, flushing.

"Right, my boy, right," said the President with a ponderous heartiness,

"you aren't good at anything."

While this stream of conversation continued, Syme was looking more

steadily at the men around him. As he did so, he gradually felt all his

sense of something spiritually queer return.

He had thought at first that they were all of common stature and

costume, with the evident exception of the hairy Gogol. But as he

looked at the others, he began to see in each of them exactly what he

had seen in the man by the river, a demoniac detail somewhere. That

lop?sided laugh, which would suddenly disfigure the fine face of his

original guide, was typical of all these types. Each man had something

about him, perceived perhaps at the tenth or twentieth glance, which

was not normal, and which seemed hardly human. The only metaphor he

could think of was this, that they all looked as men of fashion and

presence would look, with the additional twist given in a false and

curved mirror.

Only the individual examples will express this half-concealed

eccentricity. Syme's original cicerone bore the title of Monday; he was

the Secretary of the Council, and his twisted smile was regarded with

more terror than anything, except the President's horrible, happy

laughter. But now that Syme had more space and light to observe him,

there were other touches. His fine face was so emaciated, that Syme

thought it must be wasted with some disease; yet somehow the very

distress of his dark eyes denied this. It was no physical ill that

troubled him. His eyes were alive with intellectual torture, as if pure

thought was pain.

He was typical of each of the tribe; each man was subtly and

differently wrong. Next to him sat Tuesday, the tousle?headed Gogol, a

man more obviously mad. Next was Wednesday, a certain Marquis de St.

Eustache, a sufficiently characteristic figure. The first few glances

found nothing unusual about him, except that he was the only man at

table who wore the fashionable clothes as if they were really his own.

He had a black French beard cut square and a black English frock?coat

cut even squarer. But Syme, sensitive to such things, felt somehow that

the man carried a rich atmosphere with him, a rich atmosphere that

suffocated. It reminded one irrationally of drowsy odours and of dying

lamps in the darker poems of Byron and Poe. With this went a sense of

his being clad, not in lighter colours, but in softer materials; his

black seemed richer and warmer than the black shades about him, as if

it were compounded of profound colour. His black coat looked as if it

were only black by being too dense a purple. His black beard looked as

if it were only black by being too deep a blue. And in the gloom and

thickness of the beard his dark red mouth showed sensual and scornful.

Whatever he was he was not a Frenchman; he might be a Jew; he might be

something deeper yet in the dark heart of the East. In the bright

coloured Persian tiles and pictures showing tyrants hunting, you may

see just those almond eyes, those blue?black beards, those cruel,

crimson lips.

Then came Syme, and next a very old man, Professor de Worms, who still

kept the chair of Friday, though every day it was expected that his

death would leave it empty. Save for his intellect, he was in the last

dissolution of senile decay. His face was as grey as his long grey

beard, his forehead was lifted and fixed finally in a furrow of mild

despair. In no other case, not even that of Gogol, did the bridegroom

brilliancy of the morning dress express a more painful contrast. For

the red flower in his button?hole showed up against a face that was

literally discoloured like lead; the whole hideous effect was as if

some drunken dandies had put their clothes upon a corpse. When he rose

or sat down, which was with long labour and peril, something worse was

expressed than mere weakness, something indefinably connected with the

horror of the whole scene. It did not express decrepitude merely, but

corruption. Another hateful fancy crossed Syme's quivering mind. He

could not help thinking that whenever the man moved a leg or arm might

fall off.

Right at the end sat the man called Saturday, the simplest and the most

baffling of all. He was a short, square man with a dark, square face

clean-shaven, a medical practitioner going by the name of Bull. He had

that combination of savoir?faire with a sort of well-groomed coarseness

which is not uncommon in young doctors. He carried his fine clothes

with confidence rather than ease, and he mostly wore a set smile. There

was nothing whatever odd about him, except that he wore a pair of dark,

almost opaque spectacles. It may have been merely a crescendo of

nervous fancy that had gone before, but those black discs were dreadful

to Syme; they reminded him of half?remembered ugly tales, of some story

about pennies being put on the eyes of the dead. Syme's eye always

caught the black glasses and the blind grin. Had the dying Professor

worn them, or even the pale Secretary, they would have been

appropriate. But on the younger and grosser man they seemed only an

enigma. They took away the key of the face. You could not tell what his

smile or his gravity meant. Partly from this, and partly because he had

a vulgar virility wanting in most of the others it seemed to Syme that

he might be the wickedest of all those wicked men. Syme even had the

thought that his eyes might be covered up because they were too

frightful to see.

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CHAPTER VI

THE EXPOSURE

SUCH were the six men who had sworn to destroy the world. Again and

again Syme strove to pull together his common sense in their presence.

Sometimes he saw for an instant that these notions were subjective,

that he was only looking at ordinary men, one of whom was old, another

nervous, another short?sighted. The sense of an unnatural symbolism

always settled back on him again. Each figure seemed to be, somehow, on

the borderland of things, just as their theory was on the borderland of

thought. He knew that each one of these men stood at the extreme end,

so to speak, of some wild road of reasoning. He could only fancy, as in

some old?world fable, that if a man went westward to the end of the

world he would find something--say a tree--that was more or less than a

tree, a tree possessed by a spirit; and that if he went east to the end

of the world he would find something else that was not wholly itself--a

tower, perhaps, of which the very shape was wicked. So these figures

seemed to stand up, violent and unaccountable, against an ultimate

horizon, visions from the verge. The ends of the earth were closing in.

Talk had been going on steadily as he took in the scene; and not the

least of the contrasts of that bewildering breakfast?table was the

contrast between the easy and unobtrusive tone of talk and its terrible

purport. They were deep in the discussion of an actual and immediate

plot. The waiter downstairs had spoken quite correctly when he said

that they were talking about bombs and kings. Only three days

afterwards the Czar was to meet the President of the French Republic in

Paris, and over their bacon and eggs upon their sunny balcony these

beaming gentlemen had decided how both should die. Even the instrument

was chosen; the black?bearded Marquis, it appeared, was to carry the

bomb.

Ordinarily speaking, the proximity of this positive and objective crime

would have sobered Syme, and cured him of all his merely mystical

tremors. He would have thought of nothing but the need of saving at

least two human bodies from being ripped in pieces with iron and

roaring gas. But the truth was that by this time he had begun to feel a

third kind of fear, more piercing and practical than either his moral

revulsion or his social responsibility. Very simply, he had no fear to

spare for the French President or the Czar; he had begun to fear for

himself. Most of the talkers took little heed of him, debating now with

their faces closer together, and almost uniformly grave, save when for

an instant the smile of the Secretary ran aslant across his face as the

jagged lightning runs aslant across the sky. But there was one

persistent thing which first troubled Syme and at last terrified him.

The President was always looking at him, steadily, and with a great and

baffling interest. The enormous man was quite quiet, but his blue eyes

stood out of his head. And they were always fixed on Syme.

Syme felt moved to spring up and leap over the balcony. When the

President's eyes were on him he felt as if he were made of glass. He

had hardly the shred of a doubt that in some silent and extraordinary

way Sunday had found out that he was a spy. He looked over the edge of

the balcony, and saw a policeman, standing abstractedly just beneath,

staring at the bright railings and the sunlit trees.

Then there fell upon him the great temptation that was to torment him

for many days. In the presence of these powerful and repulsive men, who

were the princes of anarchy, he had almost forgotten the frail and

fanciful figure of the poet Gregory, the mere aesthete of anarchism. He

even thought of him now with an old kindness, as if they had played

together when children. But he remembered that he was still tied to

Gregory by a great promise. He had promised never to do the very thing

that he now felt himself almost in the act of doing. He had promised

not to jump over that balcony and speak to that policeman. He took his

cold hand off the cold stone balustrade. His soul swayed in a vertigo

of moral indecision. He had only to snap the thread of a rash vow made

to a villainous society, and all his life could be as open and sunny as

the square beneath him. He had, on the other hand, only to keep his

antiquated honour, and be delivered inch by inch into the power of this

great enemy of mankind, whose very intellect was a torture-chamber.

Whenever he looked down into the square he saw the comfortable

policeman, a pillar of common sense and common order. Whenever he

looked back at the breakfast?table he saw the President still quietly

studying him with big, unbearable eyes.

In all the torrent of his thought there were two thoughts that never

crossed his mind. First, it never occurred to him to doubt that the

President and his Council could crush him if he continued to stand

alone. The place might be public, the project might seem impossible.

But Sunday was not the man who would carry himself thus easily without

having, somehow or somewhere, set open his iron trap. Either by

anonymous poison or sudden street accident, by hypnotism or by fire

from hell, Sunday could certainly strike him. If he defied the man he

was probably dead, either struck stiff there in his chair or long

afterwards as by an innocent ailment. If he called in the police

promptly, arrested everyone, told all, and set against them the whole

energy of England, he would probably escape; certainly not otherwise.

They were a balconyful of gentlemen overlooking a bright and busy

square; but he felt no more safe with them than if they had been a

boatful of armed pirates overlooking an empty sea.

There was a second thought that never came to him. It never occurred to

him to be spiritually won over to the enemy. Many moderns, inured to a

weak worship of intellect and force, might have wavered in their

allegiance under this oppression of a great personality. They might

have called Sunday the super?man. If any such creature be conceivable,

he looked, indeed, somewhat like it, with his earth?shaking

abstraction, as of a stone statue walking. He might have been called

something above man, with his large plans, which were too obvious to be

detected, with his large face, which was too frank to be understood.

But this was a kind of modern meanness to which Syme could not sink

even in his extreme morbidity. Like any man, he was coward enough to

fear great force; but he was not quite coward enough to admire it.

The men were eating as they talked, and even in this they were typical.

Dr. Bull and the Marquis ate casually and conventionally of the best

things on the table--cold pheasant or Strasbourg pie. But the Secretary

was a vegetarian, and he spoke earnestly of the projected murder over

half a raw tomato and three quarters of a glass of tepid water. The old

Professor had such slops as suggested a sickening second childhood. And

even in this President Sunday preserved his curious predominance of

mere mass. For he ate like twenty men; he ate incredibly, with a

frightful freshness of appetite, so that it was like watching a sausage

factory. Yet continually, when he had swallowed a dozen crumpets or

drunk a quart of coffee, he would be found with his great head on one

side staring at Syme.

"I have often wondered," said the Marquis, taking a great bite out of a

slice of bread and jam, "whether it wouldn't be better for me to do it

with a knife. Most of the best things have been brought off with a

knife. And it would be a new emotion to get a knife into a French

President and wriggle it round."

"You are wrong," said the Secretary, drawing his black brows together.

"The knife was merely the expression of the old personal quarrel with a

personal tyrant. Dynamite is not only our best tool, but our best

symbol. It is as perfect a symbol of us as is incense of the prayers of

the Christians. It expands; it only destroys because it broadens; even

so, thought only destroys because it broadens. A man's brain is a

bomb," he cried out, loosening suddenly his strange passion and

striking his own skull with violence. "My brain feels like a bomb,

night and day. It must expand! It must expand! A man's brain must

expand, if it breaks up the universe."

"I don't want the universe broken up just yet," drawled the Marquis. "I

want to do a lot of beastly things before I die. I thought of one

yesterday in bed."

"No, if the only end of the thing is nothing," said Dr. Bull with his

sphinx-like smile, "it hardly seems worth doing."

The old Professor was staring at the ceiling with dull eyes.

"Every man knows in his heart, " he said, "that nothing is worth

doing."

There was a singular silence, and then the Secretary said--

"We are wandering, however, from the point. The only question is how

Wednesday is to strike the blow. I take it we should all agree with the

original notion of a bomb. As to the actual arrangements, I should

suggest that tomorrow morning he should go first of all to--"

The speech was broken off short under a vast shadow. President Sunday

had risen to his feet, seeming to fill the sky above them.

"Before we discuss that," he said in a small, quiet voice, "let us go

into a private room. I have something vent particular to say."

Syme stood up before any of the others. The instant of choice had come

at last, the pistol was at his head. On the pavement before he could

hear the policeman idly stir and stamp, for the morning, though bright,

was cold.

A barrel?organ in the street suddenly sprang with a jerk into a jovial

tune. Syme stood up taut, as if it had been a bugle before the battle.

He found himself filled with a supernatural courage that came from

nowhere. That jingling music seemed full of the vivacity, the

vulgarity, and the irrational valour of the poor, who in all those

unclean streets were all clinging to the decencies and the charities of

Christendom. His youthful prank of being a policeman had faded from his

mind; he did not think of himself as the representative of the corps of

gentlemen turned into fancy constables, or of the old eccentric who

lived in the dark room. But he did feel himself as the ambassador of

all these common and kindly people in the street, who every day marched

into battle to the music of the barrel-organ. And this high pride in

being human had lifted him unaccountably to an infinite height above

the monstrous men around him. For an instant, at least, he looked down

upon all their sprawling eccentricities from the starry pinnacle of the

commonplace. He felt towards them all that unconscious and elementary

superiority that a brave man feels over powerful beasts or a wise man

over powerful errors. He knew that he had neither the intellectual nor

the physical strength of President Sunday; but in that moment he minded

it no more than the fact that he had not the muscles of a tiger or a

horn on his nose like a rhinoceros. All was swallowed up in an ultimate

certainty that the President was wrong and that the barrel?organ was

right. There clanged in his mind that unanswerable and terrible truism

in the song of Roland--

"Pa�ens ont tort et Chr�tiens ont droit."

which in the old nasal French has the clang and groan of great iron.

This liberation of his spirit from the load of his weakness went with a

quite clear decision to embrace death. If the people of the

barrel?organ could keep their old?world obligations, so could he. This

very pride in keeping his word was that he was keeping it to

miscreants. It was his last triumph over these lunatics to go down into

their dark room and die for something that they could not even

understand. The barrel?organ seemed to give the marching tune with the

energy and the mingled noises of a whole orchestra; and he could hear

deep and rolling, under all the trumpets of the pride of life, the

drums of the pride of death.

The conspirators were already filing through the open window and into

the rooms behind. Syme went last, outwardly calm, but with all his

brain and body throbbing with romantic rhythm. The President led them

down an irregular side stair, such as might be used by servants, and

into a dim, cold, empty room, with a table and benches, like an

abandoned boardroom. When they were all in, he closed and locked the

door.

The first to speak was Gogol, the irreconcilable, who seemed bursting

with inarticulate grievance.

"Zso! Zso!" he cried, with an obscure excitement, his heavy Polish

accent becoming almost impenetrable. "You zay you nod ide. You zay you

show himselves. It is all nuzzinks. Ven you vant talk importance you

run yourselves in a dark box!"

The President seemed to take the foreigner's incoherent satire with

entire good humour.

"You can't get hold of it yet, Gogol," he said in a fatherly way. "When

once they have heard us talking nonsense on that balcony they will not

care where we go afterwards. If we had come here first, we should have

had the whole staff at the keyhole. You don't seem to know anything

about mankind."

"I die for zem," cried the Pole in thick excitement, "and I slay zare

oppressors. I care not for these games of gonzealment. I would zmite ze

tyrant in ze open square."

"I see, I see," said the President, nodding kindly as he seated himself

at the top of a long table. "You die for mankind first, and then you

get up and smite their oppressors. So that's all right. And now may I

ask you to control your beautiful sentiments, and sit down with the

other gentlemen at this table. For the first time this morning

something intelligent is going to be said."

Syme, with the perturbed promptitude he had shown since the original

summons, sat down first. Gogol sat down last, grumbling in his brown

beard about gombromise. No one except Syme seemed to have any notion of

the blow that was about to fall. As for him, he had merely the feeling

of a man mounting the scaffold with the intention, at any rate, of

making a good speech.

"Comrades," said the President, suddenly rising, "we have spun out this

farce long enough. I have called you down here to tell you something so

simple and shocking that even the waiters upstairs (long inured to our

levities) might hear some new seriousness in my voice. Comrades, we

were discussing plans and naming places. I propose, before saying

anything else, that those plans and places should not be voted by this

meeting, but should be left wholly in the control of some one reliable

member. I suggest Comrade Saturday, Dr. Bull."

They all stared at him; then they all started in their seats, for the

next words, though not loud, had a living and sensational emphasis.

Sunday struck the table.

"Not one word more about the plans and places must be said at this

meeting. Not one tiny detail more about what we mean to do must be

mentioned in this company."

Sunday had spent his life in astonishing his followers; but it seemed

as if he had never really astonished them until now. They all moved

feverishly in their seats, except Syme. He sat stiff in his, with his

hand in his pocket, and on the handle of his loaded revolver. When the

attack on him came he would sell his life dear. He would find out at

least if the President was mortal.

Sunday went on smoothly--

"You will probably understand that there is only one possible motive

for forbidding free speech at this festival of freedom. Strangers

overhearing us matters nothing. They assume that we are joking. But

what would matter, even unto death, is this, that there should be one

actually among us who is not of us, who knows our grave purpose, but

does not share it, who--"

The Secretary screamed out suddenly like a woman.

"It can't be!" he cried, leaping. "There can't--"

The President flapped his large flat hand on the table like the fin of

some huge fish.

"Yes," he said slowly, "there is a spy in this room. There is a traitor

at this table. I will waste no more words. His name--"

Syme half rose from his seat, his finger firm on the trigger.

"His name is Gogol," said the President. "He is that hairy humbug over

there who pretends to be a Pole."

Gogol sprang to his feet, a pistol in each hand. With the same flash

three men sprang at his throat. Even the Professor made an effort to

rise. But Syme saw little of the scene, for he was blinded with a

beneficent darkness; he had sunk down into his seat shuddering, in a

palsy of passionate relief.

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CHAPTER VII

THE UNACCOUNTABLE CONDUCT OF PROFESSOR DE WORMS

"SIT down!" said Sunday in a voice that he used once or twice in his

life, a voice that made men drop drawn swords.

The three who had risen fell away from Gogol, and that equivocal person

himself resumed his seat.

"Well, my man," said the President briskly, addressing him as one

addresses a total stranger, "will you oblige me by putting your hand in

your upper waistcoat pocket and showing me what you have there?"

The alleged Pole was a little pale under his tangle of dark hair, but

he put two fingers into the pocket with apparent coolness and pulled

out a blue strip of card. When Syme saw it lying on the table, he woke

up again to the world outside him. For although the card lay at the

other extreme of the table, and he could read nothing of the

inscription on it, it bore a startling resemblance to the blue card in

his own pocket, the card which had been given to him when he joined the

anti?anarchist constabulary.

"Pathetic Slav," said the President, "tragic child of Poland, are you

prepared in the presence of that card to deny that you are in this

company--shall we say de trop?"

"Right oh!" said the late Gogol. It made everyone jump to hear a clear,

commercial and somewhat cockney voice coming out of that forest of

foreign hair. It was irrational, as if a Chinaman had suddenly spoken

with a Scotch accent.

"I gather that you fully understand your position," said Sunday.

"You bet," answered the Pole. "I see it's a fair cop. All I say is, I

don't believe any Pole could have imitated my accent like I did his."

"I concede the point," said Sunday. "I believe your own accent to be

inimitable, though I shall practise it in my bath. Do you mind leaving

your beard with your card?"

"Not a bit," answered Gogol; and with one finger he ripped off the

whole of his shaggy head?covering, emerging with thin red hair and a

pale, pert face. "It was hot," he added.

"I will do you the justice to say," said Sunday, not without a sort of

brutal admiration, "that you seem to have kept pretty cool under it.

Now listen to me. I like you. The consequence is that it would annoy me

for just about two and a half minutes if I heard that you had died in

torments. Well, if you ever tell the police or any human soul about us,

I shall have that two and a half minutes of discomfort. On your

discomfort I will not dwell. Good day. Mind the step."

The red?haired detective who had masqueraded as Gogol rose to his feet

without a word, and walked out of the room with an air of perfect

nonchalance. Yet the astonished Syme was able to realise that this ease

was suddenly assumed; for there was a slight stumble outside the door,

which showed that the departing detective had not minded the step.

"Time is flying," said the President in his gayest manner, after

glancing at his watch, which like everything about him seemed bigger

than it ought to be. "I must go off at once; I have to take the chair

at a Humanitarian meeting."

The Secretary turned to him with working eyebrows.

"Would it not be better," he said a little sharply, "to discuss further

the details of our project, now that the spy has left us?"

"No, I think not," said the President with a yawn like an unobtrusive

earthquake. "Leave it as it is. Let Saturday settle it. I must be off.

Breakfast here next Sunday."

But the late loud scenes had whipped up the almost naked nerves of the

Secretary. He was one of those men who are conscientious even in crime.

"I must protest, President, that the thing is irregular," he said. "It

is a fundamental rule of our society that all plans shall be debated in

full council. Of course, I fully appreciate your forethought when in

the actual presence of a traitor--"

"Secretary," said the President seriously, "if you'd take your head

home and boil it for a turnip it might be useful. I can't say. But it

might.

The Secretary reared back in a kind of equine anger.

"I really fail to understand--" he began in high offense.

"That's it, that's it," said the President, nodding a great many times.

"That's where you fail right enough. You fail to understand. Why, you

dancing donkey," he roared, rising, "you didn't want to be overheard by

a spy, didn't you? How do you know you aren't overheard now?"

And with these words he shouldered his way out of the room, shaking

with incomprehensible scorn.

Four of the men left behind gaped after him without any apparent

glimmering of his meaning. Syme alone had even a glimmering, and such

as it was it froze him to the bone. If the last words of the President

meant anything, they meant that he had not after all passed

unsuspected. They meant that while Sunday could not denounce him like

Gogol, he still could not trust him like the others.

The other four got to their feet grumbling more or less, and betook

themselves elsewhere to find lunch, for it was already well past

midday. The Professor went last, very slowly and painfully. Syme sat

long after the rest had gone, revolving his strange position. He had

escaped a thunderbolt, but he was still under a cloud. At last he rose

and made his way out of the hotel into Leicester Square. The bright,

cold day had grown increasingly colder, and when he came out into the

street he was surprised by a few flakes of snow. While he still carried

the sword?stick and the rest of Gregory's portable luggage, he had

thrown the cloak down and left it somewhere, perhaps on the steam?tug,

perhaps on the balcony. Hoping, therefore, that the snow?shower might

be slight, he stepped back out of the street for a moment and stood up

under the doorway of a small and greasy hair?dresser's shop, the front

window of which was empty, except for a sickly wax lady in evening

dress.

Snow, however, began to thicken and fall fast; and Syme, having found

one glance at the wax lady quite sufficient to depress his spirits,

stared out instead into the white and empty street. He was considerably

astonished to see, standing quite still outside the shop and staring

into the window, a man. His top hat was loaded with snow like the hat

of Father Christmas, the white drift was rising round his boots and

ankles; but it seemed as if nothing could tear him away from the

contemplation of the colourless wax doll in dirty evening dress. That

any human being should stand in such weather looking into such a shop

was a matter of sufficient wonder to Syme; but his idle wonder turned

suddenly into a personal shock; for he realised that the man standing

there was the paralytic old Professor de Worms. It scarcely seemed the

place for a person of his years and infirmities.

Syme was ready to believe anything about the perversions of this

dehumanized brotherhood; but even he could not believe that the

Professor had fallen in love with that particular wax lady. He could

only suppose that the man's malady (whatever it was) involved some

momentary fits of rigidity or trance. He was not inclined, however, to

feel in this case any very compassionate concern. On the contrary, he

rather congratulated himself that the Professor's stroke and his

elaborate and limping walk would make it easy to escape from him and

leave him miles behind. For Syme thirsted first and last to get clear

of the whole poisonous atmosphere, if only for an hour. Then he could

collect his thoughts, formulate his policy, and decide finally whether

he should or should not keep faith with Gregory.

He strolled away through the dancing snow, turned up two or three

streets, down through two or three others, and entered a small Soho

restaurant for lunch. He partook reflectively of four small and quaint

courses, drank half a bottle of red wine, and ended up over black

coffee and a black cigar, still thinking. He had taken his seat in the

upper room of the restaurant, which was full of the chink of knives and

the chatter of foreigners. He remembered that in old days he had

imagined that all these harmless and kindly aliens were anarchists. He

shuddered, remembering the real thing. But even the shudder had the

delightful shame of escape. The wine, the common food, the familiar

place, the faces of natural and talkative men, made him almost feel as

if the Council of the Seven Days had been a bad dream; and although he

knew it was nevertheless an objective reality, it was at least a

distant one. Tall houses and populous streets lay between him and his

last sight of the shameful seven; he was free in free London, and

drinking wine among the free. With a somewhat easier action, he took

his hat and stick and strolled down the stair into the shop below.

When he entered that lower room he stood stricken and rooted to the

spot. At a small table, close up to the blank window and the white

street of snow, sat the old anarchist Professor over a glass of milk,

with his lifted livid face and pendent eyelids. For an instant Syme

stood as rigid as the stick he leant upon. Then with a gesture as of

blind hurry, he brushed past the Professor, dashing open the door and

slamming it behind him, and stood outside in the snow.

"Can that old corpse be following me?" he asked himself, biting his

yellow moustache. "I stopped too long up in that room, so that even

such leaden feet could catch me up. One comfort is, with a little brisk

walking I can put a man like that as far away as Timbuctoo. Or am I too

fanciful? Was he really following me? Surely Sunday would not be such a

fool as to send a lame man? "

He set off at a smart pace, twisting and whirling his stick, in the

direction of Covent Garden. As he crossed the great market the snow

increased, growing blinding and bewildering as the afternoon began to

darken. The snow?flakes tormented him like a swarm of silver bees.

Getting into his eyes and beard, they added their unremitting futility

to his already irritated nerves; and by the time that he had come at a

swinging pace to the beginning of Fleet Street, he lost patience, and

finding a Sunday teashop, turned into it to take shelter. He ordered

another cup of black coffee as an excuse. Scarcely had he done so, when

Professor de Worms hobbled heavily into the shop, sat down with

difficulty and ordered a glass of milk.

Syme's walking?stick had fallen from his hand with a great clang, which

confessed the concealed steel. But the Professor did not look round.

Syme, who was commonly a cool character, was literally gaping as a

rustic gapes at a conjuring trick. He had seen no cab following; he had

heard no wheels outside the shop; to all mortal appearances the man had

come on foot. But the old man could only walk like a snail, and Syme

had walked like the wind. He started up and snatched his stick, half

crazy with the contradiction in mere arithmetic, and swung out of the

swinging doors, leaving his coffee untasted. An omnibus going to the

Bank went rattling by with an unusual rapidity. He had a violent run of

a hundred yards to reach it; but he managed to spring, swaying upon the

splash?board and, pausing for an instant to pant, he climbed on to the

top. When he had been seated for about half a minute, he heard behind

him a sort of heavy and asthmatic breathing.

Turning sharply, he saw rising gradually higher and higher up the

omnibus steps a top hat soiled and dripping with snow, and under the

shadow of its brim the short?sighted face and shaky shoulders of

Professor de Worms. He let himself into a seat with characteristic

care, and wrapped himself up to the chin in the mackintosh rug.

Every movement of the old man's tottering figure and vague hands, every

uncertain gesture and panic?stricken pause, seemed to put it beyond

question that he was helpless, that he was in the last imbecility of

the body. He moved by inches, he let himself down with little gasps of

caution. And yet, unless the philosophical entities called time and

space have no vestige even of a practical existence, it appeared quite

unquestionable that he had run after the omnibus.

Syme sprang erect upon the rocking car, and after staring wildly at the

wintry sky, that grew gloomier every moment, he ran down the steps. He

had repressed an elemental impulse to leap over the side.

Too bewildered to look back or to reason, he rushed into one of the

little courts at the side of Fleet Street as a rabbit rushes into a

hole. He had a vague idea, if this incomprehensible old Jack?in?the?box

was really pursuing him, that in that labyrinth of little streets he

could soon throw him off the scent. He dived in and out of those

crooked lanes, which were more like cracks than thoroughfares; and by

the time that he had completed about twenty alternate angles and

described an unthinkable polygon, he paused to listen for any sound of

pursuit. There was none; there could not in any case have been much,

for the little streets were thick with the soundless snow. Somewhere

behind Red Lion Court, however, he noticed a place where some energetic

citizen had cleared away the snow for a space of about twenty yards,

leaving the wet, glistening cobble?stones. He thought little of this as

he passed it, only plunging into yet another arm of the maze. But when

a few hundred yards farther on he stood still again to listen, his

heart stood still also, for he heard from that space of rugged stones

the clinking crutch and labouring feet of the infernal cripple.

The sky above was loaded with the clouds of snow, leaving London in a

darkness and oppression premature for that hour of the evening. On each

side of Syme the walls of the alley were blind and featureless; there

was no little window or any kind of eve. He felt a new impulse to break

out of this hive of houses, and to get once more into the open and

lamp-lit street. Yet he rambled and dodged for a long time before he

struck the main thoroughfare. When he did so, he struck it much farther

up than he had fancied. He came out into what seemed the vast and void

of Ludgate Circus, and saw St. Paul's Cathedral sitting in the sky.

At first he was startled to find these great roads so empty, as if a

pestilence had swept through the city. Then he told himself that some

degree of emptiness was natural; first because the snow?storm was even

dangerously deep, and secondly because it was Sunday. And at the very

word Sunday he bit his lip; the word was henceforth for hire like some

indecent pun. Under the white fog of snow high up in the heaven the

whole atmosphere of the city was turned to a very queer kind of green

twilight, as of men under the sea. The sealed and sullen sunset behind

the dark dome of St. Paul's had in it smoky and sinister

colours--colours of sickly green, dead red or decaying bronze, that

were just bright enough to emphasise the solid whiteness of the snow.

But right up against these dreary colours rose the black bulk of the

cathedral; and upon the top of the cathedral was a random splash and

great stain of snow, still clinging as to an Alpine peak. It had fallen

accidentally, but just so fallen as to half drape the dome from its

very topmost point, and to pick out in perfect silver the great orb and

the cross. When Syme saw it he suddenly straightened himself, and made

with his sword?stick an involuntary salute.

He knew that that evil figure, his shadow, was creeping quickly or

slowly behind him, and he did not care.

It seemed a symbol of human faith and valour that while the skies were

darkening that high place of the earth was bright. The devils might

have captured heaven, but they had not yet captured the cross. He had a

new impulse to tear out the secret of this dancing, jumping and

pursuing paralytic; and at the entrance of the court as it opened upon

the Circus he turned, stick in hand, to face his pursuer.

Professor de Worms came slowly round the corner of the irregular alley

behind him, his unnatural form outlined against a lonely gas?lamp,

irresistibly recalling that very imaginative figure in the nursery

rhymes, "the crooked man who went a crooked mile." He really looked as

if he had been twisted out of shape by the tortuous streets he had been

threading. He came nearer and nearer, the lamplight shining on his

lifted spectacles, his lifted, patient face. Syme waited for him as St.

George waited for the dragon, as a man waits for a final explanation or

for death. And the old Professor came right up to him and passed him

like a total stranger, without even a blink of his mournful eyelids.

There was something in this silent and unexpected innocence that left

Syme in a final fury. The man's colourless face and manner seemed to

assert that the whole following had been an accident. Syme was

galvanised with an energy that was something between bitterness and a

burst of boyish derision. He made a wild gesture as if to knock the old

man's hat off, called out something like "Catch me if you can," and

went racing away across the white, open Circus. Concealment was

impossible now; and looking back over his shoulder, he could see the

black figure of the old gentleman coming after him with long, swinging

strides like a man winning a mile race. But the head upon that bounding

body was still pale, grave and professional, like the head of a

lecturer upon the body of a harlequin.

This outrageous chase sped across Ludgate Circus, up Ludgate Hill,

round St. Paul's Cathedral, along Cheapside, Syme remembering all the

nightmares he had ever known. Then Syme broke away towards the river,

and ended almost down by the docks. He saw the yellow panes of a low,

lighted public?house, flung himself into it and ordered beer. It was a

foul tavern, sprinkled with foreign sailors, a place where opium might

be smoked or knives drawn.

A moment later Professor de Worms entered the place, sat down

carefully, and asked for a glass of milk.

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CHAPTER VIII

THE PROFESSOR EXPLAINS

WHEN Gabriel Syme found himself finally established in a chair, and

opposite to him, fixed and final also, the lifted eyebrows and leaden

eyelids of the Professor, his fears fully returned. This

incomprehensible man from the fierce council, after all, had certainly

pursued him. If the man had one character as a paralytic and another

character as a pursuer, the antithesis might make him more interesting,

but scarcely more soothing. It would be a very small comfort that he

could not find the Professor out, if by some serious accident the

Professor should find him out. He emptied a whole pewter pot of ale

before the professor had touched his milk.

One possibility, however, kept him hopeful and yet helpless. It was

just possible that this escapade signified something other than even a

slight suspicion of him. Perhaps it was some regular form or sign.

Perhaps the foolish scamper was some sort of friendly signal that he

ought to have understood. Perhaps it was a ritual. Perhaps the new

Thursday was always chased along Cheapside, as the new Lord Mayor is

always escorted along it. He was just selecting a tentative inquiry,

when the old Professor opposite suddenly and simply cut him short.

Before Syme could ask the first diplomatic question, the old anarchist

had asked suddenly, without any sort of preparation--

"Are you a policeman?"

Whatever else Syme had expected, he had never expected anything so

brutal and actual as this. Even his great presence of mind could only

manage a reply with an air of rather blundering jocularity.

"A policeman?" he said, laughing vaguely. "Whatever made you think of a

policeman in connection with me?"

"The process was simple enough," answered the Professor patiently. "I

thought you looked like a policeman. I think so now."

"Did I take a policeman's hat by mistake out of the restaurant?" asked

Syme, smiling wildly. "Have I by any chance got a number stuck on to me

somewhere? Have my boots got that watchful look? Why must I be a

policeman? Do, do let me be a postman."

The old Professor shook his head with a gravity that gave no hope, but

Syme ran on with a feverish irony.

"But perhaps I misunderstood the delicacies of your German philosophy.

Perhaps policeman is a relative term. In an evolutionary sense, sir,

the ape fades so gradually into the policeman, that I myself can never

detect the shade. The monkey is only the policeman that may be. Perhaps

a maiden lady on Clapham Common is only the policeman that might have

been. I don't mind being the policeman that might have been. I don't

mind being anything in German thought."

"Are you in the police service?" said the old man, ignoring all Syme's

improvised and desperate raillery. "Are you a detective?"

Syme's heart turned to stone, but his face never changed.

"Your suggestion is ridiculous," he began. "Why on earth--"

The old man struck his palsied hand passionately on the rickety table,

nearly breaking it.

"Did you hear me ask a plain question, you pattering spy?" he shrieked

in a high, crazy voice. "Are you, or are you not, a police detective?"

"No!" answered Syme, like a man standing on the hangman's drop.

"You swear it," said the old man, leaning across to him, his dead face

becoming as it were loathsomely alive. "You swear it! You swear it! If

you swear falsely, will you be damned? Will you be sure that the devil

dances at your funeral? Will you see that the nightmare sits on your

grave? Will there really be no mistake? You are an anarchist, you are a

dynamiter! Above all, you are not in any sense a detective? You are not

in the British police?"

He leant his angular elbow far across the table, and put up his large

loose hand like a flap to his ear.

"I am not in the British police," said Syme with insane calm.

Professor de Worms fell back in his chair with a curious air of kindly

collapse.

"That's a pity," he said, "because I am."

Syme sprang up straight, sending back the bench behind him with a

crash.

"Because you are what?" he said thickly. "You are what?"

"I am a policeman," said the Professor with his first broad smile. and

beaming through his spectacles. "But as you think policeman only a

relative term, of course I have nothing to do with you. I am in the

British police force; but as you tell me you are not in the British

police force, I can only say that I met you in a dynamiters' club. I

suppose I ought to arrest you." And with these words he laid on the

table before Syme an exact facsimile of the blue card which Syme had in

his own waistcoat pocket, the symbol of his power from the police.

Syme had for a flash the sensation that the cosmos had turned exactly

upside down, that all trees were growing downwards and that all stars

were under his feet. Then came slowly the opposite conviction. For the

last twenty?four hours the cosmos had really been upside down, but now

the capsized universe had come right side up again. This devil from

whom he had been fleeing all day was only an elder brother of his own

house, who on the other side of the table lay back and laughed at him.

He did not for the moment ask any questions of detail; he only knew the

happy and silly fact that this shadow, which had pursued him with an

intolerable oppression of peril, was only the shadow of a friend trying

to catch him up. He knew simultaneously that he was a fool and a free

man. For with any recovery from morbidity there must go a certain

healthy humiliation. There comes a certain point in such conditions

when only three things are possible: first a perpetuation of Satanic

pride, secondly tears, and third laughter. Syme's egotism held hard to

the first course for a few seconds, and then suddenly adopted the

third. Taking his own blue police ticket from his own waist coat

pocket, he tossed it on to the table; then he flung his head back until

his spike of yellow beard almost pointed at the ceiling, and shouted

with a barbaric laughter.

Even in that close den, perpetually filled with the din of knives,

plates, cans, clamorous voices, sudden struggles and stampedes, there

was something Homeric in Syme's mirth which made many half-drunken men

look round.

"What yer laughing at, guv'nor?" asked one wondering labourer from the

docks.

"At myself," answered Syme, and went off again into the agony of his

ecstatic reaction.

"Pull yourself together," said the Professor, "or you'll get

hysterical. Have some more beer. I'll join you."

"You haven't drunk your milk," said Syme.

"My milk! " said the other, in tones of withering and unfathomable

contempt, "my milk! Do you think I'd look at the beastly stuff when I'm

out of sight of the bloody anarchists? We're all Christians in this

room, though perhaps," he added, glancing around at the reeling crowd,

"not strict ones. Finish my milk? Great blazes! yes, I'll finish it

right enough!" and he knocked the tumbler off the table, making a crash

of glass and a splash of silver fluid.

Syme was staring at him with a happy curiosity.

"I understand now," he cried; "of course, you're not an old man at

all."

"I can't take my face off here," replied Professor de Worms. "It's

rather an elaborate make?up. As to whether I'm an old man, that's not

for me to say. I was thirty?eight last birthday."

"Yes, but I mean," said Syme impatiently, "there's nothing the matter

with you."

"Yes," answered the other dispassionately. "I am subject to colds."

Syme's laughter at all this had about it a wild weakness of relief. He

laughed at the idea of the paralytic Professor being really a young

actor dressed up as if for the foot?lights. But he felt that he would

have laughed as loudly if a pepperpot had fallen over.

The false Professor drank and wiped his false beard.

"Did you know," he asked, "that that man Gogol was one of us?"

"I? No, I didn't know it," answered Syme in some surprise. "But didn't

you?"

"I knew no more than the dead," replied the man who called himself de

Worms. "I thought the President was talking about me, and I rattled in

my boots."

"And I thought he was talking about me," said Syme, with his rather

reckless laughter. "I had my hand on my revolver all the time."

"So had I," said the Professor grimly; "so had Gogol evidently."

Syme struck the table with an exclamation.

"Why, there were three of us there!" he cried. "Three out of seven is a

fighting number. If we had only known that we were three!"

The face of Professor de Worms darkened, and he did not look up.

"We were three," he said. "If we had been three hundred we could still

have done nothing."

"Not if we were three hundred against four?" asked Syme, jeering rather

boisterously.

"No," said the Professor with sobriety, "not if we were three hundred

against Sunday."

And the mere name struck Syme cold and serious; his laughter had died

in his heart before it could die on his lips. The face of the

unforgettable President sprang into his mind as startling as a coloured

photograph, and he remarked this difference between Sunday and all his

satellites, that their faces, however fierce or sinister, became

gradually blurred by memory like other human faces, whereas Sunday's

seemed almost to grow more actual during absence, as if a man's painted

portrait should slowly come alive.

They were both silent for a measure of moments, and then Syme's speech

came with a rush, like the sudden foaming of champagne.

"Professor," he cried, "it is intolerable. Are you afraid of this man?"

The Professor lifted his heavy lids, and gazed at Syme with large,

wide?open, blue eyes of an almost ethereal honesty.

"Yes, I am," he said mildly. "So are you."

Syme was dumb for an instant. Then he rose to his feet erect, like an

insulted man, and thrust the chair away from him.

"Yes," he said in a voice indescribable, "you are right. I am afraid of

him. Therefore I swear by God that I will seek out this man whom I fear

until I find him, and strike him on the mouth. If heaven were his

throne and the earth his footstool, I swear that I would pull him

down."

"How?" asked the staring Professor. "Why?"

"Because I am afraid of him," said Syme; "and no man should leave in

the universe anything of which he is afraid."

De Worms blinked at him with a sort of blind wonder. He made an effort

to speak, but Syme went on in a low voice, but with an undercurrent of

inhuman exaltation--

"Who would condescend to strike down the mere things that he does not

fear? Who would debase himself to be merely brave, like any common

prizefighter? Who would stoop to be fearless--like a tree? Fight the

thing that you fear. You remember the old tale of the English clergyman

who gave the last rites to the brigand of Sicily, and how on his

death?bed the great robber said, I can give you no money, but I can

give you advice for a lifetime: your thumb on the blade, and strike

upwards.' So I say to you, strike upwards, if you strike at the stars."

The other looked at the ceiling, one of the tricks of his pose.

"Sunday is a fixed star," he said.

"You shall see him a falling star," said Syme, and put on his hat.

The decision of his gesture drew the Professor vaguely to his feet.

"Have you any idea," he asked, with a sort of benevolent bewilderment,

"exactly where you are going?"

"Yes," replied Syme shortly, "I am going to prevent this bomb being

thrown in Paris."

"Have you any conception how?" inquired the other.

"No," said Syme with equal decision.

"You remember, of course," resumed the soi?disant de Worms, pulling his

beard and looking out of the window, "that when we broke up rather

hurriedly the whole arrangements for the atrocity were left in the

private hands of the Marquis and Dr. Bull. The Marquis is by this time

probably crossing the Channel. But where he will go and what he will do

it is doubtful whether even the President knows; certainly we don't

know. The only man who does know is Dr. Bull.

"Confound it!" cried Syme. "And we don't know where he is."

"Yes," said the other in his curious, absent?minded way, "I know where

he is myself."

"Will you tell me?" asked Syme with eager eyes.

"I will take you there," said the Professor, and took down his own hat

from a peg.

Syme stood looking at him with a sort of rigid excitement.

"What do you mean?" he asked sharply. "Will you join me? Will you take

the risk?"

"Young man," said the Professor pleasantly, "I am amused to observe

that you think I am a coward. As to that I will say only one word, and

that shall be entirely in the manner of your own philosophical

rhetoric. You think that it is possible to pull down the President. I

know that it is impossible, and I am going to try it," and opening the

tavern door, which let in a blast of bitter air, they went out together

into the dark streets by the docks.

Most of the snow was melted or trampled to mud, but here and there a

clot of it still showed grey rather than white in the gloom. The small

streets were sloppy and full of pools, which reflected the flaming

lamps irregularly, and by accident, like fragments of some other and

fallen world. Syme felt almost dazed as he stepped through this growing

confusion of lights and shadows; but his companion walked on with a

certain briskness, towards where, at the end of the street, an inch or

two of the lamplit river looked like a bar of flame.

"Where are you going?" Syme inquired.

"Just now," answered the Professor, "I am going just round the corner

to see whether Dr. Bull has gone to bed. He is hygienic, and retires

early."

"Dr. Bull!" exclaimed Syme. "Does he live round the corner?"

"No," answered his friend. "As a matter of fact he lives some way off,

on the other side of the river, but we can tell from here whether he

has gone to bed."

Turning the corner as he spoke, and facing the dim river, flecked with

flame, he pointed with his stick to the other bank. On the Surrey side

at this point there ran out into the Thames, seeming almost to overhang

it, a bulk and cluster of those tall tenements, dotted with lighted

windows, and rising like factory chimneys to an almost insane height.

Their special poise and position made one block of buildings especially

look like a Tower of Babel with a hundred eyes. Syme had never seen any

of the sky?scraping buildings in America, so he could only think of the

buildings in a dream.

Even as he stared, the highest light in this innumerably lighted turret

abruptly went out, as if this black Argus had winked at him with one of

his innumerable eyes.

Professor de Worms swung round on his heel, and struck his stick

against his boot.

"We are too late," he said, "the hygienic Doctor has gone to bed."

"What do you mean?" asked Syme. "Does he live over there, then?"

"Yes," said de Worms, "behind that particular window which you can't

see. Come along and get some dinner. We must call on him to?morrow

morning."

Without further parley, he led the way through several by?ways until

they came out into the flare and clamour of the East India Dock Road.

The Professor, who seemed to know his way about the neighbourhood,

proceeded to a place where the line of lighted shops fell back into a

sort of abrupt twilight and quiet, in which an old white inn, all out

of repair, stood back some twenty feet from the road.

"You can find good English inns left by accident everywhere, like

fossils," explained the Professor. "I once found a decent place in the

West End."

"I suppose," said Syme, smiling, "that this is the corresponding decent

place in the East End?"

"It is," said the Professor reverently, and went in.

In that place they dined and slept, both very thoroughly. The beans and

bacon, which these unaccountable people cooked well, the astonishing

emergence of Burgundy from their cellars, crowned Syme's sense of a new

comradeship and comfort. Through all this ordeal his root horror had

been isolation, and there are no words to express the abyss between

isolation and having one ally. It may be conceded to the mathematicians

that four is twice two. But two is not twice one; two is two thousand

times one. That is why, in spite of a hundred disadvantages, the world

will always return to monogamy.

Syme was able to pour out for the first time the whole of his

outrageous tale, from the time when Gregory had taken him to the little

tavern by the river. He did it idly and amply, in a luxuriant

monologue, as a man speaks with very old friends. On his side, also,

the man who had impersonated Professor de Worms was not less

communicative. His own story was almost as silly as Syme's.

"That's a good get?up of yours," said Syme, draining a glass of M�con;

"a lot better than old Gogol's. Even at the start I thought he was a

bit too hairy."

"A difference of artistic theory," replied the Professor pensively.

"Gogol was an idealist. He made up as the abstract or platonic ideal of

an anarchist. But I am a realist. I am a portrait painter. But, indeed,

to say that I am a portrait painter is an inadequate expression. I am a

portrait."

"I don't understand you," said Syme.

"I am a portrait," repeated the Professor. "I am a portrait of the

celebrated Professor de Worms, who is, I believe, in Naples."

"You mean you are made up like him," said Syme. "But doesn't he know

that you are taking his nose in vain?"

"He knows it right enough," replied his friend cheerfully.

"Then why doesn't he denounce you?"

"I have denounced him," answered the Professor.

"Do explain yourself," said Syme.

"With pleasure, if you don't mind hearing my story," replied the

eminent foreign philosopher. "I am by profession an actor, and my name

is Wilks. When I was on the stage I mixed with all sorts of Bohemian

and blackguard company. Sometimes I touched the edge of the turf,

sometimes the riff?raff of the arts, and occasionally the political

refugee. In some den of exiled dreamers I was introduced to the great

German Nihilist philosopher, Professor de Worms. I did not gather much

about him beyond his appearance, which was very disgusting, and which I

studied carefully. I understood that he had proved that the destructive

principle in the universe was God; hence he insisted on the need for a

furious and incessant energy, rending all things in pieces. Energy, he

said, was the All. He was lame, shortsighted, and partially paralytic.

When I met him I was in a frivolous mood, and I disliked him so much

that I resolved to imitate him. If I had been a draughtsman I would

have drawn a caricature. I was only an actor, I could only act a

caricature. I made myself up into what was meant for a wild

exaggeration of the old Professor's dirty old self. When I went into

the room full of his supporters I expected to be received with a roar

of laughter, or (if they were too far gone) with a roar of indignation

at the insult. I cannot describe the surprise I felt when my entrance

was received with a respectful silence, followed (when I had first

opened my lips) with a murmur of admiration. The curse of the perfect

artist had fallen upon me. I had been too subtle, I had been too true.

They thought I really was the great Nihilist Professor. I was a

healthy-minded young man at the time, and I confess that it was a blow.

Before I could fully recover, however, two or three of these admirers

ran up to me radiating indignation, and told me that a public insult

had been put upon me in the next room. I inquired its nature. It seemed

that an impertinent fellow had dressed himself up as a preposterous

parody of myself. I had drunk more champagne than was good for me, and

in a flash of folly I decided to see the situation through.

Consequently it was to meet the glare of the company and my own lifted

eyebrows and freezing eyes that the real Professor came into the room.

"I need hardly say there was a collision. The pessimists all round me

looked anxiously from one Professor to the other Professor to see which

was really the more feeble. But I won. An old man in poor health, like

my rival, could not be expected to be so impressively feeble as a young

actor in the prime of life. You see, he really had paralysis, and

working within this definite limitation, he couldn't be so jolly

paralytic as I was. Then he tried to blast my claims intellectually. I

countered that by a very simple dodge. Whenever he said something that

nobody but he could understand, I replied with something which I could

not even understand myself. I don't fancy,' he said, that you could

have worked out the principle that evolution is only negation, since

there inheres in it the introduction of lacuna, which are an essential

of differentiation.' I replied quite scornfully, You read all that up

in Pinckwerts; the notion that involution functioned eugenically was

exposed long ago by Glumpe.' It is unnecessary for me to say that there

never were such people as Pinckwerts and Glumpe. But the people all

round (rather to my surprise) seemed to remember them quite well, and

the Professor, finding that the learned and mysterious method left him

rather at the mercy of an enemy slightly deficient in scruples, fell

back upon a more popular form of wit. I see,' he sneered, you prevail

like the false pig in �sop.' And you fail,' I answered, smiling, like

the hedgehog in Montaigne.' Need I say that there is no hedgehog in

Montaigne? Your claptrap comes off,' he said; so would your beard.' I

had no intelligent answer to this, which was quite true and rather

witty. But I laughed heartily, answered, Like the Pantheist's boots,'

at random, and turned on my heel with all the honours of victory. The

real Professor was thrown out, but not with violence, though one man

tried very patiently to pull off his nose. He is now, I believe,

received everywhere in Europe as a delightful impostor. His apparent

earnestness and anger, you see, make him all the more entertaining."

"Well," said Syme, "I can understand your putting on his dirty old

beard for a night's practical joke, but I don't understand your never

taking it off again."

"That is the rest of the story," said the impersonator. "When I myself

left the company, followed by reverent applause, I went limping down

the dark street, hoping that I should soon be far enough away to be

able to walk like a human being. To my astonishment, as I was turning

the corner, I felt a touch on the shoulder, and turning, found myself

under the shadow of an enormous policeman. He told me I was wanted. I

struck a sort of paralytic attitude, and cried in a high German accent,

Yes, I am wanted--by the oppressed of the world. You are arresting me

on the charge of being the great anarchist, Professor de Worms.' The

policeman impassively consulted a paper in his hand, No, sir,' he said

civilly, at least, not exactly, sir. I am arresting you on the charge

of not being the celebrated anarchist, Professor de Worms.' This

charge, if it was criminal at all, was certainly the lighter of the

two, and I went along with the man, doubtful, but not greatly dismayed.

I was shown into a number of rooms, and eventually into the presence of

a police officer, who explained that a serious campaign had been opened

against the centres of anarchy, and that this, my successful

masquerade, might be of considerable value to the public safety. He

offered me a good salary and this little blue card. Though our

conversation was short, he struck me as a man of very massive common

sense and humour; but I cannot tell you much about him personally,

because--"

Syme laid down his knife and fork.

"I know," he said, "because you talked to him in a dark room."

Professor de Worms nodded and drained his glass.

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CHAPTER IX

THE MAN IN SPECTACLES

"BURGUNDY is a jolly thing," said the Professor sadly, as he set his

glass down.

"You don't look as if it were," said Syme; "you drink it as if it were

medicine."

"You must excuse my manner," said the Professor dismally, "my position

is rather a curious one. Inside I am really bursting with boyish

merriment; but I acted the paralytic Professor so well, that now I

can't leave off. So that when I am among friends, and have no need at

all to disguise myself, I still can't help speaking slow and wrinkling

my forehead--just as if it were my forehead. I can be quite happy, you

understand, but only in a paralytic sort of way. The most buoyant

exclamations leap up in my heart, but they come out of my mouth quite

different. You should hear me say, Buck up, old cock!' It would bring

tears to your eyes."

"It does," said Syme; "but I cannot help thinking that apart from all

that you are really a bit worried."

The Professor started a little and looked at him steadily.

"You are a very clever fellow," he said, "it is a pleasure to work with

you. Yes, I have rather a heavy cloud in my head. There is a great

problem to face," and he sank his bald brow in his two hands.

Then he said in a low voice--

"Can you play the piano?"

"Yes," said Syme in simple wonder, "I'm supposed to have a good touch."

Then, as the other did not speak, he added--

"I trust the great cloud is lifted."

After a long silence, the Professor said out of the cavernous shadow of

his hands--

"It would have done just as well if you could work a typewriter."

"Thank you," said Syme, "you flatter me."

"Listen to me," said the other, "and remember whom we have to see

tomorrow. You and I are going to?morrow to attempt something which is

very much more dangerous than trying to steal the Crown Jewels out of

the Tower. We are trying to steal a secret from a very sharp, very

strong, and very wicked man. I believe there is no man, except the

President, of course, who is so seriously startling and formidable as

that little grinning fellow in goggles. He has not perhaps the

white?hot enthusiasm unto death, the mad martyrdom for anarchy, which

marks the Secretary. But then that very fanaticism in the Secretary has

a human pathos, and is almost a redeeming trait. But the little Doctor

has a brutal sanity that is more shocking than the Secretary's disease.

Don't you notice his detestable virility and vitality. He bounces like

an india?rubber ball. Depend on it, Sunday was not asleep (I wonder if

he ever sleeps?) when he locked up all the plans of this outrage in the

round, black head of Dr. Bull."

"And you think," said Syme, "that this unique monster will be soothed

if I play the piano to him?"

"Don't be an ass," said his mentor. "I mentioned the piano because it

gives one quick and independent fingers. Syme, if we are to go through

this interview and come out sane or alive, we must have some code of

signals between us that this brute will not see. I have made a rough

alphabetical cypher corresponding to the five fingers--like this, see,"

and he rippled with his fingers on the wooden table--"B A D, bad, a

word we may frequently require."

Syme poured himself out another glass of wine, and began to study the

scheme. He was abnormally quick with his brains at puzzles, and with

his hands at conjuring, and it did not take him long to learn how he

might convey simple messages by what would seem to be idle taps upon a

table or knee. But wine and companionship had always the effect of

inspiring him to a farcical ingenuity, and the Professor soon found

himself struggling with the too vast energy of the new language, as it

passed through the heated brain of Syme.

"We must have several word?signs," said Syme seriously--"words that we

are likely to want, fine shades of meaning. My favourite word is '

coeval.' What's yours?"

"Do stop playing the goat," said the Professor plaintively. "You don't

know how serious this is."

" ' Lush,' too, " said Syme, shaking his head sagaciously, "we must

have ' lush'--word applied to grass, don't you know?"

"Do you imagine," asked the Professor furiously, "that we are going to

talk to Dr. Bull about grass?"

"There are several ways in which the subject could be approached," said

Syme reflectively, "and the word introduced without appearing forced.

We might say, ' Dr. Bull, as a revolutionist, you remember that a

tyrant once advised us to eat grass; and indeed many of us, looking on

the fresh lush grass of summer "'

"Do you understand," said the other, "that this is a tragedy?"

"Perfectly," replied Syme; "always be comic in a tragedy. What the

deuce else can you do? I wish this language of yours had a wider scope.

I suppose we could not extend it from the fingers to the toes? That

would involve pulling off our boots and socks during the conversation,

which however unobtrusively performed--"

"Syme," said his friend with a stern simplicity, "go to bed!"

Syme, however, sat up in bed for a considerable time mastering the new

code. He was awakened next morning while the east was still sealed with

darkness, and found his grey?bearded ally standing like a ghost beside

his bed.

Syme sat up in bed blinking; then slowly collected his thoughts, threw

off the bed?clothes, and stood up. It seemed to him in some curious way

that all the safety and sociability of the night before fell with the

bedclothes off him, and he stood up in an air of cold danger. He still

felt an entire trust and loyalty towards his companion; but it was the

trust between two men going to the scaffold.

"Well," said Syme with a forced cheerfulness as he pulled on his

trousers, "I dreamt of that alphabet of yours. Did it take you long to

make it up?"

The Professor made no answer, but gazed in front of him with eyes the

colour of a wintry sea; so Syme repeated his question.

"I say, did it take you long to invent all this? I'm considered good at

these things, and it was a good hour's grind. Did you learn it all on

the spot?"

The Professor was silent; his eyes were wide open, and he wore a fixed

but very small smile.

"How long did it take you?"

The Professor did not move.

"Confound you, can't you answer?" called out Syme, in a sudden anger

that had something like fear underneath. Whether or no the Professor

could answer, he did not.

Syme stood staring back at the stiff face like parchment and the blank,

blue eyes. His first thought was that the Professor had gone mad, but

his second thought was more frightful. After all, what did he know

about this queer creature whom he had heedlessly accepted as a friend?

What did he know, except that the man had been at the anarchist

breakfast and had told him a ridiculous tale? How improbable it was

that there should be another friend there beside Gogol! Was this man's

silence a sensational way of declaring war? Was this adamantine stare

after all only the awful sneer of some threefold traitor, who had

turned for the last time? He stood and strained his ears in this

heartless silence. He almost fancied he could hear dynamiters come to

capture him shifting softly in the corridor outside.

Then his eye strayed downwards, and he burst out laughing. Though the

Professor himself stood there as voiceless as a statue, his five dumb

fingers were dancing alive upon the dead table. Syme watched the

twinkling movements of the talking hand, and read clearly the message--

"I will only talk like this. We must get used to it."

He rapped out the answer with the impatience of relief--

"All right. Let's get out to breakfast."

They took their hats and sticks in silence; but as Syme took his

sword?stick, he held it hard.

They paused for a few minutes only to stuff down coffee and coarse

thick sandwiches at a coffee stall, and then made their way across the

river, which under the grey and growing light looked as desolate as

Acheron. They reached the bottom of the huge block of buildings which

they had seen from across the river, and began in silence to mount the

naked and numberless stone steps, only pausing now and then to make

short remarks on the rail of the banisters. At about every other flight

they passed a window; each window showed them a pale and tragic dawn

lifting itself laboriously over London. From each the innumerable roofs

of slate looked like the leaden surges of a grey, troubled sea after

rain. Syme was increasingly conscious that his new adventure had

somehow a quality of cold sanity worse than the wild adventures of the

past. Last night, for instance, the tall tenements had seemed to him

like a tower in a dream. As he now went up the weary and perpetual

steps, he was daunted and bewildered by their almost infinite series.

But it was not the hot horror of a dream or of anything that might be

exaggeration or delusion. Their infinity was more like the empty

infinity of arithmetic, something unthinkable, yet necessary to

thought. Or it was like the stunning statements of astronomy about the

distance of the fixed stars. He was ascending the house of reason, a

thing more hideous than unreason itself.

By the time they reached Dr. Bull's landing, a last window showed them

a harsh, white dawn edged with banks of a kind of coarse red, more like

red clay than red cloud. And when they entered Dr. Bull's bare garret

it was full of light.

Syme had been haunted by a half historic memory in connection with

these empty rooms and that austere daybreak. The moment he saw the

garret and Dr. Bull sitting writing at a table, he remembered what the

memory was--the French Revolution. There should have been the black

outline of a guillotine against that heavy red and white of the

morning. Dr. Bull was in his white shirt and black breeches only; his

cropped, dark head might well have just come out of its wig; he might

have been Marat or a more slipshod Robespierre.

Yet when he was seen properly, the French fancy fell away. The Jacobins

were idealists; there was about this man a murderous materialism. His

Dosition gave him a somewhat new appearance. The strong, white light of

morning coming from one side creating sharp shadows, made him seem both

more pale and more angular than he had looked at the breakfast on the

balcony. Thus the two black glasses that encased his eyes might really

have been black cavities in his skull, making him look like a

death's?head. And, indeed, if ever Death himself sat writing at a

wooden table, it might have been he.

He looked up and smiled brightly enough as the men came in, and rose

with the resilient rapidity of which the Professor had spoken. He set

chairs for both of them, and going to a peg behind the door, proceeded

to put on a coat and waistcoat of rough, dark tweed; he buttoned it up

neatly, and came back to sit down at his table.

The quiet good humour of his manner left his two opponents helpless. It

was with some momentary difficulty that the Professor broke silence and

began, "I'm sorry to disturb you so early, comrade," said he, with a

careful resumption of the slow de Worms manner. "You have no doubt made

all the arrangements for the Paris affair?" Then he added with infinite

slowness, "We have information which renders intolerable anything in

the nature of a moment's delay."

Dr. Bull smiled again, but continued to gaze on them without speaking.

The Professor resumed, a pause before each weary word--

"Please do not think me excessively abrupt; but I advise you to alter

those plans, or if it is too late for that, to follow your agent with

all the support you can get for him. Comrade Syme and I have had an

experience which it would take more time to recount than we can afford,

if we are to act on it. I will, however, relate the occurrence in

detail, even at the risk of losing time, if you really feel that it is

essential to the understanding of the problem we have to discuss."

He was spinning out his sentences, making them intolerably long and

lingering, in the hope of maddening the practical little Doctor into an

explosion of impatience which might show his hand. But the little

Doctor continued only to stare and smile, and the monologue was uphill

work. Syme began to feel a new sickness and despair. The Doctor's smile

and silence were not at all like the cataleptic stare and horrible

silence which he had confronted in the Professor half an hour before.

About the Professor's makeup and all his antics there was always

something merely grotesque, like a gollywog. Syme remembered those wild

woes of yesterday as one remembers being afraid of Bogy in childhood.

But here was daylight; here was a healthy, square?shouldered man in

tweeds, not odd save for the accident of his ugly spectacles, not

glaring or grinning at all, but smiling steadily and not saying a word.

The whole had a sense of unbearable reality. Under the increasing

sunlight the colours of the Doctor's complexion, the pattern of his

tweeds, grew and expanded outrageously, as such things grow too

important in a realistic novel. But his smile was quite slight, the

pose of his head polite; the only uncanny thing was his silence.

"As I say," resumed the Professor, like a man toiling through heavy

sand, "the incident that has occurred to us and has led us to ask for

information about the Marquis, is one which you may think it better to

have narrated; but as it came in the way of Comrade Syme rather than

me--"

His words he seemed to be dragging out like words in an anthem; but

Syme, who was watching, saw his long fingers rattle quickly on the edge

of the crazy table. He read the message, "You must go on. This devil

has sucked me dry!"

Syme plunged into the breach with that bravado of improvisation which

always came to him when he was alarmed.

"Yes, the thing really happened to me," he said hastily. "I had the

good fortune to fall into conversation with a detective who took me,

thanks to my hat, for a respectable person. Wishing to clinch my

reputation for respectability, I took him and made him very drunk at

the Savoy. Under this influence he became friendly, and told me in so

many words that within a day or two they hope to arrest the Marquis in

France.

So unless you or I can get on his track--"

The Doctor was still smiling in the most friendly way, and his

protected eyes were still impenetrable. The Professor signalled to Syme

that he would resume his explanation, and he began again with the same

elaborate calm.

"Syme immediately brought this information to me, and we came here

together to see what use you would be inclined to make of it. It seems

to me unquestionably urgent that--"

All this time Syme had been staring at the Doctor almost as steadily as

the Doctor stared at the Professor, but quite without the smile. The

nerves of both comrades?in?arms were near snapping under that strain of

motionless amiability, when Syme suddenly leant forward and idly tapped

the edge of the table. His message to his ally ran, "I have an

intuition."

The Professor, with scarcely a pause in his monologue, signalled back,

"Then sit on it."

Syme telegraphed, "It is quite extraordinary."

The other answered, "Extraordinary rot!"

Syme said, "I am a poet."

The other retorted, "You are a dead man."

Syme had gone quite red up to his yellow hair, and his eyes were

burning feverishly. As he said he had an intuition, and it had risen to

a sort of lightheaded certainty. Resuming his symbolic taps, he

signalled to his friend, "You scarcely realise how poetic my intuition

is. It has that sudden quality we sometimes feel in the coming of

spring."

He then studied the answer on his friend's fingers. The answer was, "Go

to hell! "

The Professor then resumed his merely verbal monologue addressed to the

Doctor.

"Perhaps I should rather say," said Syme on his fingers, "that it

resembles that sudden smell of the sea which may be found in the heart

of lush woods."

His companion disdained to reply.

"Or yet again," tapped Syme, "it is positive, as is the passionate red

hair of a beautiful woman."

The Professor was continuing his speech, but in the middle of it Syme

decided to act. He leant across the table, and said in a voice that

could not be neglected--

"Dr. Bull!"

The Doctor's sleek and smiling head did not move, but they could have

sworn that under his dark glasses his eyes darted towards Syme.

"Dr. Bull," said Syme, in a voice peculiarly precise and courteous,

"would you do me a small favour? Would you be so kind as to take off

your spectacles?"

The Professor swung round on his seat, and stared at Syme with a sort

of frozen fury of astonishment. Syme, like a man who has thrown his

life and fortune on the table, leaned forward with a fiery face. The

Doctor did not move.

For a few seconds there was a silence in which one could hear a pin

drop, split once by the single hoot of a distant steamer on the Thames.

Then Dr. Bull rose slowly, still smiling, and took off his spectacles.

Syme sprang to his feet, stepping backwards a little, like a chemical

lecturer from a successful explosion. His eyes were like stars, and for

an instant he could only point without speaking.

The Professor had also started to his feet, forgetful of his supposed

paralysis. He leant on the back of the chair and stared doubtfully at

Dr. Bull, as if the Doctor had been turned into a toad before his eyes.

And indeed it was almost as great a transformation scene.

The two detectives saw sitting in the chair before them a very

boyish?looking young man, with very frank and happy hazel eyes, an open

expression, cockney clothes like those of a city clerk, and an

unquestionable breath about him of being very good and rather

commonplace. The smile was still there, but it might have been the

first smile of a baby.

"I knew I was a poet," cried Syme in a sort of ecstasy. "I knew my

intuition was as infallible as the Pope. It was the spectacles that did

it! It was all the spectacles. Given those beastly black eyes, and all

the rest of him his health and his jolly looks, made him a live devil

among dead ones."

"It certainly does make a queer difference," said the Professor

shakily. "But as regards the project of Dr. Bull--"

"Project be damned!" roared Syme, beside himself. "Look at him! Look at

his face, look at his collar, look at his blessed boots! You don't

suppose, do you, that that thing's an anarchist?"

"Syme!" cried the other in an apprehensive agony.

"Why, by God," said Syme, "I'll take the risk of that myself! Dr. Bull,

I am a police officer. There's my card," and he flung down the blue

card upon the table.

The Professor still feared that all was lost; but he was loyal. He

pulled out his own official card and put it beside his friend's. Then

the third man burst out laughing, and for the first time that morning

they heard his voice.

"I'm awfully glad you chaps have come so early," he said, with a sort

of schoolboy flippancy, "for we can all start for France together. Yes,

I'm in the force right enough," and he flicked a blue card towards them

lightly as a matter of form.

Clapping a brisk bowler on his head and resuming his goblin glasses,

the Doctor moved so quickly towards the door, that the others

instinctively followed him. Syme seemed a little distrait, and as he

passed under the doorway he suddenly struck his stick on the stone

passage so that it rang.

"But Lord God Almighty," he cried out, "if this is all right, there

were more damned detectives than there were damned dynamiters at the

damned Council!"

"We might have fought easily," said Bull; "we were four against three."

The Professor was descending the stairs, but his voice came up from

below.

"No," said the voice, "we were not four against three --we were not so

lucky. We were four against One."

The others went down the stairs in silence.

The young man called Bull, with an innocent courtesy characteristic of

him, insisted on going last until they reached the street; but there

his own robust rapidity asserted itself unconsciously, and he walked

quickly on ahead towards a railway inquiry office, talking to the

others over his shoulder.

"It is jolly to get some pals," he said. "I've been half dead with the

jumps, being quite alone. I nearly flung my arms round Gogol and

embraced him, which would have been imprudent. I hope you won't despise

me for having been in a blue funk."

"All the blue devils in blue hell," said Syme, "contributed to my blue

funk! But the worst devil was you and your infernal goggles."

The young man laughed delightedly.

"Wasn't it a rag?" he said. "Such a simple idea-- not my own. I haven't

got the brains. You see, I wanted to go into the detective service,

especially the anti?dynamite business. But for that purpose they wanted

someone to dress up as a dynamiter; and they all swore by blazes that I

could never look like a dynamiter. They said my very walk was

respectable, and that seen from behind I looked like the British

Constitution. They said I looked too healthy and too optimistic, and

too reliable and benevolent; they called me all sorts of names at

Scotland Yard. They said that if I had been a criminal, I might have

made my fortune by looking so like an honest man; but as I had the

misfortune to be an honest man, there was not even the remotest chance

of my assisting them by ever looking like a criminal. But as last I was

brought before some old josser who was high up in the force, and who

seemed to have no end of a head on his shoulders. And there the others

all talked hopelessly. One asked whether a bushy beard would hide my

nice smile; another said that if they blacked my face I might look like

a negro anarchist; but this old chap chipped in with a most

extraordinary remark. A pair of smoked spectacles will do it,' he said

positively. Look at him now; he looks like an angelic office boy. Put

him on a pair of smoked spectacles, and children will scream at the

sight of him.' And so it was, by George! When once my eyes were

covered, all the rest, smile and big shoulders and short hair, made me

look a perfect little devil. As I say, it was simple enough when it was

done, like miracles; but that wasn't the really miraculous part of it.

There was one really staggering thing about the business, and my head

still turns at it."

"What was that?" asked Syme.

"I'll tell you," answered the man in spectacles. "This big pot in the

police who sized me up so that he knew how the goggles would go with my

hair and socks--by God, he never saw me at all!"

Syme's eyes suddenly flashed on him.

"How was that?" he asked. "I thought you talked to him."

"So I did," said Bull brightly; "but we talked in a pitch?dark room

like a coalcellar. There, you would never have guessed that."

"I could not have conceived it," said Syme gravely.

"It is indeed a new idea," said the Professor.

Their new ally was in practical matters a whirlwind. At the inquiry

office he asked with businesslike brevity about the trains for Dover.

Having got his information, he bundled the company into a cab, and put

them and himself inside a railway carriage before they had properly

realised the breathless process. They were already on the Calais boat

before conversation flowed freely.

"I had already arranged," he explained, "to go to France for my lunch;

but I am delighted to have someone to lunch with me. You see, I had to

send that beast, the Marquis, over with his bomb, because the President

had his eye on me, though God knows how. I'll tell you the story some

day. It was perfectly choking. Whenever I tried to slip out of it I saw

the President somewhere, smiling out of the bow?window of a club, or

taking off his hat to me from the top of an omnibus. I tell you, you

can say what you like, that fellow sold himself to the devil; he can be

in six places at once."

"So you sent the Marquis off, I understand," asked the Professor. "Was

it long ago? Shall we be in time to catch him?"

"Yes," answered the new guide, "I've timed it all. He'll still be at

Calais when we arrive."

"But when we do catch him at Calais," said the Professor, "what are we

going to do?"

At this question the countenance of Dr. Bull fell for the first time.

He reflected a little, and then said--

"Theoretically, I suppose, we ought to call the police."

"Not I," said Syme. "Theoretically I ought to drown myself first. I

promised a poor fellow, who was a real modern pessimist, on my word of

honour not to tell the police. I'm no hand at casuistry, but I can't

break my word to a modern pessimist. It's like breaking one's word to a

child."

"I'm in the same boat," said the Professor. "I tried to tell the police

and I couldn't, because of some silly oath I took. You see, when I was

an actor I was a sort of all-round beast. Perjury or treason is the

only crime I haven't committed. If I did that I shouldn't know the

difference between right and wrong."

"I've been through all that," said Dr. Bull, "and I've made up my mind.

I gave my promise to the Secretary --you know him, man who smiles

upside down. My friends, that man is the most utterly unhappy man that

was ever human. It may be his digestion, or his conscience, or his

nerves, or his philosophy of the universe, but he's damned, he's in

hell! Well, I can't turn on a man like that, and hunt him down. It's

like whipping a leper. I may be mad, but that's how I feel; and there's

jolly well the end of it."

"I don't think you're mad," said Syme. "I knew you would decide like

that when first you--"

"Eh?" said Dr. Bull.

"When first you took off your spectacles."

Dr. Bull smiled a little, and strolled across the deck to look at the

sunlit sea. Then he strolled back again, kicking his heels carelessly,

and a companionable silence fell between the three men.

"Well," said Syme, "it seems that we have all the same kind of morality

or immorality, so we had better face the fact that comes of it."

"Yes," assented the Professor, "you're quite right; and we must hurry

up, for I can see the Grey Nose standing out from France."

"The fact that comes of it," said Syme seriously, "is this, that we

three are alone on this planet. Gogol has gone, God knows where;

perhaps the President has smashed him like a fly. On the Council we are

three men against three, like the Romans who held the bridge. But we

are worse off than that, first because they can appeal to their

organization and we cannot appeal to ours, and second because--"

"Because one of those other three men," said the Professor, "is not a

man."

Syme nodded and was silent for a second or two, then he said--

"My idea is this. We must do something to keep the Marquis in Calais

till tomorrow midday. I have turned over twenty schemes in my head. We

cannot denounce him as a dynamiter; that is agreed. We cannot get him

detained on some trivial charge, for we should have to appear; he knows

us, and he would smell a rat. We cannot pretend to keep him on

anarchist business; he might swallow much in that way, but not the

notion of stopping in Calais while the Czar went safely through Paris.

We might try to kidnap him, and lock him up ourselves; but he is a

well?known man here. He has a whole bodyguard of friends; he is very

strong and brave, and the event is doubtful. The only thing I can see

to do is actually to take advantage of the very things that are in the

Marquis's favour. I am going to profit by the fact that he is a highly

respected nobleman. I am going to profit by the fact that he has many

friends and moves in the best society."

"What the devil are you talking about?" asked the Professor.

"The Symes are first mentioned in the fourteenth century," said Syme;

"but there is a tradition that one of them rode behind Bruce at

Bannockburn. Since 1350 the tree is quite clear."

"He's gone off his head," said the little Doctor, staring.

"Our bearings," continued Syme calmly, "are argent a chevron gules

charged with three cross crosslets of the field.' The motto varies."

The Professor seized Syme roughly by the waistcoat.

"We are just inshore," he said. "Are you seasick or joking in the wrong

place?"

"My remarks are almost painfully practical," answered Syme, in an

unhurried manner. "The house of St. Eustache also is very ancient. The

Marquis cannot deny that he is a gentleman. He cannot deny that I am a

gentleman. And in order to put the matter of my social position quite

beyond a doubt, I propose at the earliest opportunity to knock his hat

off. But here we are in the harbour."

They went on shore under the strong sun in a sort of daze. Syme, who

had now taken the lead as Bull had taken it in London, led them along a

kind of marine parade until he came to some caf�s, embowered in a bulk

of greenery and overlooking the sea. As he went before them his step

was slightly swaggering, and he swung his stick like a sword. He was

making apparently for the extreme end of the line of caf�s, but he

stopped abruptly. With a sharp gesture he motioned them to silence, but

he pointed with one gloved finger to a caf� table under a bank of

flowering foliage at which sat the Marquis de St. Eustache, his teeth

shining in his thick, black beard, and his bold, brown face shadowed by

a light yellow straw hat and outlined against the violet sea.

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CHAPTER X

THE DUEL

SYME sat down at a caf� table with his companions, his blue eyes

sparkling like the bright sea below, and ordered a bottle of Saumur

with a pleased impatience. He was for some reason in a condition of

curious hilarity. His spirits were already unnaturally high; they rose

as the Saumur sank, and in half an hour his talk was a torrent of

nonsense. He professed to be making out a plan of the conversation

which was going to ensue between himself and the deadly Marquis. He

jotted it down wildly with a pencil. It was arranged like a printed

catechism, with questions and answers, and was delivered with an

extraordinary rapidity of utterance.

"I shall approach. Before taking off his hat, I shall take off my own.

I shall say, The Marquis de Saint Eustache, I believe.' He will say, '

The celebrated Mr. Syme, I presume.' He will say in the most exquisite

French, How are you?' I shall reply in the most exquisite Cockney, Oh,

just the Syme--' "

"Oh, shut it," said the man in spectacles. "Pull yourself together, and

chuck away that bit of paper. What are you really going to do?"

"But it was a lovely catechism," said Syme pathetically. "Do let me

read it you. It has only forty?three questions and answers, and some of

the Marquis's answers are wonderfully witty. I like to be just to my

enemy."

"But what's the good of it all?" asked Dr. Bull in exasperation.

"It leads up to my challenge, don't you see," said Syme, beaming. "When

the Marquis has given the thirty?ninth reply, which runs--"

"Has it by any chance occurred to you," asked the Professor, with a

ponderous simplicity, "that the Marquis may not say all the forty?three

things you have put down for him? In that case, I understand, your own

epigrams may appear somewhat more forced."

Syme struck the table with a radiant face.

"Why, how true that is," he said, "and I never thought of it. Sir, you

have an intellect beyond the common. You will make a name."

"Oh, you're as drunk as an owl!" said the Doctor.

"It only remains," continued Syme quite unperturbed, "to adopt some

other method of breaking the ice (if I may so express it) between

myself and the man I wish to kill. And since the course of a dialogue

cannot be predicted by one of its parties alone (as you have pointed

out with such recondite acumen), the only thing to be done, I suppose,

is for the one party, as far as possible, to do all the dialogue by

himself. And so I will, by George!" And he stood up suddenly, his

yellow hair blowing in the slight sea breeze.

A band was playing in a caf� chantant hidden somewhere among the trees,

and a woman had just stopped singing. On Syme's heated head the bray of

the brass band seemed like the jar and jingle of that barrel?organ in

Leicester Square, to the tune of which he had once stood up to die. He

looked across to the little table where the Marquis sat. The man had

two companions now, solemn Frenchmen in frock?coats and silk hats, one

of them with the red rosette of the Legion of Honour, evidently people

of a solid social position. Besides these black, cylindrical costumes,

the Marquis, in his loose straw hat and light spring clothes, looked

Bohemian and even barbaric; but he looked the Marquis. Indeed, one

might say that he looked the king, with his animal elegance, his

scornful eyes, and his proud head lifted against the purple sea. But he

was no Christian king, at any rate; he was, rather, some swarthy

despot, half Greek, half Asiatic, who in the days when slavery seemed

natural looked down on the Mediterranean, on his galley and his

groaning slaves. Just so, Syme thought, would the brown?gold face of

such a tyrant have shown against the dark green olives and the burning

blue.

"Are you going to address the meeting?" asked the Professor peevishly,

seeing that Syme still stood up without moving.

Syme drained his last glass of sparkling wine.

"I am," he said, pointing across to the Marquis and his companions,

"that meeting. That meeting displeases me. I am going to pull that

meeting's great ugly, mahogany?coloured nose."

He stepped across swiftly, if not quite steadily. The Marquis, seeing

him, arched his black Assyrian eyebrows in surprise, but smiled

politely.

"You are Mr. Syme, I think," he said.

Syme bowed.

"And you are the Marquis de Saint Eustache," he said gracefully.

"Permit me to pull your nose."

He leant over to do so, but the Marquis started backwards, upsetting

his chair, and the two men in top hats held Syme back by the shoulders.

"This man has insulted me!" said Syme, with gestures of explanation.

"Insulted you?" cried the gentleman with the red rosette, "when?"

"Oh, just now," said Syme recklessly. "He insulted my mother."

"Insulted your mother!" exclaimed the gentleman incredulously.

"Well, anyhow," said Syme, conceding a point, "my aunt."

"But how can the Marquis have insulted your aunt just now?" said the

second gentleman with some legitimate wonder. "He has been sitting here

all the time."

"Ah, it was what he said!" said Syme darkly.

"I said nothing at all," said the Marquis, "except something about the

band. I only said that I liked Wagner played well."

"It was an allusion to my family," said Syme firmly. "My aunt played

Wagner badly. It was a painful subject. We are always being insulted

about it."

"This seems most extraordinary," said the gentleman who was decor�,

looking doubtfully at the Marquis.

"Oh, I assure you," said Syme earnestly, "the whole of your

conversation was simply packed with sinister allusions to my aunt's

weaknesses."

"This is nonsense!" said the second gentleman. "I for one have said

nothing for half an hour except that I liked the singing of that girl

with black hair."

"Well, there you are again!" said Syme indignantly. "My aunt's was

red."

"It seems to me," said the other, "that you are simply seeking a

pretext to insult the Marquis."

"By George!" said Syme, facing round and looking at him, "what a clever

chap you are!"

The Marquis started up with eyes flaming like a tiger's.

"Seeking a quarrel with me!" he cried. "Seeking a fight with me! By

God! there was never a man who had to seek long. These gentlemen will

perhaps act for me. There are still four hours of daylight. Let us

fight this evening."

Syme bowed with a quite beautiful graciousness.

"Marquis," he said, "your action is worthy of your fame and blood.

Permit me to consult for a moment with the gentlemen in whose hands I

shall place myself."

In three long strides he rejoined his companions, and they, who had

seen his champagne?inspired attack and listened to his idiotic

explanations, were quite startled at the look of him. For now that he

came back to them he was quite sober, a little pale, and he spoke in a

low voice of passionate practicality.

"I have done it," he said hoarsely. "I have fixed a fight on the beast.

But look here, and listen carefully. There is no time for talk. You are

my seconds, and everything must come from you. Now you must insist, and

insist absolutely, on the duel coming off after seven to?morrow, so as

to give me the chance of preventing him from catching the 7.45 for

Paris. If he misses that he misses his crime. He can't refuse to meet

you on such a small point of time and place. But this is what he will

do. He will choose a field somewhere near a wayside station, where he

can pick up the train. He is a very good swordsman, and he will trust

to killing me in time to catch it. But I can fence well too, and I

think I can keep him in play, at any rate, until the train is lost.

Then perhaps he may kill me to console his feelings. You understand?

Very well then, let me introduce you to some charming friends of mine,"

and leading them quickly across the parade, he presented them to the

Marquis's seconds by two very aristocratic names of which they had not

previously heard.

Syme was subject to spasms of singular common sense, not otherwise a

part of his character. They were (as he said of his impulse about the

spectacles) poetic intuitions, and they sometimes rose to the

exaltation of prophecy.

He had correctly calculated in this case the policy of his opponent.

When the Marquis was informed by his seconds that Syme could only fight

in the morning, he must fully have realised that an obstacle had

suddenly arisen between him and his bomb?throwing business in the

capital. Naturally he could not explain this objection to his friends,

so he chose the course which Syme had predicted. He induced his seconds

to settle on a small meadow not far from the railway, and he trusted to

the fatality of the first engagement.

When he came down very coolly to the field of honour, no one could have

guessed that he had any anxiety about a journey; his hands were in his

pockets, his straw hat on the back of his head, his handsome face

brazen in the sun. But it might have struck a stranger as odd that

there appeared in his train, not only his seconds carrying the

sword?case, but two of his servants carrying a portmanteau and a

luncheon basket.

Early as was the hour, the sun soaked everything in warmth, and Syme

was vaguely surprised to see so many spring flowers burning gold and

silver in the tall grass in which the whole company stood almost

knee-deep.

With the exception of the Marquis, all the men were in sombre and

solemn morning?dress, with hats like black chimney?pots; the little

Doctor especially, with the addition of his black spectacles, looked

like an undertaker in a farce. Syme could not help feeling a comic

contrast between this funereal church parade of apparel and the rich

and glistening meadow, growing wild flowers everywhere. But, indeed,

this comic contrast between the yellow blossoms and the black hats was

but a symbol of the tragic contrast between the yellow blossoms and the

black business. On his right was a little wood; far away to his left

lay the long curve of the railway line, which he was, so to speak,

guarding from the Marquis, whose goal and escape it was. In front of

him, behind the black group of his opponents, he could see, like a

tinted cloud, a small almond bush in flower against the faint line of

the sea.

The member of the Legion of Honour, whose name it seemed was Colonel

Ducroix, approached the Professor and Dr. Bull with great politeness,

and suggested that the play should terminate with the first

considerable hurt.

Dr. Bull, however, having been carefully coached by Syme upon this

point of policy, insisted, with great dignity and in very bad French,

that it should continue until one of the combatants was disabled. Syme

had made up his mind that he could avoid disabling the Marquis and

prevent the Marquis from disabling him for at least twenty minutes. In

twenty minutes the Paris train would have gone by.

"To a man of the well?known skill and valour of Monsieur de St.

Eustache," said the Professor solemnly, "it must be a matter of

indifference which method is adopted, and our principal has strong

reasons for demanding the longer encounter, reasons the delicacy of

which prevent me from being explicit, but for the just and honourable

nature of which I can--"

"Peste!" broke from the Marquis behind, whose face had suddenly

darkened, "let us stop talking and begin," and he slashed off the head

of a tall flower with his stick.

Syme understood his rude impatience and instinctively looked over his

shoulder to see whether the train was coming in sight. But there was no

smoke on the horizon.

Colonel Ducroix knelt down and unlocked the case, taking out a pair of

twin swords, which took the sunlight and turned to two streaks of white

fire. He offered one to the Marquis, who snatched it without ceremony,

and another to Syme, who took it, bent it, and poised it with as much

delay as was consistent with dignity.

Then the Colonel took out another pair of blades, and taking one

himself and giving another to Dr. Bull, proceeded to place the men.

Both combatants had thrown off their coats and waistcoats, and stood

sword in hand. The seconds stood on each side of the line of fight with

drawn swords also, but still sombre in their dark frock?coats and hats.

The principals saluted. The Colonel said quietly, "Engage!" and the two

blades touched and tingled.

When the jar of the joined iron ran up Syme's arm, all the fantastic

fears that have been the subject of this story fell from him like

dreams from a man waking up in bed. He remembered them clearly and in

order as mere delusions of the nerves--how the fear of the Professor

had been the fear of the tyrannic accidents of nightmare, and how the

fear of the Doctor had been the fear of the airless vacuum of science.

The first was the old fear that any miracle might happen, the second

the more hopeless modern fear that no miracle can ever happen. But he

saw that these fears were fancies, for he found himself in the presence

of the great fact of the fear of death, with its coarse and pitiless

common sense. He felt like a man who had dreamed all night of falling

over precipices, and had woke up on the morning when he was to be

hanged. For as soon as he had seen the sunlight run down the channel of

his foe's foreshortened blade, and as soon as he had felt the two

tongues of steel touch, vibrating like two living things, he knew that

his enemy was a terrible fighter, and that probably his last hour had

come.

He felt a strange and vivid value in all the earth around him, in the

grass under his feet; he felt the love of life in all living things. He

could almost fancy that he heard the grass growing; he could almost

fancy that even as he stood fresh flowers were springing up and

breaking into blossom in the meadow--flowers blood red and burning gold

and blue, fulfilling the whole pageant of the spring. And whenever his

eyes strayed for a flash from the calm, staring, hypnotic eyes of the

Marquis, they saw the little tuft of almond tree against the sky?line.

He had the feeling that if by some miracle he escaped he would be ready

to sit for ever before that almond tree, desiring nothing else in the

world.

But while earth and sky and everything had the living beauty of a thing

lost, the other half of his head was as clear as glass, and he was

parrying his enemy's point with a kind of clockwork skill of which he

had hardly supposed himself capable. Once his enemy's point ran along

his wrist, leaving a slight streak of blood, but it either was not

noticed or was tacitly ignored. Every now and then he riposted, and

once or twice he could almost fancy that he felt his point go home, but

as there was no blood on blade or shirt he supposed he was mistaken.

Then came an interruption and a change.

At the risk of losing all, the Marquis, interrupting his quiet stare,

flashed one glance over his shoulder at the line of railway on his

right. Then he turned on Syme a face transfigured to that of a fiend,

and began to fight as if with twenty weapons. The attack came so fast

and furious, that the one shining sword seemed a shower of shining

arrows. Syme had no chance to look at the railway; but also he had no

need. He could guess the reason of the Marquis's sudden madness of

battle --the Paris train was in sight.

But the Marquis's morbid energy over?reached itself. Twice Syme,

parrying, knocked his opponent's point far out of the fighting circle;

and the third time his riposte was so rapid, that there was no doubt

about the hit this time. Syme's sword actually bent under the weight of

the Marquis's body, which it had pierced.

Syme was as certain that he had stuck his blade into his enemy as a

gardener that he has stuck his spade into the ground. Yet the Marquis

sprang back from the stroke without a stagger, and Syme stood staring

at his own sword?point like an idiot. There was no blood on it at all.

There was an instant of rigid silence, and then Syme in his turn fell

furiously on the other, filled with a flaming curiosity. The Marquis

was probably, in a general sense, a better fencer than he, as he had

surmised at the beginning, but at the moment the Marquis seemed

distraught and at a disadvantage. He fought wildly and even weakly, and

he constantly looked away at the railway line, almost as if he feared

the train more than the pointed steel. Syme, on the other hand, fought

fiercely but still carefully, in an intellectual fury, eager to solve

the riddle of his own bloodless sword. For this purpose, he aimed less

at the Marquis's body, and more at his throat and head. A minute and a

half afterwards he felt his point enter the man's neck below the jaw.

It came out clean. Half mad, he thrust again, and made what should have

been a bloody scar on the Marquis's cheek. But there was no scar.

For one moment the heaven of Syme again grew black with supernatural

terrors. Surely the man had a charmed life. But this new spiritual

dread was a more awful thing than had been the mere spiritual

topsy-turvydom symbolised by the paralytic who pursued him. The

Professor was only a goblin; this man was a devil--perhaps he was the

Devil! Anyhow, this was certain, that three times had a human sword

been driven into him and made no mark. When Syme had that thought he

drew himself up, and all that was good in him sang high up in the air

as a high wind sings in the trees. He thought of all the human things

in his story--of the Chinese lanterns in Saffron Park, of the girl's

red hair in the garden, of the honest, beer?swilling sailors down by

the dock, of his loyal companions standing by. Perhaps he had been

chosen as a champion of all these fresh and kindly things to cross

swords with the enemy of all creation. "After all," he said to himself,

"I am more than a devil; I am a man. I can do the one thing which Satan

himself cannot do--I can die," and as the word went through his head,

he heard a faint and far?off hoot, which would soon be the roar of the

Paris train.

He fell to fighting again with a supernatural levity, like a Mohammedan

panting for Paradise. As the train came nearer and nearer he fancied he

could see people putting up the floral arches in Paris; he joined in

the growing noise and the glory of the great Republic whose gate he was

guarding against Hell. His thoughts rose higher and higher with the

rising roar of the train, which ended, as if proudly, in a long and

piercing whistle. The train stopped.

Suddenly, to the astonishment of everyone the Marquis sprang back quite

out of sword reach and threw down his sword. The leap was wonderful,

and not the less wonderful because Syme had plunged his sword a moment

before into the man's thigh.

"Stop!" said the Marquis in a voice that compelled a momentary

obedience. "I want to say something."

"What is the matter?" asked Colonel Ducroix, staring. "Has there been

foul play?"

"There has been foul play somewhere," said Dr. Bull, who was a little

pale. "Our principal has wounded the Marquis four times at least, and

he is none the worse ."

The Marquis put up his hand with a curious air of ghastly patience.

"Please let me speak," he said. "It is rather important. Mr. Syme," he

continued, turning to his opponent, "we are fighting to?day, if I

remember right, because you expressed a wish (which I thought

irrational) to pull my nose. Would you oblige me by pulling my nose now

as quickly as possible? I have to catch a train."

"I protest that this is most irregular," said Dr. Bull indignantly.

"It is certainly somewhat opposed to precedent," said Colonel Ducroix,

looking wistfully at his principal. "There is, I think, one case on

record (Captain Bellegarde and the Baron Zumpt) in which the weapons

were changed in the middle of the encounter at the request of one of

the combatants. But one can hardly call one's nose a weapon."

"Will you or will you not pull my nose?" said the Marquis in

exasperation. "Come, come, Mr. Syme! You wanted to do it, do it! You

can have no conception of how important it is to me. Don't be so

selfish! Pull my nose at once, when I ask you!" and he bent slightly

forward with a fascinating smile. The Paris train, panting and

groaning, had grated into a little station behind the neighbouring

hill.

Syme had the feeling he had more than once had in these adventures--the

sense that a horrible and sublime wave lifted to heaven was just

toppling over. Walking in a world he half understood, he took two paces

forward and seized the Roman nose of this remarkable nobleman. He

pulled it hard, and it came off in his hand.

He stood for some seconds with a foolish solemnity, with the pasteboard

proboscis still between his fingers, looking at it, while the sun and

the clouds and the wooded hills looked down upon this imbecile scene.

The Marquis broke the silence in a loud and cheerful voice.

"If anyone has any use for my left eyebrow," he said, "he can have it.

Colonel Ducroix, do accept my left eyebrow! It's the kind of thing that

might come in useful any day," and he gravely tore off one of his

swarthy Assyrian brows, bringing about half his brown forehead with it,

and politely offered it to the Colonel, who stood crimson and

speechless with rage.

"If I had known," he spluttered, "that I was acting for a poltroon who

pads himself to fight--"

"Oh, I know, I know!" said the Marquis, recklessly throwing various

parts of himself right and left about the field. "You are making a

mistake; but it can't be explained just now. I tell you the train has

come into the station!"

"Yes," said Dr. Bull fiercely, "and the train shall go out of the

station. It shall go out without you. We know well enough for what

devil's work--"

The mysterious Marquis lifted his hands with a desperate gesture. He

was a strange scarecrow standing there in the sun with half his old

face peeled off, and half another face glaring and grinning from

underneath.

"Will you drive me mad?" he cried. "The train--"

"You shall not go by the train," said Syme firmly, and grasped his

sword.

The wild figure turned towards Syme, and seemed to be gathering itself

for a sublime effort before speaking.

"You great fat, blasted, blear?eyed, blundering, thundering, brainless,

Godforsaken, doddering, damned fool!" he said without taking breath.

"You great silly, pink?faced, towheaded turnip! You--"

"You shall not go by this train," repeated Syme.

"And why the infernal blazes," roared the other, "should I want to go

by the train?"

"We know all," said the Professor sternly. "You are going to Paris to

throw a bomb!"

"Going to Jericho to throw a Jabberwock!" cried the other, tearing his

hair, which came off easily.

"Have you all got softening of the brain, that you don't realise what I

am? Did you really think I wanted to catch that train? Twenty Paris

trains might go by for me. Damn Paris trains!"

"Then what did you care about?" began the Professor.

"What did I care about? I didn't care about catching the train; I cared

about whether the train caught me, and now, by God! it has caught me."

"I regret to inform you," said Syme with restraint, "that your remarks

convey no impression to my mind. Perhaps if you were to remove the

remains of your original forehead and some portion of what was once

your chin, your meaning would become clearer. Mental lucidity fulfils

itself in many ways. What do you mean by saying that the train has

caught you? It may be my literary fancy, but somehow I feel that it

ought to mean something."

"It means everything," said the other, "and the end of everything.

Sunday has us now in the hollow of his hand."

"Us!" repeated the Professor, as if stupefied. "What do you mean by

us'?"

"The police, of course!" said the Marquis, and tore off his scalp and

half his face.

The head which emerged was the blonde, well brushed, smooth?haired head

which is common in the English constabulary, but the face was terribly

pale.

"I am Inspector Ratcliffe," he said, with a sort of haste that verged

on harshness. "My name is pretty well known to the police, and I can

see well enough that you belong to them. But if there is any doubt

about my position, I have a card " and he began to pull a blue card

from his pocket.

The Professor gave a tired gesture.

"Oh, don't show it us," he said wearily; "we've got enough of them to

equip a paper?chase."

The little man named Bull, had, like many men who seem to be of a mere

vivacious vulgarity, sudden movements of good taste. Here he certainly

saved the situation. In the midst of this staggering transformation

scene he stepped forward with all the gravity and responsibility of a

second, and addressed the two seconds of the Marquis.

"Gentlemen," he said, "we all owe you a serious apology; but I assure

you that you have not been made the victims of such a low joke as you

imagine, or indeed of anything undignified in a man of honour. You have

not wasted your time; you have helped to save the world. We are not

buffoons, but very desperate men at war with a vast conspiracy. A

secret society of anarchists is hunting us like hares; not such

unfortunate madmen as may here or there throw a bomb through starvation

or German philosophy, but a rich and powerful and fanatical church, a

church of eastern pessimism, which holds it holy to destroy mankind

like vermin. How hard they hunt us you can gather from the fact that we

are driven to such disguises as those for which I apologise, and to

such pranks as this one by which you suffer. "

The younger second of the Marquis, a short man with a black moustache,

bowed politely, and said--

"Of course, I accept the apology; but you will in your turn forgive me

if I decline to follow you further into your difficulties, and permit

myself to say good morning! The sight of an acquaintance and

distinguished fellow?townsman coming to pieces in the open air is

unusual, and, upon the whole, sufficient for one day. Colonel Ducroix,

I would in no way influence your actions, but if you feel with me that

our present society is a little abnormal, I am now going to walk back

to the town."

Colonel Ducroix moved mechanically, but then tugged abruptly at his

white moustache and broke out--

"No, by George! I won't. If these gentlemen are really in a mess with a

lot of low wreckers like that, I'll see them through it. I have fought

for France, and it is hard if I can't fight for civilization."

Dr. Bull took off his hat and waved it, cheering as at a public

meeting.

"Don't make too much noise," said Inspector Ratcliffe, "Sunday may hear

you."

"Sunday!" cried Bull, and dropped his hat.

"Yes," retorted Ratcliffe, "he may be with them."

"With whom?" asked Syme.

"With the people out of that train," said the other.

"What you say seems utterly wild," began Syme. "Why, as a matter of

fact--But, my God," he cried out suddenly, like a man who sees an

explosion a long way off, "by God! if this is true the whole bally lot

of us on the Anarchist Council were against anarchy! Every born man was

a detective except the President and his personal secretary. What can

it mean?"

"Mean!" said the new policeman with incredible violence. "It means that

we are struck dead! Don't you know Sunday? Don't you know that his

jokes are always so big and simple that one has never thought of them?

Can you think of anything more like Sunday than this, that he should

put all his powerful enemies on the Supreme Council, and then take care

that it was not supreme? I tell you he has bought every trust, he has

captured every cable, he has control of every railway line--especially

of that railway line!" and he pointed a shaking finger towards the

small wayside station. "The whole movement was controlled by him; half

the world was ready to rise for him. But there were just five people,

perhaps, who would have resisted him . . . and the old devil put them

on the Supreme Council, to waste their time in watching each other.

Idiots that we are, he planned the whole of our idiocies! Sunday knew

that the Professor would chase Syme through London, and that Syme would

fight me in France. And he was combining great masses of capital, and

seizing great lines of telegraphy, while we five idiots were running

after each other like a lot of confounded babies playing blind man's

buff."

"Well?" asked Syme with a sort of steadiness.

"Well," replied the other with sudden serenity, "he has found us

playing blind man's buff to?day in a field of great rustic beauty and

extreme solitude. He has probably captured the world; it only remains

to him to capture this field and all the fools in it. And since you

really want to know what was my objection to the arrival of that train,

I will tell you. My objection was that Sunday or his Secretary has just

this moment got out of it."

Syme uttered an involuntary cry, and they all turned their eyes towards

the far?off station. It was quite true that a considerable bulk of

people seemed to be moving in their direction. But they were too

distant to be distinguished in any way.

"It was a habit of the late Marquis de St. Eustache," said the new

policeman, producing a leather case, "always to carry a pair of opera

glasses. Either the President or the Secretary is coming after us with

that mob. They have caught us in a nice quiet place where we are under

no temptations to break our oaths by calling the police. Dr. Bull, I

have a suspicion that you will see better through these than through

your own highly decorative spectacles."

He handed the field?glasses to the Doctor, who immediately took off his

spectacles and put the apparatus to his eyes.

"It cannot be as bad as you say," said the Professor, somewhat shaken.

"There are a good number of them certainly, but they may easily be

ordinary tourists."

"Do ordinary tourists," asked Bull, with the fieldglasses to his eyes,

"wear black masks half?way down the face?"

Syme almost tore the glasses out of his hand, and looked through them.

Most men in the advancing mob really looked ordinary enough; but it was

quite true that two or three of the leaders in front wore black

half?masks almost down to their mouths. This disguise is very complete,

especially at such a distance, and Syme found it impossible to conclude

anything from the clean-shaven jaws and chins of the men talking in the

front. But presently as they talked they all smiled and one of them

smiled on one side.

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CHAPTER XI

THE CRIMINALS CHASE THE POLICE

SYME put the field?glasses from his eyes with an almost ghastly relief.

"The President is not with them, anyhow," he said, and wiped his

forehead.

"But surely they are right away on the horizon," said the bewildered

Colonel, blinking and but half recovered from Bull's hasty though

polite explanation. "Could you possibly know your President among all

those people?"

"Could I know a white elephant among all those people!" answered Syme

somewhat irritably. "As you very truly say, they are on the horizon;

but if he were walking with them . . . by God! I believe this ground

would shake."

After an instant's pause the new man called Ratcliffe said with gloomy

decision--

"Of course the President isn't with them. I wish to Gemini he were.

Much more likely the President is riding in triumph through Paris, or

sitting on the ruins of St. Paul's Cathedral."

"This is absurd!" said Syme. "Something may have happened in our

absence; but he cannot have carried the world with a rush like that. It

is quite true," he added, frowning dubiously at the distant fields that

lay towards the little station, "it is certainly true that there seems

to be a crowd coming this way; but they are not all the army that you

make out."

"Oh, they," said the new detective contemptuously; "no they are not a

very valuable force. But let me tell you frankly that they are

precisely calculated to our value--we are not much, my boy, in Sunday's

universe. He has got hold of all the cables and telegraphs himself. But

to kill the Supreme Council he regards as a trivial matter, like a post

card; it may be left to his private secretary," and he spat on the

grass.

Then he turned to the others and said somewhat austerely--

"There is a great deal to be said for death; but if anyone has any

preference for the other alternative, I strongly advise him to walk

after me."

With these words, he turned his broad back and strode with silent

energy towards the wood. The others gave one glance over their

shoulders, and saw that the dark cloud of men had detached itself from

the station and was moving with a mysterious discipline across the

plain. They saw already, even with the naked eye, black blots on the

foremost faces, which marked the masks they wore. They turned and

followed their leader, who had already struck the wood, and disappeared

among the twinkling trees.

The sun on the grass was dry and hot. So in plunging into the wood they

had a cool shock of shadow, as of divers who plunge into a dim pool.

The inside of the wood was full of shattered sunlight and shaken

shadows. They made a sort of shuddering veil, almost recalling the

dizziness of a cinematograph. Even the solid figures walking with him

Syme could hardly see for the patterns of sun and shade that danced

upon them. Now a man's head was lit as with a light of Rembrandt,

leaving all else obliterated; now again he had strong and staring white

hands with the face of a negro. The ex?Marquis had pulled the old straw

hat over his eyes, and the black shade of the brim cut his face so

squarely in two that it seemed to be wearing one of the black

half-masks of their pursuers. The fancy tinted Syme's overwhelming

sense of wonder. Was he wearing a mask? Was anyone wearing a mask? Was

anyone anything? This wood of witchery, in which men's faces turned

black and white by turns, in which their figures first swelled into

sunlight and then faded into formless night, this mere chaos of

chiaroscuro (after the clear daylight outside), seemed to Syme a

perfect symbol of the world in which he had been moving for three days,

this world where men took off their beards and their spectacles and

their noses, and turned into other people. That tragic self?confidence

which he had felt when he believed that the Marquis was a devil had

strangely disappeared now that he knew that the Marquis was a friend.

He felt almost inclined to ask after all these bewilderments what was a

friend and what an enemy. Was there anything that was apart from what

it seemed? The Marquis had taken off his nose and turned out to be a

detective. Might he not just as well take off his head and turn out to

be a hobgoblin? Was not everything, after all, like this bewildering

woodland, this dance of dark and light? Everything only a glimpse, the

glimpse always unforeseen, and always forgotten. For Gabriel Syme had

found in the heart of that sun-splashed wood what many modern painters

had found there. He had found the thing which the modern people call

Impressionism, which is another name for that final scepticism which

can find no floor to the universe.

As a man in an evil dream strains himself to scream and wake, Syme

strove with a sudden effort to fling off this last and worst of his

fancies. With two impatient strides he overtook the man in the

Marquis's straw hat, the man whom he had come to address as Ratcliffe.

In a voice exaggeratively loud and cheerful, he broke the bottomless

silence and made conversation.

"May I ask," he said, "where on earth we are all going to? "

So genuine had been the doubts of his soul, that he was quite glad to

hear his companion speak in an easy, human voice.

"We must get down through the town of Lancy to the sea," he said. "I

think that part of the country is least likely to be with them."

"What can you mean by all this?" cried Syme. "They can't be running the

real world in that way. Surely not many working men are anarchists, and

surely if they were, mere mobs could not beat modern armies and

police."

"Mere mobs!" repeated his new friend with a snort of scorn. "So you

talk about mobs and the working classes as if they were the question.

You've got that eternal idiotic idea that if anarchy came it would come

from the poor. Why should it? The poor have been rebels, but they have

never been anarchists; they have more interest than anyone else in

there being some decent government. The poor man really has a stake in

the country. The rich man hasn't; he can go away to New Guinea in a

yacht. The poor have sometimes objected to being governed badly; the

rich have always objected to being governed at all. Aristocrats were

always anarchists, as you can see from the barons' wars."

"As a lecture on English history for the little ones," said Syme, "this

is all very nice; but I have not yet grasped its application."

"Its application is," said his informant, "that most of old Sunday's

right?hand men are South African and American millionaires. That is why

he has got hold of all the communications; and that is why the last

four champions of the anti?anarchist police force are running through a

wood like rabbits."

"Millionaires I can understand," said Syme thoughtfully, "they are

nearly all mad. But getting hold of a few wicked old gentlemen with

hobbies is one thing; getting hold of great Christian nations is

another. I would bet the nose off my face (forgive the allusion) that

Sunday would stand perfectly helpless before the task of converting any

ordinary healthy person anywhere."

"Well," said the other, "it rather depends what sort of person you

mean."

"Well, for instance," said Syme, "he could never convert that person,"

and he pointed straight in front of him.

They had come to an open space of sunlight, which seemed to express to

Syme the final return of his own good sense; and in the middle of this

forest clearing was a figure that might well stand for that common

sense in an almost awful actuality. Burnt by the sun and stained with

perspiration, and grave with the bottomless gravity of small necessary

toils, a heavy French peasant was cutting wood with a hatchet. His cart

stood a few yards off, already half full of timber; and the horse that

cropped the grass was, like his master, valorous but not desperate;

like his master, he was even prosperous, but yet was almost sad. The

man was a Norman, taller than the average of the French and very

angular; and his swarthy figure stood dark against a square of

sunlight, almost like some allegoric figure of labour frescoed on a

ground of gold.

"Mr. Syme is saying," called out Ratcliffe to the French Colonel, "that

this man, at least, will never be an anarchist."

"Mr. Syme is right enough there," answered Colonel Ducroix, laughing,

"if only for the reason that he has plenty of property to defend. But I

forgot that in your country you are not used to peasants being

wealthy."

"He looks poor," said Dr. Bull doubtfully.

"Quite so," said the Colonel; "that is why he is rich."

"I have an idea," called out Dr. Bull suddenly; "how much would he take

to give us a lift in his cart? Those dogs are all on foot, and we could

soon leave them behind."

"Oh, give him anything! " said Syme eagerly. "I have piles of money on

me."

"That will never do," said the Colonel; "he will never have any respect

for you unless you drive a bargain."

"Oh, if he haggles!" began Bull impatiently.

"Erie haggles because he is a free man," said the other. "You do not

understand; he would not see the meaning of generosity. He is not being

tipped."

And even while they seemed to hear the heavy feet of their strange

pursuers behind them, they had to stand and stamp while the French

Colonel talked to the French wood?cutter with all the leisurely

badinage and bickering of market?day. At the end of the four minutes,

however, they saw that the Colonel was right, for the wood?cutter

entered into their plans, not with the vague servility of a tout

too?well paid, but with the seriousness of a solicitor who had been

paid the proper fee. He told them that the best thing they could do was

to make their way down to the little inn on the hills above Lancy,

where the innkeeper, an old soldier who had become d�vot in his latter

years, would be certain to sympathise with them, and even to take risks

in their support. The whole company, therefore, piled themselves on top

of the stacks of wood, and went rocking in the rude cart down the other

and steeper side of the woodland. Heavy and ramshackle as was the

vehicle, it was driven quickly enough, and they soon had the

exhilarating impression of distancing altogether those, whoever they

were, who were hunting them. For, after all, the riddle as to where the

anarchists had got all these followers was still unsolved. One man's

presence had sufficed for them; they had fled at the first sight of the

deformed smile of the Secretary. Syme every now and then looked back

over his shoulder at the army on their track.

As the wood grew first thinner and then smaller with distance, he could

see the sunlit slopes beyond it and above it; and across these was

still moving the square black mob like one monstrous beetle. In the

very strong sunlight and with his own very strong eyes, which were

almost telescopic, Syme could see this mass of men quite plainly. He

could see them as separate human figures; but he was increasingly

surprised by the way in which they moved as one man. They seemed to be

dressed in dark clothes and plain hats, like any common crowd out of

the streets; but they did not spread and sprawl and trail by various

lines to the attack, as would be natural in an ordinary mob. They moved

with a sort of dreadful and wicked woodenness, like a staring army of

automatons.

Syme pointed this out to Ratcliffe.

"Yes," replied the policeman, "that's discipline. That's Sunday. He is

perhaps five hundred miles off, but the fear of him is on all of them,

like the finger of God. Yes, they are walking regularly; and you bet

your boots that they are talking regularly, yes, and thinking

regularly. But the one important thing for us is that they are

disappearing regularly."

Syme nodded. It was true that the black patch of the pursuing men was

growing smaller and smaller as the peasant belaboured his horse.

The level of the sunlit landscape, though flat as a whole, fell away on

the farther side of the wood in billows of heavy slope towards the sea,

in a way not unlike the lower slopes of the Sussex downs. The only

difference was that in Sussex the road would have been broken and

angular like a little brook, but here the white French road fell sheer

in front of them like a waterfall. Down this direct descent the cart

clattered at a considerable angle, and in a few minutes, the road

growing yet steeper, they saw below them the little harbour of Lancy

and a great blue arc of the sea. The travelling cloud of their enemies

had wholly disappeared from the horizon.

The horse and cart took a sharp turn round a clump of elms, and the

horse's nose nearly struck the face of an old gentleman who was sitting

on the benches outside the little caf� of "Le Soleil d'Or." The peasant

grunted an apology, and got down from his seat. The others also

descended one by one, and spoke to the old gentleman with fragmentary

phrases of courtesy, for it was quite evident from his expansive manner

that he was the owner of the little tavern.

He was a white?haired, apple?faced old boy, with sleepy eyes and a grey

moustache; stout, sedentary, and very innocent, of a type that may

often be found in France, but is still commoner in Catholic Germany.

Everything about him, his pipe, his pot of beer, his flowers, and his

beehive, suggested an ancestral peace; only when his visitors looked up

as they entered the inn-parlour, they saw the sword upon the wall.

The Colonel, who greeted the innkeeper as an old friend, passed rapidly

into the inn?parlour, and sat down ordering some ritual refreshment.

The military decision of his action interested Syme, who sat next to

him, and he took the opportunity when the old innkeeper had gone out of

satisfying his curiosity.

"May I ask you, Colonel," he said in a low voice, "why we have come

here?"

Colonel Ducroix smiled behind his bristly white moustache.

"For two reasons, sir," he said; "and I will give first, not the most

important, but the most utilitarian. We came here because this is the

only place within twenty miles in which we can get horses."

"Horses!" repeated Syme, looking up quickly.

"Yes," replied the other; "if you people are really to distance your

enemies it is horses or nothing for you, unless of course you have

bicycles and motor?cars in your pocket."

"And where do you advise us to make for?" asked Syme doubtfully.

"Beyond question," replied the Colonel, "you had better make all haste

to the police station beyond the town. My friend, whom I seconded under

somewhat deceptive circumstances, seems to me to exaggerate very much

the possibilities of a general rising; but even he would hardly

maintain, I suppose, that you were not safe with the gendarmes."

Syme nodded gravely; then he said abruptly--

"And your other reason for coming here?"

"My other reason for coming here," said Ducroix soberly, "is that it is

just as well to see a good man or two when one is possibly near to

death."

Syme looked up at the wall, and saw a crudely-painted and pathetic

religious picture. Then he said--

"You are right," and then almost immediately afterwards, "Has anyone

seen about the horses?"

"Yes," answered Ducroix, "you may be quite certain that I gave orders

the moment I came in. Those enemies of yours gave no impression of

hurry, but they were really moving wonderfully fast, like a

well?trained army. I had no idea that the anarchists had so much

discipline. You have not a moment to waste."

Almost as he spoke, the old innkeeper with the blue eyes and white hair

came ambling into the room, and announced that six horses were saddled

outside.

By Ducroix's advice the five others equipped themselves with some

portable form of food and wine, and keeping their duelling swords as

the only weapons available, they clattered away down the steep, white

road. The two servants, who had carried the Marquis's luggage when he

was a marquis, were left behind to drink at the caf� by common consent,

and not at all against their own inclination.

By this time the afternoon sun was slanting westward, and by its rays

Syme could see the sturdy figure of the old innkeeper growing smaller

and smaller, but still standing and looking after them quite silently,

the sunshine in his silver hair. Syme had a fixed, superstitious fancy,

left in his mind by the chance phrase of the Colonel, that this was

indeed, perhaps, the last honest stranger whom he should ever see upon

the earth.

He was still looking at this dwindling figure, which stood as a mere

grey blot touched with a white flame against the great green wall of

the steep down behind him. And as he stared over the top of the down

behind the innkeeper, there appeared an army of black?clad and marching

men. They seemed to hang above the good man and his house like a black

cloud of locusts. The horses had been saddled none too soon.

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CHAPTER XII

THE EARTH IN ANARCHY

URGING the horses to a gallop, without respect to the rather rugged

descent of the road, the horsemen soon regained their advantage over

the men on the march, and at last the bulk of the first buildings of

Lancy cut off the sight of their pursuers. Nevertheless, the ride had

been a long one, and by the time they reached the real town the west

was warming with the colour and quality of sunset. The Colonel

suggested that, before making finally for the police station, they

should make the effort, in passing, to attach to themselves one more

individual who might be useful.

"Four out of the five rich men in this town," he said, "are common

swindlers. I suppose the proportion is pretty equal all over the world.

The fifth is a friend of mine, and a very fine fellow; and what is even

more important from our point of view, he owns a motor?car."

"I am afraid," said the Professor in his mirthful way, looking back

along the white road on which the black, crawling patch might appear at

any moment, "I am afraid we have hardly time for afternoon calls."

"Doctor Renard's house is only three minutes off," said the Colonel.

"Our danger," said Dr. Bull, "is not two minutes off."

"Yes," said Syme, "if we ride on fast we must leave them behind, for

they are on foot."

"He has a motor?car," said the Colonel.

"But we may not get it," said Bull.

"Yes, he is quite on your side."

"But he might be out."

"Hold your tongue," said Syme suddenly. "What is that noise?"

For a second they all sat as still as equestrian statues, and for a

second--for two or three or four seconds-- heaven and earth seemed

equally still. Then all their ears, in an agony of attention, heard

along the road that indescribable thrill and throb that means only one

thing--horses!

The Colonel's face had an instantaneous change, as if lightning had

struck it, and yet left it scatheless.

"They have done us," he said, with brief military irony. "Prepare to

receive cavalry!"

"Where can they have got the horses?" asked Syme, as he mechanically

urged his steed to a canter.

The Colonel was silent for a little, then he said in a strained voice--

"I was speaking with strict accuracy when I said that the Soleil d'Or'

was the only place where one can get horses within twenty miles."

"No!" said Syme violently, "I don't believe he'd do it. Not with all

that white hair."

"He may have been forced," said the Colonel gently. "They must be at

least a hundred strong, for which reason we are all going to see my

friend Renard, who has a motor?car."

With these words he swung his horse suddenly round a street corner, and

went down the street with such thundering speed, that the others,

though already well at the gallop, had difficulty in following the

flying tail of his horse.

Dr. Renard inhabited a high and comfortable house at the top of a steep

street, so that when the riders alighted at his door they could once

more see the solid green ridge of the hill, with the white road across

it, standing up above all the roofs of the town. They breathed again to

see that the road as yet was clear, and they rang the bell.

Dr. Renard was a beaming, brown?bearded man, a good example of that

silent but very busy professional class which France has preserved even

more perfectly than England. When the matter was explained to him he

pooh-poohed the panic of the ex?Marquis altogether; he said, with the

solid French scepticism, that there was no conceivable probability of a

general anarchist rising. "Anarchy," he said, shrugging his shoulders,

"it is childishness! "

"Et �a," cried out the Colonel suddenly, pointing over the other's

shoulder, "and that is childishness, isn't it?"

They all looked round, and saw a curve of black cavalry come sweeping

over the top of the hill with all the energy of Attila. Swiftly as they

rode, however, the whole rank still kept well together, and they could

see the black vizards of the first line as level as a line of uniforms.

But although the main black square was the same, though travelling

faster, there was now one sensational difference which they could see

clearly upon the slope of the hill, as if upon a slanted map. The bulk

of the riders were in one block; but one rider flew far ahead of the

column, and with frantic movements of hand and heel urged his horse

faster and faster, so that one might have fancied that he was not the

pursuer but the pursued. But even at that great distance they could see

something so fanatical, so unquestionable in his figure, that they knew

it was the Secretary himself. "I am sorry to cut short a cultured

discussion," said the Colonel, "but can you lend me your motor?car now,

in two minutes?"

"I have a suspicion that you are all mad," said Dr. Renard, smiling

sociably; "but God forbid that madness should in any way interrupt

friendship. Let us go round to the garage."

Dr. Renard was a mild man with monstrous wealth; his rooms were like

the Mus�e de Cluny, and he had three motor?cars. These, however, he

seemed to use very sparingly, having the simple tastes of the French

middle class, and when his impatient friends came to examine them, it

took them some time to assure themselves that one of them even could be

made to work. This with some difficulty they brought round into the

street before the Doctor's house. When they came out of the dim garage

they were startled to find that twilight had already fallen with the

abruptness of night in the tropics. Either they had been longer in the

place than they imagined, or some unusual canopy of cloud had gathered

over the town. They looked down the steep streets, and seemed to see a

slight mist coming up from the sea.

"It is now or never," said Dr. Bull. "I hear horses."

"No," corrected the Professor, "a horse."

And as they listened, it was evident that the noise, rapidly coming

nearer on the rattling stones, was not the noise of the whole cavalcade

but that of the one horseman, who had left it far behind--the insane

Secretary.

Syme's family, like most of those who end in the simple life, had once

owned a motor, and he knew all about them. He had leapt at once into

the chauffeur's seat, and with flushed face was wrenching and tugging

at the disused machinery. He bent his strength upon one handle, and

then said quite quietly--

"I am afraid it's no go."

As he spoke, there swept round the corner a man rigid on his rushing

horse, with the rush and rigidity of an arrow. He had a smile that

thrust out his chin as if it were dislocated. He swept alongside of the

stationary car, into which its company had crowded, and laid his hand

on the front. It was the Secretary, and his mouth went quite straight

in the solemnity of triumph.

Syme was leaning hard upon the steering wheel, and there was no sound

but the rumble of the other pursuers riding into the town. Then there

came quite suddenly a scream of scraping iron, and the car leapt

forward. It plucked the Secretary clean out of his saddle, as a knife

is whipped out of its sheath, trailed him kicking terribly for twenty

yards, and left him flung flat upon the road far in front of his

frightened horse. As the car took the corner of the street with a

splendid curve, they could just see the other anarchists filling the

street and raising their fallen leader.

"I can't understand why it has grown so dark," said the Professor at

last in a low voice.

"Going to be a storm, I think," said Dr. Bull. "I say, it's a pity we

haven't got a light on this car, if only to see by."

"We have," said the Colonel, and from the floor of the car he fished up

a heavy, old?fashioned, carved iron lantern with a light inside it. It

was obviously an antique, and it would seem as if its original use had

been in some way semi?religious, for there was a rude moulding of a

cross upon one of its sides.

"Where on earth did you get that?" asked the Professor.

"I got it where I got the car," answered the Colonel, chuckling, "from

my best friend. While our friend here was fighting with the steering

wheel, I ran up the front steps of the house and spoke to Renard, who

was standing in his own porch, you will remember. I suppose,' I said,

there's no time to get a lamp.' He looked up, blinking amiably at the

beautiful arched ceiling of his own front hall. From this was

suspended, by chains of exquisite ironwork, this lantern, one of the

hundred treasures of his treasure house. By sheer force he tore the

lamp out of his own ceiling, shattering the painted panels, and

bringing down two blue vases with his violence. Then he handed me the

iron lantern, and I put it in the car. Was I not right when I said that

Dr. Renard was worth knowing?"

"You were," said Syme seriously, and hung the heavy lantern over the

front. There was a certain allegory of their whole position in the

contrast between the modern automobile and its strange ecclesiastical

lamp. Hitherto they had passed through the quietest part of the town,

meeting at most one or two pedestrians, who could give them no hint of

the peace or the hostility of the place. Now, however, the windows in

the houses began one by one to be lit up, giving a greater sense of

habitation and humanity. Dr. Bull turned to the new detective who had

led their flight, and permitted himself one of his natural and friendly

smiles.

"These lights make one feel more cheerful."

Inspector Ratcliffe drew his brows together.

"There is only one set of lights that make me more cheerful," he said,

"and they are those lights of the police station which I can see beyond

the town. Please God we may be there in ten minutes."

Then all Bull's boiling good sense and optimism broke suddenly out of

him.

"Oh, this is all raving nonsense!" he cried. "If you really think that

ordinary people in ordinary houses are anarchists, you must be madder

than an anarchist yourself. If we turned and fought these fellows, the

whole town would fight for us."

"No," said the other with an immovable simplicity, "the whole town

would fight for them. We shall see.'

While they were speaking the Professor had leant forward with sudden

excitement.

"What is that noise?" he said.

"Oh, the horses behind us, I suppose," said the Colonel. "I thought we

had got clear of them."

"The horses behind us! No," said the Professor, "it is not horses, and

it is not behind us."

Almost as he spoke, across the end of the street before them two

shining and rattling shapes shot past. They were gone almost in a

flash, but everyone could see that they were motor?cars, and the

Professor stood up with a pale face and swore that they were the other

two motor?cars from Dr. Renard's garage.

"I tell you they were his," he repeated, with wild eyes, "and they were

full of men in masks!"

"Absurd!" said the Colonel angrily. "Dr. Renard would never give them

his cars."

"He may have been forced," said Ratcliffe quietly. "The whole town is

on their side."

"You still believe that," asked the Colonel incredulously.

"You will all believe it soon," said the other with a hopeless calm.

There was a puzzled pause for some little time, and then the Colonel

began again abruptly--

"No, I can't believe it. The thing is nonsense. The plain people of a

peaceable French town--"

He was cut short by a bang and a blaze of light, which seemed close to

his eyes. As the car sped on it left a floating patch of white smoke

behind it, and Syme had heard a shot shriek past his ear.

"My God!" said the Colonel, "someone has shot at us."

"It need not interrupt conversation," said the gloomy Ratcliffe. "Pray

resume your remarks, Colonel. You were talking, I think, about the

plain people of a peaceable French town."

The staring Colonel was long past minding satire. He rolled his eyes

all round the street.

"It is extraordinary," he said, "most extraordinary."

"A fastidious person," said Syme, "might even call it unpleasant.

However, I suppose those lights out in the field beyond this street are

the Gendarmerie. We shall soon get there."

"No," said Inspector Ratcliffe, "we shall never get there."

He had been standing up and looking keenly ahead of him. Now he sat

down and smoothed his sleek hair with a weary gesture.

"What do you mean?" asked Bull sharply.

"I mean that we shall never get there," said the pessimist placidly.

"They have two rows of armed men across the road already; I can see

them from here. The town is in arms, as I said it was.

I can only wallow in the exquisite comfort of my own exactitude."

And Ratcliffe sat down comfortably in the car and lit a cigarette, but

the others rose excitedly and stared down the road. Syme had slowed

down the car as their plans became doubtful, and he brought it finally

to a standstill just at the corner of a side street that ran down very

steeply to the sea.

The town was mostly in shadow, but the sun had not sunk; wherever its

level light could break through, it painted everything a burning gold.

Up this side street the last sunset light shone as sharp and narrow as

the shaft of artificial light at the theatre. It struck the car of the

five friends, and lit it like a burning chariot. But the rest of the

street, especially the two ends of it, was in the deepest twilight, and

for some seconds they could see nothing. Then Syme, whose eyes were the

keenest, broke into a little bitter whistle, and said

"It is quite true. There is a crowd or an army or some such thing

across the end of that street."

"Well, if there is," said Bull impatiently, "it must be something

else--a sham fight or the mayor's birthday or something. I cannot and

will not believe that plain, jolly people in a place like this walk

about with dynamite in their pockets. Get on a bit, Syme, and let us

look at them."

The car crawled about a hundred yards farther, and then they were all

startled by Dr. Bull breaking into a high crow of laughter.

"Why, you silly mugs!" he cried, "what did I tell you. That crowd's as

law-abiding as a cow, and if it weren't, it's on our side."

"How do you know?" asked the professor, staring.

"You blind bat," cried Bull, "don't you see who is leading them?"

They peered again, and then the Colonel, with a catch in his voice,

cried out--

"Why, it's Renard!"

There was, indeed, a rank of dim figures running across the road, and

they could not be clearly seen; but far enough in front to catch the

accident of the evening light was stalking up and down the unmistakable

Dr. Renard, in a white hat, stroking his long brown beard, and holding

a revolver in his left hand.

"What a fool I've been! " exclaimed the Colonel. "Of course, the dear

old boy has turned out to help us."

Dr. Bull was bubbling over with laughter, swinging the sword in his

hand as carelessly as a cane. He jumped out of the car and ran across

the intervening space, calling out--

"Dr. Renard! Dr. Renard!"

An instant after Syme thought his own eyes had gone mad in his head.

For the philanthropic Dr. Renard had deliberately raised his revolver

and fired twice at Bull, so that the shots rang down the road.

Almost at the same second as the puff of white cloud went up from this

atrocious explosion a long puff of white cloud went up also from the

cigarette of the cynical Ratcliffe. Like all the rest he turned a

little pale, but he smiled. Dr. Bull, at whom the bullets had been

fired, just missing his scalp, stood quite still in the middle of the

road without a sign of fear, and then turned very slowly and crawled

back to the car, and climbed in with two holes through his hat.

"Well," said the cigarette smoker slowly, "what do you think now?"

"I think," said Dr. Bull with precision, "that I am lying in bed at No.

217 Peabody Buildings, and that I shall soon wake up with a jump; or,

if that's not it, I think that I am sitting in a small cushioned cell

in Hanwell, and that the doctor can't make much of my case. But if you

want to know what I don't think, I'll tell you. I don't think what you

think. I don't think, and I never shall think, that the mass of

ordinary men are a pack of dirty modern thinkers. No, sir, I'm a

democrat, and I still don't believe that Sunday could convert one

average navvy or counter-jumper. No, I may be mad, but humanity isn't."

Syme turned his bright blue eyes on Bull with an earnestness which he

did not commonly make clear.

"You are a very fine fellow," he said. "You can believe in a sanity

which is not merely your sanity. And you're right enough about

humanity, about peasants and people like that jolly old innkeeper. But

you're not right about Renard. I suspected him from the first. He's

rationalistic, and, what's worse, he's rich. When duty and religion are

really destroyed, it will be by the rich."

"They are really destroyed now," said the man with a cigarette, and

rose with his hands in his pockets. "The devils are coming on!"

The men in the motor?car looked anxiously in the direction of his

dreamy gaze, and they saw that the whole regiment at the end of the

road was advancing upon them, Dr. Renard marching furiously in front,

his beard flying in the breeze.

The Colonel sprang out of the car with an intolerant exclamation.

"Gentlemen," he cried, "the thing is incredible. It must be a practical

joke. If you knew Renard as I do-- it's like calling Queen Victoria a

dynamiter. If you had got the man's character into your head--"

"Dr. Bull," said Syme sardonically, "has at least got it into his hat."

"I tell you it can't be!" cried the Colonel, stamping.

"Renard shall explain it. He shall explain it to me," and he strode

forward.

"Don't be in such a hurry," drawled the smoker. "He will very soon

explain it to all of us."

But the impatient Colonel was already out of earshot, advancing towards

the advancing enemy. The excited Dr. Renard lifted his pistol again,

but perceiving his opponent, hesitated, and the Colonel came face to

face with him with frantic gestures of remonstrance.

"It is no good," said Syme. "He will never get anything out of that old

heathen. I vote we drive bang through the thick of them, bang as the

bullets went through Bull's hat. We may all be killed, but we must kill

a tidy number of them."

"I won't ave it," said Dr. Bull, growing more vulgar in the sincerity

of his virtue. "The poor chaps may be making a mistake. Give the

Colonel a chance."

"Shall we go back, then?" asked the Professor.

"No," said Ratcliffe in a cold voice, "the street behind us is held

too. In fact, I seem to see there another friend of yours, Syme."

Syme spun round smartly, and stared backwards at the track which they

had travelled. He saw an irregular body of horsemen gathering and

galloping towards them in the gloom. He saw above the foremost saddle

the silver gleam of a sword, and then as it grew nearer the silver

gleam of an old man's hair. The next moment, with shattering violence,

he had swung the motor round and sent it dashing down the steep side

street to the sea, like a man that desired only to die.

"What the devil is up?" cried the Professor, seizing his arm.

"The morning star has fallen!" said Syme, as his own car went down the

darkness like a falling star.

The others did not understand his words, but when they looked back at

the street above they saw the hostile cavalry coming round the corner

and down the slopes after them; and foremost of all rode the good

innkeeper, flushed with the fiery innocence of the evening light.

"The world is insane!" said the Professor, and buried his face in his

hands.

"No," said Dr. Bull in adamantine humility, "it is I."

"What are we going to do?" asked the Professor.

"At this moment," said Syme, with a scientific detachment, "I think we

are going to smash into a lamppost."

The next instant the automobile had come with a catastrophic jar

against an iron object. The instant after that four men had crawled out

from under a chaos of metal, and a tall lean lamp?post that had stood

up straight on the edge of the marine parade stood out, bent and

twisted, like the branch of a broken tree.

"Well, we smashed something," said the Professor, with a faint smile.

"That's some comfort."

"You're becoming an anarchist," said Syme, dusting his clothes with his

instinct of daintiness.

"Everyone is," said Ratcliffe.

As they spoke, the white?haired horseman and his followers came

thundering from above, and almost at the same moment a dark string of

men ran shouting along the sea?front. Syme snatched a sword, and took

it in his teeth; he stuck two others under his arm?pits, took a fourth

in his left hand and the lantern in his right, and leapt off the high

parade on to the beach below.

The others leapt after him, with a common acceptance of such decisive

action, leaving the debris and the gathering mob above them.

"We have one more chance," said Syme, taking the steel out of his

mouth. "Whatever all this pandemonium means, I suppose the police

station will help us. We can't get there, for they hold the way. But

there's a pier or breakwater runs out into the sea just here, which we

could defend longer than anything else, like Horatius and his bridge.

We must defend it till the Gendarmerie turn out. Keep after me."

They followed him as he went crunching down the beach, and in a second

or two their boots broke not on the sea gravel, but on broad, flat

stones. They marched down a long, low jetty, running out in one arm

into the dim, boiling sea, and when they came to the end of it they

felt that they had come to the end of their story. They turned and

faced the town.

That town was transfigured with uproar. All along the high parade from

which they had just descended was a dark and roaring stream of

humanity, with tossing arms and fiery faces, groping and glaring

towards them. The long dark line was dotted with torches and lanterns;

but even where no flame lit up a furious face, they could see in the

farthest figure, in the most shadowy gesture, an organised hate. It was

clear that they were the accursed of all men, and they knew not why.

Two or three men, looking little and black like monkeys, leapt over the

edge as they had done and dropped on to the beach. These came ploughing

down the deep sand, shouting horribly, and strove to wade into the sea

at random. The example was followed, and the whole black mass of men

began to run and drip over the edge like black treacle.

Foremost among the men on the beach Syme saw the peasant who had driven

their cart. He splashed into the surf on a huge cart?horse, and shook

his axe at them.

"The peasant!" cried Syme. "They have not risen since the Middle Ages."

"Even if the police do come now," said the Professor mournfully, "they

can do nothing with this mob."

"Nonsence!" said Bull desperately; "there must be some people left in

the town who are human."

"No," said the hopeless Inspector, "the human being will soon be

extinct. We are the last of mankind."

"It may be," said the Professor absently. Then he added in his dreamy

voice, "What is all that at the end of the Dunciad'?

Nor public flame; nor private, dares to shine;

Nor human light is left, nor glimpse divine!

Lo! thy dread Empire, Chaos, is restored;

Light dies before thine uncreating word:

Thy hand, great Anarch, lets the curtain fall;

And universal darkness buries all."'

"Stop!" cried Bull suddenly, "the gendarmes are out."

The low lights of the police station were indeed blotted and broken

with hurrying figures, and they heard through the darkness the clash

and jingle of a disciplined cavalry.

' They are charging the mob!" cried Bull in ecstacy or alarm.

"No," said Syme, "they are formed along the parade."

"They have unslung their carbines," cried Bull dancing with excitement.

"Yes," said Ratcliffe, "and they are going to fire on us."

As he spoke there came a long crackle of musketry, and bullets seemed

to hop like hailstones on the stones in front of them.

'The gendarmes have joined them!" cried the Professor, and struck his

forehead.

"I am in the padded cell," said Bull solidly.

There was a long silence, and then Ratcliffe said, looking out over the

swollen sea, all a sort of grey purple--

"What does it matter who is mad or who is sane? We shall all be dead

soon."

Syme turned to him and said--

"You are quite hopeless, then?"

Mr. Ratcliffe kept a stony silence; then at last he said quietly--

"No; oddly enough I am not quite hopeless. There is one insane little

hope that I cannot get out of my mind. The power of this whole planet

is against us, yet I cannot help wondering whether this one silly

little hope is hopeless yet."

"In what or whom is your hope?" asked Syme with curiosity.

"In a man I never saw," said the other, looking at the leaden sea.

"I know what you mean," said Syme in a low voice, "the man in the dark

room. But Sunday must have killed him by now."

"Perhaps," said the other steadily; "but if so, he was the only man

whom Sunday found it hard to kill."

"I heard what you said," said the Professor, with his back turned. "I

also am holding hard on to the thing I never saw."

All of a sudden Syme, who was standing as if blind with introspective

thought, swung round and cried out, like a man waking from sleep--

"Where is the Colonel? I thought he was with us!"

"The Colonel! Yes," cried Bull, "where on earth is the Colonel?"

"He went to speak to Renard," said the Professor.

"We cannot leave him among all those beasts," cried Syme. "Let us die

like gentlemen if--"

"Do not pity the Colonel," said Ratcliffe, with a pale sneer. "He is

extremely comfortable. He is--"

"No! no! no!" cried Syme in a kind of frenzy, "not the Colonel too! I

will never believe it!"

"Will you believe your eyes?" asked the other, and pointed to the

beach.

Many of their pursuers had waded into the water shaking their fists,

but the sea was rough, and they could not reach the pier. Two or three

figures, however, stood on the beginning of the stone footway, and

seemed to be cautiously advancing down it. The glare of a chance

lantern lit up the faces of the two foremost. One face wore a black

half?mask, and under it the mouth was twisting about in such a madness

of nerves that the black tuft of beard wriggled round and round like a

restless, living thing. The other was the red face and white moustache

of Colonel Ducroix. They were in earnest consultation.

"Yes, he is gone too," said the Professor, and sat down on a stone.

"Everything's gone. I'm gone! I can't trust my own bodily machinery. I

feel as if my own hand might fly up and strike me."

"When my hand flies up," said Syme, "it will strike somebody else," and

he strode along the pier towards the Colonel, the sword in one hand and

the lantern in the other.

As if to destroy the last hope or doubt, the Colonel, who saw him

coming, pointed his revolver at him and fired. The shot missed Syme,

but struck his sword, breaking it short at the hilt. Syme rushed on,

and swung the iron lantern above his head.

"Judas before Herod!" he said, and struck the Colonel down upon the

stones. Then he turned to the Secretary, whose frightful mouth was

almost foaming now, and held the lamp high with so rigid and arresting

a gesture, that the man was, as it were, frozen for a moment, and

forced to hear.

"Do you see this lantern?" cried Syme in a terrible voice. "Do you see

the cross carved on it, and the flame inside? You did not make it. You

did not light it, Better men than you, men who could believe and obey,

twisted the entrails of iron and preserved the legend of fire. There is

not a street you walk on, there is not a thread you wear, that was not

made as this lantern was, by denying your philosophy of dirt and rats.

You can make nothing. You can only destroy. You will destroy mankind;

you will destroy the world. Let that suffice you. Yet this one old

Christian lantern you shall not destroy. It shall go where your empire

of apes will never have the wit to find it."

He struck the Secretary once with the lantern so that he staggered; and

then, whirling it twice round his head, sent it flying far out to sea,

where it flared like a roaring rocket and fell.

"Swords!" shouted Syme, turning his flaming face ; to the three behind

him. "Let us charge these dogs, for our time has come to die."

His three companions came after him sword in hand. Syme's sword was

broken, but he rent a bludgeon from the fist of a fisherman, flinging

him down. In a moment they would have flung themselves upon the face of

the mob and perished, when an interruption came. The Secretary, ever

since Syme's speech, had stood with his hand to his stricken head as if

dazed; now he suddenly pulled off his black mask.

The pale face thus peeled in the lamplight revealed not so much rage as

astonishment. He put up his hand with an anxious authority.

"There is some mistake," he said. "Mr. Syme, I hardly think you

understand your position. I arrest you in the name of the law."

"Of the law?" said Syme, and dropped his stick.

"Certainly!" said the Secretary. "I am a detective from Scotland Yard,"

and he took a small blue card from his pocket.

"And what do you suppose we are?" asked the Professor, and threw up his

arms.

"You," said the Secretary stiffly, "are, as I know for a fact, members

of the Supreme Anarchist Council. Disguised as one of you, I--"

Dr. Bull tossed his sword into the sea.

"There never was any Supreme Anarchist Council," he said. "We were all

a lot of silly policemen looking at each other. And all these nice

people who have been peppering us with shot thought we were the

dynamiters. I knew I couldn't be wrong about the mob," he said, beaming

over the enormous multitude, which stretched away to the distance on

both sides. "Vulgar people are never mad. I'm vulgar myself, and I

know. I am now going on shore to stand a drink to everybody here."

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CHAPTER XIII

THE PURSUIT OF THE PRESIDENT

NEXT morning five bewildered but hilarious people took the boat for

Dover. The poor old Colonel might have had some cause to complain,

having been first forced to fight for two factions that didn't exist,

and then knocked down with an iron lantern. But he was a magnanimous

old gentleman, and being much relieved that neither party had anything

to do with dynamite, he saw them off on the pier with great geniality.

The five reconciled detectives had a hundred details to explain to each

other. The Secretary had to tell Syme how they had come to wear masks

originally in order to approach the supposed enemy as

fellow?conspirators;

Syme had to explain how they had fled with such swiftness through a

civilised country. But above all these matters of detail which could be

explained, rose the central mountain of the matter that they could not

explain. What did it all mean? If they were all harmless officers, what

was Sunday? If he had not seized the world, what on earth had he been

up to? Inspector Ratcliffe was still gloomy about this.

"I can't make head or tail of old Sunday's little game any more than

you can," he said. "But whatever else Sunday is, he isn't a blameless

citizen. Damn it! do you remember his face?"

"I grant you," answered Syme, "that I have never been able to forget

it."

"Well," said the Secretary, "I suppose we can find out soon, for

to?morrow we have our next general meeting. You will excuse me," he

said, with a rather ghastly smile, "for being well acquainted with my

secretarial duties."

"I suppose you are right," said the Professor reflectively. "I suppose

we might find it out from him; but I confess that I should feel a bit

afraid of asking Sunday who he really is."

"Why," asked the Secretary, "for fear of bombs?"

"No," said the Professor, "for fear he might tell me."

"Let us have some drinks," said Dr. Bull, after a silence.

Throughout their whole journey by boat and train they were highly

convivial, but they instinctively kept together. Dr. Bull, who had

always been the optimist of the party, endeavoured to persuade the

other four that the whole company could take the same hansom cab from

Victoria; but this was over?ruled, and they went in a four?wheeler,

with Dr. Bull on the box, singing. They finished their journey at an

hotel in Piccadilly Circus, so as to be close to the early breakfast

next morning in Leicester Square. Yet even then the adventures of the

day were not entirely over. Dr. Bull, discontented with the general

proposal to go to bed, had strolled out of the hotel at about eleven to

see and taste some of the beauties of London. Twenty minutes

afterwards, however, he came back and made quite a clamour in the hall.

Syme, who tried at first to soothe him, was forced at last to listen to

his communication with quite new attention.

"I tell you I've seen him!" said Dr. Bull, with thick emphasis.

"Whom?" asked Syme quickly. "Not the President?"

"Not so bad as that," said Dr. Bull, with unnecessary laughter, "not so

bad as that. I've got him here."

"Got whom here?" asked Syme impatiently.

"Hairy man," said the other lucidly, "man that used to be hairy

man--Gogol. Here he is," and he pulled forward by a reluctant elbow the

identical young man who five days before had marched out of the Council

with thin red hair and a pale face, the first of all the sham

anarchists who had been exposed.

"Why do you worry with me?" he cried. "You have expelled me as a spy."

"We are all spies!" whispered Syme.

"We're all spies!" shouted Dr. Bull. "Come and have a drink."

Next morning the battalion of the reunited six marched stolidly towards

the hotel in Leicester Square.

"This is more cheerful," said Dr. Bull; "we are six men going to ask

one man what he means."

"I think it is a bit queerer than that," said Syme. "I think it is six

men going to ask one man what they mean."

They turned in silence into the Square, and though the hotel was in the

opposite corner, they saw at once the little balcony and a figure that

looked too big for it. He was sitting alone with bent head, poring over

a newspaper. But all his councillors, who had come to vote him down,

crossed that Square as if they were watched out of heaven by a hundred

eyes.

They had disputed much upon their policy, about whether they should

leave the unmasked Gogol without and begin diplomatically, or whether

they should bring him in and blow up the gunpowder at once. The

influence of Syme and Bull prevailed for the latter course, though the

Secretary to the last asked them why they attacked Sunday so rashly.

"My reason is quite simple," said Syme. "I attack him rashly because I

am afraid of him."

They followed Syme up the dark stair in silence, and they all came out

simultaneously into the broad sunlight of the morning and the broad

sunlight of Sunday's smile.

"Delightful!" he said. "So pleased to see you all. What an exquisite

day it is. Is the Czar dead?"

The Secretary, who happened to be foremost, drew himself together for a

dignified outburst.

"No, sir," he said sternly "there has been no massacre. I bring you

news of no such disgusting spectacles."

"Disgusting spectacles?" repeated the President, with a bright,

inquiring smile. "You mean Dr. Bull's spectacles?"

The Secretary choked for a moment, and the President went on with a

sort of smooth appeal--

"Of course, we all have our opinions and even our eyes, but really to

call them disgusting before the man himself--"

Dr. Bull tore off his spectacles and broke them on the table.

"My spectacles are blackguardly," he said, "but I'm not. Look at my

face."

"I dare say it's the sort of face that grows on one," said the

President, "in fact, it grows on you; and who am I to quarrel with the

wild fruits upon the Tree of Life? I dare say it will grow on me some

day."

"We have no time for tomfoolery," said the Secretary, breaking in

savagely. "We have come to know what all this means. Who are you? What

are you? Why did you get us all here? Do you know who and what we are?

Are you a half?witted man playing the conspirator, or are you a clever

man playing the fool? Answer me, I tell you."

"Candidates," murmured Sunday, "are only required to answer eight out

of the seventeen questions on the paper. As far as I can make out, you

want me to tell you what I am, and what you are, and what this table

is, and what this Council is, and what this world is for all I know.

Well, I will go so far as to rend the veil of one mystery. If you want

to know what you are, you are a set of highly well?intentioned young

jackasses."

"And you," said Syme, leaning forward, "what are you?"

"I? What am I?" roared the President, and he rose slowly to an

incredible height, like some enormous wave about to arch above them and

break. "You want to know what I am, do you? Bull, you are a man of

science. Grub in the roots of those trees and find out the truth about

them. Syme, you are a poet. Stare at those morning clouds. But I tell

you this, that you will have found out the truth of the last tree and

the top-most cloud before the truth about me. You will understand the

sea, and I shall be still a riddle; you shall know what the stars are,

and not know what I am. Since the beginning of the world all men have

hunted me like a wolf--kings and sages, and poets and lawgivers, all

the churches, and all the philosophies. But I have never been caught

yet, and the skies will fall in the time I turn to bay. I have given

them a good run for their money, and I will now."

Before one of them could move, the monstrous man had swung himself like

some huge ourang?outang over the balustrade of the balcony. Yet before

he dropped he pulled himself up again as on a horizontal bar, and

thrusting his great chin over the edge of the balcony, said solemnly--

"There's one thing I'll tell you though about who I am. I am the man in

the dark room, who made you all policemen."

With that he fell from the balcony, bouncing on the stones below like a

great ball of india?rubber, and went bounding off towards the corner of

the Alhambra, where he hailed a hansom?cab and sprang inside it. The

six detectives had been standing thunderstruck and livid in the light

of his last assertion; but when he disappeared into the cab, Syme's

practical senses returned to him, and leaping over the balcony so

recklessly as almost to break his legs, he called another cab.

He and Bull sprang into the cab together, the Professor and the

Inspector into another, while the Secretary and the late Gogol

scrambled into a third just in time to pursue the flying Syme, who was

pursuing the flying President. Sunday led them a wild chase towards the

north?west, his cabman, evidently under the influence of more than

common inducements, urging the horse at breakneck speed. But Syme was

in no mood for delicacies, and he stood up in his own cab shouting,

"Stop thief!" until crowds ran along beside his cab, and policemen

began to stop and ask questions. All this had its influence upon the

President's cabman, who began to look dubious, and to slow down to a

trot. He opened the trap to talk reasonably to his fare, and in so

doing let the long whip droop over the front of the cab. Sunday leant

forward, seized it, and jerked it violently out of the man's hand. Then

standing up in front of the cab himself, he lashed the horse and roared

aloud, so that they went down the streets like a flying storm. Through

street after street and square after square went whirling this

preposterous vehicle, in which the fare was urging the horse and the

driver trying desperately to stop it. The other three cabs came after

it (if the phrase be permissible of a cab) like panting hounds. Shops

and streets shot by like rattling arrows.

At the highest ecstacy of speed, Sunday turned round on the splashboard

where he stood, and sticking his great grinning head out of the cab,

with white hair whistling in the wind, he made a horrible face at his

pursuers, like some colossal urchin. Then raising his right hand

swiftly, he flung a ball of paper in Syme's face and vanished. Syme

caught the thing while instinctively warding it off, and discovered

that it consisted of two crumpled papers. One was addressed to himself,

and the other to Dr. Bull, with a very long, and it is to be feared

partly ironical, string of letters after his name. Dr. Bull's address

was, at any rate, considerably longer than his communication, for the

communication consisted entirely of the words:--

"What about Martin Tupper now?"

"What does the old maniac mean?" asked Bull, staring at the words.

"What does yours say, Syme?"

Syme's message was, at any rate, longer, and ran as follows:--

"No one would regret anything in the nature of an interference by the

Archdeacon more than I. I trust it will not come to that. But, for the

last time, where are your goloshes? The thing is too bad, especially

after what uncle said."

The President's cabman seemed to be regaining some control over his

horse, and the pursuers gained a little as they swept round into the

Edgware Road. And here there occurred what seemed to the allies a

providential stoppage. Traffic of every kind was swerving to right or

left or stopping, for down the long road was coming the unmistakable

roar announcing the fire?engine, which in a few seconds went by like a

brazen thunderbolt. But quick as it went by, Sunday had bounded out of

his cab, sprung at the fire?engine, caught it, slung himself on to it,

and was seen as he disappeared in the noisy distance talking to the

astonished fireman with explanatory gestures.

"After him!" howled Syme. "He can't go astray now. There's no mistaking

a fire?engine."

The three cabmen, who had been stunned for a moment, whipped up their

horses and slightly decreased the distance between themselves and their

disappearing prey. The President acknowledged this proximity by coming

to the back of the car, bowing repeatedly, kissing his hand, and

finally flinging a neatly?folded note into the bosom of Inspector

Ratcliffe. When that gentleman opened it, not without impatience, he

found it contained the words:--

"Fly at once. The truth about your trouser-stretchers is known.--A

FRIEND."

The fire?engine had struck still farther to the north, into a region

that they did not recognise; and as it ran by a line of high railings

shadowed with trees, the six friends were startled, but somewhat

relieved, to see the President leap from the fire?engine, though

whether through another whim or the increasing protest of his

entertainers they could not see. Before the three cabs, however, could

reach up to the spot, he had gone up the high railings like a huge grey

cat, tossed himself over, and vanished in a darkness of leaves.

Syme with a furious gesture stopped his cab, jumped out, and sprang

also to the escalade. When he had one leg over the fence and his

friends were following, he turned a face on them which shone quite pale

in the shadow.

"What place can this be?" he asked. "Can it be the old devil's house?

I've heard he has a house in North London."

"All the better," said the Secretary grimly, planting a foot in a

foothold, "we shall find him at home."

"No, but it isn't that," said Syme, knitting his brows. "I hear the

most horrible noises, like devils laughing and sneezing and blowing

their devilish noses!"

"His dogs barking, of course," said the Secretary.

"Why not say his black?beetles barking!" said Syme furiously, "snails

barking! geraniums barking! Did you ever hear a dog bark like that?"

He held up his hand, and there came out of the thicket a long growling

roar that seemed to get under the skin and freeze the flesh--a low

thrilling roar that made a throbbing in the air all about them.

"The dogs of Sunday would be no ordinary dogs," said Gogol, and

shuddered.

Syme had jumped down on the other side, but he still stood listening

impatiently.

"Well, listen to that," he said, "is that a dog--anybody's dog?"

There broke upon their ear a hoarse screaming as of things protesting

and clamouring in sudden pain; and then, far off like an echo, what

sounded like a long nasal trumpet.

"Well, his house ought to be hell! " said the Secretary; "and if it is

hell, I'm going in!" and he sprang over the tall railings almost with

one swing.

The others followed. They broke through a tangle of plants and shrubs,

and came out on an open path. Nothing was in sight, but Dr. Bull

suddenly struck his hands together.

"Why, you asses," he cried, "it's the Zoo!"

As they were looking round wildly for any trace of their wild quarry, a

keeper in uniform came running along the path with a man in plain

clothes.

"Has it come this way?" gasped the keeper.

"Has what?" asked Syme.

"The elephant!" cried the keeper. "An elephant has gone mad and run

away!"

"He has run away with an old gentleman," said the other stranger

breathlessly, "a poor old gentleman with white hair! "

"What sort of old gentleman?" asked Syme, with great curiosity.

"A very large and fat old gentleman in light grey clothes," said the

keeper eagerly.

"Well," said Syme, "if he's that particular kind of old gentleman, if

you're quite sure that he's a large and fat old gentleman in grey

clothes, you may take my word for it that the elephant has not run away

with him. He has run away with the elephant. The elephant is not made

by God that could run away with him if he did not consent to the

elopement. And, by thunder, there he is! "

There was no doubt about it this time. Clean across the space of grass,

about two hundred yards away, with a crowd screaming and scampering

vainly at his heels, went a huge grey elephant at an awful stride, with

his trunk thrown out as rigid as a ship's bowsprit, and trumpeting like

the trumpet of doom. On the back of the bellowing and plunging animal

sat President Sunday with all the placidity of a sultan, but goading

the animal to a furious speed with some sharp object in his hand.

"Stop him!" screamed the populace. "He'll be out of the gate!"

"Stop a landslide!" said the keeper. "He is out of the gate!"

And even as he spoke, a final crash and roar of terror announced that

the great grey elephant had broken out of the gates of the Zoological

Gardens, and was careening down Albany Street like a new and swift sort

of omnibus.

"Great Lord!" cried Bull, "I never knew an elephant could go so fast.

Well, it must be hansom?cabs again if we are to keep him in sight."

As they raced along to the gate out of which the elephant had vanished,

Syme felt a glaring panorama of the strange animals in the cages which

they passed. Afterwards he thought it queer that he should have seen

them so clearly. He remembered especially seeing pelicans, with their

preposterous, pendant throats. He wondered why the pelican was the

symbol of charity, except it was that it wanted a good deal of charity

to admire a pelican. He remembered a hornbill, which was simply a huge

yellow beak with a small bird tied on behind it. The whole gave him a

sensation, the vividness of which he could not explain, that Nature was

always making quite mysterious jokes. Sunday had told them that they

would understand him when they had understood the stars. He wondered

whether even the archangels understood the hornbill.

The six unhappy detectives flung themselves into cabs and followed the

elephant sharing the terror which he spread through the long stretch of

the streets. This time Sunday did not turn round, but offered them the

solid stretch of his unconscious back, which maddened them, if

possible, more than his previous mockeries. Just before they came to

Baker Street, however, he was seen to throw something far up into the

air, as a boy does a ball meaning to catch it again. But at their rate

of racing it fell far behind, just by the cab containing Gogol; and in

faint hope of a clue or for some impulse unexplainable, he stopped his

cab so as to pick it up. It was addressed to himself, and was quite a

bulky parcel. On examination, however, its bulk was found to consist of

thirty?three pieces of paper of no value wrapped one round the other.

When the last covering was torn away it reduced itself to a small slip

of paper, on which was written:--

"The word, I fancy, should be pink'."

The man once known as Gogol said nothing, but the movements of his

hands and feet were like those of a man urging a horse to renewed

efforts.

Through street after street, through district after district, went the

prodigy of the flying elephant, calling crowds to every window, and

driving the traffic left and right. And still through all this insane

publicity the three cabs toiled after it, until they came to be

regarded as part of a procession, and perhaps the advertisement of a

circus. They went at such a rate that distances were shortened beyond

belief, and Syme saw the Albert Hall in Kensington when he thought that

he was still in Paddington. The animal's pace was even more fast and

free through the empty, aristocratic streets of South Kensington, and

he finally headed towards that part of the sky?line where the enormous

Wheel of Earl's Court stood up in the sky. The wheel grew larger and

larger, till it filled heaven like the wheel of stars.

The beast outstripped the cabs. They lost him round several corners,

and when they came to one of the gates of the Earl's Court Exhibition

they found themselves finally blocked. In front of them was an enormous

crowd; in the midst of it was an enormous elephant, heaving and

shuddering as such shapeless creatures do. But the President had

disappeared.

"Where has he gone to?" asked Syme, slipping to the ground.

"Gentleman rushed into the Exhibition, sir!" said an official in a

dazed manner. Then he added in an injured voice: "Funny gentleman, sir.

Asked me to hold his horse, and gave me this."

He held out with distaste a piece of folded paper, addressed: "To the

Secretary of the Central Anarchist Council."

The Secretary, raging, rent it open, and found written inside it:--

"When the herring runs a mile,

Let the Secretary smile;

When the herring tries to fly,

Let the Secretary die.

Rustic Proverb."

"Why the eternal crikey," began the Secretary, "did you let the man in?

Do people commonly come to you Exhibition riding on mad elephants?

Do--"

"Look! " shouted Syme suddenly. "Look over there! '

"Look at what?" asked the Secretary savagely.

"Look at the captive balloon!" said Syme, and pointed in a frenzy.

"Why the blazes should I look at a captive balloon?' demanded the

Secretary. "What is there queer about a captive balloon?"

"Nothing," said Syme, "except that it isn't captive!'

They all turned their eyes to where the balloon swung and swelled above

the Exhibition on a string, like a child's balloon. A second afterwards

the string came in two just under the car, and the balloon, broken

loose, floated away with the freedom of a soap bubble.

"Ten thousand devils!" shrieked the Secretary. "He's got into it!" and

he shook his fists at the sky.

The balloon, borne by some chance wind, came right above them, and they

could see the great white head of the President peering over the side

and looking benevolently down on them.

"God bless my soul!" said the Professor with the elderly manner that he

could never disconnect from his bleached beard and parchment face. "God

bless my soul! I seemed to fancy that something fell on the top of my

hat!"

He put up a trembling hand and took from that shelf a piece of twisted

paper, which he opened absently only to find it inscribed with a true

lover's knot and, the words:--

"Your beauty has not left me indifferent.--From LITTLE SNOWDROP. "

There was a short silence, and then Syme said, biting his beard--

"I'm not beaten yet. The blasted thing must come down somewhere. Let's

follow it!"

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CHAPTER XIV

THE SIX PHILOSOPHERS

ACROSS green fields, and breaking through blooming hedges, toiled six

draggled detectives, about five miles out of London. The optimist of

the party had at first proposed that they should follow the balloon

across South England in hansom?cabs. But he was ultimately convinced of

the persistent refusal of the balloon to follow the roads, and the

still more persistent refusal of the cabmen to follow the balloon.

Consequently the tireless though exasperated travellers broke through

black thickets and ploughed through ploughed fields till each was

turned into a figure too outrageous to be mistaken for a tramp. Those

green hills of Surrey saw the final collapse and tragedy of the

admirable light grey suit in which Syme had set out from Saffron Park.

His silk hat was broken over his nose by a swinging bough, his

coat?tails were torn to the shoulder by arresting thorns, the clay of

England was splashed up to his collar; but he still carried his yellow

beard forward with a silent and furious determination, and his eyes

were still fixed on that floating ball of gas, which in the full flush

of sunset seemed coloured like a sunset cloud.

"After all," he said, "it is very beautiful!"

"It is singularly and strangely beautiful!" said the Professor. "I wish

the beastly gas?bag would burst!"

"No," said Dr. Bull, "I hope it won't. It might hurt the old boy."

"Hurt him!" said the vindictive Professor, "hurt him! Not as much as

I'd hurt him if I could get up with him. Little Snowdrop!"

"I don't want him hurt, somehow," said Dr. Bull.

"What!" cried the Secretary bitterly. "Do you believe all that tale

about his being our man in the dark room? Sunday would say he was

anybody."

"I don't know whether I believe it or not," said Dr. Bull. "But it

isn't that that I mean. I can't wish old Sunday's balloon to burst

because--"

"Well," said Syme impatiently, "because?"

"Well, because he's so jolly like a balloon himself," said Dr. Bull

desperately. "I don't understand a word of all that idea of his being

the same man who gave us all our blue cards. It seems to make

everything nonsense. But I don't care who knows it, I always had a

sympathy for old Sunday himself, wicked as he was. Just as if he was a

great bouncing baby. How can I explain what my queer sympathy was? It

didn't prevent my fighting him like hell! Shall I make it clear if I

say that I liked him because he was so fat?"

"You will not," said the Secretary.

"I've got it now," cried Bull, "it was because he was so fat and so

light. Just like a balloon. We always think of fat people as heavy, but

he could have danced against a sylph. I see now what I mean. Moderate

strength is shown in violence, supreme strength is shown in levity. It

was like the old speculations--what would happen if an elephant could

leap up in the sky like a grasshopper?"

"Our elephant," said Syme, looking upwards, "has leapt into the sky

like a grasshopper."

"And somehow," concluded Bull, "that's why I can't help liking old

Sunday. No, it's not an admiration of force, or any silly thing like

that. There is a kind of gaiety in the thing, as if he were bursting

with some good news. Haven't you sometimes felt it on a spring day? You

know Nature plays tricks, but somehow that day proves they are

good?natured tricks. I never read the Bible myself, but that part they

laugh at is literal truth, Why leap ye, ye high hills?' The hills do

leap --?at least, they try to.... Why do I like Sunday? . . . how can I

tell you? . . . because he's such a Bounder."

There was a long silence, and then the Secretary said in a curious,

strained voice--

"You do not know Sunday at all. Perhaps it is because you are better

than I, and do not know hell. I was a fierce fellow, and a trifle

morbid from the first. The man who sits in darkness, and who chose us

all, chose me because I had all the crazy look of a

conspirator--because my smile went crooked, and my eyes were gloomy,

even when I smiled. But there must have been something in me that

answered to the nerves in all these anarchic men. For when I first saw

Sunday he expressed to me, not your airy vitality, but something both

gross and sad in the Nature of Things. I found him smoking in a

twilight room, a room with brown blind down, infinitely more depressing

than the genial darkness in which our master lives. He sat there on a

bench, a huge heap of a man, dark and out of shape. He listened to all

my words without speaking or even stirring. I poured out my most

passionate appeals, and asked my most eloquent questions. Then, after a

long silence, the Thing began to shake, and I thought it was shaken by

some secret malady. It shook like a loathsome and living jelly. It

reminded me of everything I had ever read about the base bodies that

are the origin of life--the deep sea lumps and protoplasm. It seemed

like the final form of matter, the most shapeless and the most

shameful. I could only tell myself, from its shudderings, that it was

something at least that such a monster could be miserable. And then it

broke upon me that the bestial mountain was shaking with a lonely

laughter, and the laughter was at me. Do you ask me to forgive him

that? It is no small thing to be laughed at by something at once lower

and stronger than oneself."

"Surely you fellows are exaggerating wildly," cut in the clear voice of

Inspector Ratcliffe. "President Sunday is a terrible fellow for one's

intellect, but he is not such a Barnum's freak physically as you make

out. He received me in an ordinary office, in a grey check coat, in

broad daylight. He talked to me in an ordinary way. But I'll tell you

what is a trifle creepy about Sunday. His room is neat, his clothes are

neat, everything seems in order; but he's absent?minded. Sometimes his

great bright eyes go quite blind. For hours he forgets that you are

there. Now absent?mindedness is just a bit too awful in a bad man. We

think of a wicked man as vigilant. We can't think of a wicked man who

is honestly and sincerely dreamy, because we daren't think of a wicked

man alone with himself. An absentminded man means a good?natured man.

It means a man who, if he happens to see you, will apologise. But how

will you bear an absentminded man who, if he happens to see you, will

kill you? That is what tries the nerves, abstraction combined with

cruelty. Men have felt it sometimes when they went through wild

forests, and felt that the animals there were at once innocent and

pitiless. They might ignore or slay. How would you like to pass ten

mortal hours in a parlour with an absent?minded tiger?"

"And what do you think of Sunday, Gogol?" asked Syme.

"I don't think of Sunday on principle," said Gogol simply, "any more

than I stare at the sun at noonday."

"Well, that is a point of view," said Syme thoughtfully. "What do you

say, Professor?"

The Professor was walking with bent head and trailing stick, and he did

not answer at all.

"Wake up, Professor!" said Syme genially. "Tell us what you think of

Sunday."

The Professor spoke at last very slowly.

"I think something," he said, "that I cannot say clearly. Or, rather, I

think something that I cannot even think clearly. But it is something

like this. My early life, as you know, was a bit too large and loose.

Well, when I saw Sunday's face I thought it was too large--everybody

does, but I also thought it was too loose. The face was so big, that

one couldn't focus it or make it a face at all. The eye was so far away

from the nose, that it wasn't an eye. The mouth was so much by itself,

that one had to think of it by itself. The whole thing is too hard to

explain."

He paused for a little, still trailing his stick, and then went on--

"But put it this way. Walking up a road at night, I have seen a lamp

and a lighted window and a cloud make together a most complete and

unmistakable face. If anyone in heaven has that face I shall know him

again. Yet when I walked a little farther I found that there was no

face, that the window was ten yards away, the lamp ten hundred yards,

the cloud beyond the world. Well, Sunday's face escaped me; it ran away

to right and left, as such chance pictures run away. And so his face

has made me, somehow, doubt whether there are any faces. I don't know

whether your face, Bull, is a face or a combination in perspective.

Perhaps one black disc of your beastly glasses is quite close and

another fifty miles away. Oh, the doubts of a materialist are not worth

a dump. Sunday has taught me the last and the worst doubts, the doubts

of a spiritualist. I am a Buddhist, I suppose; and Buddhism is not a

creed, it is a doubt. My poor dear Bull, I do not believe that you

really have a face. I have not faith enough to believe in matter."

Syme's eyes were still fixed upon the errant orb, which, reddened in

the evening light, looked like some rosier and more innocent world.

"Have you noticed an odd thing," he said, "about all your descriptions?

Each man of you finds Sunday quite different, yet each man of you can

only find one thing to compare him to--the universe itself. Bull finds

him like the earth in spring, Gogol like the sun at noonday. The

Secretary is reminded of the shapeless protoplasm, and the Inspector of

the carelessness of virgin forests. The Professor says he is like a

changing landscape. This is queer, but it is queerer still that I also

have had my odd notion about the President, and I also find that I

think of Sunday as I think of the whole world."

"Get on a little faster, Syme," said Bull; "never mind the balloon."

"When I first saw Sunday," said Syme slowly, "I only saw his back; and

when I saw his back, I knew he was the worst man in the world. His neck

and shoulders were brutal, like those of some apish god. His head had a

stoop that was hardly human, like the stoop of an ox. In fact, I had at

once the revolting fancy that this was not a man at all, but a beast

dressed up in men's clothes."

"Get on," said Dr. Bull.

"And then the queer thing happened. I had seen his back from the

street, as he sat in the balcony. Then I entered the hotel, and coming

round the other side of him, saw his face in the sunlight. His face

frightened me, as it did everyone; but not because it was brutal, not

because it was evil. On the contrary, it frightened me because it was

so beautiful, because it was so good."

"Syme," exclaimed the Secretary, "are you ill?"

"It was like the face of some ancient archangel, judging justly after

heroic wars. There was laughter in the eyes, and in the mouth honour

and sorrow. There was the same white hair, the same great, grey?clad

shoulders that I had seen from behind. But when I saw him from behind I

was certain he was an animal, and when I saw him in front I knew he was

a god."

"Pan," said the Professor dreamily, "was a god and an animal."

"Then, and again and always," went on Syme like a man talking to

himself, "that has been for me the mystery of Sunday, and it is also

the mystery of the world. When I see the horrible back, I am sure the

noble face is but a mask. When I see the face but for an instant, I

know the back is only a jest. Bad is so bad, that we cannot but think

good an accident; good is so good, that we feel certain that evil could

be explained. But the whole came to a kind of crest yesterday when I

raced Sunday for the cab, and was just behind him all the way."

"Had you time for thinking then?" asked Ratcliffe.

"Time," replied Syme, "for one outrageous thought. I was suddenly

possessed with the idea that the blind, blank back of his head really

was his face--an awful, eyeless face staring at me! And I fancied that

the figure running in front of me was really a figure running

backwards, and dancing as he ran."

"Horrible!" said Dr. Bull, and shuddered.

"Horrible is not the word," said Syme. "It was exactly the worst

instant of my life. And yet ten minutes afterwards, when he put his

head out of the cab and made a grimace like a gargoyle, I knew that he

was only like a father playing hide?and?seek with his children."

"It is a long game," said the Secretary, and frowned at his broken

boots.

"Listen to me," cried Syme with extraordinary emphasis. "Shall I tell

you the secret of the whole world? It is that we have only known the

back of the world. We see everything from behind, and it looks brutal.

That is not a tree, but the back of a tree. That is not a cloud, but

the back of a cloud. Cannot you see that everything is stooping and

hiding a face? If we could only get round in front--"

"Look!" cried out Bull clamorously, "the balloon is coming down!"

There was no need to cry out to Syme, who had never taken his eyes off

it. He saw the great luminous globe suddenly stagger in the sky, right

itself, and then sink slowly behind the trees like a setting sun.

The man called Gogol, who had hardly spoken through all their weary

travels, suddenly threw up his hands like a lost spirit.

"He is dead!" he cried. "And now I know he was my friend--my friend in

the dark!"

"Dead!" snorted the Secretary. "You will not find him dead easily. If

he has been tipped out of the car, we shall find him rolling as a colt

rolls in a field, kicking his legs for fun."

"Clashing his hoofs," said the Professor. "The colts do, and so did

Pan."

"Pan again!" said Dr. Bull irritably. "You seem to think Pan is

everything."

"So he is," said the Professor, "in Greek. He means everything."

"Don't forget," said the Secretary, looking down, "that he also means

Panic."

Syme had stood without hearing any of the exclamations.

"It fell over there," he said shortly. "Let us follow it!"

Then he added with an indescribable gesture--

"Oh, if he has cheated us all by getting killed! It would be like one

of his larks."

He strode off towards the distant trees with a new energy, his rags and

ribbons fluttering in the wind. The others followed him in a more

footsore and dubious manner. And almost at the same moment all six men

realised that they were not alone in the little field.

Across the square of turf a tall man was advancing towards them,

leaning on a strange long staff like a sceptre. He was clad in a fine

but old?fashioned suit with knee?breeches; its colour was that shade

between blue, violet and grey which can be seen in certain shadows of

the woodland. His hair was whitish grey, and at the first glance, taken

along with his knee-breeches, looked as if it was powdered. His advance

was very quiet; but for the silver frost upon his head, he might have

been one to the shadows of the wood.

"Gentlemen," he said, "my master has a carriage waiting for you in the

road just by."

"Who is your master?" asked Syme, standing quite still.

"I was told you knew his name," said the man respectfully.

There was a silence, and then the Secretary said--

"Where is this carriage?"

"It has been waiting only a few moments," said the stranger. "My master

has only just come home."

Syme looked left and right upon the patch of green field in which he

found himself. The hedges were ordinary hedges, the trees seemed

ordinary trees; yet he felt like a man entrapped in fairyland.

He looked the mysterious ambassador up and down, but he could discover

nothing except that the man's coat was the exact colour of the purple

shadows, and that the man's face was the exact colour of the red and

brown and golden sky.

"Show us the place," Syme said briefly, and without a word the man in

the violet coat turned his back and walked towards a gap in the hedge,

which let in suddenly the light of a white road.

As the six wanderers broke out upon this thoroughfare, they saw the

white road blocked by what looked like a long row of carriages, such a

row of carriages as might close the approach to some house in Park

Lane. Along the side of these carriages stood a rank of splendid

servants, all dressed in the grey?blue uniform, and all having a

certain quality of stateliness and freedom which would not commonly

belong to the servants of a gentleman, but rather to the officials and

ambassadors of a great king. There were no less than six carriages

waiting, one for each of the tattered and miserable band. All the

attendants (as if in court?dress) wore swords, and as each man crawled

into his carriage they drew them, and saluted with a sudden blaze of

steel.

"What can it all mean?" asked Bull of Syme as they separated. "Is this

another joke of Sunday's?"

"I don't know," said Syme as he sank wearily back in the cushions of

his carriage; "but if it is, it's one of the jokes you talk about. It's

a good?natured one."

The six adventurers had passed through many adventures, but not one had

carried them so utterly off their feet as this last adventure of

comfort. They had all become inured to things going roughly; but things

suddenly going smoothly swamped them. They could not even feebly

imagine what the carriages were; it was enough for them to know that

they were carriages, and carriages with cushions. They could not

conceive who the old man was who had led them; but it was quite enough

that he had certainly led them to the carriages.

Syme drove through a drifting darkness of trees in utter abandonment.

It was typical of him that while he had carried his bearded chin

forward fiercely so long as anything could be done, when the whole

business was taken out of his hands he fell back on the cushions in a

frank collapse.

Very gradually and very vaguely he realised into what rich roads the

carriage was carrying him. He saw that they passed the stone gates of

what might have been a park, that they began gradually to climb a hill

which, while wooded on both sides, was somewhat more orderly than a

forest. Then there began to grow upon him, as upon a man slowly waking

from a healthy sleep, a pleasure in everything. He felt that the hedges

were what hedges should be, living walls; that a hedge is like a human

army, disciplined, but all the more alive. He saw high elms behind the

hedges, and vaguely thought how happy boys would be climbing there.

Then his carriage took a turn of the path, and he saw suddenly and

quietly, like a long, low, sunset cloud, a long, low house, mellow in

the mild light of sunset. All the six friends compared notes afterwards

and quarrelled; but they all agreed that in some unaccountable way the

place reminded them of their boyhood. It was either this elm?top or

that crooked path, it was either this scrap of orchard or that shape of

a window; but each man of them declared that he could remember this

place before he could remember his mother.

When the carriages eventually rolled up to a large, low, cavernous

gateway, another man in the same uniform, but wearing a silver star on

the grey breast of his coat, came out to meet them. This impressive

person said to the bewildered Syme--

"Refreshments are provided for you in your room."

Syme, under the influence of the same mesmeric sleep of amazement, went

up the large oaken stairs after the respectful attendant. He entered a

splendid suite of apartments that seemed to be designed specially for

him. He walked up to a long mirror with the ordinary instinct of his

class, to pull his tie straight or to smooth his hair; and there he saw

the frightful figure that he was--blood running down his face from

where the bough had struck him, his hair standing out like yellow rags

of rank grass, his clothes torn into long, wavering tatters. At once

the whole enigma sprang up, simply as the question of how he had got

there, and how he was to get out again. Exactly at the same moment a

man in blue, who had been appointed as his valet, said very solemnly--

"I have put out your clothes, sir."

"Clothes!" said Syme sardonically. "I have no clothes except these,"

and he lifted two long strips of his frock?coat in fascinating

festoons, and made a movement as if to twirl like a ballet girl.

"My master asks me to say," said the attendant, that there is a fancy

dress ball to?night, and that he desires you to put on the costume that

I have laid out. Meanwhile, sir, there is a bottle of Burgundy and some

cold pheasant, which he hopes you will not refuse, as it is some hours

before supper."

"Cold pheasant is a good thing," said Syme reflectively, "and Burgundy

is a spanking good thing. But really I do not want either of them so

much as I want to know what the devil all this means, and what sort of

costume you have got laid out for me. Where is it?"

The servant lifted off a kind of ottoman a long peacock?blue drapery,

rather of the nature of a domino, on the front of which was emblazoned

a large golden sun, and which was splashed here and there with flaming

stars and crescents.

"You're to be dressed as Thursday, sir," said the valet somewhat

affably.

"Dressed as Thursday!" said Syme in meditation. "It doesn't sound a

warm costume."

"Oh, yes, sir," said the other eagerly, "the Thursday costume is quite

warm, sir. It fastens up to the chin."

"Well, I don't understand anything," said Syme, sighing. "I have been

used so long to uncomfortable adventures that comfortable adventures

knock me out. Still, I may be allowed to ask why I should be

particularly like Thursday in a green frock spotted all over with the

sun and moon. Those orbs, I think, shine on other days. I once saw the

moon on Tuesday, I remember."

"Beg pardon, sir," said the valet, "Bible also provided for you," and

with a respectful and rigid finger he pointed out a passage in the

first chapter of Genesis. Syme read it wondering. It was that in which

the fourth day of the week is associated with the creation of the sun

and moon. Here, however, they reckoned from a Christian Sunday.

"This is getting wilder and wilder," said Syme, as he sat down in a

chair. "Who are these people who provide cold pheasant and Burgundy,

and green clothes and Bibles? Do they provide everything?"

"Yes, sir, everything," said the attendant gravely. "Shall I help you

on with your costume?"

"Oh, hitch the bally thing on! " said Syme impatiently.

But though he affected to despise the mummery, he felt a curious

freedom and naturalness in his movements as the blue and gold garment

fell about him; and when he found that he had to wear a sword, it

stirred a boyish dream. As he passed out of the room he flung the folds

across his shoulder with a gesture, his sword stood out at an angle,

and he had all the swagger of a troubadour. For these disguises did not

disguise, but reveal.

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CHAPTER XV

THE ACCUSER

AS Syme strode along the corridor he saw the Secretary standing at the

top of a great flight of stairs. The man had never looked so noble. He

was draped in a long robe of starless black, down the centre of which

fell a band or broad stripe of pure white, like a single shaft of

light. The whole looked like some very severe ecclesiastical vestment.

There was no need for Syme to search his memory or the Bible in order

to remember that the first day of creation marked the mere creation of

light out of darkness. The vestment itself would alone have suggested

the symbol; and Syme felt also how perfectly this pattern of pure white

and black expressed the soul of the pale and austere Secretary, with

his inhuman veracity and his cold frenzy, which made him so easily make

war on the anarchists, and yet so easily pass for one of them. Syme was

scarcely surprised to notice that, amid all the ease and hospitality of

their new surroundings, this man's eyes were still stern. No smell of

ale or orchards could make the Secretary cease to ask a reasonable

question.

If Syme had been able to see himself, he would have realised that he,

too, seemed to be for the first time himself and no one else. For if

the Secretary stood for that philosopher who loves the original and

formless light, Syme was a type of the poet who seeks always to make

the light in special shapes, to split it up into sun and star. The

philosopher may sometimes love the infinite; the poet always loves the

finite. For him the great moment is not the creation of light, but the

creation of the sun and moon.

As they descended the broad stairs together they overtook Ratcliffe,

who was clad in spring green like a huntsman, and the pattern upon

whose garment was a green tangle of trees. For he stood for that third

day on which the earth and green things were made, and his square,

sensible face, with its not unfriendly cynicism, seemed appropriate

enough to it.

They were led out of another broad and low gateway into a very large

old English garden, full of torches and bonfires, by the broken light

of which a vast carnival of people were dancing in motley dress. Syme

seemed to see every shape in Nature imitated in some crazy costume.

There was a man dressed as a windmill with enormous sails, a man

dressed as an elephant, a man dressed as a balloon; the two last,

together, seemed to keep the thread of their farcical adventures. Syme

even saw, with a queer thrill, one dancer dressed like an enormous

hornbill, with a beak twice as big as himself--the queer bird which had

fixed itself on his fancy like a living question while he was rushing

down the long road at the Zoological Gardens. There were a thousand

other such objects, however. There was a dancing lamp?post, a dancing

apple tree, a dancing ship. One would have thought that the untamable

tune of some mad musician had set all the common objects of field and

street dancing an eternal jig. And long afterwards, when Syme was

middle?aged and at rest, he could never see one of those particular

objects--a lamppost, or an apple tree, or a windmill--without thinking

that it was a strayed reveller from that revel of masquerade.

On one side of this lawn, alive with dancers, was a sort of green bank,

like the terrace in such old?fashioned gardens.

Along this, in a kind of crescent, stood seven great chairs, the

thrones of the seven days. Gogol and Dr. Bull were already in their

seats; the Professor was just mounting to his. Gogol, or Tuesday, had

his simplicity well symbolised by a dress designed upon the division of

the waters, a dress that separated upon his forehead and fell to his

feet, grey and silver, like a sheet of rain. The Professor, whose day

was that on which the birds and fishes--the ruder forms of life--were

created, had a dress of dim purple, over which sprawled goggle?eyed

fishes and outrageous tropical birds, the union in him of unfathomable

fancy and of doubt. Dr. Bull, the last day of Creation, wore a coat

covered with heraldic animals in red and gold, and on his crest a man

rampant. He lay back in his chair with a broad smile, the picture of an

optimist in his element.

One by one the wanderers ascended the bank and sat in their strange

seats. As each of them sat down a roar of enthusiasm rose from the

carnival, such as that with which crowds receive kings. Cups were

clashed and torches shaken, and feathered hats flung in the air. The

men for whom these thrones were reserved were men crowned with some

extraordinary laurels. But the central chair was empty.

Syme was on the left hand of it and the Secretary on the right. The

Secretary looked across the empty throne at Syme, and said, compressing

his lips--

"We do not know yet that he is not dead in a field."

Almost as Syme heard the words, he saw on the sea of human faces in

front of him a frightful and beautiful alteration, as if heaven had

opened behind his head. But Sunday had only passed silently along the

front like a shadow, and had sat in the central seat. He was draped

plainly, in a pure and terrible white, and his hair was like a silver

flame on his forehead.

For a long time--it seemed for hours--that huge masquerade of mankind

swayed and stamped in front of them to marching and exultant music.

Every couple dancing seemed a separate romance; it might be a fairy

dancing with a pillar?box, or a peasant girl dancing with the moon; but

in each case it was, somehow, as absurd as Alice in Wonderland, yet as

grave and kind as a love story. At last, however, the thick crowd began

to thin itself. Couples strolled away into the garden-walks, or began

to drift towards that end of the building where stood smoking, in huge

pots like fish-kettles, some hot and scented mixtures of old ale or

wine. Above all these, upon a sort of black framework on the roof of

the house, roared in its iron basket a gigantic bonfire, which lit up

the land for miles. It flung the homely effect of firelight over the

face of vast forests of grey or brown, and it seemed to fill with

warmth even the emptiness of upper night. Yet this also, after a time,

was allowed to grow fainter; the dim groups gathered more and more

round the great cauldrons, or passed, laughing and clattering, into the

inner passages of that ancient house. Soon there were only some ten

loiterers in the garden; soon only four. Finally the last stray

merry?maker ran into the house whooping to his companions. The fire

faded, and the slow, strong stars came out. And the seven strange men

were left alone, like seven stone statues on their chairs of stone. Not

one of them had spoken a word.

They seemed in no haste to do so, but heard in silence the hum of

insects and the distant song of one bird. Then Sunday spoke, but so

dreamily that he might have been continuing a conversation rather than

beginning one.

"We will eat and drink later," he said. "Let us remain together a

little, we who have loved each other so sadly, and have fought so long.

I seem to remember only centuries of heroic war, in which you were

always heroes--epic on epic, iliad on iliad, and you always brothers in

arms. Whether it was but recently (for time is nothing), or at the

beginning of the world, I sent you out to war. I sat in the darkness,

where there is not any created thing, and to you I was only a voice

commanding valour and an unnatural virtue. You heard the voice in the

dark, and you never heard it again. The sun in heaven denied it, the

earth and sky denied it, all human wisdom denied it. And when I met you

in the daylight I denied it myself."

Syme stirred sharply in his seat, but otherwise there was silence, and

the incomprehensible went on.

"But you were men. You did not forget your secret honour, though the

whole cosmos turned an engine of torture to tear it out of you. I knew

how near you were to hell. I know how you, Thursday, crossed swords

with King Satan, and how you, Wednesday, named me in the hour without

hope."

There was complete silence in the starlit garden, and then the

black?browed Secretary, implacable, turned in his chair towards Sunday,

and said in a harsh voice--

"Who and what are you?"

"I am the Sabbath," said the other without moving. "I am the peace of

God."

The Secretary started up, and stood crushing his costly robe in his

hand.

"I know what you mean," he cried, "and it is exactly that that I cannot

forgive you. I know you are contentment, optimism, what do they call

the thing, an ultimate reconciliation. Well, I am not reconciled. If

you were the man in the dark room, why were you also Sunday, an offense

to the sunlight? If you were from the first our father and our friend,

why were you also our greatest enemy? We wept, we fled in terror; the

iron entered into our souls--and you are the peace of God! Oh, I can

forgive God His anger, though it destroyed nations; but I cannot

forgive Him His peace."

Sunday answered not a word, but very slowly he turned his face of stone

upon Syme as if asking a question.

"No," said Syme, "I do not feel fierce like that. I am grateful to you,

not only for wine and hospitality here, but for many a fine scamper and

free fight. But I should like to know. My soul and heart are as happy

and quiet here as this old garden, but my reason is still crying out. I

should like to know."

Sunday looked at Ratcliffe, whose clear voice said--

"It seems so silly that you should have been on both sides and fought

yourself."

Bull said--

"l understand nothing, but I am happy. In fact, I am going to sleep."

"I am not happy," said the Professor with his head in his hands,

"because I do not understand. You let me stray a little too near to

hell."

And then Gogol said, with the absolute simplicity of a child--

"I wish I knew why I was hurt so much."

Still Sunday said nothing, but only sat with his mighty chin upon his

hand, and gazed at the distance. Then at last he said--

"I have heard your complaints in order. And here, I think, comes

another to complain, and we will hear him also."

The falling fire in the great cresset threw a last long gleam, like a

bar of burning gold, across the dim grass. Against this fiery band was

outlined in utter black the advancing legs of a black?clad figure. He

seemed to have a fine close suit with knee?breeches such as that which

was worn by the servants of the house, only that it was not blue, but

of this absolute sable. He had, like the servants, a kind of word by

his side. It was only when he had come quite close to the crescent of

the seven and flung up his face to look at them, that Syme saw, with

thunder?struck clearness, that the face was the broad, almost ape?like

face of his old friend Gregory, with its rank red hair and its

insulting smile.

"Gregory!" gasped Syme, half?rising from his seat. "Why, this is the

real anarchist!"

"Yes," said Gregory, with a great and dangerous restraint, "I am the

real anarchist."

" Now there was a day,' " murmured Bull, who seemed really to have

fallen asleep, " when the sons of God came to present themselves before

the Lord, and Satan came also among them.' "

"You are right," said Gregory, and gazed all round. "I am a destroyer.

I would destroy the world if I could."

A sense of a pathos far under the earth stirred up in Syme, and he

spoke brokenly and without sequence.

"Oh, most unhappy man," he cried, "try to be happy! You have red hair

like your sister."

"My red hair, like red flames, shall burn up the world," said Gregory.

"I thought I hated everything more than common men can hate anything;

but I find that I do not hate everything so much as I hate you! "

"I never hated you," said Syme very sadly.

Then out of this unintelligible creature the last thunders broke.

"You! " he cried. "You never hated because you never lived. I know what

you are all of you, from first to last--you are the people in power!

You are the police--the great fat, smiling men in blue and buttons! You

are the Law, and you have never been broken. But is there a free soul

alive that does not long to break you, only because you have never been

broken? We in revolt talk all kind of nonsense doubtless about this

crime or that crime of the Government. It is all folly! The only crime

of the Government is that it governs. The unpardonable sin of the

supreme power is that it is supreme. I do not curse you for being

cruel. I do not curse you (though I might) for being kind. I curse you

for being safe! You sit in your chairs of stone, and have never come

down from them. You are the seven angels of heaven, and you have had no

troubles. Oh, I could forgive you everything, you that rule all

mankind, if I could feel for once that you had suffered for one hour a

real agony such as I--"

Syme sprang to his feet, shaking from head to foot.

"I see everything," he cried, "everything that there is. Why does each

thing on the earth war against each other thing? Why does each small

thing in the world have to fight against the world itself? Why does a

fly have to fight the whole universe? Why does a dandelion have to

fight the whole universe? For the same reason that I had to be alone in

the dreadful Council of the Days. So that each thing that obeys law may

have the glory and isolation of the anarchist. So that each man

fighting for order may be as brave and good a man as the dynamiter. So

that the real lie of Satan may be flung back in the face of this

blasphemer, so that by tears and torture we may earn the right to say

to this man, You lie!' No agonies can be too great to buy the right to

say to this accuser, We also have suffered.'

"It is not true that we have never been broken. We have been broken

upon the wheel. It is not true that we have never descended from these

thrones. We have descended into hell. We were complaining of

unforgettable miseries even at the very moment when this man entered

insolently to accuse us of happiness. I repel the slander; we have not

been happy. I can answer for every one of the great guards of Law whom

he has accused. At least--"

He had turned his eyes so as to see suddenly the great face of Sunday,

which wore a strange smile.

"Have you," he cried in a dreadful voice, "have you ever suffered?"

As he gazed, the great face grew to an awful size, grew larger than the

colossal mask of Memnon, which had made him scream as a child. It grew

larger and larger, filling the whole sky; then everything went black.

Only in the blackness before it entirely destroyed his brain he seemed

to hear a distant voice saying a commonplace text that he had heard

somewhere, "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?"

\* \* \*

When men in books awake from a vision, they commonly find themselves in

some place in which they might have fallen asleep; they yawn in a

chair, or lift themselves with bruised limbs from a field. Syme's

experience was something much more psychologically strange if there was

indeed anything unreal, in the earthly sense, about the things he had

gone through. For while he could always remember afterwards that he had

swooned before the face of Sunday, he could not remember having ever

come to at all. He could only remember that gradually and naturally he

knew that he was and had been walking along a country lane with an easy

and conversational companion. That companion had been a part of his

recent drama; it was the red?haired poet Gregory. They were walking

like old friends, and were in the middle of a conversation about some

triviality. But Syme could only feel an unnatural buoyancy in his body

and a crystal simplicity in his mind that seemed to be superior to

everything that he said or did. He felt he was in possession of some

impossible good news, which made every other thing a triviality, but an

adorable triviality.

Dawn was breaking over everything in colours at once clear and timid;

as if Nature made a first attempt at yellow and a first attempt at

rose. A breeze blew so clean and sweet, that one could not think that

it blew from the sky; it blew rather through some hole in the sky. Syme

felt a simple surprise when he saw rising all round him on both sides

of the road the red, irregular buildings of Saffron Park. He had no

idea that he had walked so near London. He walked by instinct along one

white road, on which early birds hopped and sang, and found himself

outside a fenced garden. There he saw the sister of Gregory, the girl

with the gold?red hair, cutting lilac before breakfast, with the great

unconscious gravity of a girl.

THE END

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