

*The*  
*House of the Arrow*

*By*  
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# **THE HOUSE OF THE ARROW**

## ***CHAPTER ONE: Letters of Mark***

Messrs. Frobisher & Haslitt, the solicitors on the east side of Russell Square, counted amongst their clients a great many who had undertakings established in France; and the firm was very proud of this branch of its business.

"It gives us a place in history," Mr. Jeremy Haslitt used to say. "For it dates from the year 1806, when Mr. James Frobisher, then our very energetic senior partner, organised the escape of hundreds of British subjects who were detained in France by the edict of the first Napoleon. The firm received the thanks of His Majesty's Government and has been fortunate enough to retain the connection thus made. I look after that side of our affairs myself."

Mr. Haslitt's daily batch of letters, therefore, contained as a rule a fair number bearing the dark-blue stamp of France upon their envelopes. On this morning of early April, however, there was only one. It was addressed in a spidery, uncontrolled hand with which Mr. Haslitt was unfamiliar. But it bore the postmark of Dijon, and Mr. Haslitt tore it open rather quickly. He had a client in Dijon, a widow, Mrs. Harlowe, of whose health he had had bad reports. The letter was certainly written from her house, La Maison Crenelle, but not by her. He turned to the signature.

"Waberski?" he said, with a frown. "Boris Waberski?" And then, as he identified his correspondent, "Oh, yes, yes."

He sat down in his chair and read. The first part of the letter was merely flowers and compliments, but half-way down the second page its object was made clear as glass. It was five hundred

pounds. Old Mr. Haslitt smiled and read on, keeping up, whilst he read, a one-sided conversation with the writer.

"I have a great necessity of that money," wrote Boris, "and—  
—"

"I am quite sure of that," said Mr. Haslitt.

"My beloved sister, Jeanne-Marie——" the letter continued.

"Sister-in-law," Mr. Haslitt corrected.

"——cannot live for long, in spite of all the care and attention I give to her," Boris Waberski went on. "She has left me, as no doubt you know, a large share of her fortune. Already, then, it is mine—yes? One may say so and be favourably understood. We must look at the facts with the eyes. Expedite me, then, by the recommended post a little of what is mine and agree my distinguished salutations."

Haslitt's smile became a broad grin. He had in one of his tin boxes a copy of the will of Jeanne-Marie Harlowe drawn up in due form by her French notary at Dijon, by which every farthing she possessed was bequeathed without condition to her husband's niece and adopted daughter, Betty Harlowe. Jeremy Haslitt almost destroyed that letter. He folded it; his fingers twitched at it; there was already actually a tear at the edges of the sheets when he changed his mind.

"No," he said to himself. "No! With the Boris Waberskis one never knows," and he locked the letter away on a ledge of his private safe.

He was very glad that he had when three weeks later he read, in the obituary column of *The Times*, the announcement of Mrs. Harlowe's death, and received a big card with a very deep black border in the French style from Betty Harlowe inviting him to the funeral at Dijon. The invitation was merely formal. He could hardly have reached Dijon in time for the ceremony had he started off that instant. He contented himself with writing a few lines of sincere condolence to the girl, and a letter to the French notary in which he placed the services of the firm at Betty's disposal. Then he waited.

"I shall hear again from little Boris," he said, and he heard within the week. The handwriting was more spidery and uncontrolled than ever; hysteria and indignation had played havoc with Waberski's English; also he had doubled his demand.

"It is outside belief," he wrote. "Nothing has she left to her so attentive brother. There is something here I do not much like. It must be one thousand pounds now, by the recommended post. 'You have always had the world against you, my poor Boris,' she say with the tears all big in her dear eyes. 'But I make all right for you in my will.' And now nothing! I speak, of course, to my niece—ah, that hard one! She snap her the fingers at me! Is that a behaviour? One thousand pounds, mister! Otherwise there will be awkwardnesses! Yes! People do not snap them the fingers at Boris Waberski without the payment. So one thousand pounds by the recommended post or awkwardnesses"; and this time Boris Waberski did not invite Mr. Haslitt to agree any salutations, distinguished or otherwise, but simply signed his name with a straggling pen which shot all over the sheet.

Mr. Haslitt did not smile over this letter. He rubbed the palms of his hands softly together.

"Then we shall have to make some awkwardnesses too," he said hastily, and he locked this second letter away with the first. But Mr. Haslitt found it a little difficult to settle to his work. There was that girl out there in the big house at Dijon and no one of her race near her! He got up from his chair abruptly and crossed the corridor to the offices of his junior partner.

"Jim, you were at Monte Carlo this winter," he said.

"For a week," answered Jim Frobisher.

"I think I asked you to call on a client of ours who has a villa there—Mrs. Harlowe."

Jim Frobisher nodded. "I did. But Mrs. Harlowe was ill. There was a niece, but she was out."

"You saw no one, then?" Jeremy Haslitt asked.

"No, that's wrong," Jim corrected. "I saw a strange creature who came to the door to make Mrs. Harlowe's excuses—a Russian."

"Boris Waberski," said Mr. Haslitt.

"That's the name."

Mr. Haslitt sat down in a chair.

"Tell me about him, Jim."

Jim Frobisher stared at nothing for a few moments. He was a young man of twenty-six who had only during this last year



succeeded to his partnership. Though quick enough when action was imperative, he was naturally deliberate in his estimates of other people's characters; and a certain awe he had of old Jeremy Haslitt doubled that natural deliberation in any matters of the firm's business. He answered at length.

"He is a tall, shambling fellow with a shock of grey hair standing up like wires above a narrow forehead and a pair of wild eyes. He made me think of a marionette whose limbs have not been properly strung. I should imagine that he was rather extravagant and emotional. He kept twitching at his moustache with very long, tobacco-stained fingers. The sort of man who might go off at the deep end at any moment."

Mr. Haslitt smiled.

"That's just what I thought."

"Is he giving you any trouble?" asked Jim.

"Not yet," said Mr. Haslitt. "But Mrs. Harlowe is dead, and I think it very likely that he will. Did he play at the tables?"

"Yes, rather high," said Jim. "I suppose that he lived on Mrs. Harlowe."

"I suppose so," said Mr. Haslitt, and he sat for a little while in silence. Then: "It's a pity you didn't see Betty Harlowe. I stopped at Dijon once on my way to the South of France five years ago when Simon Harlowe, the husband, was alive. Betty was then a long-legged slip of a girl in black silk stockings with a pale, clear face and dark hair and big eyes—rather beautiful." Mr. Haslitt moved in his chair uncomfortably. That old house with its great garden of chestnuts and sycamores and that girl alone in it with an aggrieved

and half-crazed man thinking out awkwardnesses for her—Mr. Haslitt did not like the picture!

"Jim," he said suddenly, "could you arrange your work so that you could get away at short notice, if it becomes advisable?"

Jim looked up in surprise. Excursions and alarms, as the old stage directions have it, were not recognised as a rule by the firm of Frobisher & Haslitt. If its furniture was dingy, its methods were stately; clients might be urgent, but haste and hurry were words for which the firm had no use. No doubt, somewhere round the corner, there would be an attorney who understood them. Yet here was Mr. Haslitt himself, with his white hair and his curious round face, half-babyish, half-supremely intelligent, actually advocating that his junior partner should be prepared to skip to the Continent at a word.

"No doubt I could," said Jim, and Mr. Haslitt looked him over with approbation.

Jim Frobisher had an unusual quality of which his acquaintances, even his friends, knew only the outward signs. He was a solitary person. Very few people up till now had mattered to him at all, and even those he could do without. It was his passion to feel that his life and the means of his life did not depend upon the purchased skill of other people; and he had spent the spare months of his life in the fulfilment of his passion. A half-decked sailing-boat which one man could handle, an ice-axe, a rifle, an inexhaustible volume or two like *The Ring and the Book*—these with the stars and his own thoughts had been his companions on many lonely expeditions; and in consequence he had acquired a queer little look of aloofness which made him at once noticeable

amongst his fellows. A misleading look, since it encouraged a confidence for which there might not be sufficient justification. It was just this look which persuaded Mr. Haslitt now. "This is the very man to deal with creatures like Boris Waberski," he thought, but he did not say so aloud.

What he did say was:

"It may not be necessary after all. Betty Harlowe has a French lawyer. No doubt he is adequate. Besides"—and he smiled as he recollected a phrase in Waberski's second letter—"Betty seems very capable of looking after herself. We shall see."

He went back to his own office, and for a week he heard no more from Dijon. His anxiety, indeed, was almost forgotten when suddenly startling news arrived and by the most unexpected channel.

Jim Frobisher brought it. He broke into Mr. Haslitt's office at the sacred moment when the senior partner was dictating to a clerk the answers to his morning letters.

"Sir!" cried Jim, and stopped short at the sight of the clerk. Mr. Haslitt took a quick look at his young partner's face and said:

"We will resume these answers, Godfrey, later on."

The clerk took his shorthand notebook out of the room, and Mr. Haslitt turned to Jim Frobisher.

"Now, what's your bad news, Jim?"

Jim blurted it out.

"Waberski accuses Betty Harlowe of murder."

"What!"

Mr. Haslitt sprang to his feet. Jim Frobisher could not have said whether incredulity or anger had the upper hand with the old man, the one so creased his forehead, the other so blazed in his eyes.

"Little Betty Harlowe!" he said in a wondering voice.

"Yes. Waberski has laid a formal charge with the Prefect of Police at Dijon. He accuses Betty of poisoning Mrs. Harlowe on the night of April the twenty-seventh."

"But Betty's not arrested?" Mr. Haslitt exclaimed.

"No, but she's under surveillance."

Mr. Haslitt sat heavily down in his arm-chair at his table. Extravagant! Uncontrolled! These were very mild epithets for Boris Waberski. Here was a devilish malignity at work in the rogue, a passion for revenge just as mean as could be imagined.

"How do you know all this, Jim?" he asked suddenly.

"I have had a letter this morning from Dijon."

"You?" exclaimed Mr. Haslitt, and the question caught hold of Jim Frobisher and plunged him too among perplexities. In the first shock of the news, the monstrous fact of the accusation had driven everything else out of his head. Now he asked himself why, after all, had the news come to him and not to the partner who had the Harlowe estate in his charge.

"Yes, it is strange," he replied. "And here's another queer thing. The letter doesn't come from Betty Harlowe, but from a friend, a companion of hers, Ann Upcott."

Mr. Haslitt was a little relieved.

"Betty had a friend with her, then? That's a good thing." He reached out his hand across the table. "Let me read the letter, Jim."

Frobisher had been carrying it in his hand, and he gave it now to Jeremy Haslitt. It was a letter of many sheets, and Jeremy let the edges slip and flicker under the ball of his thumb.

"Have I got to read all this?" he said ruefully, and he set himself to his task. Boris Waberski had first of all accused Betty to her face. Betty had contemptuously refused to answer the charge, and Waberski had gone straight off to the Prefect of Police. He had returned in an hour's time, wildly gesticulating and talking aloud to himself. He had actually asked Ann Upcott to back him up. Then he had packed his bags and retired to an hotel in the town. The story was set out in detail, with quotations from Waberski's violent, crazy talk; and as the old man read, Jim Frobisher became more and more uneasy, more and more troubled.

He was sitting by the tall, broad window which looked out upon the square, expecting some explosion of wrath and contempt. But he saw anxiety peep out of Mr. Haslitt's face and stay there as he read. More than once he stopped altogether in his reading, like a man seeking to remember or perhaps to discover.

"But the whole thing's as clear as daylight," Jim said to himself impatiently. And yet—and yet—Mr. Haslitt had sat in that arm-chair during the better part of the day, during the better part of

thirty years. How many men and women during those years had crossed the roadway below this window and crept into this quiet oblong room with their grievances, their calamities, their confessions? And had passed out again, each one contributing his little to complete the old man's knowledge and sharpen the edge of his wit? Then, if Mr. Haslitt was troubled, there was something in that letter, or some mission from it, which he himself in his novitiate had overlooked. He began to read it over again in his mind to the best of his recollection, but he had not got far before Mr. Haslitt put the letter down.

"Surely, sir," cried Jim, "it's an obvious case of blackmail."

Mr. Haslitt awoke with a little shake of his shoulders.

"Blackmail? Oh! that of course, Jim."

Mr. Haslitt got up and unlocked his safe. He took from it the two Waberski letters and brought them across the room to Jim.

"Here's the evidence, as damning as any one could wish."

Jim read the letters through and uttered a little cry of delight.

"The rogue has delivered himself over to us."

"Yes," said Mr. Haslitt.

But to him, at all events, that was not enough; he was still looking through the lines of the letter for something beyond, which he could not find.

"Then what's troubling you?" asked Frobisher.

Mr. Haslitt took his stand upon the worn hearthrug with his back towards the fire.

"This, Jim," and he began to expound. "In ninety-five of these cases out of a hundred, there is something else, something behind the actual charge, which isn't mentioned, but on which the blackmailer is really banking. As a rule it's some shameful little secret, some blot on the family honour, which any sort of public trial would bring to light. And there must be something of that kind here. The more preposterous Waberski's accusation is, the more certain it is that he knows something to the discredit of the Harlowe name, which any Harlowe would wish to keep dark. Only, I haven't an idea what the wretched thing can be!"

"It might be some trifle," Jim suggested, "which a crazy person like Waberski would exaggerate."

"Yes," Mr. Haslitt agreed. "That happens. A man brooding over imagined wrongs, and flighty and extravagant besides—yes, that might well be, Jim."

Jeremy Haslitt spoke in a more cheerful voice.

"Let us see exactly what we do know of the family," he said, and he pulled up a chair to face Jim Frobisher and the window. But he had not yet sat down in it, when there came a discreet knock upon the door, and a clerk entered to announce a visitor.

"Not yet," said Mr. Haslitt before the name of the visitor had been mentioned.

"Very good, sir," said the clerk, and he retired. The firm of Frobisher & Haslitt conducted its business in that way. It was the real thing as a firm of solicitors, and clients who didn't like its

methods were very welcome to take their affairs to the attorney round the corner. Just as people who go to the real thing in the line of tailors must put up with the particular style in which he cuts their clothes.

Mr. Haslitt turned back to Jim.

"Let us see what we know," he said, and he sat down in the chair.



## *CHAPTER TWO: A Cry for Help*

"Simon Harlow," he began, "was the owner of the famous Clos du Prince vineyards on the Côte-d'Or to the east of Dijon. He had an estate in Norfolk, this big house, the Maison Crenelle in Dijon, and a villa at Monte Carlo. But he spent most of his time in Dijon, where at the age of forty-five he married a French lady, Jeanne-Marie Raviart. There was, I believe, quite a little romance about the affair. Jeanne-Marie was married and separated from her husband, and Simon Harlowe waited, I think, for ten years until the husband Raviart died."

Jim Frobisher moved quickly and Mr. Haslitt, who seemed to be reading off this history in the pattern of the carpet, looked up.

"Yes, I see what you mean," he said, replying to Jim's movement. "Yes, there might have been some sort of affair between those two before they were free to marry. But nowadays, my dear Jim! Opinion takes a more human view than it did in my youth. Besides, don't you see, this little secret, to be of any value to Boris Waberski, must be near enough to Betty Harlowe—I don't say to affect her if published, but to make Waberski think that she would hate to have it published. Now Betty Harlowe doesn't come into the picture at all until two years after Simon and Jeanne-Marie were married, when it became clear that they were not likely to have any children. No, the love-affairs of Simon Harlowe are sufficiently remote for us to leave them aside."

Jim Frobisher accepted the demolition of his idea with a flush of shame.

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