**Lord Mountdrago**

W. Somerset Maugham

Dr. audlin looked at the clock on his desk. It was twenty minutes to six. He was surprised that his patient was late, for Lord Mountdrago prided him­self on his punctuality; he had a sententious way of expressing himself which gave the air *of* an epigram to a commonplace remark, and he was in the habit of saying that punctuality is a compliment you pay to the intelligent and a rebuke you administer to the stupid. Lord Mountdrago’s appointment was for five-thirty.

There was in Dr. Audlin’s appearance nothing to attract attention. He was tall and spare, with narrow shoulders and something of a stoop; his hair was grey and thin; his long, sallow face deeply lined. He was not more than fifty, but he looked older. His eyes, pale blue and rather large, were weary. When you had been with him for a while you noticed that they moved very little; they remained fixed on your face, but so empty of expression were they that it was no discomfort. They seldom lit up. They gave no clue to his thoughts nor changed with the words he spoke. If you were of an observant turn it might have struck you that he blinked much less often than most of us. His hands were on the large side, with long, tapering fingers; they were soft but firm, cool but not clammy. You could never have said what Dr. Audlin wore unless you had made a point of looking. His clothes were dark. His tie was black. His dress made his sallow lined face paler and his pale eyes more wan. He gave you the impression of a very sick man.

Dr. Audlin was a psychoanalyst. He had adopted the profession by accident and practised it with mis­giving. When the war broke out he had not been long qualified and was getting experience at various hos­pitals; he offered his services to the authorities, and after a time was sent out to France. It was then that he discovered his singular gift. He could allay certain pains by the touch of his cool, firm hands, and by talking to them often induce sleep in men who were suffering from sleeplessness. He spoke slowly. His voice had no particular colour, and its tone did not alter with the words he uttered, but it was musical, soft and lulling. He told the men that they must rest, that they mustn’t worry, that they must sleep; and rest stole into their jaded bones, tranquillity pushed their anxieties away, like a man finding a place for himself on a crowded bench, and slumber fell on their tired eyelids like the light rain of spring upon the fresh-turned earth. Dr. Audlin found that by speak­ing to men with that low, monotonous voice of his, by looking at them with his pale, quiet eyes, by strok­ing their weary foreheads with his long firm hands, he could soothe their perturbations, resolve the con­flicts that distracted them and banish the phobias that made their lives a torment. Sometimes he effected cures that seemed miraculous. He restored speech to a man who, after being buried under the earth by a bursting shell, had been struck dumb, and he gave back the use of his limbs to another who had been paralyzed after a crash in a plane. He could not understand his powers; he was of a sceptical turn, and though they say that in circumstances of this kind the first thing is to believe in yourself, he never quite succeeded in doing that; and it was only the outcome of his activities, patent to the most incredu­lous observer, that obliged him to admit that he had some faculty, coming from he knew not where, ob­scure and uncertain, that enabled him to do things for which he could offer no explanation. When the war was over he went to Vienna and studied there, and afterwards to Zurich; and then settled down in London to practise the art he had so strangely ac­quired. He had been practising now for fifteen years, and had attained, in the speciality he followed, a distinguished reputation. People told one another of the amazing things he had done, and though his fees were high, he had as many patients as he had time to see. Dr. Audlin knew that he had achieved some very extraordinary results; he had saved men from suicide, others from the lunatic asylum, he had assuaged griefs that embittered useful lives, he had turned unhappy marriages into happy ones, he had eradi­cated abnormal instincts and thus delivered not a few from a hateful bondage, he had given health to the sick in spirit; he had done all this, and yet at the back of his mind remained the suspicion that he was little more than a quack.

It went against his grain to exercise a power that he could not understand, and it offended his honesty to trade on the faith of the people he treated when he had no faith in himself. He was rich enough now to live without working, and the work exhausted him; a dozen times he had been on the point of giving up practice. He knew all that Freud and Jung and the rest of them had written. He was not satisfied; he had an intimate conviction that all their theory was hocus-pocus, and yet there the results were, in­comprehensible, but manifest. And what had he not seen of human nature during the fifteen years that patients had been coming to his dingy back room in Wimpole Street? The revelations that had been poured into his ears, sometimes only too willingly, sometimes with shame, with reservations, with anger, had long ceased to surprise him. Nothing could shock him any longer. He knew by now that men were liars, he knew how extravagant was their vanity; he knew far worse than that about them; but he knew that it was not for him to judge or to condemn. But year by year as these terrible confidences were imparted to him his face grew a little greyer, its lines a little more marked and his pale eyes more weary. He seldom laughed, but now and again when *for* relaxation he read a novel he smiled. Did their authors really think the men and women they wrote of were like that? If they only knew how much more complicated they were, how much more unexpected, what irreconcilable elements coexisted within their souls and what dark and sinister contentions afflicted them!

It was a quarter to six. Of all the strange cases he had been called upon to deal with, Dr. Audlin could remember none stranger than that *of* Lord Mount- drago. For one thing the personality of his patient made it singular. Lord Mountdrago was an able and a distinguished man. Appointed Secretary for Foreign Affairs when still under forty, now after three years in office he had seen his policy prevail. It was gener­ally acknowledged that he was the ablest politician in the Conservative Party, and only the fact that his father was a peer, on whose death he would no longer be able to sit in the House of Commons, made it impossible for him to aim at the premiership. But if in these democratic times it is out of the question for a Prime Minister of England to be in the House of Lords, there was nothing to prevent Lord Mount- drago from continuing to be Secretary for Foreign Affairs in successive Conservative administrations and so for long directing the foreign policy of his country.

Lord Mountdrago had many good qualities. He had intelligence and industry. He was widely travelled and spoke several languages fluently. From early youth he had specialized in foreign affairs and had conscientiously made himself acquainted with the political and economic circumstances of other coun­tries. He had courage, insight and determination. He was a good speaker, both on the platform and in the House, clear, precise and often witty. He was a brilliant debater and his gift of repartee was cele­brated. He had a fine presence: he was a tall, hand­some man, rather bald and somewhat too stout, but this gave him solidity and an air of maturity that were of service to him. As a young man he had been something of an athlete and had rowed in the Oxford boat, and he was known to be one of the best shots in England. At twenty-four he had married a girl of eighteen whose father was a duke and her mother a great American heiress, so that she had both position and wealth, and by her he had had two sons. For several years they had lived privately apart, but in public united, so that appearances were saved, and no other attachment on either side had given the gossips occasion to whisper. Lord Mountdrago indeed was too ambitious, too hard-working, and it must be added too patriotic, to be tempted by any pleasures that might interfere with his career. He had in short a great deal to make him a popular and successful figure. He had unfortunately great defects.

He was a fearful snob. You would not have beer, surprised at this if his father had been the first holder of the title. That the son of an ennobled lawyer, manufacturer or distiller should attach an inordinate importance to his rank is understandable. The earl­dom held by Lord Mountdrago’s father was created by Charles II, and the barony held by the first earl dated from the Wars of the Roses. For three hundred years the successive holders of the title had allied themselves with the noblest families of England. But Lord Mountdrago was as conscious *of* his birth as a *nouveau riche* is conscious of his money. He never missed an opportunity of impressing it upon others. He had beautiful manners when he chose to display them, but this he did only with people whom he re­garded as his equals. He was coldly insolent to those whom he looked upon as his social inferiors. He was rude to his servants and insulting to his secretaries. The subordinate officials in the government offices to which he had been successively attached feared and hated him. His arrogance was horrible. He knew that he was a great deal cleverer than most of the persons he had to do with, and never hesitated to apprise them of the fact. He had no patience with the infirmities of human nature. He felt himself born to command and was irritated with people who expected him to listen to their arguments or wished to hear the reasons for his decisions. He was immeasurably selfish. He looked upon any service that was rendered him as a right due to his rank and intelligence and therefore deserving of no gratitude. It never entered his head that he was called upon to do anything for others. He had many enemies: he despised them. He knew no one who merited his assistance, his sympathy or his compassion. He had no friends. He was dis­trusted by his chiefs, because they doubted his loyalty; he was unpopular with his party, because he was overbearing and discourteous; and yet his merit was so great, his patriotism so evident, his intelligence so solid and his management of affairs so brilliant, that they had to put up with him. And what made it possible to do this was that on occasion he could be enchanting: when he was with persons whom he considered his equals, or whom he wished to captivate, in the company of foreign dignitaries or women of distinction, he could be gay, witty and debonair; his manners then reminded you that in his

veins ran the same blood as had run in the veins of Lord Chesterfield; he could tell a story with point, he could be natural, sensible and even profound. You were surprised at the extent *of* his knowledge and the sensitiveness of his taste. You thought him the best company in the world; you forgot that he had in­sulted you the day before and was quite capable of cutting you dead the next.

Lord Mountdrago almost failed to become Dr. Audlin’s patient. A secretary rang up the doctor and told him that his lordship, wishing to consult him, would be glad if he would come to his house at ten o’clock on the following morning. Dr. Audlin answered that he was unable to go to Lord Mountdrago’s house, but would be pleased to give him an appointment at his consulting room at five o’clock on the next day but one. The secretary took the message and presently rang back to say that Lord Mountdrago insisted on seeing Dr. Audlin in his own house and the doctor could fix his own fee. Dr. Audlin replied that he saw patients only in his consulting room and expressed his regret that unless Lord Mountdrago was prepared to come to him he could not give him his attention. In a quarter of an hour a brief message was delivered to him that his lordship would come not next day but one, but next day, at five.

When Lord Mountdrago was then shown in he did not come forward, but stood at the door and inso­lently looked the doctor up and down. Dr. Audlin perceived that he was in a rage; he gazed at him, silently, with still eyes. He saw a big heavy man, with greying hair, receding on the forehead so that it gave nobility to his brow, a puffy face with bold regular features and an expression of haughtiness. He had somewhat the look of one of the Bourbon sovereigns of the eighteenth century.

“It seems that it is as difficult to see you as a Prime Minister, Dr. Audlin. I’m an extremely busy man.”

“Won’t you sit down?” said the doctor.

His face showed no sign that Lord Mountdrago’s speech in any way affected him. Dr. Audlin sat in his chair at the desk. Lord Mountdrago still stood, and his frown darkened.

“I think I should tell you that I am His Majesty’s Secretary for Foreign Affairs,” he said acidly.

“Won’t you sit down?” the doctor repeated.

Lord Mountdrago made a gesture, which might have suggested that he was about to turn on his heel and stalk out of the room; but if that was his in­tention he apparently thought better of it. He seated himself. Dr. Audlin opened a large book and took up his pen. He wrote without looking at his patient.

“How old are you?”

“Forty-two.”

“Are you married?”

“Yes.”

“How long have you been married?”

“Eighteen years.”

“Have you any children?”

“I have two sons.”

Dr. Audlin noted down the facts as Lord Mount- drago abruptly answered his questions. Then he leaned back in his chair and looked at him. He did not speak; he just looked, gravely, with pale eyes that did not move.

“Why have you come to see me?” he asked at length.

“I’ve heard about you. Lady Canute is a patient of yours, I understand. She tells me you’ve done her a certain amount of good.”

Dr. Audlin did not reply. His eyes remained fixed on the other’s face, but they were so empty of ex­pression that you might have thought he did not even see him.

“I can’t do miracles,” he said at length. Not a smile, but the shadow of a smile flickered in his eyes. “The Royal College of Physicians would not approve of it if I did.”

Lord Mountdrago gave a brief chuckle. It seemed to lessen his hostility. He spoke more amiably.

“You have a very remarkable reputation. People seem to believe in you.”

“Why have you come to me ? ” repeated Dr. Audlin.

Now it was Lord Mountdrago’s turn to be silent.

It looked as though he found it hard to answer. Dr. Audlin waited. At last Lord Mountdrago seemed to make an effort. He spoke.

“I’m in perfect health. Just as a matter of routine I had myself examined by my own doctor the other day, Sir Augustus Fitzherbert, I daresay you’ve heard of him, and he tells me I have the physique of a man of thirty. I work hard, but I’m never tired, and I enjoy my work. I smoke very little and I’m an extremely moderate drinker. I take a sufficiency of exercise and I lead a regular life. I am a perfectly sound, normal, healthy man. I quite expect you to think it very silly and childish of me to consult you.”

Dr. Audlin saw that he must help him.

“I don’t know if I can do anything to help you. I’ll try. You’re distressed?”

Lord Mountdrago frowned.

“The work that I’m engaged in is important. The decisions I am called upon to make can easily affect the welfare of the country and even the peace of the world. It is essential that my judgment should be balanced and my brain clear. I look upon it as my duty to eliminate any cause of worry that may inter­fere with my usefulness.”

Dr. Audlin had never taken his eyes off him. He saw a great deal. He saw behind his patient’s pompous, manner and arrogant pride an anxiety that he could not dispel.

“I asked you to be good enough to come here because I know by experience that it’s easier for someone to speak openly in the dingy surroundings of a doctor’s consulting room than in his accustomed environment.”

“They’re certainly dingy,” said Lord Mountdrago acidly. He paused. It was evident that this man who had so much self-assurance, so quick and decided a mind that he was never at a loss, at this moment was embarrassed. He smiled in order to show the doctor that he was at his ease, but his eyes betrayed his disquiet. When he spoke again it was with unnatural heartiness.

“The whole thing’s so trivial that I can hardly bring myself to bother you with it. I’m afraid you’ll just tell me not to be a fool and waste your valuable time.”

“Even things that seem very trivial may have their importance. They can be a symptom of a deep- seated derangement. And my time is entirely at your disposal.”

Dr. Audlin’s voice was low and grave. The mono­tone in which he spoke was strangely soothing. Lord Mountdrago at length made up his mind to be frank.

“The fact is I’ve been having some very tiresome dreams lately. I know it’s silly to pay any attention to them, but—well, the honest truth is that I’m afraid they’ve got on my nerves.”

“Can you describe any of them to me?”

Lord Mountdrago smiled, but the smile that tried to be careless was only rueful.

“They’re so idiotic, I can hardly bring myself to narrate them.”

“Never mind.”

“Well, the first I had was about a month ago. I dreamt that I was at a party at Connemara House. It was an official party. The King and Queen were to be there, and of course decorations were worn. I was wearing my ribbon and my star. I went into a sort of cloakroom they have to take off my coat. There was a little man there called Owen Griffiths, who’s a Welsh member of Parliament, and to tell you the truth, I was surprised to see him. He’s very common, and I said to myself: ‘ Really, Lydia Conne­mara is going too far, whom will she ask next?’ I thought he looked at me rather curiously, but I didn’t take any notice of him; in fact I cut the little bounder and walked upstairs. I suppose you’ve never been there?”

“Never.”

“No, it’s not the sort of house you’d ever be likely to go to. It’s a rather vulgar house, but it’s got a very fine marble staircase, and the Connemaras were at the top receiving their guests. Lady Connemara gave me a look of surprise when I shook hands with her, and began to giggle; I didn’t pay much attention— she s a very silly, ill-bred woman, and her manners are no better than those of her ancestress whom King Charles II made a duchess. I must say the reception rooms at Connemara House are stately. I walked through, nodding to a number of people and shaking hands; then I saw the German Ambassador talking with one of the Austrian archdukes. I particularly wanted to have a word with him, so I went up and held out my hand. The moment the Archduke saw me he burst into a roar of laughter. I was deeply affronted. I looked him up and down sternly, but he only laughed the more. I was about to speak to him rather sharply, when there was a sudden hush, and I realized that the King and Queen had come. Turn­ing my back on the Archduke, I stepped forward, and then, quite suddenly, I noticed that I hadn’t got any trousers on. I was in short silk drawers, and I wore scarlet sock suspenders. No wonder Lady Connemara had giggled; no wonder the Archduke had laughed! I can’t tell you what that moment was. An agony of shame. I awoke in a cold sweat. Oh, you don’t know the relief I felt to find it was only a dream.”

“It’s the kind *of* dream that’s not so very un­common,” said Dr. Audlin.

“I daresay not. But an odd thing happened next day. I was in the lobby of the House of Commons, when that fellow Griffiths walked slowly past me. He deliberately looked down at my legs, and then he looked me full in the face, and I was almost certain he winked. A ridiculous thought came to me. He’d been there the night before and seen me make that ghastly exhibition of myself and was enjoying the joke. But of course I knew that was impossible be­cause it was only a dream. I gave him an icy glare, and he walked on. But he was grinning his head off.”

Lord Mountdrago took his handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped the palms of his hands. He was making no attempt now to conceal his perturbation. Dr. Audlin never took his eyes off him.

“Tell me another dream.”

“It was the night after, and it was even more absurd than the first one. I dreamt that I was in the House. There was a debate on foreign affairs which not only the country, but the world, had been looking forward to with the gravest concern. The government had decided on a change in their policy which vitally affected the future of the Empire. The occasion was historic. Of course the House was crowded. All the ambassadors were there. The galleries were packed. It fell to me to make the important speech of the evening. I had prepared it carefully. A man like me has enemies—there are a lot of people who resent my having achieved the position I have at an age when even the cleverest men are content with situations of relative obscurity—and I was determined that my speech should not only be worthy of the occasion, but should silence my detractors. It excited me to think that the whole world was hanging on my lips. I rose to my feet. If you’ve ever been in the House you’ll know how members chat to one another during a debate, rustle papers and turn over reports. The silence was the silence of the grave when I began to speak. Suddenly I caught sight of that odious little bounder on one of the benches opposite, Griffiths, the Welsh member; he put out his tongue at me. I don’t know if you’ve ever heard a vulgar music-hall song called ‘A Bicycle Made for Two.’ It was very popular a great many years ago. To show Griffiths how completely I despised him I began to sing it. I sang the first verse right through. There was a mo­ment’s surprise, and when I finished they cried ‘Hear, hear,’ on the opposite benches. I put up my hand to silence them and sang the second verse. The House listened to me in stony silence and I felt the song wasn’t going down very well. I was vexed, for I have a good baritone voice, and I was determined that they should do me justice. When I started the third verse the members began to laugh; in an instant the laugh­ter spread; the ambassadors, the strangers in the Distinguished Strangers’ Gallery, the ladies in the Ladies’ Gallery, the reporters, they shook, they bellowed, they held their sides, they rolled in their seats; everyone was overcome with laughter except the ministers on the Front Bench immediately behind me. In that incredible, in that unprecedented, uproar they sat petrified. I gave them a glance, and suddenly the enormity of what I had done fell upon me. I had made myself the laughing-stock, of the whole world. With misery I realized that I should have to resign. I woke and knew it was only a dream.”

Lord Mountdrago’s grand manner had deserted him as he narrated this, and now having finished he was pale and trembling. But with an effort he pulled himself together. He forced a laugh to his shaking lips.

“The whole thing was so fantastic that I couldn’t help being amused. I didn’t give it another thought, and when I went into the House on the following afternoon I was feeling in very good form. The debate was dull, but I had to be there, and I read some docu­ments that required my attention. For some reason I chanced to look up, and I saw that Griffiths was speaking. He has an unpleasant Welsh accent and an unprepossessing appearance. I couldn’t imagine that he had anything to say that it was worth my while to listen to, and I was about to return to my papers when he quoted two lines from ‘A Bicycle Made for Two.’ I couldn’t help glancing at him, and I saw that his eyes were fixed on me with a grin of bitter mockery. I faintly shrugged my shoulders. It was comic that a scrubby little Welsh member should look at me like that. It was an odd coincidence that he should quote two lines from that disastrous song that I’d sung all through in my dream. I began to read my papers again, but I don’t mind telling you that I found it difficult to concentrate on them. I was a little puzzled. Owen Griffiths had been in my first dream, the one at Connemara House, and I’d re­ceived a very definite impression afterwards that he knew the sorry figure I’d cut. Was it a mere coinci­dence that he had just quoted those two lines? I asked myself if it was possible that he was dreaming the same dreams as I w as. But of course the idea w as preposterous, and I determined not to give it a second thought.”

There was a silence. Dr. Audlin looked at Lord Mountdrago and Lord Mountdrago looked at Dr. Audlin.

“Other people’s dreams are very boring. My wife used to dream occasionally and insist on telling me her dreams next day with circumstantial detail. I found it maddening.”

Dr. Audlin faintly smiled.

“You’re not boring me.”

“I’ll tell you one more dream I had a few days later. I dreamt that I went into a public house at Limehouse. I’ve never been to Limehouse in my life and I don’t think I’ve ever been in a public house since I was at Oxford, and yet I saw the street and the place I went into as exactly as if I were at home there. I went into a room—I don’t know whether they call it the saloon bar or the private bar; there was a fireplace and a large leather armchair on one side of it, and on the other a small sofa; a bar ran the whole length of the room, and over it you could see into the public bar. Near the door was a round marble-topped table and two armchairs beside it. It was a Saturday night, and the place was packed. It was brightly lit, but the smoke was so thick that it made my eyes smart. I was dressed like a rough, with a cap on my head and a handkerchief round my neck. It seemed to me that most of the people there wrere drunk. I thought it rather amusing. There was a gramophone going, or the radio, I don’t know which, and in front of the fireplace two women were doing a grotesque dance. There was a little crowd round them, laughing, cheering and singing. I went up to have a look, and some man said to me: ‘’Ave a drink, Bill.’ There were glasses on the table full of a dark liquid which I understand is called brown ale. He gave me a glass, and not wishing to be conspicu­ous I drank it. One of the women who were dancing broke away from the other and took hold of the glass. ‘’Ere, what’s the idea?’ she said. ‘That’s my beer you’re putting away.’ ‘Oh, I’m so sorry,’ I said, ‘this gentleman offered it me, and I very naturally thought it was his to offer.’ ‘All right, mate,’ she said, ‘ I don’t mind. You come an’ ’ave a dance with me.’ Before

I could protest she’d caught hold of me and we were dancing together. And then I found myself sitting in the armchair with the woman on my lap and we were sharing a glass of beer. I should tell you that sex has never played any great part in my life. I married young because in my position it was desirable that I should marry, but also in order to settle once for all the question of sex. I had the two sons I had made up my mind to have, and then I put the whole matter on one side. I’ve always been too busy to give much thought to that kind of thing, and living so much in the public eye as I do, it would have been madness to do anything that might give rise to scandal. The greatest asset a politician can have is a blameless record as far as women are concerned. I have no patience with the men who smash up their careers for women. I only despise them. The woman I had on my knees was drunk; she wasn’t pretty and she wasn’t young: in fact, she was just a blowsy old prostitute. She filled me with disgust, and yet when she put her mouth to mine and kissed me, though her breath stank of beer and her teeth were decayed, though I loathed myself, I wanted her—I wanted her with all my soul. Suddenly I heard a voice: ‘That’s right, old boy, have a good time.’ I looked up, and there was Owen Griffiths. I tried to spring out of the chair, but that horrible woman wouldn’t let me. ‘Don’t you pay no attention to ’im,’ she said, ‘’e’s only one of them nosy parkers.’ ‘You go to it,’ he said. ‘I know Moll. She’ll give you your money’s worth all right.’ You know, I wasn’t so much annoyed at his seeing me in that absurd situation as angry that he should address me as old boy. I pushed the woman aside and stood up and faced him. ‘ I don’t know you, and I don’t want to know you,’ I said. ‘I know you all right,’ he said. ‘And my advice to you, Molly, is, see that you get your money, he’ll bilk you if he can.’ There was a bottle of beer standing on the table close by. Without a word I seized it by the neck and hit him over the head with it as hard as I could. I made such a violent gesture that it woke me up.”

“A dream of that sort is not incomprehensible,” said Dr. Audlin. “It is the revenge nature takes on persons of unimpeachable character.”

“The story’s idiotic. I haven’t told it you for its own sake. I’ve told it you for what happened next day. I wanted to look up something in a hurry, and I went into the library of the House. I got the book and began reading. I hadn’t noticed when I sat down that Griffiths was sitting in a chair close by me. Another of the Labour Members came in and went up to him. ‘Hullo, Owen,’ he said to him, ‘you’re looking pretty dicky today.’ ‘I’ve got an awful headache,’ he answered, ‘ I feel as if I’d been cracked over the head with a bottle.’”

Now Lord Mountdrago’s face was grey with anguish.

“I knew then that the idea I’d had and dismissed as preposterous was true. I knew that Griffiths was dreaming my dreams and that he remembered them as well as I did.”

“It may also have been a coincidence.”

“When he spoke he didn’t speak to his friend, he deliberately spoke to me. He looked at me with sullen resentment.”

“Can you offer any suggestion why this same man should come into your dreams?”

“None.”

Dr. Audlin’s eyes had not left his patient’s face and he saw that he lied. He had a pencil in his hand, and he drew a straggling line or two on his blotting paper. It often took a long time to get people to tell the truth, and yet they knew that unless they told it he could do nothing for them.

“The dream you’ve just described to me took place just over three weeks ago. Have you had any since?”

“Every night.”

“And does this man Griffiths come into them all?” “Yes.”

The doctor drew more lines on his blotting paper. He wanted the silence, the drabness, the dull light of that little room to have its effect on Lord Mount- drago’s sensibility. Lord Mountdrago threw himself back in his chair and turned his head away so that he should not see the other’s grave eyes.

“Dr. Audlin, you must do something for me. I’m at the end of my tether. I shall go mad if this goes on. I’m afraid to go to sleep. Two or three nights I haven’t. I’ve sat up reading and when I felt drowsy put on my coat and walked till I was exhausted. But I must have sleep. With all the work I have to do I must be at concert pitch; I must be in complete control of all my faculties. I need rest; sleep brings me none. I no sooner fall asleep than my dreams begin, and he’s always there, that vulgar little cad, grinning at me, mocking me, despising me. It’s a monstrous perse­cution. I tell you, Doctor, I’m not the man of my dreams; it’s not fair to judge me by them. Ask any­one you like. I’m an honest, upright, decent man. No one can say anything against my moral character either private or public. My whole ambition is to serve my country and maintain its greatness. I have money, I have rank, I’m not exposed to many of the temptations of lesser men, so that it’s no credit to me to be incorruptible; but this I can claim, that no honour, no personal advantage, no thought of self would induce me to swerve by a hairsbreadth from my duty. I’ve sacrificed everything to become the man I am. Greatness is my aim. Greatness is within my reach, and I’m losing my nerve. I’m not that mean, despicable, cowardly, lewd creature that hor­rible little man sees. I’ve told you three of my dreams; they’re nothing; that man has seen me do things that are so beastly, so horrible, so shameful, that even if my life depended on it I wouldn’t tell them. And he remembers them. I can hardly meet the derision and disgust I see in his eyes, and I even hesitate to speak because I know my words can seem to him nothing but utter humbug. He’s seen me do things that no man with any self-respect would do, things for which men are driven out of the society of their fellows and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment; he’s heard the foulness of my speech; he’s seen me not only ridiculous, but revolting. He despises me and he no longer pretends to conceal it. I tell you that if you can’t do something to help me I shall either kill my­self or kill him.”

“I wouldn’t kill him if I were you,” said Dr. Audlin coolly, in that soothing voice of his. “In this country the consequences of killing a fellow creature are awkward.”

“I shouldn’t be hanged for it, if that’s what you mean. Who would know that I’d killed him? That dream of mine has shown me how. I told you, the day after I’d hit him over the head with a beer bottle he had such a headache that he couldn’t see straight. He said so himself. That shows that he can feel with his waking body what happens to his body asleep. It’s not with a bottle I shall hit him next time. One night, when I’m dreaming, I shall find myself with a knife in my hand or a revolver in my pocket—I must because I want to so intensely—and then I shall seize my opportunity. I’ll stick him like a pig; I’ll shoot him like a dog. In the heart. And then I shall be free of this fiendish persecution.”

Some people might have thought that Lord Mount­drago was mad; after all the years during which Dr. Audlin had been treating the diseased souls of men he knew how thin a line divides those whom we call sane from those whom we call insane. He knew how often in men who to all appearance were healthy and nor­mal, who were seemingly devoid of imagination, and who fulfilled the duties of common life with credit to themselves and with benefit to their fellows, when you gained their confidence, when you tore away the mask they wore to the world, you found not only hideous abnormality, but kinks so strange, mental extravagances so fantastic, that in that respect you could only call them lunatic. If you put them in an asylum, not all the asylums in the world would be large enough. Anyhow, a man was not certifiable because he had strange dreams and they had shat­tered his nerve. The case was singular, but it was only an exaggeration of others that had come under Dr. Audlin’s observation; he was doubtful, however, whether the methods of treatment that he had so often found efficacious would here avail.

“Have you consulted any other member of my profession?” he asked.

“Only Sir Augustus. I merely told him that I suffered from nightmares. He said I was overworked and recommended me to go for a cruise. That’s ab­surd. I can t leave the Foreign Office just now when the international situation needs constant attention. I’m indispensable, and I know it. On my conduct at the present juncture my whole future depends. He gave me sedatives. They had no effect. He gave me tonics. They were worse than useless. He’s an old fool.”

“Can you give any reason why it should be this particular man who persists in coming into your dreams?”

“You asked me that question before. I answered it.**”**

That was true. But Dr. Audlin had not been satis­fied with the answer.

“Just now you talked of persecution. Why should Owen Griffiths want to persecute you?”

“I don’t know.”

Lord Mountdrago’s eyes shifted a little. Dr. Audlin was sure that he was not speaking the truth.

“Have you ever done him an injury?”

“Never.”

Lord Mountdrago made no movement, but Dr. Audlin had a queer feeling that he shrank into his skin. He saw before him a large, proud man who gave the impression that the questions put to him were an insolence, and yet for all that, behind that façade, was something shifting and startled that made you think of a frightened animal in a trap. Dr. Audlin leaned forward and by the power of his eyes forced Lord Mountdrago to meet them.

“Are you quite sure?”

“Quite sure. You don’t seem to understand that our ways lead along different paths. I don’t wish to harp on it, but I must remind you that I am a Minis­ter of the Crown and Griffiths is an obscure member of the Labour Party. Naturally there’s no social con­nection between us; he’s a man of very humble origin, he’s not the sort of person I should be likely to meet at any of the houses I go to; and politically our re­spective stations are so far separated that we could not possibly have anything in common.”

“I can do nothing for you unless you tell me the complete truth.”

Lord Mountdrago raised his eyebrows. His voice was rasping.

“I’m not accustomed to having my word doubted, Dr. Audlin. If you’re going to do that, I think to take up any more of your time can only be a waste of mine. If you will kindly let my secretary know what your fee is, he will see that a cheque is sent to you.”

For all the expression that was to be seen on Dr. Audlin’s face you might have thought that he simply had not heard what Lord Mountdrago said. He con­tinued to look steadily into his eyes, and his voice was grave and low.

“Have you done anything to this man that *he* might look upon as an injury?”

Lord Mountdrago hesitated. He looked away, and then, as though there were in Dr. Audlin’s eyes a compelling force that he could not resist, looked back. He answered sulkily:

“Only if he was a dirty, second-rate little cad.”

“But that is exactly what you’ve described him to be.”

Lord Mountdrago sighed. He was beaten. Dr. Audlin knew that the sigh meant he was going at last to say what he had till then held back. Now he had no longer to insist. He dropped his eyes and began again drawing vague geometrical figures on his blotting paper. The silence lasted two or three minutes.

“I’m anxious to tell you everything that can be of any use to you. If I didn’t mention this before, it’s only because it was so unimportant that I didn’t see how it could possibly have anything to do with the case. Griffiths won a seat at the last election, and he began to make a nuisance of himself almost at once. His father’s a miner, and he worked in a mine himself when he was a boy; he’s been a schoolmaster in the board schools and a journalist. He’s that half-baked, conceited intellectual, with inadequate knowledge, ill-considered ideas and impractical plans, that com­pulsory education has brought forth from the work­ing classes. He’s a scrawny, grey-faced man who looks half starved, and he’s always very slovenly in appearance; heaven knows members nowadays don’t bother much about their dress, but his clothes are an outrage to the dignity of the House. They’re osten­tatiously shabby, his collar’s never clean, and his tie’s never tied properly; he looks as if he hadn’t had a bath for a month, and his hands are filthy. The Labour Party have two or three fellows on the Front Bench who’ve got a certain ability, but the rest of them don’t amount to much. In the kingdom of the blind the one-eyed man is king: because Griffiths it glib and has a lot of superficial information on a num­ber of subjects, the Whips on his side began to put him up to speak whenever there was a chance. It appeared that he fancied himself on foreign affairs, and he was continually asking me silly, tiresome questions. I don’t mind telling you that I made a point of snubbing him as soundly as I thought he deserved. From the beginning I hated the way he talked, his whining voice and his vulgar accent; he had nervous mannerisms that intensely irritated me. He talked rather shyly, hesitatingly, as though it were torture to him to speak and yet he was forced to by some inner passion, and often he used to say some very disconcerting things. I’ll admit that now and again he had a sort of tub-thumping eloquence.

It had a certain influence over the ill-regulated minds of the members of his party. They were impressed by his earnestness, and they weren’t, as I was, nause­ated by his sentimentality. A certain sentimentality is the common coin of political debate. Nations are governed by self-interest, but they prefer to believe that their aims are altruistic, and the politician is justified if with fair words and fine phrases he can persuade the electorate that the hard bargain he is driving for his country’s advantage tends to the good of humanity. The mistake people like Griffiths make is to take these fair words and fine phrases at their face value. He’s a crank, and a noxious crank. He calls himself an idealist. He has at his tongue’s end all the tedious blather that the intelligentsia have been boring us with for years. Nonresistance. The brotherhood of man. You know the hopeless rubbish. The worst of it was that it impressed not only his own party, it even shook some of the sillier, more sloppy-minded members of ours. I heard rumours that Griffiths was likely to get office when a Labour Government came in; I even heard it suggested that he might get the Foreign Office. The notion was gro­tesque but not impossible. One day I had occasion to wind up a debate on foreign affairs which Griffiths had opened. He’d spoken for an hour. I thought it a very good opportunity to cook his goose, and by God, sir, I cooked it. I tore his speech to pieces. I pointed out the faultiness of his reasoning and emphasized the deficiency of his knowledge. In the House of Com­mons the most devastating weapon is ridicule: I mocked him; I bantered him; I was in good form that day and the House rocked with laughter. Their laugh­ter excited me, and I excelled myself. The Opposition sat glum and silent, but even some of them couldn’t help laughing once or twice; it’s not intolerable, you know, to see a colleague, perhaps a rival, made a fool of. And if ever a man was made *a* fool of, I made a fool of Griffiths. He shrank down in his seat; I saw his face go white, and presently he buried it in his hands. When I sat down I’d killed him. I’d destroyed his prestige for ever; he had no more chance of getting office when a Labour Government came in than the policeman at the door. I heard afterwards that his father, the old miner, and his mother had come up from Wales, with various supporters *of* his in the constituency, to watch the triumph they expected him to have. They had seen only his utter humiliation. He’d won the constituency by the narrowest margin. An incident like that might very easily lose him his seat. But that was no business of mine.”

“Should I be putting it too strongly if I said you had ruined his career?” asked Dr. Audlin.

“I don’t suppose you would.”

“That is a very serious injury you’ve done him.” “He brought it on himself.”

“Have you never felt any qualms about it?”

“I think perhaps if I’d known that his father and mother were there I might have let him down a little more gently.”

There was nothing further for Dr. Audlin to say, and he set about treating his patient in such a man­ner as he thought might avail. He sought by sug­gestion to make him forget his dreams when he awoke; he sought to make him sleep so deeply that he would not dream. He found Lord Mountdrago’s resistance impossible to break down. At the end of an hour he dismissed him.

Since then he had seen Lord Mountdrago half a dozen times. He had done him no good. The frightful dreams continued every night to harass the unfortu­nate man, and it was clear that his general condition was growing rapidly worse. He was worn out. His irritability was uncontrollable. Lord Mountdrago was angry because he received no benefit from his treatment, and yet continued it, not only because it seemed his only hope, but because it was a relief to him to have someone with whom he could talk openly. Dr. Audlin came to the conclusion at last that there was only one way in which Lord Mountdrago could achieve deliverance, but he knew him well enough to be assured that of his own free will he would never, never take it. If Lord Mountdrago was to be saved from the breakdown that was threatening, he must be induced to take a step that must be abhorrent to his pride of birth and his self-complacency. Dr. Audlin was convinced that to delay was impossible. He was treating his patient by suggestion, and after several visits found him more susceptible to it. At length he managed to get him into a condition of somnolence. With his low, soft, monotonous voice he soothed his tortured nerves. He repeated the same words over and over again. Lord Mountdrago lay quite still, his eyes closed; his breathing was regular, and his limbs were relaxed. Then Dr. Audlin in the same quiet tone spoke the words he had prepared.

“You will go to Owen Griffiths and say that you are sorry that you caused him that great injury. You will say that you will do whatever lies in your power to undo the harm that you have done him.”

The words acted on Lord Mountdrago like the blow of a whip across his face. He shook himself out of his hypnotic state and sprang to his feet. His eyes blazed with passion, and he poured forth upon Dr. Audlin a stream of angry vituperation such as even he had never heard. He swore at him. He cursed him. He used language of such obscenity that Dr. Audlin, who had heard every sort of foul word, sometimes from the lips of chaste and distinguished women, was surprised that he knew it.

“Apologize to that filthy little Welshman? I’d rather kill myself.”

“I believe it to be the only way in which you can regain your balance.”

Dr. Audlin had not often seen a man presumably sane in such a condition of uncontrollable fury. Lord Mountdrago grew red in the face, and his eyes bulged out of his head. He did really foam at the mouth. Dr. Audlin watched him coolly, waiting for the storm to wear itself out, and presently he saw that Lord Mountdrago, weakened by the strain to which he had been subjected for so many weeks, was exhausted.

“Sit down,” he said then, sharply.

Lord Mountdrago crumpled up into a chair.

“Christ, I feel all in. I must rest a minute and then I’ll go.”

For five minutes perhaps they sat in complete silence. Lord Mountdrago was a gross, blustering bully, but he was also a gentleman. When he broke the silence he had recovered his self-control.

“I’m afraid I’ve been very rude to you. I’m ashamed of the things I’ve said to you, and I can only say you’d be justified if you refused to have anything more to do with me. I hope you won’t do that. I feel that my visits to you do help me. I think you’re my only chance.”

“You mustn’t give another thought to what you said. It was of no consequence.”

“But there’s one thing you mustn’t ask me to do, and that is to make excuses to Griffiths.”

“I’ve thought a great deal about your case. I don’t pretend to understand it, but I believe that your only chance of release is to do what I proposed. I have a notion that we’re none of us one self, but many, and one of the selves in you has risen up against the injury you did Griffiths and has taken on the form of Griffiths in your mind and is punishing you for what you cruelly did. If I were a priest I should tell you that it is your conscience that has adopted the shape and lineaments of this man to scourge you to repent­ance and persuade you to reparation.”

“My conscience is clear. It’s not my fault if I smashed the man’s career. I crushed him like a slug in my garden. I regret nothing.”

It was on these words that Lord Mountdrago had left him. Reading through his notes, while he waited, Dr. Audlin considered how best he could bring his patient to the state of mind that, now that his usual methods of treatment had failed, he thought alone could help him. He glanced at his clock. It was six. It was strange that Lord Mountdrago did not come. He knew he had intended to because a secretary had rung up that morning to say that he would be with him at the usual hour. He must have been detained by pressing work. This notion gave Dr. Audlin some­thing else to think of: Lord Mountdrago was quite unfit to work and in no condition to deal with impor­tant matters of state. Dr. Audlin wondered whether it behooved him to get in touch with someone in authority, the Prime Minister or the Permanent Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and impart to him his conviction that Lord Mountdrago’s mind was so unbalanced that it was dangerous to leave affairs of moment in his hands. It was a ticklish thing to do. He might cause needless trouble and get roundly snubbed for his pains. He shrugged his shoulders.

“After all,” he reflected, “the politicians have made such a mess of the world during the last five- and-twenty years, I don’t suppose it makes much odds if they’re mad or sane.”

He rang the bell.

“If Lord Mountdrago comes now, will you tell him that I have another appointment at six-fifteen and so I’m afraid I can’t see him.”

“Very good, sir.”

“Has the evening paper come yet?”

“I’ll go and see.”

In a moment the servant brought it in. A huge headline ran across the front page: Tragic Death of Foreign Minister.

“My God!” cried Dr. Audlin.

For once he was wrenched out of his wonted calm. He was shocked, horribly shocked, and yet he was not altogether surprised. The possibility that Lord Mount­drago might commit suicide had occurred to him several times, for that it was suicide he could not doubt. The paper said that Lord Mountdrago had been waiting in a tube station, standing on the edge of the platform, and as the train came in was seen to fall on the rail. It was supposed that he had had a sudden attack of faintness. The paper went on to say that Lord Mountdrago had been suffering for some weeks from the effects of overwork, but had felt it impossible to absent himself while the foreign situation demanded his unremitting attention. Lord Mountdrago was another victim of the strain that modern politics placed upon those who played the more important parts in it. There was a neat little piece about the talents and industry, the patriotism and vision, of the deceased statesman, followed by various surmises upon the Prime Minister’s choice of his successor. Dr. Audlin read all this. He had not liked Lord Mountdrago. The chief emotion that his death caused in him was dissatisfaction with him­self because he had been able to do nothing for him.

Perhaps he had done wrong in not getting into touch with Lord Mountdrago’s doctor. He was dis­couraged, as always when failure frustrated his conscientious efforts, and repulsion seized him for the theory and practice of this empiric doctrine by which he earned his living. He was dealing with dark and mysterious forces that it was perhaps beyond the powers of the human mind to understand. He was like a man blindfold trying to feel his way to he knew not whither. Listlessly he turned the pages of the paper. Suddenly he gave a great start, and an excla­mation once more was forced from his lips. His eyes had fallen on a small paragraph near the bottom of a column. Sudden Death of an M.P., he read. Mr. Owen Griffiths, member for so-and-so, had been taken ill in Fleet Street that afternoon and when he was brought to Charing Cross Hospital life was found to be extinct. It was supposed that death was due to natural causes, but an inquest would be held. Dr. Audlin could hardly believe his eyes. Was it possible that the night before Lord Mountdrago had at last in his dream found himself possessed of the weapon, knife or gun, that he had wanted, and had killed his tormentor, and had that ghostly murder, in the same way as the blow with the bottle had given him a rack­ing headache on the following day, taken effect a certain number of hours later on the waking man? Or was it, more mysterious and more frightful, that when Lord Mountdrago sought relief in death, the enemy he had so cruelly wronged, unappeased, escap­ing from his own mortality, had pursued him to some other sphere, there to torment him still? It was strange. The sensible thing was to look upon it merely as an odd coincidence. Dr. Audlin rang the bell.

“Tell Mrs. Milton that I’m sorry I can’t see her this evening, I’m not well.”

It was true; he shivered as though of an ague. With some kind of spiritual sense he seemed to envisage a bleak, a horrible void. The dark night of the soul engulfed him, and he felt a strange, primeval terror of he knew not what.