

Three

THE FOURTH MAN

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on Parfitt panted a little. Running for trains was not much  
ness for a man of his age. For one thing his figure was not  
was and with the loss of his slender silhouette went an in-  
tendency to be short of breath. This tendency the Canon  
always referred to, with dignity, as "*My heart, you know!*"  
sank into the corner of the first-class carriage with a sigh  
The warmth of the heated carriage was most agreeable to  
itside the snow was falling. Lucky to get a corner seat on a  
ht journey. Miserable business if you didn't. There ought to  
per on this train.

\*2 The other three corners were already occupied, and noting this fact Canon Parfitt became aware that the man in the far corner was smiling at him in gentle recognition. He was a clean-shaven man with a quizzical face and hair just turning grey on the temples. His profession was so clearly the law that no one could have mistaken him for anything else for a moment. Sir George Durand was, indeed, a very famous lawyer.

"Well, Parfitt," he remarked genially, "you had a run for it, didn't you?"

"Very bad for my heart, I'm afraid," said the Canon. "Quite a coincidence meeting you, Sir George. Are you going far north?"

"Newcastle," said Sir George laconically. "By the way," he added, "do you know Dr. Campbell Clark?" *conice*

The man sitting on the same side of the carriage as the Canon inclined his head pleasantly.

"We met on the platform," continued the lawyer. "Another coincidence."

\*3 Canon Parfitt looked at Dr. Campbell Clark with a good deal of interest. It was a name of which he had often heard. Dr. Clark was in the forefront as a physician and mental specialist, and his last book, *The Problem of the Unconscious Mind,* had been the most discussed book of the year.

Canon Parfitt saw a square jaw, very steady blue eyes and reddish hair untouched by grey, but thinning rapidly. And he received also the impression of a very forceful personality.

By a perfectly natural association of ideas the Canon looked across to the seat opposite him, half expecting to receive a glance of recognition there also, but the fourth occupant of the carriage

\*4 proved to be a total stranger—a foreigner, the Canon fancied. He was a slight dark man, rather insignificant in appearance. Huddled in a big overcoat, he appeared to be fast asleep.

"Canon Parfitt of Bradchester?" inquired Dr. Campbell Clark in a pleasant voice.

The Canon looked flattered. Those "scientific sermons" of his had really made a great hit—especially since the Press had taken them up. Well, that was what the Church needed—good modern up-to-date stuff.

"I have read your book with great interest, Dr. Campbell Clark," he said. "Though it's a bit technical here and there for me to follow."

Durand broke in.

"Are you for talking or sleeping, Canon?" he asked. "I'll confess at once that I suffer from insomnia and that therefore I'm in favour of the former."

"Oh! certainly. By all means," said the Canon. "I seldom sleep on these night journeys, and the book I have with me is a very dull one."

"We are at any rate a representative gathering," remarked the doctor with a smile. "The Church, the Law, the Medical Profession."

"Not much we couldn't give an opinion on between us, eh?" laughed Durand. "The Church for the spiritual view, myself for the purely worldly and legal view, and you, doctor, with widest field of all, ranging from the purely pathological to the super-psychological! Between us three we should cover any ground pretty completely, I fancy."

“Not so completely as you imagine, I think,” said Dr. Clark. “There’s another point of view, you know, that you left out, and that’s rather an important one.”

“Meaning?” queried the lawyer. *asked*

“The point of view of the Man in the Street.” *# 4?*

“Is that so important? Isn’t the Man in the Street usually wrong?”

“Oh! almost always. But he has the thing that all expert opinion must lack—the personal point of view. In the end, you know, you can’t get away from personal relationships. I’ve found that in my profession. For every patient who comes to me genuinely ill, at least five come who have nothing whatever the matter with them except an inability to live happily with the inmates of the same house. They call it everything—from housemaid’s knee to writer’s cramp, but it’s all the same thing, the raw surface produced by mind rubbing against mind.”

“You have a lot of patients with ‘nerves,’ I suppose,” the Canon remarked disparagingly. His own nerves were excellent.

“Ah! and what do you mean by that?” The other swung round on him, quick as a flash. “Nerves! People use that word and laugh after it, just as you did. ‘Nothing the matter with so and so,’ they say. ‘Just nerves.’ But, good God, man, you’ve got the crux of everything there! You can get at a mere bodily ailment and heal it. But at this day we know very little more about the obscure causes of the hundred and one forms of nervous disease than we did in—well, the reign of Queen Elizabeth!”

“Dear me,” said Canon Parfitt, a little bewildered by this onslaught. “Is that so?”

“Mind you, it’s a sign of grace,” Dr. Campbell Clark went on.

“In the old days we considered man a simple animal, body and soul—with stress laid on the former.”

“Body, soul and spirit,” corrected the clergyman mildly.

“Spirit?” The doctor smiled oddly. “What do you parsons mean exactly by spirit? You’ve never been very clear about it, you know. All down the ages you’ve funked an exact definition.”

The Canon cleared his throat in preparation for speech, but to his chagrin he was given no opportunity. The doctor went on.

“Are we even sure the word is spirit—might it not be *spirits*?”

“Spirits?” Sir George Durand questioned, his eyebrows raised quizzically.

“Yes.” Campbell Clark’s gaze transferred itself to him. He leaned forward and tapped the other man lightly on the breast. “Are you so sure,” he said gravely, “that there is only one occupant of this structure—for that is all it is, you know—this desirable residence to be let furnished—for seven, twenty-one, forty-one, seventy-one—whatever it may be!—years? And in the end the tenant moves his things out—little by little—and then goes out of the house altogether—and down comes the house, a mass of ruin and decay. You’re the master of the house—we’ll admit that, but aren’t you ever conscious of the presence of others—soft-footed servants, hardly noticed, except for the work they do—work that you’re not conscious of having done? Or friends—moods that take hold of you and make you, for the time being, a ‘different man’ as the saying goes? You’re the king of the castle, right enough, but be very sure the ‘dirty rascal’ is there too.”

“My dear Clark,” drawled the lawyer. “You make me positively uncomfortable. Is my mind really a battleground of conflicting personalities? Is that Science’s latest?”

*multiple personalities*

It was the doctor's turn to shrug his shoulders.

"Your body is," he said drily. "If the body, why not the mind?"

"Very interesting," said Canon Parfitt. "Ah! Wonderful science—wonderful science."

And inwardly he thought to himself: "I can get a most interesting sermon out of that idea."

But Dr. Campbell Clark had leant back in his seat, his momentary excitement spent.

"As a matter of fact," he remarked in a dry professional manner, "it is a case of dual personality that takes me to Newcastle to-night. Very interesting case. Neurotic subject, of course. But quite genuine."

"Dual personality," said Sir George Durand thoughtfully. "It's not so very rare, I believe. There's loss of memory as well, isn't there? I know the matter cropped up in a case in the Probate Court the other day."

Dr. Clark nodded.

"The classic case, of course," he said, "was that of Felicie Bault. You may remember hearing of it?"

"Of course," said Canon Parfitt. "I remember reading about it in the papers—but quite a long time ago—seven years at least."

Dr. Campbell Clark nodded.

"That girl became one of the most famous figures in France. Scientists from all over the world came to see her. She had no less than four distinct personalities. They were known as Felicie 1, Felicie 2, Felicie 3, etc."

"Wasn't there some suggestion of deliberate trickery?" asked Sir George alertly.

"The personalities of Felicie 3 and Felicie 4 were a little open

to doubt," admitted the doctor. "But the main facts remain. Felicie Bault was a Brittany peasant girl. She was the third of a family of five; the daughter of a drunken father and a mentally defective mother. In one of his drinking bouts the father strangled the mother and was, if I remember rightly, transported for life. Felicie was then five years of age. Some charitable people interested themselves in the children and Felicie was brought up and educated by an English maiden lady who had a kind of home for destitute children. She could make very little of Felicie, however. She describes the girl as abnormally slow and stupid, only taught to read and write with the greatest difficulty and clumsy with her hands. This lady, Miss Slater, tried to fit the girl for domestic service, and did indeed find her several places when she was of an age to take them. But she never stayed long anywhere owing to her stupidity and also her intense laziness."

The doctor paused for a minute, and the Canon, recrossing his legs, and arranging his travelling rug more closely round him, was suddenly aware that the man opposite him had moved very slightly. His eyes, which had formerly been shut, were now open, and something in them, something mocking and indefinable, startled the worthy Canon. It was as though the man were listening and gloating secretly over what he heard.

"There is a photograph taken of Felicie Bault at the age of seventeen," continued the doctor. "It shows her as a loutish peasant girl, heavy of build. There is nothing in that picture to indicate that she was soon to be one of the most famous persons in France.

"Five years later, when she was 22, Felicie Bault had a severe nervous illness, and on recovery the strange phenomena began to manifest themselves. The following are facts attested to by many

eminent scientists. The personality called Felicie 1 was undistinguishable from the Felicie Bault of the last twenty-two years.

① Felicie 1 wrote French badly and haltingly, she spoke no foreign languages and was unable to play the piano. Felicie 2, on the contrary, spoke Italian fluently and German moderately. Her handwriting was quite dissimilar to that of Felicie 1, and she wrote fluent and expressive French. She could discuss politics and art and she was

② passionately fond of playing the piano. Felicie 3 had many points in common with Felicie 2. She was intelligent and apparently well educated, but in moral character she was a total contrast. She appeared, in fact, an utterly depraved creature—but depraved in a Parisian and not a provincial way. She knew all the Paris argot, and the expressions of the chic demi monde. Her language was filthy and she

③ would rail against religion and so-called 'good people' in the most blasphemous terms. Finally there was Felicie 4—a dreamy, almost half-witted creature, distinctly pious and professedly clairvoyant,

④ but this fourth personality was very unsatisfactory and elusive and has been sometimes thought to be a deliberate trickery on the part of Felicie 3—a kind of joke played by her on a credulous public. I may say that (with the possible exception of Felicie 4) each personality was distinct and separate and had no knowledge of the others.

Felicie 2 was undoubtedly the most predominant and would last sometimes for a fortnight at a time, then Felicie 1 would appear abruptly for a day or two. After that, perhaps Felicie 3 or 4, but the two latter seldom remained in command for more than a few hours. Each change was accompanied by severe headache and heavy sleep, and in each case there was complete loss of memory of the other states, the personality in question taking up life where she had left it, unconscious of the passage of time."

"Remarkable," murmured the Canon. "Very remarkable. As yet we know next to nothing of the marvels of the universe."

"We know that there are some very astute impostors in it," remarked the lawyer drily.

"The case of Felicie Bault was investigated by lawyers as well as by doctors and scientists," said Dr. Campbell Clark quickly. "Maitre Quimbellier, you remember, made the most thorough investigation and confirmed the views of the scientists. And after all, why should it surprise us so much? We come across the double-yolked egg, do we not? And the twin banana? Why not the double soul—in the single body?"

"The double soul?" protested the Canon.

Dr. Campbell Clark turned his piercing blue eyes on him.

"What else can we call it? That is to say—if the personality is the soul?"

"It is a good thing such a state of affairs is only in the nature of a 'freak,'" remarked Sir George. "If the case were common, it would give rise to pretty complications."

"The condition is, of course, quite abnormal," agreed the doctor. "It was a great pity that a longer study could not have been made, but all that was put an end to by Felicie's unexpected death."

"There was something queer about that, if I remember rightly," said the lawyer slowly.

Dr. Campbell Clark nodded.

"A most unaccountable business. The girl was found one morning dead in bed. She had clearly been strangled. But to everyone's stupefaction it was presently proved beyond doubt that she had actually strangled herself. The marks on her neck were those of

her own fingers. A method of suicide which, though not physically impossible, must have necessitated terrific muscular strength and almost superhuman will power. What had driven the girl to such straits has never been found out. Of course her mental balance must always have been precarious. Still, there it is. The curtain has been rung down forever on the mystery of Felicie Bault."

It was then that the man in the far corner laughed.

The other three men jumped as though shot. They had totally forgotten the existence of the fourth amongst them. As they stared towards the place where he sat, still huddled in his overcoat, he laughed again.

"You must excuse me, gentlemen," he said, in perfect English that had, nevertheless, a foreign flavour.

He sat up, displaying a pale face with a small jet-black moustache.

"Yes, you must excuse me," he said, with a mock bow. "But really! in science, is the last word ever said?"

"You know something of the case we have been discussing?" asked the doctor courteously.

"Of the case? No. But I knew her."

"Felicie Bault?"

"Yes. And Annette Ravel also. You have not heard of Annette Ravel, I see? And yet the story of the one is the story of the other. Believe me, you know nothing of Felicie Bault if you do not also know the history of Annette Ravel."

He drew out his watch and looked at it.

"Just half an hour before the next stop. I have time to tell you the story—that is, if you care to hear it?"

"Please tell it to us," said the doctor quietly.

"Delighted," said the Canon. "Delighted."

Sir George Durand merely composed himself in an attitude of keen attention.

"My name, gentlemen," began their strange travelling companion, "is Raoul Letardeau. You have spoken just now of an English lady, Miss Slater, who interested herself in works of charity. I was born in that Brittany fishing village and when my parents were both killed in a railway accident it was Miss Slater who came to the rescue and saved me from the equivalent of your English workhouse. There were some twenty children under her care, girls and boys. Amongst these children were Felicie Bault and Annette Ravel. If I cannot make you understand the personality of Annette, gentlemen, you will understand nothing. She was the child of what you call a 'fille de joie' who had died of consumption abandoned by her lover. The mother had been a dancer, and Annette, too, had the desire to dance. When I saw her first she was eleven years old, a little shrimp of a thing with eyes that alternately mocked and promised—a little creature all fire and life. And at once—yes, at once—she made me her slave. It was 'Raoul, do this for me.' 'Raoul, do that for me.' And me, I obeyed. Already I worshipped her, and she knew it.

"We would go down to the shore together, we three—for Felicie would come with us. And there Annette would pull off her shoes and stockings and dance on the sand. And then when she sank down breathless, she would tell us of what she meant to do and to be.

"See you, I shall be famous. Yes, exceedingly famous. I will have hundreds and thousands of silk stockings—the finest silk. And I shall live in an exquisite apartment. All my lovers shall be

young and handsome as well as being rich. And when I dance all Paris shall come to see me. They will yell and call and shout and go mad over my dancing. And in the winters I shall not dance. I shall go south to the sunlight. There are villas there with orange trees. I shall have one of them. I shall lie in the sun on silk cushions, eating oranges. As for you, Raoul, I will never forget you, however rich and famous I shall be. I will protect you and advance your career. Felicie here shall be my maid—no, her hands are too clumsy. Look at them, how large and coarse they are.'

'Felicie would grow angry at that. And then Annette would go on teasing her.

'She is so ladylike, Felicie—so elegant, so refined. She is a princess in disguise—ha, ha.'

'My father and mother were married, which is more than yours were,' Felicie would growl out spitefully.

'Yes, and your father killed your mother. A pretty thing, to be a murderer's daughter.'

'Your father left your mother to rot,' Felicie would rejoin.

'Ah! yes.' Annette became thoughtful. '*Pauvre Maman.* One must keep strong and well. It is everything to keep strong and well.'

'I am as strong as a horse,' Felicie boasted.

'And indeed she was. She had twice the strength of any other girl in the Home. And she was never ill.

'But she was stupid, you comprehend, stupid like a brute beast. I often wondered why she followed Annette round as she did. It was, with her, a kind of fascination. Sometimes, I think, she actually hated Annette, and indeed Annette was not kind to her. She jeered at her slowness and stupidity, and baited her in front of the others. I have seen Felicie grow quite white with rage. Sometimes I

have thought that she would fasten her fingers round Annette's neck and choke the life out of her. She was not nimble-witted enough to reply to Annette's taunts, but she did learn in time to make one retort which never failed. That was a reference to her own health and strength. She had learned (what I had always known) that Annette envied her her strong physique, and she struck instinctively at the weak spot in her enemy's armour.

'One day Annette came to me in great glee.

'Raoul,' she said. 'We shall have fun today with that stupid Felicie. We shall die of laughing.'

'What are you going to do?'

'Come behind the little shed, and I will tell you.'

'It seemed that Annette had got hold of some book. Part of it she did not understand, and indeed the whole thing was much over her head. It was an early work on hypnotism.

'A bright object, they say. The brass knob of my bed, it twirls round. I made Felicie look at it last night. 'Look at it steadily,' I said. 'Do not take your eyes off it.' And then I twirled it. Raoul, I was frightened. Her eyes looked so queer—so queer. 'Felicie, you will do what I say always,' I said. 'I will do what you say always, Annette,' she answered. And then—and then—I said: 'Tomorrow you will bring a tallow candle out into the playground at twelve o'clock and start to eat it. And if anyone asks you, you will say that is it the best *galette* you ever tasted. Oh! Raoul, think of it!'

'But she'll never do such a thing,' I objected.

'The book says so. Not that I can quite believe it—but, oh! Raoul, if the book is all true, how we shall amuse ourselves!'

'I, too, thought the idea very funny. We passed word round to the comrades and at twelve o'clock we were all in the playground.

Punctual to the minute, out came Felicie with a stump of candle in her hand. Will you believe me, Messieurs, she began solemnly to nibble at it? We were all in hysterics! Every now and then one or other of the children would go up to her and say solemnly: 'It is good, what you eat there, eh, Felicie?' And she would answer: 'But, yes, it is the best *galette* I ever tasted.' And then we would shriek with laughter. We laughed at last so loud that the noise seemed to wake up Felicie to a realization of what she was doing. She blinked her eyes in a puzzled way, looked at the candle, then at us. She passed her hand over her forehead.

"But what is it that I do here?' she muttered.

"You are eating a candle,' we screamed.

"I made you do it. I made you do it,' cried Annette, dancing about.

"Felicie stared for a moment. Then she went slowly up to Annette.

*Here* "So it is you—it is you who have made me ridiculous? I seem to remember. Ah! I will kill you for this.'

"She spoke in a very quiet tone, but Annette rushed suddenly away and hid behind me.

"Save me, Raoul! I am afraid of Felicie. It was only a joke, Felicie. Only a joke.'

"I do not like these jokes,' said Felicie. 'You understand? I hate you. I hate you all.'

"She suddenly burst out crying and rushed away.

"Annette was, I think, scared by the result of her experiment, and did not try to repeat it. But from that day on, her ascendancy over Felicie seemed to grow stronger.

"Felicie, I now believe, always hated her, but nevertheless she

could not keep away from her. She used to follow Annette around like a dog.

"Soon after that, Messieurs, employment was found for me, and I only came to the Home for occasional holidays. Annette's desire to become a dancer was not taken seriously, but she developed a very pretty singing voice as she grew older and Miss Slater consented to her being trained as a singer.

"She was not lazy, Annette. She worked feverishly, without rest. Miss Slater was obliged to prevent her doing too much. She spoke to me once about her.

"You have always been fond of Annette,' she said. 'Persuade her not to work too hard. She has a little cough lately that I do not like.'

"My work took me far afield soon afterwards. I received one or two letters from Annette at first, but then came silence. For five years after that I was abroad.

"Quite by chance, when I returned to Paris, my attention was caught by a poster advertising Annette Ravelli with a picture of the lady. I recognized her at once. That night I went to the theatre in question. Annette sang in French and Italian. On the stage she was wonderful. Afterwards I went to her dressing room. She received me at once.

"Why, Raoul,' she cried, stretching out her whitened hands to me. 'This is splendid. Where have you been all these years?'

"I would have told her, but she did not really want to listen."

"You see, I have very nearly arrived!"

"She waved a triumphant hand round the room filled with bouquets.

"The good Miss Slater must be proud of your success."

*Annette = famous*



"That old one? No, indeed. She designed me, you know, for the Conservatoire. Decorous concert singing. But me, I am an artist. It is here, on the variety stage, that I can express myself."

"Just then a handsome middle-aged man came in. He was very distinguished. By his manner I soon saw that he was Annette's protector. He looked sideways at me, and Annette explained.

"A friend of my infancy. He passes through Paris, sees my picture on a poster *et voila!*"

"The man was then very affable and courteous. In my presence he produced a ruby and diamond bracelet and clasped it on Annette's wrist. As I rose to go, she threw me a glance of triumph and a whisper.

"I arrive, do I not? You see? All the world is before me."

"But as I left the room, I heard her cough, a sharp dry cough. I knew what it meant, that cough. It was the legacy of her consumptive mother. —TB

"I saw her next two years later. She had gone for refuge to Miss Slater. Her career had broken down. She was in a state of advanced consumption for which the doctors said nothing could be done.

"Ah! I shall never forget her as I saw her then! She was lying in a kind of shelter in the garden. She was kept outdoors night and day. Her cheeks were hollow and flushed, her eyes bright and feverish and she coughed repeatedly.

"She greeted me with a kind of desperation that startled me.

"It is good to see you, Raoul. You know what they say—that I may not get well? They say it behind my back, you understand. To me they are soothing and consolatory. But it is not true, Raoul,

it is not true! I shall not permit myself to die. Die? With beautiful life stretching in front of me? It is the will to live that matters. All the great doctors say that nowadays. I am not one of the feeble ones who let go. Already I feel myself infinitely better—indefinitely better, do you hear?"

"She raised herself on her elbow to drive her words home, then fell back, attacked by a fit of coughing that racked her thin body.

"The cough—it is nothing,' she gasped. 'And haemorrhages do not frighten me. I shall surprise the doctors. It is the will that counts. Remember, Raoul, I am going to live.'

"It was pitiful, you understand, pitiful.

"Just then, Felicie Bault came out with a tray. A glass of hot milk. She gave it to Annette and watched her drink it with an expression that I could not fathom. There was a kind of smug satisfaction in it.

"Annette too caught the look. She flung the glass down angrily, so that it smashed to bits.

"You see her? That is how she always looks at me. She is glad I am going to die! Yes, she gloats over it. She who is well and strong. Look at her, never a day's illness, that one! And all for nothing. What good is that great carcass of hers to her? What can she make of it?"

"Felicie stooped and picked up the broken fragments of glass.

"I do not mind what she says,' she observed in a singsong voice. 'What does it matter? I am a respectable girl, I am. As for her. She will be knowing the fires of Purgatory before very long. I am a Christian, I say nothing.'

"You hate me,' cried Annette. 'You have always hated me. Ah!

but I can charm you, all the same. I can make you do what I want. See now, if I ask you to, you would go down on your knees before me now on the grass.'

"'You are absurd,' said Felicie uneasily.

"'But, yes, you will do it. You will. To please me. Down on your knees. I ask it of you, I, Annette. Down on your knees, Felicie.'

"Whether it was the wonderful pleading in the voice, or some deeper motive, Felicie obeyed. She sank slowly to her knees, her arms spread wide, her face vacant and stupid.

"Annette flung her head back and laughed—peal upon peal of laughter.

"'Look at her, with her stupid face! How ridiculous she looks. You can get up now, Felicie, thank you! It is of no use to scowl at me. I am your mistress. You have to do what I say.'

"She lay back on her pillows exhausted. Felicie picked up the tray and moved slowly away. Once she looked back over her shoulder, and the smouldering resentment in her eyes startled me.

"I was not there when Annette died. But it was terrible, it seems. She clung to life. She fought against death like a mad-woman. Again and again she gasped out: 'I will not die—do you hear me? I will not die. I will live—live—'

"Miss Slater told me all this when I came to see her six months later.

"'My poor Raoul,' she said kindly. 'You loved her, did you not?'

"'Always—always. But of what use could I be to her? Let us not talk of it. She is dead—she so brilliant, so full of burning life . . .'

"Miss Slater was a sympathetic woman. She went on to talk of other things. She was very worried about Felicie, so she told me.

The girl had had a queer sort of nervous breakdown, and ever since she had been very strange in manner.

"'You know,' said Miss Slater, after a momentary hesitation, 'that she is learning the piano?'

~~She~~ did not know it, and was very much surprised to hear it. Felicie—learning the piano! I would have declared the girl would not know one note from another.

"'She has talent, they say,' continued Miss Slater. 'I can't understand it. I have always put her down as—well, Raoul, you know yourself, she was always a stupid girl.'

"I nodded.

"'She is so strange in her manner sometimes—I really don't know what to make of it.'

"A few minutes later I entered the Salle de Lecture. Felicie was playing the piano. She was playing the air that I had heard Annette sing in Paris. You understand, Messieurs, it gave me quite a turn. And then, hearing me, she broke off suddenly and looked round at me, her eyes full of mockery and intelligence. For a moment I thought—Well, I will not tell you what I thought. → ??

"'Tiens!' she said. 'So it is you—*Monsieur* Raoul.'

"I cannot describe the way she said it. To Annette I had never ceased to be Raoul. But Felicie, since we had met as grown-ups, always addressed me as *Monsieur* Raoul. But the way she said it now was different—as though the *Monsieur*, slightly stressed, was somehow very amusing.

"'Why, Felicie,' I stammered. 'You look quite different today.'

"'Do I?' she said reflectively. 'It is odd, that. But do not be so solemn, Raoul—decidedly I shall call you Raoul—did we not play together as children?—Life was made for laughter. Let us talk of

the poor Annette—she who is dead and buried. Is she in Purgatory, I wonder, or where?’

“And she hummed a snatch of song—untunefully enough, but the words caught my attention.

“‘Felicie,’ I cried. ‘You speak Italian?’

“‘Why not, Raoul? I am not as stupid as I pretend to be, perhaps.’ She laughed at my mystification.

“‘I don’t understand—’ I began.

“‘But I will tell you. I am a very fine actress, though no one suspects it. I can play many parts—and play them very well.’

“She laughed again and ran quickly out of the room before I could stop her.

“I saw her again before I left. She was asleep in an armchair. She was snoring heavily. I stood and watched her, fascinated, yet repelled. Suddenly she woke with a start. Her eyes, dull and lifeless, met mine.

“‘Monsieur Raoul,’ she muttered mechanically.

“‘Yes, Felicie, I am going now. Will you play to me again before I go?’

“‘I? Play? You are laughing at me, Monsieur Raoul.’

“‘Don’t you remember playing to me this morning?’

“She shook her head.

“‘I play? How can a poor girl like me play?’

“She paused for a minute as though in thought, then beckoned me nearer.

“‘Monsieur Raoul, there are strange things going on in this house! They play tricks upon you. They alter the clocks. Yes, yes, I know what I am saying. And it is all her doing.’

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→ theme

→ misleading / perceptions

“‘Whose doing?’ I asked, startled.

“‘That Annette’s. That wicked one’s. When she was alive she always tormented me. Now that she is dead, she comes back from the dead to torment me.’

“I stared at Felicie. I could see now that she was in an extremity of terror, her eyes staring from her head.

“‘She is bad, that one. She is bad, I tell you. She would take the bread from your mouth, the clothes from your back, the soul from your body. . . .’

“She clutched me suddenly.

“‘I am afraid, I tell you—afraid. I hear her voice—not in my ear—no, not in my ear. Here, in my head—’ She tapped her forehead. ‘She will drive me away—drive me away altogether, and then what shall I do, what will become of me?’

“Her voice rose almost to a shriek. She had in her eyes the look of the terrified brute beast at bay. . . .

“Suddenly she smiled, a peasant smile, full of cunning, with something in it that made me shiver.

“‘If it should come to it, Monsieur Raoul, I am very strong with my hands—very strong with my hands.’

“I had never noticed her hands particularly before. I looked at them now and shuddered in spite of myself. Squat brutal fingers, and as Felicie had said, terribly strong. . . . I cannot explain to you the nausea that swept over me. With hands such as these her father must have strangled her mother. . . .

“That was the last time I ever saw Felicie Bault. Immediately afterwards I went abroad—to South America. I returned from there two years after her death. Something I had read in the newspapers

of her life and sudden death. I have heard fuller details tonight—from you—gentlemen! Felicie 3 and Felicie 4—I wonder? She was a good actress, you know!”

The train suddenly slackened speed. The man in the corner sat erect and buttoned his overcoat more closely.

“What is your theory?” asked the lawyer, leaning forward.

“I can hardly believe—” began Canon Parfitt, and stopped.

The doctor said nothing. He was gazing steadily at Raoul Lepardeau.

“*The clothes from your back, the soul from your body,*” quoted the Frenchman lightly. He stood up. “I say to you, Messieurs, that the history of Felicie Bault is the history of Annette Ravel. You did not know her, gentlemen. I did. *She was very fond of life. . . .*”

His hand on the door, ready to spring out, he turned suddenly and bending down tapped Canon Parfitt on the chest.

“M. le docteur over there, he said just now, that all *this*—his hand smote the Canon’s stomach, and the Canon winced—“was only a residence. Tell me, if you find a burglar in your house what do you do? Shoot him, do you not?”

“No,” cried the Canon. “No, indeed—I mean—not in this country.”

But he spoke the last words to empty air. The carriage door banged.

The clergyman, the lawyer and the doctor were alone. The fourth corner was vacant.