

things out of drawers. Suddenly Sybil gave a happy little cry.

'What have you found, Sybil?' said Lord Arthur, smiling.

'This little silver box, Arthur,' said Sybil. 'Isn't it beautiful? Please give it to me!'

It was the box that had held the aconitine.

Lord Arthur had almost forgotten about the box and the poison. Now, he remembered the terrible worry that he had suffered for Sybil. It seemed strange that she was the first person to remind him of it.

But he said, 'Of course you can have it, Sybil. I gave it to poor Lady Clem myself.'

'Oh, thank you, Arthur,' said Sybil. 'And please can I have the sweet too? I didn't know that Lady Clem liked sweets.'

Lord Arthur's face went pale, and when he spoke his voice was almost a whisper. 'Sweet, Sybil? What do you mean?' he said slowly.

'There's just one in the box,' she said. 'It looks quite old, and I don't really want to eat it. What's the matter, Arthur? You've gone very white!'

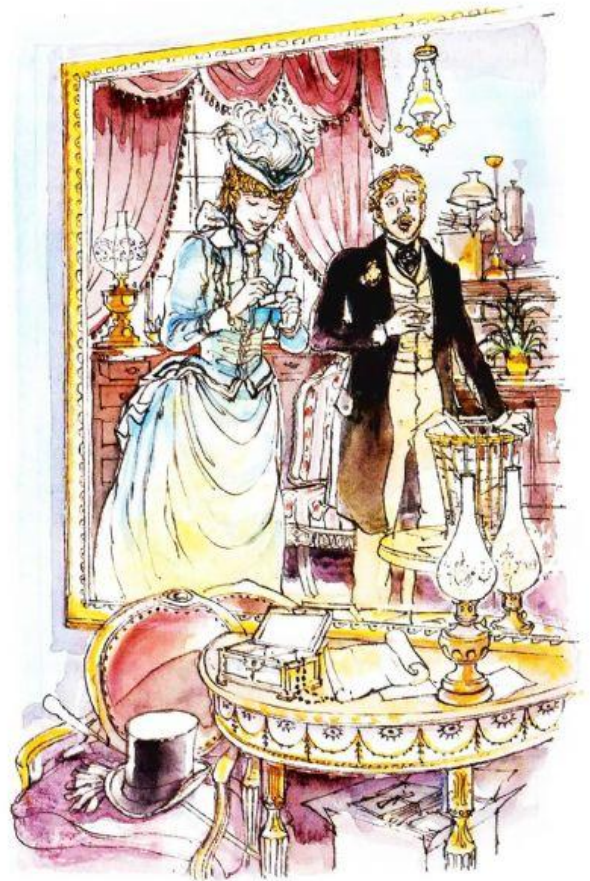
Lord Arthur rushed across the room and took the box. The capsule was there, with the aconitine liquid still in it. Lady Clementina had died a natural death!

The shock was terrible. He threw the capsule into the fire, and sat down and put his head in his hands.



When Lord Arthur delayed the marriage for a second time, Mr Merton was quite upset. His wife had already ordered her dress for the wedding, and she tried to make Sybil take back her promise to marry Lord Arthur. But Sybil's love for the young man was too strong. Her mother could not say anything to change that.

Lord Arthur felt terrible for several days after his shock. But soon he realized what he had to do. Poison had failed. Next, he



... please can I have the sweet too?

would have to try a bomb. That seemed sensible.

He looked again at his list of friends and relatives. After careful thought, he decided to blow up his uncle, the Dean of Chichester.

The Dean was an important churchman. He also had a wonderful collection of clocks. It seemed to Lord Arthur that this interest in clocks gave him a perfect opportunity.

Where would he get a clock-bomb? This was, of course, a problem. Suddenly he thought of his friend Rouvaloff. Rouvaloff was a young Russian who strongly disliked the government of his country. He knew a lot about bombs and where to get them. Lord Arthur went to see the young man without delay.

'So you're taking a serious interest in politics?' said Rouvaloff, when Lord Arthur explained what he wanted.

Lord Arthur hated pretending. He had to say that he was not interested in politics. He wanted the bomb for a family matter.

Rouvaloff looked at him in surprise, but he saw that his friend was quite serious. He wrote an address on a piece of paper, and a letter introducing Lord Arthur, and gave them to him.

Lord Arthur thanked him, then took a carriage to Soho. There he walked until he came to a little street full of small houses. He knocked on the door of a little green house at one end.

After some minutes, the door was opened by a rough-looking German. 'What do you want?' he asked Lord Arthur.

Lord Arthur gave him the letter from Rouvaloff.

In England, the German was known as Winckelkopf. He read the letter and invited Lord Arthur into a very dark little room.

'I want to discuss some business with you,' said Lord Arthur. 'My name is Smith – Mr Robert Smith – and I want you to make me a clock-bomb.'

'I'm pleased to meet you, Lord Arthur,' said the cheerful little German, laughing.

'You know me?' said Lord Arthur.

'Yes, I know who you are,' said Winckelkopf. 'But please don't worry. It's my duty to know everybody, and I remember seeing you one evening at Lady Windermere's house. I hope she's well. Will you sit with me while I finish my breakfast? Let me get you a glass of wine.'

Lord Arthur was very surprised that he had been recognized. But he was soon sitting at the table, drinking a glass of very good German wine.

'Clock-bombs are not very useful when you are sending a bomb abroad,' said Winckelkopf. 'They usually explode before they reach their correct destination. But if you want to use one in this country, I can give you an excellent one. Can I ask who it is intended for? If it's for the police, I'm afraid I can't do anything for you. The English detectives are really our best friends. They're very stupid, and because of this we can do exactly what we like. I wouldn't want to kill even one of them.'

'It's not for the police,' answered Lord Arthur.

'Then who...?' began Winckelkopf.

'It's intended for the Dean of Chichester,' said Lord Arthur.

'Oh dear! I didn't know that you felt so strongly about religion, Lord Arthur,' said Winckelkopf. 'Not many young men do these days.'

'I'm afraid I don't deserve your high opinion, Winckelkopf,' said Lord Arthur. 'The fact is, I really know nothing about religion.'

'So it's a private matter?'

'Yes,' said Lord Arthur.

Winckelkopf left the room. He returned a few minutes later with a pretty little French clock. A small golden figure of Liberty stood on the top of it.

Lord Arthur smiled when he saw it. 'That's just what I want,' he cried. 'Now tell me how it works.'



'That's just what I want,' he cried. 'Now tell me how it works.'

'Ah! That's my secret,' answered Winckelkopf. 'Tell me when you want the explosion, and I'll arrange it. It will happen at exactly the right moment.'

'Well, today's Tuesday, and if you could send it to the Dean immediately ...' began Lord Arthur.

'That's impossible,' said Winckelkopf. 'I have a lot of important work for some friends in Moscow. But I can send it tomorrow.'

'Oh, that will be soon enough,' said Lord Arthur. 'If it's delivered tomorrow night, or on Thursday morning, that will be fine. Friday, exactly at midday, would be perfect for the explosion. The Dean is always at home at midday on Fridays.'

'Friday at midday,' repeated Winckelkopf, and he made a note of the time.

'And now,' said Lord Arthur, standing up, 'how much should I pay you?'

'It's a very small matter, Lord Arthur,' said Winckelkopf. 'I can't really ask for anything. Shall we say five pounds? I'm happy to help a friend of Rouvaloff's.'

'But I must pay you for your time and trouble, Winckelkopf,' said Lord Arthur.

'Oh, that's nothing! It's a pleasure. I don't work for money. I live only for my art.'

Lord Arthur put five pounds on the table, thanked the German for his kindness, and left the house.



Lord Arthur was almost too excited to sleep for the next two days. On Friday, at twelve o'clock midday, he went to his club to wait for news.

All afternoon, one of the club servants put up messages on the notice board, but they were all about horse races, parliament or the weather. At four o'clock, the evening newspapers arrived, and Lord Arthur took several of them into the library. He

read them carefully, but there was nothing in them about the Dean of Chichester.

He went to see Winckelkopf the next day. The young German apologized many times, and offered to give him another clock-bomb. But Lord Arthur refused. He had decided that perhaps bombs were not the best idea.

Two days later, he was going upstairs at home when his mother, the Duchess, called out to him. Lord Arthur came back down and she showed him a letter from the Dean of Chichester's daughter.

'Jane writes very interesting letters,' the Duchess said. 'You really must read this one, Arthur.'

Lord Arthur read the letter quickly.

*The Deanery, Chichester
27th May*

My dearest Aunt,

We have had great fun with a clock that an unknown admirer sent to Father last Thursday. It arrived in a wooden box from London. Father thinks that it was sent by someone who has read his book, *What is Liberty?* On the top of the clock there was a small figure of Liberty.

Father put the clock above the fireplace in the library, and we were all sitting there on Friday morning when the clock sounded twelve. We heard a funny noise, then some smoke came from the bottom of the figure, and Liberty fell off! She broke her nose on the stone fireplace!

Maria was quite frightened, but it looked very funny. James and I laughed loudly, and even Father was amused. When we examined it, we found that it is an alarm clock. You put in some stuff to make a small explosion. Then it wakes you up with a loud noise at the hour you choose.

Father said it could not stay in the library because of the noise,

so Reggie carried it away to the schoolroom. Now he makes small explosions there all day.

Reggie has just made another explosion, and Father has ordered the clock to be sent to the garden room. I don't think he likes it as much as he did at first, although he is pleased that someone sent it to him. It shows that people read his books and learn from them.

We all send our love and hope that Uncle Cecil's toe is better.

Your loving niece,
Jane Percy

Lord Arthur looked very serious and unhappy about the letter, and that made the Duchess laugh.

'My dear Arthur,' she cried, 'I'll never show you a young lady's letter again. But what can I say about the clock? I'd like to have one myself.'

'I don't like them,' said Lord Arthur, with a sad smile. He kissed his mother and left the room.

When he got upstairs, he threw himself into a chair, and his eyes filled with tears.

'I've done my best to complete this murder, but on both occasions I've failed,' he thought. 'And it hasn't been my fault! I've tried to do my duty!'



At half past seven, Lord Arthur dressed and went to the club.

The doorman gave him a letter. It was from Winckelkopf, inviting him to come the next evening and look at an umbrella-bomb that had just arrived from Geneva. The umbrella exploded when you put it up.

Lord Arthur threw away the letter and went out. He walked down to the River Thames and sat for hours by the water. The moon looked down through an opening in the clouds. Sometimes

a river boat went past him. The railway lights changed from green to red as trains went across the bridge. At twelve o'clock the big bell of the clock at Westminster sounded, and the night seemed to shake. Then the railway lights went out, and the noises of the city became quieter.

At two o'clock Lord Arthur stood up and walked slowly along beside the river. After some minutes, he saw a man looking over the riverside wall. As he came nearer, the man looked up, and the gaslight lit up his face.

It was Mr Podgers, the chiromantist! It was impossible to make a mistake about the fat, unhealthy face, the gold glasses, the weak smile, and the greedy mouth.

Lord Arthur stopped. A wonderful idea came into his mind, and he stepped quietly up behind Mr Podgers. Moving quickly, he picked up the chiromantist by the legs, and threw him over the wall into the river! There was a cry, the sound of a body hitting the water, and then silence.

Lord Arthur looked down, but there was no sign of Mr Podgers. Once he thought that he saw the fat little body swimming towards the steps at the bottom of the bridge. But when the moon came out from behind a cloud, there was nothing there.

'I've succeeded at last!' he thought. Then Sybil's name came to his lips.

'Have you dropped something, sir?' said a voice behind him suddenly.

He turned round and saw a policeman.

'Nothing important,' he answered, smiling.



For the next few days Lord Arthur waited with feelings of hope, then of fear. There were moments when he almost expected Mr Podgers to walk into the room. Twice he went to

the chiromantist's address in West Moon Street, but he was not brave enough to ring the bell.

Finally news came. He was sitting in the smoking-room of his club, having tea, when a waiter came in with the evening newspapers. A moment later Lord Arthur was turning the pages of one of them when he saw this:

DEATH OF A CHIROMANTIST

Yesterday morning, at seven o'clock, the body of Mr Septimus R. Podgers, the famous chiromantist, was washed on to the shore from the river at Greenwich, just in front of the Ship Hotel. The unfortunate gentleman disappeared a few days ago. It is believed that he killed himself after working too hard.

Lord Arthur rushed out of the club with the newspaper still in his hand. He went straight to the Mertons' house. Sybil saw him from a window, and she guessed from the look on his face that he brought good news. She ran down to meet him.

'Arthur, what-?'

'My dear Sybil,' cried Lord Arthur, 'let's be married tomorrow!'

'You silly boy! We haven't ordered the wedding cake yet!' said Sybil, laughing through her tears.



The wedding was three weeks later. The Dean of Chichester read the marriage service beautifully. Everybody agreed that they had never seen a happier-looking pair than Lord Arthur and Sybil.

Some years afterwards, Lady Windermere was on a visit to Lord and Lady Arthur Savile's lovely old home in the country. She and Sybil were sitting in the garden.

'Are you happy, Sybil?' asked Lady Windermere.

'Dear Lady Windermere, of course I'm happy!' said Sybil. 'Are you?'

'I have no time to be happy, Sybil,' said Lady Windermere. 'I always like the last person who is introduced to me. But when I know people, I get bored with them.'

'Are you still interested in chiromancy, Lady Windermere?' asked Sybil, looking at her guest's beautiful hands.

'Ah! You remember that nasty Mr Podgers, do you?' said Lady Windermere. 'He made me hate chiromancy. I'm interested in other things now.'

'You mustn't say anything against chiromancy here, Lady Windermere,' said Sybil. 'It's the only subject that Arthur doesn't like people to laugh about. He's quite serious about it.'

'You don't mean that he believes in it, Sybil?'

'Ask him, Lady Windermere,' said Sybil. 'Here he is.'

And Lord Arthur came up the garden with yellow roses in his hand, and their two children dancing round him.

'Lord Arthur,' said Lady Windermere.

'Yes, Lady Windermere,' said Lord Arthur.

'You don't believe in chiromancy, do you?'

'Of course I do,' said the young man, smiling.

'But why?' asked Lady Windermere.

'Because of chiromancy, I have all the happiness in my life,' he said, and sat down in a garden chair. He gave his wife the roses and looked into her lovely eyes. 'Because of chiromancy, I have Sybil.'

'How silly!' cried Lady Windermere. 'I've never heard anything so silly in all my life.'

The Sphinx Without a Secret

One afternoon I was sitting outside the Café de la Paix in Paris, watching the people passing along the street. I was wondering why some people were very poor while others were so rich.

Suddenly I heard somebody call my name.

I turned round and saw Lord Murchison. We had not met since we were at Oxford University together, nearly ten years before, and I was pleased to see him again. We shook hands warmly.

I had liked him very much at Oxford, and we had been very good friends. He had been so handsome, so full of life, and a very honest young man. We used to say that he would be the best person in the world if he was not always so honest. But I think we really admired him for his honesty.

Now, looking at him ten years later, he seemed different. He looked anxious and worried, and he seemed to have doubts about something. I could not believe that he was in doubt about religion or politics, because he always had such definite opinions about everything. So I thought the problem must be a woman.

I asked him if he was married yet.

'I don't understand women well enough to marry one,' he answered.

'My dear Gerald,' I said, 'it is our job to love women, not to understand them.'

'I can't love anyone that I can't trust,' he answered.

'I think you have a mystery in your life, Gerald,' I said. 'Tell me about it.'

'Let's go for a drive,' he answered. 'It's too crowded here. No, not a yellow carriage – there, that dark green one will be all right.'

And in a few moments we were driven away from the café.

'Where shall we go to?' I said.

'Oh, I don't mind!' he answered. 'The restaurant in the Bois de Boulogne? We can have dinner there, and you can tell me about yourself.'

'I want to hear about you first,' I said. 'Tell me about your mystery.'

He took a little leather case from his pocket and gave it to me. I opened it. Inside was a photograph of a woman. She was tall and beautiful, with long hair, and large secretive eyes. Her clothes looked very expensive.

'What do you think of that face,' he said. 'Is it an honest face?'

I examined the face in the photograph carefully. It seemed to me to be the face of a woman with a secret. But I could not say if that secret was good or bad. The beauty of the face was full of mystery, and the faint smile on the lips made me think of the smile of the Egyptian Sphinx in the moonlight. Or was it the mysterious smile that you sometimes see on the face of Leonardo's painting, the Mona Lisa, in the Louvre in Paris?

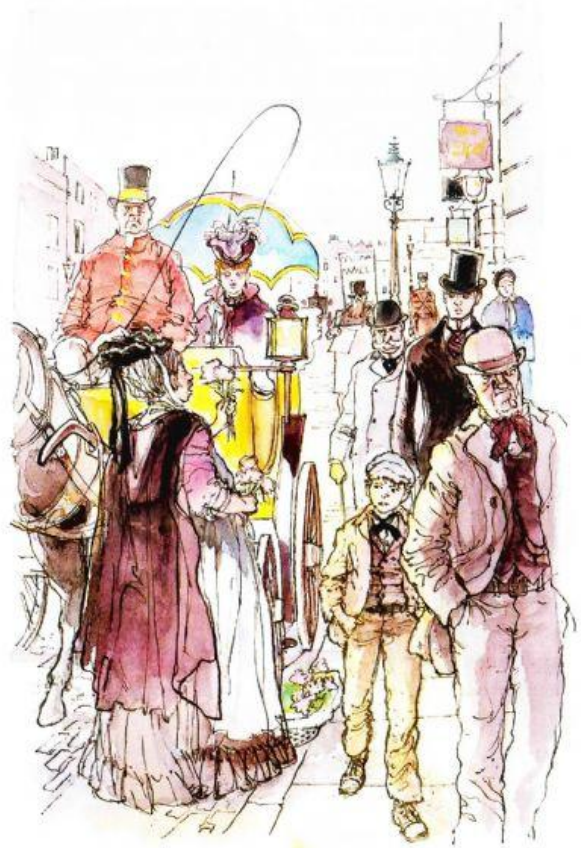
'Well,' he cried impatiently, 'what do you think?'

'A beautiful sphinx,' I answered. 'Tell me all about her.'

'Not now,' he said. 'After dinner.'

When we were drinking our coffee and smoking our cigarettes after dinner, I reminded him, and he told me this story:

'One evening,' he said, 'I was walking down Bond Street in London at about five o'clock. There were a lot of carriages, and the traffic was moving very slowly. There was a small yellow carriage on my side of the road which, for some reason or other, caught my attention. As the carriage passed, I saw the face that I showed you in the photograph earlier. It went straight to my heart. All that night, I thought about the face, and all the next day. I looked for the yellow carriage in the usual places, but I couldn't find it. I began to think that the beautiful stranger was only something from a dream.'



'There was a small yellow carriage on my side of the road ...'

'About a week later, I went to have dinner with Madame de Rastail. Dinner was for eight o'clock, but at half past eight we were still waiting in the sitting room. Finally the servant threw open the door and said "Lady Alroy". A woman entered the room – and it was the woman I was looking for! The woman in the yellow carriage.

'She came into the sitting room very slowly, looking lovely in a grey dress. I was pleased and excited when Madame de Rastail asked me to take Lady Alroy in to dinner. Lady Alroy then sat next to me at the table.

'After we sat down, I said quite innocently, "I think I saw you in Bond Street not long ago, Lady Alroy."

'She became very pale, and said to me in a low voice, "Please don't talk so loudly. Someone may hear you."

'I felt unhappy about such a bad start to our conversation, and I started talking quickly about French theatre and other unimportant things. She spoke very little, always in the same low musical voice. She seemed to be afraid that someone might be listening.

'I fell madly in love, and I was excited by the mystery that seemed to surround her. I wanted to know more – much more – about this mysterious lady.

'She left very soon after dinner, and when she was going, I asked if I could visit her. She said nothing for a moment, looked round to see if anyone was near us, and then said, "Yes. Tomorrow at a quarter to five."

'I asked Madame de Rastail to tell me about her, but I learned only that her husband had died, and she lived in a beautiful house in the most expensive part of London. I left soon after that, and went home.

'The next day I arrived at her London house at exactly a quarter to five. I asked to see Lady Alroy but I was told by a servant that she had just gone out.

'I went to the club, very unhappy and quite confused. After

some thought, I wrote a letter. I asked her if I could try again another afternoon.

'I had no answer for several days, but at last I got a letter saying that I could visit her on Sunday at four o'clock. At the end of the letter there was a strange note: "Please don't write to me here again," it said. "I will explain when I see you."

'On Sunday she was at home when I visited her, and she was perfectly nice to me. But when I was leaving, she said, "If you want to write to me again, will you address your letter to: Mrs Knox, Whitaker's Library, Green Street? There are reasons why I can't receive letters in my own house."

'After that, I saw her often. She continued to be pleasant and mysterious. I thought for a time that she might be in the power of a man, but I could not believe it.

'At last I decided to ask her to be my wife. I wrote to her at the library and asked her to see me the following Monday, at six o'clock. She answered yes, and I was wonderfully happy. I was very much in love with her, you understand. Perhaps because of the mystery surrounding her. No, no, that's not right! I loved the woman. The mystery worried me, it's true. It made me angry.'

'So you discovered the answer to the mystery?' I cried.

'In a way,' he answered. 'On Monday I had lunch with my uncle in his house in Regent's Park. After lunch, I wanted some exercise, and I decided to walk to Piccadilly. The shortest way is through a lot of poor little streets. I was going along one of these when I suddenly saw Lady Alroy in front of me. Her face was half-hidden by a large hat, but there was no doubt in my mind.

'She was walking fast. When she came to the last house in the street, she went up the steps to the front door, took a key from her bag, unlocked the door and went in.

'"So this is the mystery," I said to myself, and I hurried to the front of the house. It seemed to be a place where people can rent rooms.