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THE LUMINARIES

ELEANOR CATTON

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PART ONE

A Sphere within a Sphere

27 January 1866

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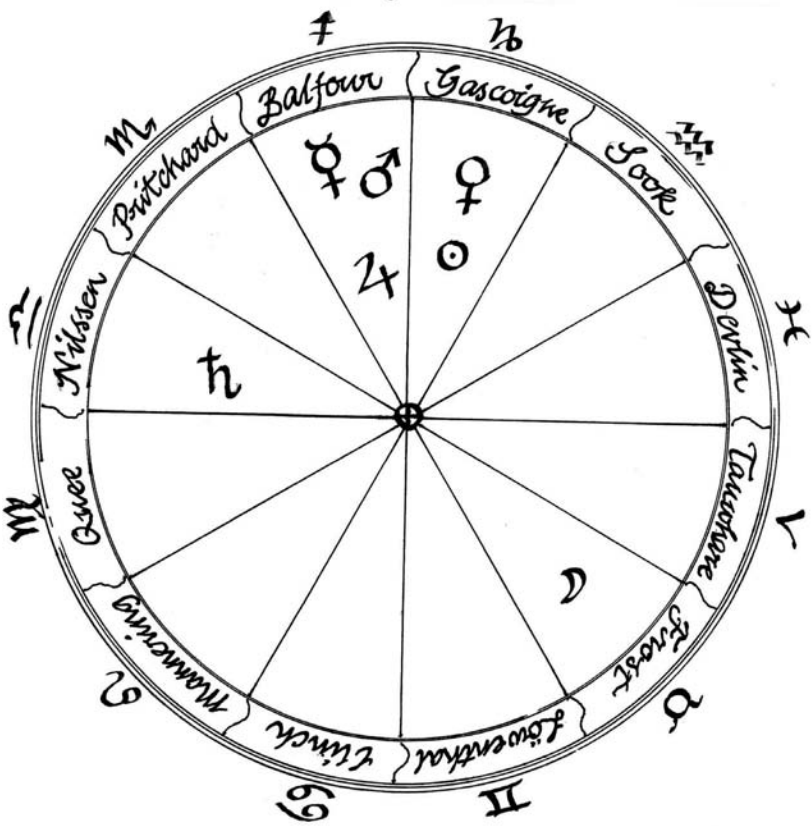

MERCURY IN SAGITTARIUS

In which a stranger arrives in Hokitika; a secret council is disturbed; Walter Moody conceals his most recent memory; and Thomas Balfour begins to tell a story.

The twelve men congregated in the smoking room of the Crown Hotel gave the impression of a party accidentally met. From the variety of their comportment and dress—frock coats, tailcoats, Norfolk jackets with buttons of horn, yellow moleskin, cambric, and twill—they might have been twelve strangers on a railway car, each bound for a separate quarter of a city that possessed fog and tides enough to divide them; indeed, the studied isolation of each man as he pored over his paper, or leaned forward to tap his ashes into the grate, or placed the splay of his hand upon the baize to take his shot at billiards, conspired to form the very type of bodily silence that occurs, late in the evening, on a public railway—deadened here not by the slur and clunk of the coaches, but by the fat clatter of the rain.

Such was the perception of Mr. Walter Moody, from where he stood in the doorway with his hand upon the frame. He was innocent of having disturbed any kind of private conference, for the speakers had ceased when they heard his tread in the passage; by the time he opened the door, each of the twelve men had resumed his occupation (rather haphazardly, on the part of the billiard players, for they had forgotten their places) with such a careful show of absorption that no one even glanced up when he stepped into the room.

The strictness and uniformity with which the men ignored him

might have aroused Mr. Moody's interest, had he been himself in body and temperament. As it was, he was queasy and disturbed. He had known the voyage to West Canterbury would be fatal at worst, an endless rolling trough of white water and spume that ended on the shattered graveyard of the Hokitika bar, but he had not been prepared for the particular horrors of the journey, of which he was still incapable of speaking, even to himself. Moody was by nature impatient of any deficiencies in his own person—fear and illness both turned him inward—and it was for this reason that he very uncharacteristically failed to assess the tenor of the room he had just entered.

Moody's natural expression was one of readiness and attention. His grey eyes were large and unblinking, and his supple, boyish mouth was usually poised in an expression of polite concern. His hair inclined to a tight curl; it had fallen in ringlets to his shoulders in his youth, but now he wore it close against his skull, parted on the side and combed flat with a sweet-smelling pomade that darkened its golden hue to an oily brown. His brow and cheeks were square, his nose straight, and his complexion smooth. He was not quite eight-and-twenty, still swift and exact in his motions, and possessed of the kind of roguish, unsullied vigour that conveys neither gullibility nor guile. He presented himself in the manner of a discreet and quick-minded butler, and as a consequence was often drawn into the confidence of the least voluble of men, or invited to broker relations between people he had only lately met. He had, in short, an appearance that betrayed very little about his own character, and an appearance that others were immediately inclined to trust.

Moody was not unaware of the advantage his inscrutable grace afforded him. Like most excessively beautiful persons, he had studied his own reflection minutely and, in a way, knew himself from the outside best; he was always in some chamber of his mind perceiving himself from the exterior. He had passed a great many hours in the alcove of his private dressing room, where the mirror tripled his image into profile, half-profile, and square: Van Dyck's Charles, though a good deal more striking. It was a private practice, and one he would likely have denied—for how roundly self-examination is

condemned, by the moral prophets of our age! As if the self had no relation to the self, and one only looked in mirrors to have one's arrogance confirmed; as if the act of self-regarding was not as subtle, fraught and ever-changing as any bond between twin souls. In his fascination Moody sought less to praise his own beauty than to master it. Certainly whenever he caught his own reflection, in a window box, or in a pane of glass after nightfall, he felt a thrill of satisfaction— but as an engineer might feel, chancing upon a mechanism of his own devising and finding it splendid, flashing, properly oiled and performing exactly as he had predicted it should.

He could see his own self now, poised in the doorway of the smoking room, and he knew that the figure he cut was one of perfect composure. He was near trembling with fatigue; he was carrying a leaden weight of terror in his gut; he felt shadowed, even dogged; he was filled with dread. He surveyed the room with an air of polite detachment and respect. It had the appearance of a place rebuilt from memory after a great passage of time, when much has been forgotten (andirons, drapes, a proper mantel to surround the hearth) but small details persist: a picture of the late Prince Consort, for example, cut from a magazine and affixed with shoe tacks to the wall that faced the yard; the seam down the middle of the billiard table, which had been sawn in two on the Sydney docks to better survive the crossing; the stack of old broadsheets upon the secretary, the pages thinned and blurry from the touch of many hands. The view through the two small windows that flanked the hearth was over the hotel's rear yard, a marshy allotment littered with crates and rusting drums, separated from the neighbouring plots only by patches of scrub and low fern, and, to the north, by a row of laying hutches, the doors of which were chained against thieves. Beyond this vague periphery, one could see sagging laundry lines running back and forth behind the houses one block to the east, latticed stacks of raw timber, pigpens, piles of scrap and sheet iron, broken cradles and flumes—everything abandoned, or in some relative state of disrepair. The clock had struck that late hour of twilight when all colours seem suddenly to lose their richness, and it was raining hard; through the cockled glass the yard was

bleached and fading. Inside, the spirit lamps had not yet succeeded the sea-coloured light of the dying day, and seemed by virtue of their paleness to accent the general cheerlessness of the room's decor.

For a man accustomed to his club in Edinburgh, where all was lit in hues of red and gold, and the studded couches gleamed with a fatness that reflected the girth of the gentlemen upon them; where, upon entering, one was given a soft jacket that smelled pleasantly of anise, or of peppermint, and thereafter the merest twitch of one's finger towards the bell-rope was enough to summon a bottle of claret on a silver tray, the prospect was a crude one. But Moody was not a man for whom offending standards were cause enough to sulk: the rough simplicity of the place only made him draw back internally, as a rich man will step swiftly to the side, and turn glassy, when confronted with a beggar in the street. The mild look upon his face did not waver as he cast his gaze about, but inwardly, each new detail—the mound of dirty wax beneath this candle, the rime of dust around that glass—caused him to retreat still further into himself, and steel his body all the more rigidly against the scene.

This recoil, though unconsciously performed, owed less to the common prejudices of high fortune—in fact Moody was only modestly rich, and often gave coins to paupers, though (it must be owned) never without a small rush of pleasure for his own largesse—than to the personal disequilibrium over which the man was currently, and invisibly, struggling to prevail. This was a gold town, after all, newbuilt between jungle and surf at the southernmost edge of the civilised world, and he had not expected luxury.

The truth was that not six hours ago, aboard the barque that had conveyed him from Port Chalmers to the wild shard of the Coast, Moody had witnessed an event so extraordinary and affecting that it called all other realities into doubt. The scene was still with him—as if a door had chinked open, in the corner of his mind, to show a band of greying light, and he could not now wish the darkness back again. It was costing him a great deal of effort to keep that door from opening further. In this fragile condition,

any unorthodoxy or inconvenience was personally affronting. He felt as if the whole dismal scene before him was an aggregate echo of the trials he had so lately sustained, and he recoiled from it in order to prevent his own mind from following this connexion, and returning to the past. Disdain was useful. It gave him a fixed sense of proportion, a rightfulness to which he could appeal, and feel secure.

He called the room luckless, and meagre, and dreary—and with his inner mind thus fortified against the furnishings, he turned to the twelve inhabitants. An inverted pantheon, he thought, and again felt a little steadier, for having indulged the conceit.

The men were bronzed and weathered in the manner of all frontiersmen, their lips chapped white, their carriage expressive of privation and loss. Two of their number were Chinese, dressed identically in cloth shoes and grey cotton shifts; behind them stood a Maori native, his face tattooed in whorls of greenish-blue. Of the others, Moody could not guess the origin. He did not yet understand how the diggings could age a man in a matter of months; casting his gaze around the room, he reckoned himself the youngest man in attendance, when in fact several were his juniors and his peers. The glow of youth was quite washed from them. They would be crabbed forever, restless, snatching, grey in body, coughing dust into the brown lines of their palms. Moody thought them coarse, even quaint; he thought them men of little influence; he did not wonder why they were so silent. He wanted a brandy, and a place to sit and close his eyes.

He stood in the doorway a moment after entering, waiting to be received, but when nobody made any gesture of welcome or dismissal he took another step forward and pulled the door softly closed behind him. He made a vague bow in the direction of the window, and another in the direction of the hearth, to suffice as a wholesale introduction of himself, then moved to the side table and engaged himself in mixing a drink from the decanters set out for that purpose. He chose a cigar and cut it; placing it between his teeth, he turned back to the room, and scanned the faces once again. Nobody seemed remotely affected by his presence. This

suited him. He seated himself in the only available armchair, lit his cigar, and settled back with the private sigh of a man who feels his daily comforts are, for once, very much deserved.

His contentment was short-lived. No sooner had he stretched out his legs and crossed his ankles (the salt on his trousers had dried, most provokingly, in tides of white) than the man on his immediate right leaned forward in his chair, prodded the air with the stump of his own cigar, and said, 'Look here—you've business, here at the Crown?'

This was rather abruptly phrased, but Moody's expression did not register as much. He bowed his head politely and explained that he had indeed secured a room upstairs, having arrived in town that very evening.

'Just off the boat, you mean?'

Moody bowed again and affirmed that this was precisely his meaning. So that the man would not think him short, he added that he was come from Port Chalmers, with the intention of trying his hand at digging for gold.

'That's good,' the man said. 'That's good. New finds up the beach—she's ripe with it. Black sands: that's the cry you'll be hearing; black sands up Charleston way; that's north of here, of course—Charleston. Though you'll still make pay in the gorge. You got a mate, or come over solo?'

'Just me alone,' Moody said.

'No affiliations!' the man said.

'Well,' Moody said, surprised again at his phrasing, 'I intend to make my own fortune, that's all.'

'No affiliations,' the man repeated. 'And no business; you've no business, here at the Crown?'

This was impertinent—to demand the same information twice—but the man seemed genial, even distracted, and he was strumming with his fingers at the lapel of his vest. Perhaps, Moody thought, he had simply not been clear enough. He said, 'My business at this hotel is only to rest. In the next few days I will make inquiries around the diggings—which rivers are yielding, which valleys are dry—and acquaint myself with the digger's life, as it were.

I intend to stay here at the Crown for one week, and after that, to make my passage inland.'

'You've not dug before, then.'

'No, sir.'

'Never seen the colour?'

'Only at the jeweller's—on a watch, or on a buckle; never pure.'

'But you've dreamed it, pure! You've dreamed it—kneeling in the water, sifting the metal from the grit!'

'I suppose … well no, I haven't, exactly,' Moody said. The expansive style of this man's speech was rather peculiar to him: for all the man's apparent distraction, he spoke eagerly, and with an energy that was almost importunate. Moody looked around, hoping to exchange a sympathetic glance with one of the others, but he failed to catch anybody's eye. He coughed, adding, 'I suppose I've dreamed of what comes afterwards—that is, what the gold might lead to, what it might become.'

The man seemed pleased by this answer. 'Reverse alchemy, is what I like to call it,' he said, 'the whole business, I mean—prospecting. Reverse alchemy. Do you see—the transformation—not *into* gold, but *out* of it—'

'It is a fine conceit, sir,'—reflecting only much later that this notion chimed very nearly with his own recent fancy of a pantheon reversed.

'And your inquiries,' the man said, nodding vigorously, 'your inquiries—you'll be asking around, I suppose—what shovels, what cradles—and maps and things.'

'Yes, precisely. I mean to do it right.'

The man threw himself back into his armchair, evidently very amused. 'One week's board at the Crown Hotel—just to ask your questions!' He gave a little shout of laughter. 'And then you'll spend two weeks in the mud, to earn it back!'

Moody recrossed his ankles. He was not in the right disposition to return the other man's energy, but he was too rigidly bred to consider being impolite. He might have simply apologised for his discomfiture, and admitted some kind of general malaise—the man seemed sympathetic enough, with his strumming fingers, and

his rising gurgle of a laugh—but Moody was not in the habit of speaking candidly to strangers, and still less of confessing illness to another man. He shook himself internally and said, in a brighter tone of voice,

'And you, sir? You are well established here, I think?'

'Oh, yes,' replied the other. 'Balfour Shipping, you'll have seen us, right past the stockyards, prime location—Wharf-street, you know. Balfour, that's me. Thomas is my Christian name. You'll need one of those on the diggings: no man goes by Mister in the gorge.'

'Then I must practise using mine,' Moody said. 'It is Walter. Walter Moody.'

'Yes, and they'll call you anything but Walter too,' Balfour said, striking his knee. '"Scottish Walt", maybe. "Two-Hand Walt", maybe. "Wally Nugget". Ha!'

'That name I shall have to earn.'

Balfour laughed. 'No earning about it,' he said. 'Big as a lady's pistol, some of the ones I've seen. Big as a lady's—but, I'm telling you, not half as hard to put your hands on.'

Thomas Balfour was around fifty in age, compact and robust in body. His hair was quite grey, combed backward from his forehead, and long about the ears. He wore a spade-beard, and was given to stroking it downward with the cup of his hand when he was amused—he did this now, in pleasure at his own joke. His prosperity sat easily with him, Moody thought, recognising in the man that relaxed sense of entitlement that comes when a lifelong optimism has been ratified by success. He was in shirtsleeves; his cravat, though of silk, and finely wrought, was spotted with gravy and coming loose at the neck. Moody placed him as a libertarian—harmless, renegade in spirit, and cheerful in his effusions.

'I am in your debt, sir,' he said. 'This is the first of many customs of which I will be entirely ignorant, I am sure. I would have certainly made the error of using a surname in the gorge.'

It was true that his mental conception of the New Zealand diggings was extremely imprecise, informed chiefly by sketches of the California goldfields—log cabins, flat-bottomed valleys, wagons in

the dust—and a dim sense (he did not know from where) that the colony was somehow the shadow of the British Isles, the unformed, savage obverse of the Empire's seat and heart. He had been surprised, upon rounding the heads of the Otago peninsula some two weeks prior, to see mansions on the hill, quays, streets, and plotted gardens—and he was surprised, now, to observe a well-dressed gentleman passing his lucifers to a Chinaman, and then leaning across him to retrieve his glass.

Moody was a Cambridge fellow, born in Edinburgh to a modest fortune and a household staff of three. The social circles in which he had tended to move, at Trinity, and then at Inner Temple in his more recent years, had not at all the rigid aspect of the peerage, where one's history and context differed from the next man only in degree; nevertheless, his education had made him insular, for it had taught him that the proper way to understand any social system was to view it from above. With his college chums (dressed in capes, and drunk on Rhenish wine) he would defend the merging of the classes with all the agony and vitality of the young, but he was always startled whenever he encountered it in practice. He did not yet know that a goldfield was a place of muck and hazard, where every fellow was foreign to the next man, and foreign to the soil; where a grocer's cradle might be thick with colour, and a lawyer's cradle might run dry; where there were no divisions. Moody was some twenty years Balfour's junior, and so he spoke with deference, but he was conscious that Balfour was a man of lower standing than himself, and he was conscious also of the strange miscellany of persons around him, whose estates and origins he had not the means to guess. His politeness therefore had a slightly wooden quality, as a man who does not often speak with children lacks any measure for what is appropriate, and so holds himself apart, and is rigid, however much he wishes to be kind.

Thomas Balfour felt this condescension, and was delighted. He had a playful distaste for men who spoke, as he phrased it, 'much too well', and he loved to provoke them—not to anger, which bored him, but to vulgarity. He regarded Moody's stiffness as if it were a fashionable collar, made in some aristocratic style, that was unbearably

confining to the wearer—he saw all conventions of polite society in this way, as useless ornamentations—and it amused him, that the man's refinement caused him to be so ill at ease.

Balfour was indeed a man of humble standing, as Moody had guessed. His father had worked in a saddlery in Kent, and he might have taken up that mantle, if a fire had not claimed both father and stable in his eleventh year—but he was a restless boy, with frayed cuffs and an impatience that belied the dreamy, half-focused expression he habitually wore, and the dogged work would not have suited him. In any case, a horse could not keep pace with a railway car, as he was fond of saying, and the trade had not weathered the rush of changing times. Balfour liked very much to feel that he was at the vanguard of an era. When he spoke of the past, it was as if each decade prior to the present year was an ill-made candle that had been burned and spent. He felt no nostalgia for the stuff of his boyhood life—the dark liquor of the tanning vats, the rack of hides, the calfskin pouch where his father stored his needles and his awl—and rarely recalled it, except to draw a comparison with newer industries. Ore: that was where the money lay. Coalmines, steelworks, and gold.

He began in glass. After several years as an apprentice he founded a glassworks of his own, a modest factory he later sold for a share in a coalmine, which in due course was expanded to a network of shaft mines, and sold to investors in London for a grand sum. He did not marry. On his thirtieth birthday he bought a one-way ticket on a clipper ship bound for Veracruz, the first leg of a nine-month journey that would take him overland to the Californian goldfields. The lustre of the digger's life soon paled for him, but the ceaseless rush and hope of the fields did not; with his first dust he bought shares in a bank, built three hotels in four years, and prospered. When California dried he sold up and sailed for Victoria—a new strike, a new uncharted land—and thence, hearing once again the call that carried across the ocean like a faery pipe on a rare breeze, to New Zealand.

During his sixteen years on the raw fields Thomas Balfour had met a great many men like Walter Moody, and it was a credit to his temperament that he had retained, over these years, a deep affection

and regard for the virgin state of men yet untested by experience, yet untried. Balfour was sympathetic to ambition, and unorthodox, as a self-made man, in his generosity of spirit. Enterprise pleased him; desire pleased him. He was disposed to like Moody simply for the reason that the other man had undertaken a pursuit about which he evidently knew very little, and from which he must expect a great return.

On this particular night, however, Balfour was not without agenda. Moody's entrance had been something of a surprise to the twelve assembled men, who had taken considerable precautions to ensure that they would not be disturbed. The front parlour of the Crown Hotel was closed that night for a private function, and a boy had been posted under the awning to watch the street, lest any man had set his mind on drinking there—which was unlikely, for the Crown smoking room was not generally celebrated for its society or its charm, and indeed was very often empty, even on the week-end nights when the diggers flooded back from the hills in droves to spend their dust on liquor at the shanties in the town. The boy on duty was Mannering's, and had in his possession a stout bundle of gallery tickets to give away for free. The performance—*Sensations from the Orient!*—was a new act, and guaranteed to please, and there were cases of champagne ready in the opera-house foyer, courtesy of Mannering himself, in honour of opening night. With these diversions in place, and believing that no boat would risk a landing in the murky evening of such an inclement day (the projected arrivals in the shipping pages of the *West Coast Times* were, by that hour, all accounted for), the assembled party had not thought to make provision for an accidental stranger who might have already checked in to the hotel some half-hour before nightfall, and so was already inside the building when Mannering's boy took up his post under the dripping porch facing the street.

Walter Moody, despite his reassuring countenance, and despite the courteous detachment with which he held himself, was nevertheless still an intruder. The men were at a loss to know how to persuade him to leave, without making it clear that he *had* intruded, and thus exposing the subversive nature of their assembly. Thomas

Balfour had assumed the task of vetting him only by the accident of their proximity, next to the fire—a happy conjunction, this, for Balfour was tenacious, for all his bluster and rhapsody, and well accustomed to turning a scene to his own gain.

'Yes, well,' he said now, 'one learns the customs soon enough, and everyone has to start where you are standing—as an apprentice, I mean; knowing nothing at all. What sowed the seed, then, if you don't object to my asking? That's a private interest of mine—what brings a fellow down here, you know, to the ends of the earth—what sparks a man.'

Moody took a pull on his cigar before answering. 'My object was a complicated one,' he said. 'A matter of family disputation, painful to relate, which accounts for my having made the crossing solo.'

'Oh, but in that you are *not* alone,' Balfour said cheerfully. 'Every boy here is on the run from something—you can be sure of it!'

'Indeed,' said Moody, thinking this a rather alarming prospect.

'Everyone's from somewhere else,' Balfour went on. 'Yes: that's the very heart of it. We're all from somewhere else. And as for family: you'll find brothers and fathers enough, in the gorge.'

'You are kind to offer comfort.'

Balfour was grinning broadly now. '*There's* a phrase,' he said, waving his cigar with such emphasis that he scattered feathers of ash all over his vest. '*Comfort*—! If this counts as comfort, then you're a very Puritan, my boy.'

Moody could not produce an appropriate response to this remark, so he bowed again—and then, as if to repudiate all puritanical implication, he drank deeply from his glass. Outside, a gust of wind interrupted the steady lash of the rain, throwing a sheet of water against the western windows. Balfour examined the end of his cigar, still chuckling; Moody placed his own between his lips, turned his face away, and drew lightly upon it.

Just then one of the eleven silent men got to his feet, folding his newspaper into quarters as he did so, and crossed to the secretary in order to exchange the paper for another. He was wearing a collarless black coat and a white necktie—a clergyman's dress, Moody

realised, with some surprise. That was strange. Why should a cleric elect to get his news in the smoking room of a common hotel, late on a Saturday night? And why should he keep such silent company, in doing so? Moody watched as the reverend man shuffled through the pile of broadsheets, rejecting several editions of the *Colonist* in favour of a *Grey River Argus*, which he plucked out with a murmur of pleasure, holding it away from his body and tilting it, with appreciation, towards the light. Then again, Moody thought, reasoning with himself, perhaps it was not so strange: the night was very wet, and the halls and taverns of the town were likely very crowded. Perhaps the clergyman had been obliged, for some reason, to seek temporary refuge from the rain.

'So you had a quarrel,' Balfour said presently, as if Moody had promised him a rousing tale, and had then forgotten to begin it.

'I was party to a quarrel,' Moody corrected him. 'That is, the dispute was not of my own making.'

'With your father, I suppose.'

'It is painful to relate, sir.' Moody glanced at the other man, meaning to silence him with a stern look, but Balfour responded by leaning further forward, encouraged by the gravity of Moody's expression to believe the story all the more worth his hearing.

'Oh, come!' he said. 'Ease your burden.'

'It is not a burden to be eased, Mr. Balfour.'

'My friend, I have never heard of such a thing.'

'Pardon me to change the subject—'

'But you have roused me! You have roused my attention!' Balfour was grinning at him.

'I beg to refuse you,' Moody said. He was trying to speak quietly, to protect their conversation from the rest of the room. 'I beg to reserve my privacy. My motive is purely that I do not wish to make a poor impression upon you.'

'But you're the wronged man, you said—the dispute, not of your making.'

'That is correct.'

'Well, now! One needn't be private about *that*!' Balfour cried. 'Do I not speak truly? One needn't be private about another fellow's

wrong! One needn't feel ashamed of another fellow's—deeds, you know!' He was being very loud.

'You describe personal shame,' Moody said in a low voice. 'I refer to the shame that is brought upon a family. I do not wish to sully my father's name; it is my name also.'

'Your father! But what have I told you already? You'll find fathers enough, I said, down in the gorge! That's no turn of phrase—it's custom, and necessity—it's the way that things are done! Let me tell you what counts for shame on the diggings. Cry a false field—*that's* worthy. Dispute the pegging on a claim—*that's* worthy. Rob a man, cheat a man, kill a man—*that's* worthy. But family shame! Tell that to the bellmen, to cry up and down the Hokitika-road—they'll think it news! What's family shame, without a family?'

Balfour concluded this exhortation with a smart rap of his empty glass upon the arm of his chair. He beamed at Moody, and lifted his open palm, as if to say that his point had been so persuasively phrased as to need no further amendment, but he would like some kind of approbation all the same. Moody gave another automatic jerk of his head and replied, in a tone that betrayed the exhaustion of his nerves for the first time, 'You speak persuasively, sir.'

Balfour, still beaming, waved the compliment aside. 'Persuasion's tricks and cleverness. I'm speaking plain.'

'I thank you for it.'

'Yes, yes,' Balfour said agreeably. He seemed to be enjoying himself very much. 'But now you must tell me about your family quarrel, Mr. Moody, so that I may judge if your name is sullied, in the end.'

'Forgive me,' Moody murmured. He glanced about, perceiving that the clergyman had returned to his seat, and was now absorbed in his paper. The man next to him—a florid type, with an imperial moustache and gingery hair—appeared to have fallen asleep.

Thomas Balfour was not to be deterred. 'Liberty and security!' he cried, waving his arm again. 'Is that not what it comes down to? You see, I know the argument already! I know the form of it! Liberty over security, security over liberty . . . provision from the father, freedom for the son. Of course the father might be too

controlling—that can happen—and the son might be wasteful . . . prodigal . . . but it's the same quarrel, every time. Lovers too,' he added, when Moody did not interject. 'It's the same for lovers, too: at bottom, always, the same dispute.'

But Moody was not listening. He had forgotten, for a moment, the creeping ash of his cigar, and the warm brandy pooling in the bottom of his glass. He had forgotten that he was here, in a hotel smoking room, in a town not five years built, at the end of the world. His mind had slipped, and returned to it: the bloody cravat, the clutching silver hand, the name, gasped out of the darkness, again and again, *Magdalena, Magdalena, Magdalena.* The scene came back to him all in a snatch, unbidden, like a shadow passing coldly over the face of the sun.

Moody had sailed from Port Chalmers aboard the barque *Godspeed*, a stout little craft with a smartly raked bow and a figurehead of painted oak—an eagle, after St. John. On a map the journey took the shape of a hairpin: the barque set off northward, traversed the narrow strait between two seas, and then turned south again, to the diggings. Moody's ticket afforded him a narrow space below decks, but the hold was so foul-smelling and close that he was compelled to spend most of the voyage topside, hunched below the gunwales with his leather case clasped wetly to his chest and his collar turned up against the spray. Crouched as he was with his back to the view, he saw very little of the coastline—the yellow plains of the East, which gave way by subtle incline to greener heights, and then the mountains, blue with distance, above them; further north, the verdant fjords, hushed by still water; in the West, the braided streams that tarnished when they met the beaches, and carved fissures in the sand.

When the *Godspeed* rounded the northern spit and began her passage southward, the weatherglass began to fall. Had Moody not been so ill and wretched he might have felt afraid, and made his vows: drowning, the boys on the docks had told him, was the West Coast disease, and whether he could call himself a lucky man was a question that would be settled long before he reached the goldfields, and long before he first knelt down to touch the edge of his dish to the stones. There were as many lost as landed. The master

of his vessel—Captain Carver was his name—had seen so many lubbers washed to their deaths from his station on the quarterdeck that the whole ship might properly be called a graveside—this last spoken with a hushed solemnity, and wide eyes.

The storm was borne on greenish winds. It began as a coppery taste in the back of one's mouth, a metallic ache that amplified as the clouds darkened and advanced, and when it struck, it was with the flat hand of a senseless fury. The seething deck, the strange whip of light and shadows cast by the sails that snapped and strained above it, the palpable fear of the sailors as they fought to hold the barque on her course—it was the stuff of nightmare, and Moody had the nightmarish sense, as the vessel drew closer and closer to the goldfields, that she had somehow willed the infernal storm upon her self.

Walter Moody was not superstitious, though he derived great enjoyment from the superstitions of others, and he was not easily deceived by impression, though he took great care in designing his own. This owed less to his intelligence, however, than to his experience—which, prior to his departure for New Zealand, could be termed neither broad nor varied in its character. In his life so far he had known only the kind of doubt that is calculated and secure. He had known only suspicion, cynicism, probability—never the fearful unravelling that comes when one ceases to trust in one's own trusting power; never the dread panic that follows this unravelling; never the dull void that follows last of all. Of these latter classes of uncertainty he had remained, until recently at least, happily unconscious. His imagination did not naturally stray to the fanciful, and he rarely theorised except with a practical purpose in mind. His own mortality held only an intellectual fascination for him, a dry lustre; and, having no religion, he did not believe in ghosts.

The full account of what transpired during this last leg of the voyage is Moody's own, and must be left to him. We think it sufficient to say, at this juncture, that there were eight passengers aboard the *Godspeed* when she pulled out of the harbour at Dunedin, and by the time the barque landed on the Coast, there were nine. The ninth was not a baby, born in transit; nor was he a stowaway; nor

did the ship's lookout spot him adrift in the water, clinging to some scrap of wreckage, and give the shout to draw him in. But to say this is to rob Walter Moody of his own tale—and unfairly, for he was still unable to recall the apparition wholly to his own mind, much less to form a narrative for the pleasures of a third.

In Hokitika it had been raining for two weeks without reprieve. Moody's first glimpse of the township was of a shifting smear that advanced and retreated as the mist blew back and forth. There was only a narrow corridor of flat land between the coastline and the sudden alps, battered by the endless surf that turned to smoke on the sand; it seemed still flatter and more contained by virtue of the cloud that sheared the mountains low on their flanks and formed a grey ceiling over the huddled roofs of the town. The port was located to the south, tucked into the crooked mouth of a river, rich in gold, which became a lather where it met the salt edge of the sea. Here at the coast it was brown and barren, but upriver the water was cool and white, and said to gleam. The river mouth itself was calm, a lakelet thick with masts and the fat stacks of steamers waiting for a clearer day; they knew better than to risk the bar that lay concealed beneath the water and shifted with each tide. The enormous number of vessels that had foundered on the bar were scattered as unhappy testament to the hazard below. There were thirty-some wrecks in total, and several were very new. Their splintered hulks wrought a strange barricade that seemed, dismally, to fortify the township against the open sea.

The barque's captain dared not bring the ship to port until the weather improved, and instead signalled for a lighter to convey the passengers over the rolling breakers to the sand. The lighter was crewed by six—grim Charons to a man, who stared and did not speak as the passengers were lowered by chair down the heaving flank of the *Godspeed*. It was awful to crouch in the tiny boat and look up through the impossible rigging of the ship above—she cast a dark shadow as she rolled, and when at last the line was struck and they pulled away into open water, Moody felt the lightness on his skin. The other passengers were merry. They exclaimed about the weather, and how splendid it had been to come through a

storm. They wondered about each shipwreck that they passed, sounding out the names; they spoke of the fields, and the fortunes they would find there. Their cheer was hateful. A woman pressed a phial of sal volatile into the bone of Moody's hip—'Take it quiet, so the others don't come wanting'—but he pushed her hand away. She had not seen what he had seen.

The downpour seemed to intensify as the lighter neared the shore. The spray from the breakers brought such a great quantity of seawater over the gunwales that Moody was obliged to assist the crew in bailing the boat, using a leather pail thrust wordlessly upon him by a man who was missing every tooth except his rearmost molars. Moody did not even have the spirit to flinch. They were carried over the bar and into the calm of the river mouth on a white-capped wave. He did not shut his eyes. When the lighter reached her mooring he was the first out of the boat, drenched to the skin and so giddy he stumbled on the ladder, causing the boat to lurch wildly away from him. Like a man pursued he staggered, half-limping, down the wharf to solid ground.

When he turned back, he could only just distinguish the fragile lighter bucking against her mooring at the end of the wharf. The barque herself had long since vanished into the mist, which hung in plates of clouded glass, obscuring the wrecked ships, the steamers in the roadstead, and the open sea beyond. Moody reeled on his feet. He was dimly aware of the crew handing bags and valises out of the boat, the other passengers running about, the porters and stevedores shouting their instructions through the rain. The scene was veiled to him, the figures gauzed—as if the journey, and everything pertaining to it, had been claimed already by the grey fog of his uncertain mind; as if his memory, recoiling upon itself, had met its obverse, the power of forgetting, and had conjured the mist and driving rain as a kind of cloth, spectral, to screen him from the shapes of his own recent past.

Moody did not linger. He turned and hurried up the beach, past the slaughterhouses, the latrines, the breakwind huts along the sandy lip of the shore, the tents that sagged under the greying weight of two weeks' rain. His head was down, his case clutched

tightly against him, and he saw none of it: not the stockyards, not the high gables of the warehouses, not the mullioned windows of the offices along Wharf-street, behind which shapeless bodies moved through lighted rooms. Moody struggled on, shin-deep in slurry, and when the sham front of the Crown Hotel rose up before him he dashed towards it and threw down his case to wrench with both hands at the door.

The Crown was an establishment of the serviceable, unadorned sort, recommended only by its proximity to the quay. If this feature was an expedience, however, it could hardly be called a virtue: here, so close to the stockyards, the bloody smell of slaughter intermingled with the sour, briny smell of the sea, putting one in mind, perpetually, of an untended icebox in which an uncured joint has spoiled. For this reason Moody might have disdained the place offhand, resolving instead to venture northward up Revell-street to where the fronts of the hotels broadened, brightened in colour, acquired porticoes, and communicated, with their high windows and their delicate fretwork, all those reassurances of wealth and comfort to which he was accustomed, as a man of means … but Moody had left all discerning faculties in the pitching belly of the barque *Godspeed*. He wanted only shelter, and solitude.

The calm of the empty foyer, once he had closed the door behind him, muting the sound of the rain, had an immediate and physical effect upon him. We have noted that Moody derived considerable personal benefit from his appearance, and that this was a fact of which he was wholly sensible: he was not about to make his first acquaintance in an unfamiliar town looking like a haunted man. He struck the water from his hat, ran a hand through his hair, stamped his feet to stop his knees from shaking, and worked his mouth in a vigorous way, as if testing its elasticity. He performed these motions swiftly and without embarrassment. By the time the maid appeared, he had arranged his face into its habitual expression of benign indifference, and was examining the dovetailed join at the corner of the front desk.

The maid was a dull-seeming girl with colourless hair and teeth as yellow as her skin. She recited the terms of board and lodging,

relieved Moody of ten shillings (these she dropped with a sullen clatter into a locked drawer beneath the desk), and wearily led him upstairs. He was conscious of the trail of rainwater he left behind him, and the sizeable puddle he had created on the foyer floor, and pressed a sixpence upon her; she took it pityingly and made to leave, but then at once seemed to wish she had been kinder. She flushed, and after a moment's pause, suggested that he might like a supper tray brought up from the kitchens—'To dry out your insides,' she said, and pulled back her lips in a yellow smile.

The Crown Hotel was lately built, and still retained the dusty, honeyed trace of fresh-planed lumber, the walls still beading gems of sap along each groove, the hearths still clean of ash and staining. Moody's room was furnished very approximately, as in a pantomime where a large and lavish household is conjured by a single chair. The bolster was thin upon the mattress, and padded with what felt like twists of muslin; the blankets were slightly too large, so that their edges pooled on the floor, giving the bed a rather shrunken aspect, huddled as it was beneath the rough slope of the eave. The bareness lent the place a spectral, unfinished quality that might have been disquieting, had the prospect through the buckled glass been of a different street and a different age, but to Moody the emptiness was like a balm. He stowed his sodden case on the whatnot beside his bed, wrung and dried his clothes as best he could, drank off a pot of tea, ate four slices of dark-grained bread with ham, and, after peering through the window to the impenetrable wash of the street, resolved to defer his business in town until the morning.

The maid had left yesterday's newspaper beneath the teapot—how thin it was, for a sixpenny broadsheet! Moody smiled as he took it up. He had a fondness for cheap news, and was amused to see that the town's *Most Alluring Dancer* also advertised her services as the town's *Most Discreet Accoucheuse*. A whole column of the paper was devoted to missing prospectors (*If this should reach the eyes of* EMERY STAINES, *or any who know of his whereabouts* . . .) and an entire page to Barmaids Wanted. Moody read the document twice over, including the shipping notices, the advertisements for lodging and small fare, and several very dull campaign speeches, printed in full.

He found that he was disappointed: the *West Coast Times* read like a parish gazette. But what had he expected? That a goldfield would be an exotic phantasm, made of glitter and promise? That the diggers would be notorious and sly—every man a murderer, every man a thief?

Moody folded the paper slowly. His line of thinking had returned him to the *Godspeed*, and to the bloody casket in her hold, and his heart began to pound again. 'That's enough,' he said aloud, and immediately felt foolish. He stood and tossed the folded paper aside. In any case, he thought, the daylight was fading, and he disliked reading in the dusk.

Quitting his room, he returned downstairs. He found the maid sequestered in the alcove beneath the stairs, scrubbing at a pair of riding boots with blacking, and inquired of her if there was a parlour in which he might spend the evening. His voyage had wrought considerable strain in him, and he was in sore need of a glass of brandy and a quiet place to rest his eyes.

The maid was more obliging now—her sixpences must be few and far between, Moody thought, which could be useful later, if he needed her. She explained that the parlour of the Crown had been reserved that night for a private party—'The Catholic Friendlies,' she clarified, grinning again—but she might conduct him instead, if he wished it, to the smoking room.

Moody returned to the present with a jolt, and saw that Thomas Balfour was still looking at him, with an expression of intrigued expectation upon his face.

'I beg your pardon,' Moody said, in confusion. 'I believe I must have drifted off into my own thoughts—for a moment—'

'What were you thinking of?' said Balfour.

What had he been thinking of? Only the cravat, the silver hand, that name, gasped out of the darkness. The scene was like a small world, Moody thought, possessed of its own dimensions. Any amount of ordinary time could pass, when his mind was straying there. There was this large world of rolling time and shifting spaces, and that small, stilled world of horror and unease; they fit inside each other, a sphere within a sphere. How strange, that Balfour had

been watching him; that real time had been passing—revolving around him, all the while—

'I wasn't thinking of anything in particular,' he said. 'I have endured a difficult journey, that is all, and I am very tired.'

Behind him one of the billiard players made a shot: a doubled crack, a velvet plop, a ripple of appreciation from the other players. The clergyman shook out his paper noisily; another man coughed; another struck the dust from his shirtsleeve, and shifted in his chair.

'I was asking about your quarrel,' Balfour said.

'The quarrel—' Moody began, and then stopped. He suddenly felt too exhausted even to speak.

'The dispute,' prompted Balfour. 'Between you and your father.'

'I am sorry,' Moody said. 'The particulars are delicate.'

'A matter of money! Do I hit upon it?'

'Forgive me: you do not.' Moody ran his hand over his face.

'Not of money! Then—a matter of love! You are in love . . . but your father will not approve the girl of your choosing . . .'

'No, sir,' Moody said. 'I am not in love.'

'A great shame,' Balfour said. 'Well! I conclude: you are already married!'

'I am unmarried.'

'You are a young widower, perhaps!'

'I have never been married, sir.'

Balfour burst out laughing and threw up both his hands, to signal that he considered Moody's reticence cheerfully exasperating, and quite absurd.

While he was laughing Moody raised himself up on his wrists and swivelled to look over the high back of his armchair at the room behind him. He had the intention of drawing others into their conversation somehow, and perhaps thus diverting the other man from his purpose. But nobody looked up to meet his gaze; they seemed, Moody thought, to be actively avoiding him. This was odd. But his posture was awkward and he was being rude, and so he reluctantly resumed his former position and crossed his legs again.

'I do not mean to disappoint you,' he said, when Balfour's laughter subsided.

'Disappoint—no!' Balfour cried. 'No, no. You will have your secrets!'

'You mistake me,' Moody said. 'My aim is not concealment. The subject is personally distressing to me, that is all.'

'Oh,' Balfour said, 'but it is always so, Mr. Moody, when one is young—to be distressed by one's own history, you know—wishing to keep it back—and never to share it—I mean, with other men.'

'That is a wise observation.'

'Wise! And nothing else?'

'I do not understand you, Mr. Balfour.'

'You are determined to thwart my curiosity!'

'I confess I am a little startled by it.'

'This is a gold town, sir!' Balfour said. 'One must be sure of his fellows—one must trust in his fellows—indeed!'

This was still more odd. For the first time—perhaps because of his growing frustration, which served to focus his attention more squarely upon the scene at hand—Moody felt his interest begin to stir. The strange silence of the room was hardly testament to the kind of fraternity where all was shared and made easy . . . and moreover, Balfour had offered very little with respect to his own character and reputation in the town, by which intelligence Moody might be made to feel more assured of *him*! His gaze slid sideways, to the fat man closest to the hearth, whose closed eyelids were trembling with the effort of pretended sleep, and then to the blond-haired man behind him, who was passing his billiard cue from one hand to the other, but seemed to have lost all interest in the game.

Something was afoot: of this he was suddenly certain. Balfour was performing a role, on behalf of the others: taking his measure, Moody thought. But for what purpose? There was a system behind this battery of questions, a design that was neatly obscured by the excess of Balfour's manner, his prodigious sympathy and charm. The other men were listening, however casually they turned the pages of their papers, or pretended to doze. With this realisation the room seemed suddenly to clarify, as when a chance scatter of stars resolves into a constellation before the eye. Balfour no longer

seemed cheery and effusive, as Moody had first believed him to be; instead he seemed overwrought, strained; even desperate. Moody wondered now whether indulging the man might serve better purpose than denying him.

Walter Moody was much experienced in the art of confidences. He knew that by confessing, one earned the subtle right to become confessor to the other, in his turn. A secret deserves a secret, and a tale deserves a tale; the gentle expectation of a response in kind was a pressure he knew how to apply. He would learn more by appearing to confide in Balfour than by openly suspecting him, simply because if he placed his trust in the other man, freely and without reservation, then Balfour would be obliged to confer his own trust in exchange. There was no reason why he could not relate his family story—however vexing it might be to recall it—in order to purchase the other man's trust. What had happened aboard the *Godspeed*, he had no intention of divulging, of course; but in this he did not need to dissimulate, for that was not the story that Thomas Balfour had requested to hear.

Having reflected upon this, Moody changed his tack.

'I see that I must win your confidence yet,' he said. 'I have nothing to hide, sir. I will relate my tale.'

Balfour flung himself back into his armchair with great satisfaction. 'You call it a tale!' he said, beaming again. 'Then I am surprised, Mr. Moody, that it concerns neither love nor money!'

'Only their absence, I am afraid,' Moody said.

'Absence—yes,' Balfour said, still smiling. He gestured for Moody to continue.

'I must first acquaint you with the particulars of my family history,' Moody said, and then lapsed into silence for a moment, his eyes narrowed, his mouth pursed.

The armchair in which he was sitting faced the hearth, and so nearly half of the men in the room were behind him, sitting or standing at their various sham pursuits. In the several seconds' grace he had secured for himself by appearing to collect his thoughts, Moody let his gaze wander to his left and right, to make note of the listeners sitting closest to them, around the fire.

Nearest the hearth sat the fat man who was feigning sleep. He was by far the most ostentatiously dressed in the room: a massive watch chain, thick as his own fat finger, was slung across his chest, between the pocket of his velvet vest and the breast of his cambric shirt, and affixed to the chain at intervals were knuckle-sized lumps of gold. The man next to him, on Balfour's other side, was partly obscured by the wing of his armchair, so that all Moody could see of him was the glint of his forehead and the shiny tip of his nose. His coat was made of herringbone, a thick woollen weave that was much too hot for his proximity to the fire, and his perspiration betrayed the posture of apparent ease with which he had arranged himself in the chair. He had no cigar; he was turning a silver cigarette case over and over in his hands. On Moody's left was another wingback armchair, pulled so close to his own that he could hear the nasal whistle of his neighbour's breath. This man was dark-haired, slim in build, and so tall that he appeared folded in two, sitting with his knees together and the soles of his shoes planted flat upon the floor. He was reading a newspaper, and in general, he was doing a much better job of pretended indifference than the others, but even so his eyes were somewhat glassy, as if they were not quite focused upon the type, and he had not turned a page in some time.

'I am the younger son of two,' Moody began at last. 'My brother, Frederick, is five years my senior. Our mother died near the end of my school years—I returned home only for a short time, to bury her—and shortly thereafter my father married again. His second wife was unknown to me then. She was—she is—a quiet, delicate woman, one who frighted easily, and was often ill. In her delicacy she is very unlike my father, who is coarse in his manner and much inclined to drink.

'The match was poor; I believe both parties regretted the marriage as a mistake, and I am sorry to report my father treated his new wife very badly. Three years ago he disappeared, leaving her, in Edinburgh, without provision to live. She might have become a pauper, or worse, such was the sudden destitution in which she found herself. She appealed to me—by letter, I mean; I was abroad—and I returned home at once. I became her protector, in

a modest sense. I made arrangements on her behalf, which she accepted, though somewhat bitterly, for the shape of her fortunes was much changed.' Moody gave an awkward dry cough. 'I secured for her a small living—employment, you understand. I then travelled to London, with the purpose of finding my father. There I exhausted all possible methods of locating him, and spent a great deal of money in the process. Finally I began to see about turning my education into an income of a kind, for I knew that I could no longer rely on my inheritance as surety, and my credit in the city had become very poor.

'My elder brother knew nothing of our stepmother's abandonment: he had left to seek his fortune on the Otago goldfields, some few weeks before my father disappeared. He was inclined to fits of whimsy of this kind—an adventurous spirit, I suppose you might call him, though we were never close with one another after childhood, and I confess I do not know him well. Months passed, and even years; he did not return, and nor did he send any news at all. My letters to him went unanswered. Indeed I still do not know if they ever reached his hands. At length I too booked my passage on a ship bound for New Zealand, my intention being to inform my brother of the changes in our family's position, and—if he was alive, of course—perhaps to join him on the diggings for a time. My own fortune was gone, the interest on my perpetuity was long since exhausted, and I was in a great deal of debt. While in London I had studied at the Inner Temple. I suppose I might have stayed on, and waited to be called to the Bar . . . but I have no real love for the law. I could not stomach it. I sailed for New Zealand instead.

'When I landed at Dunedin, not two weeks ago, I learned that Otago's gold had been all but eclipsed by new findings here on the Coast. I hesitated, not knowing where to venture first, and was rewarded for my hesitation in the most unexpected way: I met my father.'

Balfour made a murmur, but did not interrupt. He was staring into the fire, his mouth pursed judiciously around his cigar and his hand loose around the base of his glass. The eleven others were

equally still. The billiard game must have been abandoned, for Moody could no longer hear the click of the balls behind him. There was a sprung quality to the silence, as if the listeners were waiting for him to reveal something very particular . . . or fearing that he might.

'Our reunion was not a happy one,' Moody continued. He was speaking loudly, above the drumming of the rain; loudly enough for every man in the room to hear him, but not so loudly as to make it seem as if he was aware of their attention. 'He was drunk, and extremely angry that I had discovered him. I learned that he had become extraordinarily rich, and that he was married again, to a woman who doubtless was innocent of his history, or indeed of the fact that he was legally bound to another wife. I was, I am sorry to admit, unsurprised. My relations with my father have never been warm, and this was not the first time I had caught him in questionable circumstances . . . though never in a situation of this criminal magnitude, I should hasten to say.

'My real amazement came when I inquired after my brother, and learned that he had been my father's agent from the outset: they had orchestrated the abandonment together, and had journeyed south as partners. I did not wait to encounter Frederick too—I could not bear it, to see them both together—and made to leave. My father became aggressive, and attempted to detain me. I escaped, and made the immediate plan to journey here. I had money enough to return to London directly, if I wished, but my grief was of a kind that—' Moody paused, and made a helpless gesture with his fingers. 'I don't know,' he said at last. 'I believed the hard labour of the diggings might do me well, for a time. And I do not want to be a lawyer.'

There was a silence. Moody shook his head and sat forward in his chair. 'It is an unhappy story,' he said, more briskly. 'I am ashamed of my blood, Mr. Balfour, but I mean not to dwell upon it. I mean to make new.'

'Unhappy, indeed!' Balfour cried, plucking his cigar from his mouth at last, and waving it about. 'I am sorry for you, Mr. Moody, and commend you, both. But yours is the way of the goldfields, is

it not? Reinvention! Dare I say—revolution! That a man might make new—might make *himself* anew—truly, now!'

'These are words of encouragement,' Moody said.

'Your father—his name is also Moody, I presume.'

'It is,' Moody said. 'His Christian name is Adrian; perhaps you have heard of him?'

'I have not,' Balfour said, and then, perceiving that the other was disappointed, he added, '—which means very little, of course. I'm in the shipping line of business, as I told you; these days I don't rub shoulders with the men on the field. I was in Dunedin. I was in Dunedin for three years, near about. But if your pa made his luck on the diggings, he'd have been inland. Up in the high country. He might have been anywhere—Tuapeka, Clyde—anywhere at all. But—listen—as to the here and now, Mr. Moody. You're not afraid that he will follow you?'

'No,' Moody said, simply. 'I took pains to create the impression that I departed immediately for England, the day I left him. Upon the docks I found a man seeking passage to Liverpool. I explained my circumstances to him, and after a short negotiation we swapped papers with one another. He gave my name to the ticket master, and I his. Should my father inquire at the customhouse, the officers there will be able to show him proof that I have left these islands already, and am returning home.'

'But perhaps your father—and your brother—will come to the Coast of their own accord. For the diggings.'

'That I cannot predict,' Moody agreed. 'But from what I understood of their current situation, they had made gold enough in Otago.'

'Gold *enough*!' Balfour seemed about to laugh again.

Moody shrugged. 'Well,' he said coldly, 'I shall prepare myself for the possibility of their arrival, of course. But I do not expect it.'

'No—of course, of course,' Balfour said, patting Moody's sleeve with his big hand. 'Let us now talk of more hopeful things. Tell me, what do you intend to do with your pile, once you have amassed a decent sum? Back to Scotland, is it, to spend your fortune there?'

'So I hope,' Moody said. 'I have heard that a man might make

a competence in four months or less, which would take me away from here before the worst months of winter. Is that a probable expectation, in your mind?'

'Quite probable,' Balfour said, smiling at the coals, 'quite probable, indeed—yes, one might expect it. No mates in town, then? Folk to meet you on the quay, join up—lads from home?'

'None, sir,' Moody told him, for the third time that evening. 'I travelled here alone, and, as I have said to you already, I intend to make my own fortune, without the help of other men.'

'Oh, yes,' said Balfour, 'making your own—well, going *after* it, in the modern way. But a digger's mate is like his shadow—that's another thing to know—his shadow, or his wife—'

At this remark there was a ripple of amusement around the room: not open laughter, merely a quiet expulsion of breath, issued from several quarters at once. Moody glanced around him. He had sensed a slackening in the air, a collective relief, at the conclusion of his narrative. The men had been afraid of something, he thought, and his story had given them reason to put their fear aside. He wondered for the first time whether their trepidation was connected in some way to the horror he had witnessed aboard the *Godspeed*. The thought was strangely unpleasant. He did not want to believe that his private memory might be explicable to another man, and still less, that another man might share it. (Suffering, he thought later, could rob a man of his empathy, could turn him selfish, could make him depreciate all other sufferers. This realisation, when it came, surprised him.)

Balfour was grinning. 'Ay—his shadow, or his wife,' he repeated, nodding appreciatively at Moody, as though the jest had been Moody's, rather than his own. He stroked his beard several times with the cup of his hand, and laughed a little.

For he was indeed relieved. Lost inheritance, falseness in marriage, a highborn woman *put to work*—these betrayals belonged to a different world entirely, Balfour thought; a world of drawing rooms, and calling cards, and gowns. It was charming to him, that such changes in fortune might be counted as tragedies—that the young man might *confess* them, with the stern, controlled embarrassment

of a man who had been taught to believe, from the moment of his birth, that his estate would never change. To speak of that here—at the vanguard of the civilised world! Hokitika was growing faster than San Francisco, the papers said, and out of nothing . . . out of the ancient rotting life of the jungle . . . out of the tidal marshes and the shifting gullies and the fog . . . out of sly waters, rich in ore. Here the men were not self-made; they were self-*making*, as they squatted in the dirt to wash it clean. Balfour touched his lapel. Moody's story was pathetic, and had aroused in him an indulgent, fatherly feeling—for Balfour liked very much to be reminded that he himself was modern (entrepreneurial, unencumbered by connexion) while other men still foundered in the trappings of an outworn age.

This, of course, was a verdict that said less about the prisoner than about the judge. Balfour's will was too strong to admit philosophy, unless it was of the soundest empirical sort; his liberality could make no sense of despair, which was to him as a fathomless shaft, possessed of depth but not of breadth, stifled in its isolation, navigable only by touch, and starved of any kind of curiosity. He had no real fascination with the soul, and saw it only as a pretext for the greater, livelier mysteries of humour and adventure; of the soul's dark nights, he had no opinion. He often said that the only inner void to which he paid any kind of notice was appetite, and although he laughed when he said it, and seemed very well pleased, it was true that his sympathy rarely extended to situations where sympathy was expected to extend. He was indulgent towards the open spaces of other men's futures, but he was impatient with the shuttered quarters of their pasts.

'In any case,' he went on, 'mark this as your second piece of advice, Mr. Moody: find yourself a friend. Plenty of parties about that'd be glad for an extra pair of hands. That's the way, you know—find a mate, then form a party. Never known a man to make it solo. You kitted with a costume, and a swag?'

'I'm afraid I am at the mercy of the weather on that count,' Moody said. 'My trunk is still aboard ship; the weather was too inclement to risk crossing the bar tonight, and I was told to expect my belongings at the customhouse to-morrow afternoon. I myself

was conveyed by lighter—a small crew rowed out, very bravely, to fetch the passengers in.'

'Oh, yes,' Balfour said, more soberly. 'We've seen three wrecks in the past month alone, coming over the bar. It's a frightful business. There's a penny to be made in it, mind. When the ships are coming in people don't pay too much attention. But when they're going out—when they're going out, there's gold aboard.'

'I am told that the landing here at Hokitika is notoriously treacherous.'

'Notoriously—oh yes. And there's nothing to be done about it, if a vessel's on the long side of a hundred feet. She might blow off a full head of steam and it's not enough to force her over. Capital firework show, with the flares shooting up all around. But then—it's not just the steamers. Not just the big ones. It's any man's game on the Hokitika Bar, Walter. That sand will ground a schooner on the wrong tide.'

'I well believe it,' Moody said. 'Our vessel was a barque—none too large, agile, hardy enough to weather the most dreadful of storms—and yet the captain wouldn't risk her. He elected to drop anchor in the roadstead, and wait for the morning.'

'The *Waterloo*, that her name? She's a regular, in and out from Chalmers.'

'A private charter, as a matter of fact,' Moody said. 'Name of *Godspeed*.'

He might have pulled a pistol from his pocket, such was the shock that name produced. Moody looked around (his expression was still mild) and saw that the attention of the room was now openly fixed upon him. Several of the men put down their papers; those who had been dozing opened their eyes; and one of the billiard players advanced a step towards him, into the light of the lamp.

Balfour, too, had flinched at the mention of the barque's name, but his grey eyes held Moody's gaze coolly. 'Indeed,' he said, seeming in an instant to shed all the effusion and bluster that had characterised his manner up until that point. 'I confess to you the name of that craft is not unknown to me, Mr. Moody—not

unknown—but I should like to confirm the captain's name also, if you have no objection.'

Moody was searching his face for a very particular quality—one that, if he had been pressed, he would have been embarrassed to name aloud. He was trying to see if Balfour seemed haunted. He was sure that if the other man's mind leaped to imagine, or to remember, the kind of preternatural horror that Moody himself had encountered aboard the *Godspeed*, then its effect would be only too visible. But Balfour merely looked wary, as when a man hears of the return of one of his creditors, and begins in his mind to tally his excuses, and methods of escape—he did not look tormented, or afraid. Moody was certain that anyone who had witnessed what he had would bear the mark of it. And yet Balfour was changed—there was a new shrewdness to the other man's aspect, a new sharpness to his gaze. Moody felt energised by the alteration. He realised, with a surge of excitement, that he had underestimated him.

'I believe the captain's name was Carver,' he said slowly, 'Francis Carver, if I remember rightly; a man of considerable strength, with a brooding look, and a white scar upon his cheek—does that description match your man?'

'It does.' Balfour was scanning Moody's face, in turn. 'I am very curious to know how you and Mr. Carver came to be acquainted,' he said after a moment. 'If you would indulge the intrusion, of course.'

'Forgive me: we are not acquainted,' Moody said. 'That is, I am sure he would not recognise me if he saw me again.'

He was resolved, in accordance with his strategy, to field Balfour's questions politely and without reservation: it would give him licence later to demand some answers of his own. Moody had no small genius for the art of diplomacy. As a child he had known instinctively that it was always better to tell a partial truth with a willing aspect than to tell a perfect truth in a defensive way. The appearance of co-operation was worth a great deal, if only because it forced a reciprocity, fair met with fair. He did not look about him again, but instead kept his eyes wide and his face open, and

directed his speech wholly to Balfour, as if the eleven staring men on his periphery did not trouble him in the least.

'In that case,' Balfour was saying, 'I shall hazard to guess that you purchased your ticket from the ship's mate.'

'Paid him into his own pocket, sir.'

'You had a private arrangement with the man?'

'The scheme had been devised by the crew, with the master's consent,' Moody replied. 'An easy enough way to turn an extra shilling, I suppose. There were no berths of any kind—one was allotted a place below decks, and instructed to stay sharp and keep out of the way. The situation was not at all ideal, of course, but my circumstances compelled my immediate departure from Dunedin, as you know, and *Godspeed* was the only scheduled departure on the day I wished to leave. I did not know the mate prior to our transaction, nor any of the other passengers, nor any of the crew.'

'How many passengers came in under this arrangement?'

Moody met Balfour's gaze levelly. 'Eight,' he said, and put his mouth on his cigar.

Balfour was quick to pounce upon this. 'That's you and seven others? Eight in sum?'

Moody declined to answer the question directly. 'The passenger list will be published in Monday's paper; of course you may examine it yourself,' he said, with a slightly incredulous expression, as though to imply that Balfour's need for clarification was not only unnecessary, but unbecoming. He added, 'My real name, of course, will not appear there. I travelled under the name Philip de Lacy, this being the name of the man whose papers I purchased in Dunedin. Walter Moody, as the authorities have it, is currently somewhere in the South Pacific—bearing eastward, I expect, towards the Horn.'

Balfour's expression was still cool. 'Please allow me to inquire one thing further,' he said. 'I should like to know—merely—whether you have cause to think well or ill of him. Mr. Carver, I mean.'

'I am not sure that I can answer you fairly,' Moody said. 'I have on my authority only suspicion and report. I believe that the man was under some duress to leave Dunedin, for he was anxious to

weigh anchor despite predictions of a coming storm, but I am entirely ignorant of the business that compelled his haste. I did not formally meet him, and saw him only from a distance during the voyage, and then only rarely, for he kept to his cabin much of the time. So you see my opinion is not worth very much. And yet—'

'And yet . . .' Balfour prompted, when Moody did not go on. He waited.

'To be frank with you, sir,' Moody said, turning squarely to face the other man, 'I discovered certain particulars concerning the ship's cargo, while aboard, that made me doubt her errand was an honest one. If I am certain of one thing, it is this: I wish never to make an enemy of Mr. Carver, if that event is in my power to avoid.'

The dark-haired man on Moody's left had stiffened. 'Found something in cargo, you said?' he interposed, leaning forward.

Aha! Moody thought, and then: *now is the time to press my advantage.* He turned to address the new speaker. 'Please forgive me if I neglect to elaborate,' he said. 'I mean no disrespect to you, sir, but we are strangers to one another; or rather, *you* are a stranger to *me*, for my conversation with Mr. Balfour tonight has reached more ears than his alone. In this I am disadvantaged, not unto myself, as I have represented myself truthfully, but unto you, for you have made my acquaintance without introduction, and heard my piece without invitation or reply. I have nothing to conceal, concerning this or any journey I have made, but I confess,' (he turned back to Balfour) 'it rankles to be questioned so relentlessly by an interrogator who divulges nothing of his own design.'

This was rather more aggressively worded than was Moody's habit in speech, but he had spoken calmly and with dignity, and he knew that he was in the right. He did not blink; he stared at Balfour and waited, his mild eyes wide, for the other man's response. Balfour's gaze flickered sideways to the dark-haired man who had made the interruption, and then back to meet Moody's own. He exhaled. He rose from his chair, tossed the stump of his cigar into the fire, and held out his hand. 'Your glass needs refilling, Mr. Moody,' he said quietly. 'Please be so kind as to allow me.'

He went to the sideboard in silence, followed by the dark-haired man, who, when he had unfurled himself to his full height, almost grazed the low ceiling of the room. He leaned close to Balfour and began to mutter something urgently in his ear. Balfour nodded and muttered something back. It must have been an instruction, for the tall man then moved to the billiard table, beckoned the blond-haired man to approach him, and conveyed a whispered message to him. The blond-haired man began nodding, vigorously and at once. Watching them, Moody felt his habitual quickness return. The brandy had roused him; he was warmed and dried; and nothing caused his spirits to lift more surely than the promise of a tale.

It often happens that when a soul under duress is required to attend to a separate difficulty, one that does not concern him in the least, then this second problem works upon the first as a kind of salve. Moody felt this now. For the first time since he had disembarked from the lighter he found that he was able to think upon his recent misadventure clearly. In the context of this new secret, his private memory was somehow freed. He could recall the scene that haunted him—the dead man rising, his bloody throat, his cry—and find it fabular, sensational; still horrific, but somehow much more explicably so. The story had gained a kind of value: he could turn it into profit, by exchange.

He watched the whispered message pass from man to man. He could not distinguish any proper nouns—the jumble of unfamiliar accents made that impossible—but it was evident that the matter under discussion was one that concerned every man in the room. He forced his mind to evaluate the situation carefully and rationally. Inattention had led him to err in judgment once already that evening; he would not err again. Some kind of heist was in the offing, he guessed, or maybe they were forming an alliance against another man. Mr. Carver, perhaps. They numbered twelve, which put Moody in mind of a jury . . . but the presence of the Chinese men and the Maori native made that impossible. Had he interrupted a secret council of a kind? But what kind of council could possibly comprise such a diverse range of race, income, and estate?

Needless to say that Walter Moody's countenance did not betray the subject of his thoughts. He had calibrated his expression precisely between grave bafflement and apology, as if to communicate that he was very sensible of the trouble he was causing, but he had no idea what that trouble might be, and as to how he should proceed, he was willing to take anyone's direction but his own.

Outside, the wind changed direction, sending a damp gust down the chimney, so that the embers swelled scarlet and for a brief moment Moody could smell the salt of the sea. The movement in the hearth seemed to rouse the fat man nearest the fire. He levered himself from his armchair with a grunt of effort and shuffled off to join the others at the sideboard. When he had gone, Moody found himself alone before the fire with the man in the herringbone suit; the latter now leaned forward and spoke.

'I should like to introduce myself, if you have no objection,' he said, snapping open his silver cigarette case for the first time, and selecting a cigarette. He spoke with an accent identifiably French, and a manner that was clipped and courteous. 'My name is Aubert Gascoigne. I hope that you will forgive that I know your name already.'

'Well, as it happens,' Moody said, with a little jolt of surprise, 'I believe I also know yours.'

'Then we are well met,' said Aubert Gascoigne. He had been fishing for his matches; he paused now with his hand in his breast pocket, like a rakish colonel posing for a sketch. 'But I am intrigued. How is it that you know me, Mr. Moody?'

'I read your address this evening, in Friday's edition of the *West Coast Times*—am I right? If I remember correctly, you penned an opinion on behalf of the Magistrate's Court.'

Gascoigne smiled, and pulled out his matches. 'Now I understand. I am yesterday's news.' He shook out a match, placed the side of his boot against his knee, and struck his light upon the sole.

'Forgive me,' Moody began, fearing that he had offended, but Gascoigne shook his head.

'I am not insulted,' he said when his cigarette was lit. 'So. You arrive as a stranger in an unfamiliar town, and what is your first

move? You find a day-old paper and read the courthouse bulletin. You learn the names of the lawbreakers, on the one hand, and the law enforcers, on the other. This is quite a strategy.'

'There was no method in it,' Moody said modestly.

Gascoigne's name had appeared on the third page of the paper, beneath a short sermon, perhaps the length of a paragraph, on the iniquity of crime. The address was preceded by a list of all the arrests that had been made that month. (He could not recall any of those names, and in truth had only remembered Gascoigne's because his former Latin master had been Gascoyen—the familiarity had drawn his eye.)

'Perhaps not,' Gascoigne returned, 'but it has brought you to the very heart of our disquiet nonetheless: a subject that has been on every man's lips for a fortnight.'

Moody frowned. 'Petty criminals?'

'One in particular.'

'Shall I guess?' Moody asked lightly, when the other did not go on.

Gascoigne shrugged. 'It doesn't matter. I am referring to the whore.'

Moody raised his eyebrows. He tried to recall the catalogue of arrests to his mind—yes, perhaps one of the listed names had been a woman's. He wondered what every man in Hokitika had to say about a whore's arrest. It took him a moment to find the words to form an appropriate answer, and to his surprise, Gascoigne laughed. 'I am teasing you,' he said. 'You must not let me tease you. Her crime was not listed, of course, but if you read with a little imagination you will see it. Anna Wetherell is the name she gives.'

'I am not sure I know how to read with imagination.'

Gascoigne laughed again, expelling a sharp breath of smoke. 'But you are a barrister, are you not?'

'By training only,' Moody said stiffly. 'I have not yet been called to the Bar.'

'Well, here: there is always an overtone in the magistrate's address,' Gascoigne explained. '*Gentlemen of Westland*—there is your first clue. *Crimes of shame and degradation*—there is your second.'

'I see,' Moody said, though he did not. His gaze flickered over Gascoigne's shoulder: the fat man had moved to the pair of Chinese men, and was scribbling something on the flyleaf of his pocketbook for them to read. 'Perhaps the woman was wrongly indicted? Perhaps that is what captured everyone's attention?'

'Oh, she wasn't gaoled for whoring,' Gascoigne said. 'The sergeants don't care a straw about *that*! As long as a man is discreet enough, they are quite content to look the other way.'

Moody waited. There was an unsettling quality to the way that Gascoigne spoke: it was both guarded and confiding at once. Moody felt that he could not trust him. The clerk was perhaps in his middle thirties. His pale hair had begun to silver above his ears, and he wore a pale moustache, brushed sideways from a central part. His herringbone suit was tailored closely to his body.

'Why,' Gascoigne added after a moment, 'the sergeant himself made a proposition of her, directly after the committal!'

'The committal?' Moody echoed, feeling foolish. He wished that the other man would speak a little less cryptically, and at greater length. He had a cultivated air (he made Thomas Balfour seem as blunt as a doorstop) but it was a cultivation somehow mourned. He spoke as a disappointed man, for whom perfection existed only as something remembered—and then regretted, because it was lost.

'She was tried for trying to take her own life,' Gascoigne said. 'There's a symmetry in that, do you not think? Tried for trying.'

Moody thought it inappropriate to agree, and in any case he did not care to pursue that line of thinking. He said, to change the subject, 'And the master of my vessel—Mr. Carver? He is connected to this woman somehow, I presume?'

'Oh yes, Carver's *connected*,' Gascoigne said. He looked at the cigarette in his hand, seemed suddenly disgusted with it, and threw it into the fire. 'He killed his own child.'

Moody drew back in horror. 'I beg your pardon?'

'They can't prove it, of course,' Gascoigne said darkly. 'But the man's a brute. You are quite right to want to avoid him.'

Moody stared at him, again at a loss for how to reply.

'Every man has his currency,' Gascoigne added after a moment.

'Perhaps it's gold; perhaps it's women. Anna Wetherell, you see, was both.'

At this point the fat man returned, with his glass refreshed; he sat down, looked first to Gascoigne and then to Moody, and seemed to recognise, obscurely, a social obligation to introduce himself. He leaned forward and thrust out his hand. 'Name's Dick Mannering.'

'It's a pleasure,' Moody said, in a rather automatic tone. He felt disoriented. He wished Gascoigne had not been interrupted quite at that moment, so he could have pressed him further on the subject of the whore. It was indelicate to attempt to revive the subject now; in any case Gascoigne had retreated back into his armchair, and his face had closed. He began turning his cigarette case over again in his hands.

'Prince of Wales Opera House, that's me,' Mannering added, as he sat back.

'Capital,' said Moody.

'Only show in town.' Mannering rapped the arm of his chair with his knuckles, casting about for a way to proceed. Moody glanced at Gascoigne, but the clerk was staring sourly into his lap. It was clear that the fat man's reappearance had severely displeased him; it was also clear that he saw no reason to conceal his displeasure from its object—whose face, Moody saw with embarrassment, had turned a very dark shade of red.

'I could not help but admire your watch chain, earlier,' Moody said at last, addressing Mannering. 'Is it Hokitika gold?'

'Nice piece, isn't it?' Mannering said, without looking down at his chest, or lifting his fingers to touch the admired item. He rapped the arms of his chair a second time. 'Clutha nuggets, in actual fact. I was at Kawarau, Dunstan, then Clutha.'

'I confess I'm not familiar with the names,' Moody said. 'I assume they're Otago fields?'

Mannering assented that they were, and began to expound on the subject of company mining and the value of the dredge.

'You're all diggers here?' Moody said when he was done, moving his fingertips in a little circle in the air, to indicate that he meant the room at large.

'Not one—excepting the Chinamen, of course,' Mannering said. 'Camp followers is the term, though most of us started off in the gorge. Most gold on a goldfield's found where? At the hotels. At the shanties. Mates spend the stuff as soon as they find it. Tell you what: you might do better to open a business than to head to the hills. Get yourself a licence, start selling grog.'

'That must be wise advice, if you have acted upon it yourself,' Moody said.

Mannering settled back into his chair, seeming very contented with the compliment. Yes, he had quit the fields, and now paid other men to work his claims for a percentage of the yield; he was from Sussex; Hokitika was a fine place, but there were fewer girls than was proper in a town of such a size; he loved all kinds of harmony; he had modelled his opera house upon the Adelphi at the West End; he felt that the old song-and-supper could not be beat; he could not abide public houses, and small beer made him ill; the floods at Dunstan had been dreadful—dreadful; the Hokitika rain was hard to bear; he would say again that there was nothing nicer than a four-part harmony—the voices like threads in a piece of silk.

'Splendid,' Moody murmured. Gascoigne had made no movement at all during this soliloquy, save for the compulsive rhythm of his long, pale hands, as he turned the silver object over in his lap; Mannering, for his part, had not registered the clerk's presence at all, and in fact had directed his speech at a spot some three feet above Moody's head, as if Moody's presence did not really concern him either.

At length the whispered drama that was taking place on their periphery began to approach a kind of resolution, and the fat man's patter subsided. The dark-haired man returned, sitting down in his former position on Moody's left; Balfour came after him, carrying two sizeable measures of brandy. He passed one of the glasses to Moody, waved his hand at the latter's thanks, and sat down.

'I owe an explanation,' he said, 'for the rudeness with which I was questioning you just now, Mr. Moody—you needn't demur, it's quite true. The truth is—the truth is—well, the truth, sir, deserves a tale, and that's as short as I can make it.'

'If you would be so kind as to enter our confidence,' Gascoigne added, from Balfour's other side, in a rather nasty show of false politeness.

The dark-haired man sat forward in his chair suddenly and added, 'Does any man present wish to voice his reservations?'

Moody looked around him, blinking, but nobody spoke.

Balfour nodded; he waited a moment more, as if to append his own courtesy to that of the other, and then resumed.

'Let me tell you at once,' he said to Moody, 'that a man has been murdered. That blackguard of yours—Carver, I mean; I shan't call him Captain—he is the murderer, though I'll be d—ned if I could tell you how or why. I just know it, as sure as I see that glass in your hand. Now: if you'd do me the honour of hearing a piece of that villain's history, then you might . . . well, you might be willing to help us, placed as you are.'

'Excuse me, sir,' Moody said. At the mention of murder his heart had begun to beat very fast: perhaps this had something to do with the phantom aboard the *Godspeed,* after all. 'How am I placed?'

'With your trunk still aboard the barque, is what he means,' the dark-haired man said. 'And your appointment at the customhouse to-morrow afternoon.'

Balfour looked faintly annoyed; he waved his hand. 'Let us talk of that in a moment,' he said. 'I entreat you, first, to hear the story out.'

'Certainly I will listen,' Moody returned, with the slightest emphasis on the last word, as though to caution the other man against expecting, or demanding, anything more. He thought he saw a smirk pass over Gascoigne's pale face, but in the next moment the man's features had soured again.

'Of course—of course,' Balfour said, taking the point. He put down his brandy glass, laced his knuckles together, and cracked them smartly. 'Well, then. I shall endeavour to acquaint you, Mr. Moody, with the cause of our assembly.'