especially from Wales to be there with the Otis family.

Virginia put white flowers on the ground and, as she did this, the moon came out from behind a cloud and filled the Garden of Death with a silver light. At the same time, a little night bird began to sing.

The next morning, before Lord Canterville left, he and Mr Otis talked about the jewels, which were quite beautiful and very valuable.

'Lord Canterville,' said Mr Otis, 'these jewels belong to your family. I must ask you to take them to London with you. Virginia asks for only one thing – the box in which they were kept. Can she have it?'

'My dear sir,' said Lord Canterville, 'your lovely little daughter has been a good friend to one of my family – Sir Simon – and we'll always be grateful to her for that. She was wonderfully brave. Now, you remember that you bought the furniture *and* the ghost. The ghost's jewels are now yours. They are clearly your daughter's, and she must keep them. When she's a woman, she'll be pleased to have pretty things to wear. And if I dared to try and take the jewels, awful old Sir Simon would probably be back very quickly, giving me a terrible time!'

So Virginia kept the jewels, and she wore them in the spring of 1890 when she married the young Duke of Cheshire.

Some time after they were married, they went to Canterville Chase. On the day after they arrived, they walked to the old church. The Duchess had brought some lovely roses, and she put them under the old tree.

The Duke took her hands, and stood looking into her beautiful eyes.

'Virginia,' he said, 'a wife should have no secrets from her husband.'

'Dear Cecil!' said Virginia. 'I have no secrets from you.'

'Yes, you have,' he answered, smiling. 'You never told me what

happened to you when you were locked up with the ghost.'

'Please don't ask me, Cecil,' she said. 'I can't tell you. Poor Sir Simon! I have so much to thank him for. Yes, don't laugh, Cecil. I really do. He made me see what Life is, and what Death means, and why Love is stronger than both.'

The Duke kissed his wife lovingly.

'You can have your secret if I can have your heart,' he whispered.

'You have always had that, Cecil,' she said.

'And you will tell our children one day?' he said.

Virginia did not answer, but her face went prettily red.

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Lord Arthur Savile's Crime

A Study of Duty

It was Lady Windermere's last party of the season, and her London house was even more crowded than usual. Six government ministers were there, and all the women wore their prettiest dresses. At the end of a long room, with Lady Windermere's finest pictures on the walls around her, a German princess was talking bad French and laughing loudly at everything that was said to her. Some of the most intelligent people in London were discussing important matters in the supper room. It was one of Lady Windermere's best parties, and the princess stayed until nearly half past eleven.

Lady Windermere was forty years old, childless, and had that enjoyment of pleasure that is the secret of staying young. When the princess had gone, she went to talk to the Duchess of Paisley.

'Where's my chiromantist?' she asked the Duchess.

'Your what, Gladys?' said the Duchess.

'My chiromantist, Duchess,' said Lady Windermere. 'I can't live without him.'

The Duchess tried to remember what a chiromantist was, but she couldn't. She hoped it was not the person who looked after Lady Windermere's feet!

'He comes to see my hand twice a week, regularly,' continued Lady Windermere. 'He's very interesting about it.'

'Really!' the Duchess said to herself. 'He looks after feet, but he does hands too. How terrible!'

'I must introduce him to you,' said Lady Windermere.

'Introduce him!' cried the Duchess. 'You mean he is here?'

'Of course he's here. He always comes to my parties. My

hand, he tells me, shows that I can guess the future. And if my thumb was a little shorter, I'd be one of those people who are always very unhappy about the state of the world.'

'Oh, I understand now!' said the Duchess, feeling happier. 'He tells fortunes.'

'And misfortunes, too,' answered Lady Windermere. 'Plenty of them. For example, next year I'm in great danger on land and sea. It's all written down on my little finger, or on my hand – I forget which.'

'How exciting,' said the Duchess.

'Really, everyone should have their hands read once a month,' Lady Windermere continued. 'It doesn't change what's going to happen, but it's nice to be warned. Now, if someone doesn't go and fetch Mr Podgers at once, I'll have to go myself.'

'Let me go, Lady Windermere,' said a tall, handsome young man who was standing near them. He was listening to the conversation with an amused smile.

'Thank you, Lord Arthur,' said Lady Windermere. 'But I'm afraid you wouldn't recognize him.'

'If he's as wonderful as you say, Lady Windermere, I'm sure I'll know him,' said the young man. 'But tell me what he's like, and I'll bring him to you immediately.'

'Well, he isn't like a chiromantist,' said Lady Windermere. 'I mean he isn't mysterious or romantic-looking. He's a small fat man, without much hair on his head, and with big gold glasses. He looks like a family doctor. People are annoying in that way. My musicians look like writers of poems, and my writers look like musicians. Ah, here's Mr Podgers! Now, Mr Podgers, I want you to read the Duchess of Paisley's hand. Duchess, you must take your glove off. No, not the left hand – the other one.'

'Dear Gladys, I really don't think it's quite right,' said the Duchess.

'Nothing interesting is ever quite right,' said Lady Windermere.

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'But I must introduce you. Duchess, this is Mr Podgers, my chiromantist. Mr Podgers, this is the Duchess of Paisley. If you say that she has more interesting hands than I have, I'll never believe in you again.'

'I'm sure, Gladys, that my hands are quite ordinary,' said the Duchess seriously.

'Let's see,' said Mr Podgers, looking at the little fat hand with its short square fingers. 'The line of life is excellent. You'll live to a great age, Duchess, and be very happy. The line of the heart–'

'Now please find something embarrassing, Mr Podgers,' cried Lady Windermere.

'It would give me great pleasure,' said Mr Podgers, 'if the Duchess were ever embarrassing. But I'm afraid I can only see a loyal person with a strong sense of duty.'

'Please continue, Mr Podgers,' said the Duchess. She seemed to be enjoying it now.

'Economy is one of your finest qualities,' continued Mr Podgers, and Lady Windermere began laughing loudly.

'Economy is a very good thing,' said the Duchess. 'When I married Paisley, he had eleven castles, and not one house that we could live in.'

'And now he has twelve houses and not one castle,' said Lady Windermere. 'You must read some more hands for us, Mr Podgers. You, Sir Thomas, show Mr Podgers yours.'

A cheerful-looking old gentleman came forward and held out a thick, strong hand with a very long third finger.

Mr Podgers looked at it. 'You're an adventurous person,' he said. 'There are four long voyages in your past, and one in the future. Three times you've been on ships that have gone down to the bottom of the sea. No, only twice, but you'll be in danger of it on your next journey. You're always on time for appointments, and you love collecting things. You had a serious illness between the ages of sixteen and eighteen. You hate cats.'

'How very clever!' said Sir Thomas. 'You must read my wife's hand, too.'

'Your second wife's,' said Mr Podgers quietly, still keeping Sir Thomas's hand in his. 'Your second wife's. I shall be glad to.'

But the lady did not want other people to know about her past or her future, and she was not the only one. A number of people seemed afraid to face the strange little man with his fixed smile, his gold eyeglasses, and his bright little green eyes.

But Lord Arthur Savile was watching Mr Podgers with a great amount of interest, and he was filled with the desire to have his own hand read. He was a little shy about asking the chiromantist, so he asked Lady Windermere. Did she think Mr Podgers would mind reading his hand?

'Of course he won't mind,' said Lady Windermere. 'That's what he's here for. All my guests do what I tell them to do. But I must warn you that I shall tell Sybil everything he says.'

'You will?' said Lord Arthur.

'Yes,' said Lady Windermere. 'She's coming to lunch with me tomorrow. If Mr Podgers discovers that you have a bad temper, or a wife hidden away somewhere, I'll certainly tell her about it.'

Lord Arthur smiled. 'I'm not afraid,' he said. 'Sybil knows me as well as I know her.'

'I'm a little sorry to hear you say that,' said Lady Windermere. 'A future wife ought not to know everything about the man she's going to marry.'

She turned to the small fat man.

'Mr Podgers, Lord Arthur Savile would like you to read his hand,' she said. 'Don't tell him that he's going to marry one of the most beautiful girls in London, because that was in the newspapers a month ago. But be sure to tell us something nice. Lord Arthur is one of my special favourites.'

'I'll try,' said Mr Podgers.

But when he saw Lord Arthur's hand, he became pale and said

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But when he saw Lord Arthur's hand, he became pale and said nothing.

nothing. His body seemed to shake, and his fat fingers grew cold.

Lord Arthur noticed these things, and for the first time in his life he felt afraid. He wanted to rush out of the room, but he controlled himself.

'I'm waiting, Mr Podgers,' he said.

'We're all waiting,' cried Lady Windermere impatiently. 'I believe Arthur is going on the stage, and you're afraid to tell him.'

But the chiromantist did not reply. Suddenly he dropped Lord Arthur's right hand and took his left. He bent down very low to examine it and his glasses almost touched it.

'What is it?' said Lady Windermere.

For a moment the chiromantist's face became white with shock and fear, but at last he said to Lady Windermere with a forced smile, 'It's the hand of a very nice young man.'

'Of course it is!' answered Lady Windermere. 'But will he be a good husband? That's what I want to know.'

'All nice young men are good husbands,' said Mr Podgers.

'Yes, yes!' said Lady Windermere. 'But I want details, Mr Podgers. Details are what matter. What's going to happen to Lord Arthur?'

'Well, Lord Arthur will go on a journey soon,' said Mr Podgers.

'Oh yes, after his marriage, of course!'

'And lose one of his relatives,' said Mr Podgers.

'Not his sister, I hope?' said Lady Windermere.

'Certainly not his sister,' answered Mr Podgers. 'Not a close relative.'

'Is that all?' said Lady Windermere. She did not look pleased. 'I won't have anything interesting to tell Sybil tomorrow. Nobody cares about relatives who aren't close these days – it's not fashionable. Now let's all go in and have supper.'

But Lord Arthur had a terrible feeling of fear – the fear of something very bad. He only just heard Lady Windermere's call to follow her and the others into the next room for supper. He

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thought about Sybil Merton, and his eyes began to fill with tears. Could something come between them? Suddenly, Mr Podgers came back into the room. When he saw Lord Arthur, the chiromantist stopped suddenly and his fat face went a greenish-yellow colour. The two men looked at each other, and for a moment there was silence.

'The Duchess has left one of her gloves here,' said Mr Podgers at last. 'She asked me to bring it to her. Oh, here it is.'

'Mr Podgers, I want you to give me an answer – a true answer – to the question that I am going to ask you,' said Lord Arthur.

'Another time, Lord Arthur,' said Mr Podgers. 'I must take the Duchess her glove.'

'Don't go,' said Lord Arthur. 'The Duchess is in no hurry.'

He walked across the room and held out his hand.

'Tell me what you saw there,' he said. 'I must know. I'm not a child.'

Mr Podgers' eyes looked unhappy behind his glasses, and he moved from one foot to the other.

'What makes you think that I saw anything else in your hand, Lord Arthur?' he asked the other man.

'I know you did. I demand that you tell me what it was,' said Lord Arthur. 'I'll pay you. I'll give you a hundred pounds.'

The chiromantist's green eyes became bright – but only for a moment.

'I'll send you a cheque tomorrow,' said Lord Arthur. 'Where shall I send it?'

'Let me give you my card,' said Mr Podgers. And he gave Lord Arthur a rather large card. On it was printed:

MR SEPTIMUS R. PODGERS
Chiromantist
103a West Moon Street, London

'Be quick,' cried Lord Arthur. His face was pale, but he held out his hand.

Mr Podgers looked nervously round. 'It will take a little time, Lord Arthur,' he said.

'Be quick, sir!' cried Lord Arthur again.

Mr Podgers took off his glasses, cleaned them, and put them back on again. Then he smiled.

'I'm ready now,' he said.

◆

Ten minutes later, Lord Arthur Savile rushed out of Lady Windermere's house. His face was white with terror and his eyes were wild with unhappiness.

The night was very cold, and a there was a sharp wind, but his hands were hot with fever and his face burned like fire. Once he stopped under one of the gas lamps in the square. He looked at his hands, and thought he could already see the stain of blood on them. A faint cry came from his shaking lips.

Murder! That is what the chiromantist saw there. Murder! And the night seemed to know it. The dark corners of the streets were full of murder. Murder laughed at him from the roofs of the houses.

'Murder! Murder!' he repeated, as he walked and walked through the city. The sound of his own voice made him shake. He felt a mad desire to stop a man who was passing and tell him everything.

At the corner of Rich Street, he saw two men reading a large notice on the wall. He went to look at it. As he came near, he saw the word 'MURDER' printed in black letters. It was a police advertisement offering a reward for information about a man between thirty and forty years of age, with a scar on the right side of his face.

Lord Arthur read it again and again. Would the man be

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caught? How did he get the scar?

'Perhaps one day my name will appear on a notice like this,' he thought. 'Lord Arthur Savile – wanted for murder!'

The thought made him sick, and he hurried into the night.

He did not know where he went, and it was just before daylight when he found himself in Piccadilly. By the time he reached his home in Belgrave Square, the sky was a faint blue, and birds were beginning to sing in the gardens.

◆

When Lord Arthur woke, it was twelve o'clock. The midday sun was coming through the curtains of his room. He got up and looked out of the window. Some children were playing happily below him in the square, and the street was crowded with people on their way to the park.

He had a bath and some breakfast, then lit a cigarette and sat down to think. On the shelf, facing him, was a large photograph of Sybil Merton as he had seen her first. It had been at Lady Noel's party.

The small, perfectly shaped head was bending a little to one side. It seemed that the thin, pretty neck could only just carry the weight of so much beauty. The lips were not quite closed, and they seemed ready to make sweet music. All the innocence and sweetness of a young girl looked out from the dreamy eyes.

As Lord Arthur looked at the photograph, he was filled with the terrible pity that comes from love. How could he marry her now, when murder lay ahead? At any moment he might have to do the awful thing that was written in his hand. What happiness could there be for them with that in his future?

He must stop the marriage – that was clear to him. He loved Sybil with all his heart, but he knew what his duty was. He had no right to marry her until after the murder.

He must do the murder first – and soon. Many men would

prefer to do nothing. They would let time decide what happened. But Lord Arthur's sense of duty was too strong for that.

For a time, it is true, he felt badly about what he had to do. But these feelings did not continue. The wild terror of the night before was gone. He saw his duty clearly now, and he was going to do it.

There was only one question that troubled him. Who was going to be murdered? He knew that there must be a body in a murder, not just a murderer. Lord Arthur was not an especially clever person, so he had no enemies. And this was not the time, he felt, to satisfy his private dislike of someone.

So he made a list of his friends and relatives on a piece of paper, and after much thought he chose Lady Clementina Beauchamp from the list. He had always been very fond of Lady Clem, as everyone called her. She lived in Curzon Street and was his own second cousin – the daughter of his mother's cousin. This dear old lady's death could not possibly make him any richer. He already had plenty of money. She seemed to him to be just the right person. So, feeling that a delay would be unfair to Sybil, he decided to make his arrangements immediately.

First, of course, he had to write his cheque for the chiromantist. He sat down at the writing table near the window and did this. Then he put the cheque for a hundred pounds into an envelope and told a man-servant to take it to Podgers' address in West Moon Street. Next, he dressed to go out.

As he was leaving the room to go to his club, he looked back at Sybil Merton's photograph.

'She'll never know what I'm doing for her,' he told himself. 'I'll keep the secret hidden in my heart.'

On the way to the club, he stopped his carriage at a flower shop and sent Sybil a beautiful basket of spring flowers.

At the club, he went straight to the library, rang the bell, and ordered the waiter to bring him a drink and a book on poisons.

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He had decided that poison was the best method. It was safe, sure and quiet, and it was not violent.

In Erskine's book on poisons, he found an interesting and complete description of the qualities and effects of aconitine, written in quite clear English. Aconitine seemed to be the poison he wanted. It worked quickly – it was almost immediate in its effect. It was perfectly painless when it was taken in the form of a capsule. He made a note of the amount that was necessary to cause death. Then he put the book back in its place on the shelf in the club library, and left.

He walked to Pestle and Humbey's, the famous London chemists. Mr Pestle himself came out to serve Lord Arthur. He was surprised at the order, and he asked about a doctor's note.

Lord Arthur explained that the poison was for a large dog that he had to destroy. 'The dog has already bitten one of the servants,' he said.

Mr Pestle was satisfied. He admired Lord Arthur's knowledge of poisons, and he had the capsule prepared immediately.

Lord Arthur put the capsule into a pretty silver box that he saw in a shop window in Bond Street. He threw away Pestle and Humbey's ugly little box, and went immediately to Lady Clementina's.

'Well, Arthur!' said the old lady, when he entered the room. 'Why haven't you been to see me recently, you bad boy?'

'My dear Lady Clem, I never have a free moment,' said Lord Arthur, smiling.

'I suppose you go about all day with that lovely Miss Sybil Merton, buying pretty things and making sweet lovers' talk,' said Lady Clementina.

'I promise you that I haven't seen Sybil for twenty-four hours, Lady Clem,' replied Lord Arthur.

'You haven't?' said Lady Clementina. 'Why not?'

'I think at the moment she belongs to her hat maker,' replied Lord Arthur.

'Of course,' said Lady Clementina. 'And that's the only reason you come to see an ugly old woman like myself. Here I am, a poor sick woman with a bad temper. Lady Jensen sends me all the worst French story-books she can find. Without them, I don't think I could get through the day. I see as many doctors as I can, but they can't even cure my stomach trouble.'

'I've brought you a cure for that, Lady Clem,' said Lord Arthur seriously.

'Have you?' said the old lady.

'Yes,' said Lord Arthur. 'It's a wonderful thing, invented by an American.'

'I don't think I like anything invented by Americans, Arthur,' said Lady Clementina. 'I read an American book the other day, and it was very silly.'

'Oh, but there's nothing silly about this, Lady Clem! It's the perfect cure. You must promise to try it.' And Lord Arthur took the little box out of his pocket and gave it to her.

'Well, the box is very pretty, Arthur,' she said. 'Is it really a present? That's very kind of you. And is this the wonderful medicine? It looks like a sweet. I'll take it immediately.'

'No, no, Lady Clem!' cried Lord Arthur. He caught hold of her hand. 'You mustn't do that. If you take it when you aren't in pain, it might do you a lot of harm. Wait until you have a stomach ache, and take it then. You'll be surprised at the result.'

'I'd like to take it now,' said Lady Clem, holding the little capsule up to the light. 'I'm sure it's nice. I hate doctors, but I love medicines. But I'll keep it until my next attack.'

'And when will that be?' Lord Arthur asked quickly. 'Will it be soon?'

'I hope not for a week,' she said. 'I had a very bad time yesterday morning.'

'But you will have one before the end of the month, Lady Clem?' asked Lord Arthur.

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'I'm afraid so,' said Lady Clementina. She smiled at him. 'You're very kind to worry about me, Arthur, dear. But now you'll have to leave me. I have to go out to dinner with some very boring people. Goodbye. Give my love to Sybil. And thank you very much for the American medicine.'

'You won't forget to take it, Lady Clem, will you?' said Lord Arthur.

'Of course I won't, you silly boy,' she replied. 'You're really very kind. I'll write and tell you if I want any more.'

Lord Arthur left the house feeling very happy.

That night, he went to see Sybil Merton.

'Sybil,' he said. 'Because of a friend, I've been put in a very ... difficult position. I have a duty to put this matter right, and until I do I'm not a free man. I'm afraid our marriage will have to wait.'

Sybil threw herself into his arms and began to cry.

'Please be patient, dear,' he said.

He stayed with her until nearly midnight. He told her that he loved her, and promised that everything would be all right in the end.

When he got home, he wrote a letter (full of words, but explaining little) to Sybil's father.

And early the next day, he left for Venice.

◆

In Venice Lord Arthur met his brother, Lord Surbiton, who had come from Corfu in his sailing boat. The two young men spent two very pleasant weeks together, but Lord Arthur was not completely happy. Every day he looked at the list of 'Deaths' in *The Times* newspaper, expecting to see a notice of Lady Clementina's death. But every day there was nothing. Had something happened to stop her taking the aconitine?

Sybil's letters made him sad, too. They were full of love, but she

seemed to be unhappy. And sometimes he felt that he would never see her again.

After two weeks, Lord Surbiton got bored with Venice and the two brothers sailed down the coast to Ravenna. But after a time, Lord Arthur became anxious about Lady Clementina and he returned to Venice by train.

There were several messages for him at his hotel, and he opened them quickly. Everything had been successful! Lady Clementina had died quite suddenly five days ago!

His first thought was for Sybil, and he sent her a message – he was returning immediately to London. The other two messages for him were from his mother, the Duchess, and from Mr Mansfield, Lady Clementina's lawyer.

The old lady had gone to dinner with the Duchess on the night of her death. She had been very happy and full of fun, but had gone home rather early because of stomach trouble. In the morning she was found dead in her bed. The doctor said that her death was peaceful.

A few days before she died, Lady Clementina had made her will. In it she left her London house and all her furniture to Lord Arthur. The value of the property was not great, but Mr Mansfield wanted Lord Arthur to return immediately. There were a lot of bills to pay, he said.

Lord Arthur was deeply affected by Lady Clementina's kindness to him, and he blamed Mr Podgers – in a way – for her death. But his love of Sybil was stronger than any other feeling. He was glad that he had done the right thing.

The Mertons were happy to see him. Sybil made him promise that nothing would ever come between them again. The marriage was arranged for 7th June, and life seemed bright and beautiful again to Lord Arthur.

One day, he was in Lady Clementina's house with Mr Mansfield and Sybil. They were burning old papers and clearing

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