



Fergus Hume (1859–1932)

TWO CRIME NOVELS



Fergus Hume

Fergusson Wright Hume was born in England in 1859. When he was three the family emigrated to Dunedin, New Zealand, where he was educated at Otago Boys' High School and studied law at the University of Otago. He was admitted to the New Zealand bar in 1885. Shortly after graduation Hume relocated to Melbourne, Australia, where he obtained a job as a barristers' clerk. He began writing plays, but found it impossible to persuade the managers of Melbourne theatres to accept or even to read them.

Finding that the novels of Émile Gaboriau were then very popular in Melbourne, Hume obtained and read a set of them and determined to write a novel of the same kind. The result was *THE MYSTERY OF A HANSOM CAB*, set in Melbourne, with descriptions of poor urban life based on his knowledge of Little Bourke Street. It was self-published in 1886 and became a great success. Because he sold the British and American rights for 50 pounds, however, he reaped little of the potential financial benefit. It became the best-selling mystery novel of the Victorian era; according to Willard Huntington Wright (better known under his *nom de plume* S.S. Van Dine, author of the Philo-Vance-novels) it has been the greatest commercial success in the annals of detective fiction; still in 1990 John Sutherland called it the „most sensationally popular crime and detective novel of the century.” This novel inspired Arthur Conan Doyle to write »A Study in Scarlet,« which introduced the fictional consulting detective Sherlock Holmes. Doyle remarked, “Hansom Cab was a slight tale, mostly sold by ‘puffing.’”

After the success of his first novel and the publication of another, *PROFESSOR BRANKEL'S SECRET* (c. 1886), Hume returned to England in 1888. He resided in London for a few years and then moved to the Essex countryside where he lived in Thundersley for 30 years. Eventually he produced more than 130 novels and short stories, "at least half of them in the mystery-detective category."

Hume did not seek publicity and little is known of his personal life. The writer of the obituary notice in *THE TIMES* stated that he was a very religious man who during his last years did much lecturing to young people's clubs and debating societies. He died at Thundersley on 12 July 1932, shortly after completing his last book, *THE LAST STRAW*.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fergus_Hume

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THE MYSTERY OF A HANSON CAB*

*. First Edition: Fergus Hume, Melbourne 1886.

Preface

In its original form, *THE MYSTERY OF A HANSOM CAB* has reached the sale of 375,000 copies in this country, and some few editions in the United States of America. Notwithstanding this, the present publishers have the best of reasons for believing, that there are thousands of persons whom the book has never reached. The causes of this have doubtless been many, but chief among them was the form of the publication itself. It is for this section of the public chiefly that the present edition is issued. In placing it before my new readers, I have been asked by the publishers thoroughly to revise the work, and, at the same time, to set at rest the many conflicting reports concerning it and myself, which have been current since its initial issue. The first of these requests I have complied with, and the many typographic, and other errors, which disfigured the first edition, have, I think I can safely say, now disappeared. The second request I am about to fulfil; but, in order to do so, I must ask my readers to go back with me to the beginning of all things, so far as this special book is concerned.

The writing of the book was due more to accident than to design. I was bent on becoming a dramatist, but, being quite unknown, I found it impossible to induce the managers of the Melbourne Theatres to accept, or even to read a play. At length it occurred to me I might further my purpose by writing a novel. I should at all events secure a certain amount of local attention. Up to that time I had written only one or two short stories, and the “Cab” was not only the first book I ever published, but the first book I ever wrote; so to youth and lack of experience must be ascribed whatever was wanting in the book. I repeat that the story was written only to attract local attention, and no one was more astonished than I when it passed beyond the narrow circle for which it had originally been intended.

My mind made up on this point, I enquired of a leading Melbourne bookseller what style of book he sold most of. He replied that the de-

detective stories of Gaboriau had a large sale; and as, at this time, I had never even heard of this author, I bought all his works—eleven or thereabouts—and read them carefully. The style of these stories attracted me, and I determined to write a book of the same class; containing a mystery, a murder, and a description of low life in Melbourne. This was the origin of the “Cab.” The central idea—i.e. the murder in a cab—came to me while driving at a late hour to St. Kilda, a suburb of Melbourne; but it took some time and much thought to work it out to a logical conclusion. I was two months sketching out the skeleton of the novel, but even so, when I had written it, the result proved unsatisfactory, for I found I had not sufficiently well concealed the mystery upon which the whole interest of the book depended. In the first draft I made Frettlby the criminal, but on reading over the M.S. I found that his guilt was so obvious that I wrote out the story for a second time, introducing the character of Moreland as a scape-goat. Mother Guttersnipe I unearthed in the slums off Little Bourke Street; and I gave what I am afraid was perhaps too vivid a picture of her language and personality. These I have toned down in the present edition. Calton and the two lodging-house keepers were actual personages whom I knew very well, and I do not think I have exaggerated their idiosyncracies, although many have, I believe, doubted the existence of such oddities. All the scenes in the book, especially the slums, are described from personal observation; and I passed a great many nights in Little Bourke Street, gathering material.

Having completed the book, I tried to get it published, but every one to whom I offered it refused even to look at the manuscript on the ground that no Colonial could write anything worth reading. They gave no reason for this extraordinary opinion, but it was sufficient for them, and they laughed to scorn the idea that any good could come out of Nazareth—i.e., the Colonies. The story thus being boycotted on all hands, I determined to publish it myself, and accordingly an edition of, I think, some five thousand copies was brought out at my own cost. Contrary to the expectations of the publishers, and I must add to my own, the whole edition went off in three weeks, and the public demanded a second. This also sold rapidly, and after some months, proposals were made to me that the book should be brought out in London. Later on I parted with the book to several speculators, who formed themselves into what they called “The Hansom Cab Publishing Company.” Taking the book to London, they published it there with great success, and it had a phenomenal sale, which brought in a large sum of money. The success was, in the first instance, due, in no small degree, to a very

kind and generous criticism written by Mr. Clement Scott. I may here state that I had nothing to do with the Company, nor did I receive any money for the English sale of the book beyond what I sold it for; and, as a matter of fact, I did not arrive in England until a year after the novel was published I have heard it declared that the plot is founded on a real criminal case; but such a statement is utterly without foundation, as the story is pure fiction from beginning to end. Several people before and since my arrival in England, have assumed the authorship of the book to themselves; and one gentleman went so far as to declare that he would shoot me if I claimed to have written it. I am glad to say that up to the present he has not carried out his intention. Another individual had his cards printed, "Fergus Hume. Author of 'The Mystery of a Hansom Cab,' " and also added the price for which he was prepared to write a similar book. Many of the papers put this last piece of eccentricity down to my account.

I may state in conclusion, that I belong to New Zealand, and not to Australia, that I am a barrister, and not a retired policeman, that I am yet two decades off fifty years of age, that Fergus Hume is my real name, and not a *nom-de-plume*; and finally, that far from making a fortune out of the book, all I received for the English and American rights, previous to the issue of this Revised Edition by my present publishers, was the sum of fifty pounds. With this I take my leave, and I trust that the present edition may prove as successful as did the first.

1

What the ARGUS Said

THE following report appeared in the ARGUS newspaper of Saturday, the 28th July, 18—

Truth is said to be stranger than fiction, and certainly the extraordinary murder which took place in Melbourne on Thursday night, or rather Friday morning, goes a long way towards verifying this saying. A crime has been committed by an unknown assassin, within a short distance of the principal streets of this great city, and is surrounded by an impenetrable mystery. Indeed, from the nature of the crime itself, the place where it was committed, and the fact that the assassin has escaped without leaving a trace behind him, it would seem as though the case itself had been taken bodily from one of Gaboriau's novels, and that his famous detective Lecoq alone would be able to unravel it. The facts of the case are simply these:—

On the twenty-seventh day of July, at the hour of twenty minutes to two o'clock in the morning, a hansom cab drove up to the police station in Grey Street, St. Kilda, and the driver made the startling statement that his cab contained the body of a man who he had reason to believe had been murdered.

Being taken into the presence of the inspector, the cabman, who gave his name as Malcolm Royston, related the following strange story:—

At the hour of one o'clock in the morning, he was driving down Collins Street East, when, as he was passing the Burke and Wills' monument, he was hailed by a gentleman standing at the corner by the Scotch Church. He immediately drove up, and saw that the gentleman who hailed him was supporting the deceased, who appeared to be intoxicated. Both were in evening dress, but the deceased had on no overcoat, while the other wore a short covert coat of a light fawn colour, which was open. As Royston drove up, the gentleman in

the light coat said, 'Look here, cabby, here's some fellow awfully tight, you'd better take him home!'

Royston then asked him if the drunken man was his friend, but this the other denied, saying that he had just picked him up from the footpath, and did not know him from Adam. At this moment the deceased turned his face up to the light of the lamp under which both were standing, and the other seemed to recognise him, for he recoiled a pace, letting the drunken man fall in a heap on the pavement, and gasping out 'You?' he turned on his heel, and walked rapidly away down Russell Street in the direction of Bourke Street.

Royston was staring after him, and wondering at his, strange conduct, when he was recalled to himself by the voice of the deceased, who had struggled to his feet, and was holding on to the lamp-post, swaying to and fro. "I wan' g'ome," he said in a thick voice, "St. Kilda." He then tried to get into the cab, but was too drunk to do so, and finally sat down again on the pavement. Seeing this, Royston got down, and lifting him up, helped him into the cab with some considerable difficulty. The deceased fell back into the cab, and seemed to drop off to sleep; so, after closing the door, Royston turned to remount his driving-seat, when he found the gentleman in the light coat whom he had seen holding up the deceased, close to his elbow. Royston said, "Oh, you've come back," and the other answered, "Yes, I've changed my mind, and will see him home." As he said this he opened the door of the cab, stepped in beside the deceased, and told Royston to drive down to St. Kilda. Royston, who was glad that the friend of the deceased had come to look after him, drove as he had been directed, but near the Church of England Grammar School, on the St. Kilda Road, the gentleman in the light coat called out to him to stop. He did so, and the gentleman got out of the cab, closing the door after him.

"He won't let me take him home," he said, "so I'll just walk back to the city, and you can drive him to St. Kilda."

"What street, sir?" asked Royston.

"Grey Street, I fancy," said the other, "but my friend will direct you when you get to the Junction."

"Ain't he too much on, sir?" said Royston, dubiously.

"Oh, no! I think he'll be able to tell you where he lives—it's Grey Street or Ackland Street, I fancy. I don't know which."

He then opened the door of the cab and looked in. "Good night, old man," he said—the other apparently did not answer, for the gentleman in the light coat, shrugging his shoulders, and muttering "sulky brute," closed the door again. He then gave Royston half-a-sovereign, lit a cigarette, and after making a few remarks about the beauty of the night, walked off quickly in the direction of

Melbourne. Royston drove down to the Junction, and having stopped there, according to his instructions he asked his 'fare' several times where he was to drive him to. Receiving no response and thinking that the deceased was too drunk to answer, he got down from his seat, opened the door of the cab, and found the deceased lying back in the corner with a handkerchief across his mouth. He put out his hand with the intention of rousing him, thinking that he had gone to sleep. But on touching him the deceased fell forward, and on examination, to his horror, he found that he was quite dead. Alarmed at what had taken place, and suspecting the gentleman in the light coat, he drove to the police station at St. Kilda, and there made the above report. The body of the deceased was taken out of the cab and brought into the station, a doctor being sent for at once. On his arrival, however, he found that life was quite extinct, and also discovered that the handkerchief which was tied lightly over the mouth was saturated with chloroform. He had no hesitation in stating that from the way in which the handkerchief was placed, and the presence of chloroform, that a murder had been committed, and from all appearances the deceased died easily, and without a struggle. The deceased is a slender man, of medium height, with a dark complexion, and is dressed in evening dress, which will render identification difficult, as it is a costume which has no distinctive mark to render it noticeable. There were no papers or cards found on the deceased from which his name could be discovered, and the clothing was not marked in any way. The handkerchief, however, which was tied across his mouth, was of white silk, and marked in one of the corners with the letters 'O.W.' in red silk. The assassin, of course, may have used his own handkerchief to commit the crime, so that if the initials are those of his name they may ultimately lead to his detection. There will be an inquest held on the body of the deceased this morning, when, no doubt, some evidence may be elicited which may solve the mystery.

In Monday morning's issue of the ARGUS the following article appeared with reference to the matter:—

The following additional evidence which has been obtained may throw some light on the mysterious murder in a hansom cab of which we gave a full description in Saturday's issue:—

Another hansom cabman called at the police office, and gave a clue which will, no doubt, prove of value to the detectives in their search for the murderer. He states that he was driving up the St. Kilda Road on Friday morning about halfpast one o'clock, when he was hailed by a gentleman in a light coat, who stepped into the cab and told him to drive to Powlett Street, in East Melbourne. He did so, and, after paying him, the gentleman got out at the corner of Wellington Parade and Powlett Street and walked slowly up Powlett Street, while

the cab drove back to town. Here all clue ends, but there can be no doubt in the minds of our readers as to the identity of the man in the light coat who got out of Royston's cab on the St. Kilda Road, with the one who entered the other cab and alighted therefrom at Powlett Street. There could have been no struggle, as had any taken place the cabman, Royston, surely would have heard the noise. The supposition is, therefore, that the deceased was too drunk to make any resistance, and that the other, watching his opportunity, placed the handkerchief saturated with chloroform over the mouth of his victim. Then after perhaps a few ineffectual struggles the latter would succumb to the effects of his inhalation. The man in the light coat, judging from his conduct before getting into the cab, appears to have known the deceased, though the circumstance of his walking away on recognition, and returning again, shows that his attitude towards the deceased was not altogether a friendly one.

The difficulty is where to start from in the search after the author of what appears to be a deliberate murder, as the deceased seems to be unknown, and his presumed murderer has escaped. But it is impossible that the body can remain long without being identified by someone, as though Melbourne is a large city, yet it is neither Paris nor London, where a man can disappear in a crowd and never be heard of again. The first thing to be done is to establish the identity of the deceased, and then, no doubt, a clue will be obtained leading to the detection of the man in the light coat who appears to have been the perpetrator of the crime. It is of the utmost importance that the mystery in which the crime is shrouded should be cleared up, not only in the interests of justice, but also in those of the public—taking place as it did in a public conveyance, and in the public street. To think that the author of such a crime is at present at large, walking in our midst, and perhaps preparing for the committal of another, is enough to shake the strongest nerves. In one of Du Boisgobey's stories, entitled 'An Omnibus Mystery,' a murder closely resembling this tragedy takes place in an omnibus, but we question if even that author would have been daring enough to write about a crime being committed in such an unlikely place as a hansom cab. Here is a great chance for some of our detectives to render themselves famous, and we feel sure that they will do their utmost to trace the author of this cowardly and dastardly murder.

2

The Evidence at the Inquest

At the inquest held on the body found in the hansom cab the following articles taken from the deceased were placed on the table:—

1. Two pounds ten shillings in gold and silver.
2. The white silk handkerchief which was saturated with chloroform, and was found tied across the mouth of the deceased, marked with the letters O.W. in red silk.
3. A cigarette case of Russian leather, half filled with “Old Judge” cigarettes.
4. A left-hand white glove of kid—rather soiled—with black seams down the back.

Samuel Gorby, of the detective office, was present in order to see if anything might be said by the witnesses likely to point to the cause or to the author of the crime.

The first witness called was Malcolm Royston, in whose cab the crime had been committed. He told the same story as had already appeared in the *ARGUS* and the following facts were elicited by the Coroner:—

Q. Can you give a description of the gentleman in the light coat, who was holding the deceased when you drove up?

A. I did not observe him very closely, as my attention was taken up by the deceased; and, besides, the gentleman in the light coat was in the shadow.

Q Describe him from what you saw of him.

A. He was fair, I think, because I could see his moustache, rather tall, and in evening dress, with a light coat over it. I could not see his face very plainly, as he wore a soft felt hat, which was pulled down over his eyes.

Q. What kind of hat was it he wore—a wide-awake?

A. Yes. The brim was turned down, and I could see only his mouth and moustache.

Q. What did he say when you asked him if he knew the deceased?

A. He said he didn't; that he had just picked him up.

Q. And afterwards he seemed to recognise him?

A. Yes. When the deceased looked up he said "You!" and let him fall on to the ground; then he walked away towards Bourke Street.

Q. Did he look back?

A. Not that I saw.

Q. How long were you looking after him?

A. About a minute.

Q. And when did you see him again?

A. After I put deceased into the cab I turned round and found him at my elbow.

Q. And what did he say?

A. I said, "Oh! you've come back," and he said, "Yes, I've changed my mind, and will see him home," and then he got into the cab, and told me to drive to St. Kilda.

Q. He spoke then as if he knew the deceased?

A. Yes; I thought that he recognised him only when he looked up, and perhaps having had a row with him walked away, but thought he'd come back.

Q. Did you see him coming back?

A. No; the first I saw of him was at my elbow when I turned.

Q. And when did he get out?

A. Just as I was turning down by the Grammar School on the St. Kilda Road.

Q. Did you hear any sounds of fighting or struggling in the cab during the drive?

A. No; the road was rather rough, and the noise of the wheels going over the stones would have prevented my hearing anything.

Q. When the gentleman in the light coat got out did he appear disturbed?

A. No; he was perfectly calm.

Q. How could you tell that?

A. Because the moon had risen, and I could see plainly.

Q. Did you see his face then?

A. No; his hat was pulled down over it. I only saw as much as I did when he entered the cab in Collins Street.

Q. Were his clothes torn or disarranged in any way?

A. No; the only difference I remarked in him was that his coat was buttoned.

Q. And was it open when he got in?

A. No; but it was when he was holding up the deceased.

Q. Then he buttoned it before he came back and got into the cab?

A. Yes. I suppose so.

Q. What did he say when he got out of the cab on the St. Kilda Road?

A. He said that the deceased would not let him take him home, and that he would walk back to Melbourne.

Q. And you asked him where you were to drive the deceased to?

A. Yes; and he said that the deceased lived either in Grey Street or Ackland Street, St. Kilda, but that the deceased would direct me at the Junction.

Q. Did you not think that the deceased was too drunk to direct you?

A. Yes, I did; but his friend said that the sleep and the shaking of the cab would sober him a bit by the time I got to the Junction.

Q. The gentleman in the light coat apparently did not know where the deceased lived?

A. No; he said it was either in Ackland Street or Grey Street.

Q. Did you not think that curious?

A. No; I thought he might be a club friend of the deceased.

Q. For how long did the man in the light coat talk to you?

A. About five minutes.

Q. And during that time you heard no noise in the cab?

A. No; I thought the deceased had gone to sleep.

Q. And after the man in the light coat said "good-night" to the deceased, what happened?

A. He lit a cigarette, gave me a half-sovereign, and walked off towards Melbourne.

Q. Did you observe if the gentleman in the light coat had his handkerchief with him?

A. Oh, yes; because he dusted his boots with it. The road was very dusty.

Q. Did you notice any striking peculiarity about him?

A. Well, no; except that he wore a diamond ring.

Q. What was there peculiar about that?

A. He wore it on the forefinger of the right hand, and I never saw it that way before.

Q. When did you notice this?

A. When he was lighting his cigarette.

Q. How often did you call to the deceased when you got to the Junction?

A. Three or four times. I then got down, and found he was quite dead.

Q. How was he lying?

A. He was doubled up in the far corner of the cab, very much in the same position as I left him when I put him in. His head was hanging on one side, and there was a handkerchief across his mouth. When I touched him he fell into the other corner of the cab, and then I found out he was dead. I immediately drove to the St. Kilda police station and told the police.

At the conclusion of Royston's evidence, during which Gorby had been continually taking notes, Robert Chinston was called. He deposed:—

I am a duly qualified medical practitioner, residing in Collins Street East. I made a post-mortem examination of the body of the deceased on Friday.

Q. That was within a few hours of his death?

A. Yes, judging from the position of the handkerchief and the presence of chloroform that the deceased had died from the effects of anaesthesia, and knowing how rapidly the poison evaporates I made the examination at once.

Coroner: Go on, sir.

Dr. Chinston: Externally, the body was healthy-looking and well nourished. There were no marks of violence. The staining apparent at the back of the legs and trunk was due to post-mortem congestion. Internally, the brain was hyperaemic, and there was a considerable amount of congestion, especially apparent in the superficial vessels. There was no brain disease. The lungs were healthy, but slightly congested. On opening the thorax there was a faint spirituous odour discernible. The stomach contained about a pint of completely digested food. The heart was flaccid. The right-heart contained a considerable quantity of dark, fluid blood. There was a tendency to fatty degeneration of that organ.

I am of opinion that the deceased died from the inhalation of some such vapour as chloroform or methylene.

Q. You say there was a tendency to fatty degeneration of the heart? Would that have anything to do with the death of deceased?

A. Not of itself. But chloroform administered while the heart was in such a state would have a decided tendency to accelerate the fatal result. At the same time, I may mention that the post-mortem signs of poisoning by chloroform are mostly negative.

Dr. Chinston was then permitted to retire, and Clement Rankin, another hansom cabman, was called. He deposed: I am a cabman, living in Collingwood, and usually drive a hansom cab. I remember Thursday last. I had driven a party down to St. Kilda, and was returning about half-past one o'clock. A short distance past the Grammar School I was hailed by a gentleman in a light coat; he was smoking a cigarette, and told me to drive him to Powlett Street, East Melbourne. I did so, and he got out at the corner of Wellington Parade and Powlett Street. He paid me half-a-sovereign for my fare, and then walked up Powlett Street, while I drove back to town.

Q. What time was it when you stopped at Powlett Street?

A. Two o'clock exactly.

Q. How do you know?

A. Because it was a still night, and I heard the Post Office clock strike two o'clock.

Q. Did you notice anything peculiar about the man in the light coat?

A. No! He looked just the same as anyone else. I thought he was some swell of the town out for a lark. His hat was pulled down over his eyes, and I could not see his face.

Q. Did you notice if he wore a ring?

A. Yes! I did. When he was handing me the half-sovereign, I saw he had a diamond ring on the forefinger of his right hand.

Q. He did not say why he was on the St. Kilda Road at such an hour?

A. No! He did not.

Clement Rankin was then ordered to stand down, and the Coroner then summed up in an address of half-an-hour's duration. There was, he pointed out, no doubt that the death of the deceased had resulted not from natural causes, but from the effects of poisoning. Only slight evidence had been obtained up to the present time regarding the circumstances of the case, but the only person who could be accused of committing the crime was the unknown man who entered the cab with

the deceased on Friday morning at the corner of the Scotch Church, near the Burke and Wills' monument. It had been proved that the deceased, when he entered the cab, was, to all appearances, in good health, though in a state of intoxication, and the fact that he was found by the cabman, Royston, after the man in the light coat had left the cab, with a handkerchief, saturated with chloroform, tied over his mouth, would seem to show that he had died through the inhalation of chloroform, which had been deliberately administered. All the obtainable evidence in the case was circumstantial, but, nevertheless, showed conclusively that a crime had been committed. Therefore, as the circumstances of the case pointed to one conclusion, the jury could not do otherwise than frame a verdict in accordance with that conclusion.

The jury retired at four o'clock, and, after an absence of a quarter of an hour, returned with the following verdict:—

“That the deceased, whose name there is no evidence to determine, died on the 27th day of July, from the effects of poison, namely, chloroform, feloniously administered by some person unknown; and the jury, on their oaths, say that the said unknown person feloniously, wilfully, and maliciously did murder the said deceased.”

3

One Hundred Pounds Reward

V.R. MURDER. 100 POUNDS REWARD.

Whereas, on Friday, the 27th day of July, the body of a man, name unknown, was found in a hansom cab. And whreas, at an inquest held at St. Kilda, on the 30th day of July, a verdict of wilful murder, against some person unknown, was brought in by the jury. The deceased is of medium height, with a dark complexion, dark hair, clean shaved, has a mole on the left temple, and was dressed in evening dress. Notice is hereby given that a reward of 100 pounds will be paid by the Government for such information as will lead to the conviction of the murderer, who is presumed to be a man who entered the hansom cab with the deceased at the corner of Collins and Russell Streets, on the morning of the 27th day of July.

4

Mr. Gorby Makes a Start

Well," said Mr. Gorby, addressing his reflection in the looking-glass, "I've been finding out things these last twenty years, but this is a puzzler, and no mistake."

Mr. Gorby was shaving, and, as was his usual custom, conversed with his reflection. Being a detective, and of an extremely reticent disposition, he never talked outside about his business, or made a confidant of anyone. When he did want to unbosom himself, he retired to his bedroom and talked to his reflection in the mirror. This method of procedure he found to work capitally, for it relieved his sometimes overburdened mind with absolute security to himself. Did not the barber of Midas when he found out what was under the royal crown of his master, fret and chafe over his secret, until one morning he stole to the reeds by the river, and whispered, "Midas, has ass's ears?" In the like manner Mr. Gorby felt a longing at times to give speech to his innermost secrets; and having no fancy for chattering to the air, he made his mirror his confidant. So far it had never betrayed him, while for the rest it joyed him to see his own jolly red face nodding gravely at him from out the shining surface, like a mandarin. This morning the detective was unusually animated in his confidences to his mirror. At times, too, a puzzled expression would pass over his face. The hansom cab murder had been placed in his hands for solution, and he was trying to think how he should make a beginning.

"Hang it," he said, thoughtfully stropping his razor, "a thing with an end must have a start, and if I don't get the start how am I to get the end?"

As the mirror did not answer this question, Mr. Gorby lathered his face, and started shaving in a somewhat mechanical fashion, for his thoughts were with the case, and ran on in this manner:—

"Here's a man—well, say a gentleman—who gets drunk, and, therefore, don't know what he's up to. Another gent who is on the square comes up and sings out for a cab for him—first he says he don't know him, and then he shows plainly he does—he walks away in a temper, changes his mind, comes back and gets into the cab, after telling the cabby to drive down to St. Kilda. Then he polishes the drunk one off with chloroform, gets out of the cab, jumps into another, and after getting out at Powlett Street, vanishes—that's the riddle I've got to find out, and I don't think the Sphinx ever had a harder one. There are three things to be discovered—First, who is the dead man? Second, what was he killed for? And third, who did it?

"Once I get hold of the first the other two won't be very hard to find out, for one can tell pretty well from a man's life whether it's to anyone's interest that he should be got off the books. The man that murdered that chap must have had some strong motive, and I must find out what that motive was. Love? No, it wasn't that—men in love don't go to such lengths in real life—they do in novels and plays, but I've never seen it occurring in my experience. Robbery? No, there was plenty of money in his pocket. Revenge? Now, really it might be that—it's a kind of thing that carries most people further than they want to go. There was no violence used, for his clothes, weren't torn, so he must have been taken sudden, and before he knew what the other chap was up to. By the way, I don't think I examined his clothes sufficiently, there might be something about them to give a clue; at any rate it's worth looking after, so I'll start with his clothes."

So Mr. Gorby, having dressed and breakfasted, walked quickly to the police station, where he asked for the clothes of the deceased to be shown to him. When he received them he retired into a corner, and commenced an exhaustive examination of them.

There was nothing remarkable about the coat. It was merely a well-cut and well-made dress coat; so with a grunt of dissatisfaction Mr. Gorby threw it aside, and picked up the waistcoat. Here he found something to interest him, in the shape of a pocket made on the left-hand side and on the inside, of the garment.

"Now, what the deuce is this for?" said Mr. Gorby, scratching his head; "it ain't usual for a dress waistcoat to have a pocket on its inside as I'm aware of; and," continued the detective, greatly excited, "this ain't tailor's work, he did it himself, and jolly badly he did it too. Now he must have taken the trouble to make this pocket himself, so that no one else would know anything about it, and it was made to carry some-

thing valuable—so valuable that he had to carry it with him even when he wore evening clothes. Ah! here's a tear on the side nearest the outside of the waistcoat; something has been pulled out roughly. I begin to see now. The dead man possessed something which the other man wanted, and which he knew the dead one carried about with him. He sees him drunk, gets into the cab with him, and tries to get what he wants. The dead man resists, upon which the other kills him by means of the chloroform which he had with him, and being afraid that the cab will stop, and he will be found out, snatches what he wants out of the pocket so quickly that he tears the waistcoat and then makes off. That's clear enough, but the question is, What was it he wanted? A case with jewels? No! It could not have been anything so bulky, or the dead man would never have carried it about inside his waistcoat. It was something flat, which could easily lie in the pocket—a paper—some valuable paper which the assassin wanted, and for which he killed the other."

"This is all very well," said Mr. Gorby, throwing down the waistcoat, and rising. "I have found number two before number one. The first question is: Who is the murdered man. He's a stranger in Melbourne, that's pretty clear, or else some one would have been sure to recognise him before now by the description given in the reward. Now, I wonder if he has any relations here? No, he can't, or else they would have made enquiries, before this. Well, there's one thing certain, he must have had a landlady or landlord, unless he slept in the open air. He can't have lived in an hotel, as the landlord of any hotel in Melbourne would have recognised him from the description, especially when the whole place is ringing with the murder. Private lodgings more like, and a landlady who doesn't read the papers and doesn't gossip, or she'd have known all about it by this time. Now, if he did live, as I think, in private lodgings, and suddenly disappeared, his landlady wouldn't keep quiet. It's a whole week since the murder, and as the lodger has not been seen or heard of, the landlady will naturally make enquiries. If, however, as I surmise, the lodger is a stranger, she will not know where to enquire; therefore, under these circumstances, the most natural thing for her to do would be to advertise for him, so I'll have a look at the newspapers." Mr. Gorby got a file of the different newspapers, and looked carefully through those columns in which missing friends and people who will hear "something to their advantage" are generally advertised for.

"He was murdered," said Mr. Gorby to himself, "on a Friday morning, between one and two o'clock, so he might stay away till Monday without exciting any suspicion. On Monday, however, the landlady would begin to feel uneasy, and on Tuesday she would advertise for

him. Therefore," said Mr. Gorby, running his fat finger down the column, "Wednesday it is."

It did not appear in Wednesday's paper, neither did it in Thursday's, but in Friday's issue, exactly one week after the murder, Mr. Gorby suddenly came upon the following advertisement:—

"If Mr. Oliver Whyte does not return to Possum Villa, Grey Street, St. Kilda, before the end of the week, his rooms will be let again.—Rubina Hableton."

"Oliver Whyte," repeated Mr. Gorby slowly, "and the initials on the pocket-handkerchief which was proved to have belonged to the deceased were 'O.W.' So his name is Oliver Whyte, is it? Now, I wonder if Rubina Hableton knows anything about this matter. At any rate," said Mr. Gorby, putting on his hat, "as I'm fond of sea breezes, I think I'll go down, and call at Possum Villa, Grey Street, St. Kilda."

5

Mrs. Hableton Unbosoms Herself

Mrs. Hableton was a lady with a grievance, as anybody who happened to become acquainted with her, soon found out. It is Beaconsfield who says, in one of his novels, that no one is so interesting as when he is talking about himself; and, judging Mrs. Hableton by this statement, she was an extremely fascinating individual, as she never by any chance talked upon any other subject. What was the threat of a Russian invasion to her so long as she had her special grievance—once let that be removed, and she would have time to attend to such minor details as affected the colony.

Mrs. Hableton's particular grievance was want of money. Not by any means an uncommon one, you might remind her; but she snappishly would tell you that "she knowd that, but some people weren't like other people." In time one came to learn what she meant by this. She had come to the Colonies in the early days—days when the making of money in appreciable quantity was an easier matter than it is now. Owing to a bad husband, she had failed to save any. The late Mr. Hableton—for he had long since departed this life—had been addicted to alcohol, and at those times when he should have been earning, he was usually to be found in a drinking shanty spending his wife's earnings in "shouting" for himself and his friends. The constant drinking, and the hot Victorian climate, soon carried him off, and when Mrs. Hableton had seen him safely under the ground in the Melbourne Cemetery, she returned home to survey her position, and see how it could be bettered. She gathered together a little money from the wreck of her fortune, and land being cheap, purchased a small "section" at St. Kilda, and built a house on

it. She supported herself by going out charring, taking in sewing, and acting as a sick nurse. So, among this multiplicity of occupations, she managed to exist fairly well.

And in truth it was somewhat hard upon Mrs. Hableton. For at the time when she should have been resting and reaping the fruit of her early industry, she was obliged to toil more assiduously than ever. It was little consolation to her that she was but a type of many women, who, hard-working and thrifty themselves, are married to men who are nothing but an incubus to their wives and to their families. Small wonder, then, that Mrs. Hableton should condense all her knowledge of the male sex into the one bitter aphorism, "Men is brutes."

Possum Villa was an unpretentious-looking place, with one, bow-window and a narrow verandah in front. It was surrounded by a small garden in which were a few sparse flowers—the especial delight of Mrs. Hableton. It was, her way to tie an old handkerchief round her head and to go out into the garden and dig and water her beloved flowers until, from sheer desperation at the overwhelming odds, they gave up all attempt to grow. She was engaged in this favourite occupation about a week after her lodger had gone. She wondered where he was.

"Lyin' drunk in a public-'ouse, I'll be bound," she said, viciously pulling up a weed, "a-spendin' 'is, rent and a-spilin' 'is inside with beer—ah, men is brutes, drat 'em!"

Just as she said this, a shadow fell across the garden, and on looking up, she saw a man leaning over the fence, staring at her.

"Git out," she said, sharply, rising from her knees and shaking her trowel at the intruder. "I don't want no apples to-day, an' I don't care how cheap you sells 'em."

Mrs. Hableton evidently laboured under the delusion that the man was a hawker, but seeing no hand-cart with him, she changed her mind.

"You're takin' a plan of the 'ouse to rob it, are you?" she said. "Well, you needn't, 'cause there ain't nothin' to rob, the silver spoons as belonged to my fater's mother 'avin' gone down my 'usband's, throat long ago, an' I ain't 'ad money to buy more. I'm a lone pusson as is put on by brutes like you, an' I'll thank you to leave the fence I bought with my own 'ard earned money alone, and git out."

Mrs. Hableton stopped short for want of breath, and stood shaking her trowel, and gasping like a fish out of water.

"My dear lady," said the man at the fence, mildly, "are you—"

"No, I ain't," retorted Mrs. Hableton, fiercely, "I ain't neither a member of the 'Ouse, nor a school teacher, to answer your questions. I'm a wo-

man as pays my rates an' taxes, and don't gossip nor read yer rubbishin' newspapers, nor care for the Russings, no how, so git out."

"Don't read the papers?" repeated the man, in a satisfied tone, "ah! that accounts for it."

Mrs. Hableton stared suspiciously at the intruder. He was a burly-looking man, with a jovial red face, clean shaven, and his sharp, shrewd-looking grey eyes twinkled like two stars. He was, well-dressed in a suit of light clothes, and wore a stiffly-starched white waistcoat, with a massive gold chain stretched across it. Altogether he gave Mrs. Hableton finally the impression of being a well-to-do tradesman, and she mentally wondered what he wanted.

"What d'y want?" she asked, abruptly.

"Does Mr. Oliver Whyte live here?" asked the stranger.

"He do, an' he don't," answered Mrs. Hableton, epigrammatically. "I ain't seen 'im for over a week, so I s'pose 'e's gone on the drink, like the rest of 'em, but I've put sumthin' in the paper as 'ill pull him up pretty sharp, and let 'im know I ain't a carpet to be trod on, an' if you're a friend of 'im, you can tell 'im from me 'e's a brute, an' it's no more but what I expected of 'im, 'e bein' a male."

The stranger waited placidly during the outburst, and Mrs. Hableton, having stopped for want of breath, he interposed, quietly—

"Can I speak to you for a few moments?"

"An' who's a-stoppin' of you?" said Mrs. Hableton, defiantly. "Go on with you, not as I expects the truth from a male, but go on."

"Well, really," said the other, looking up at the cloudless blue sky, and wiping his face with a gaudy red silk pocket-handkerchief, "it is rather hot, you know, and—"

Mrs. Hableton did not give him time to finish, but walking to the gate, opened it with a jerk.

"Use your legs and walk in," she said, and the stranger having done so, she led the way into the house, and into a small neat sitting-room, which seemed to overflow with antimacassars, wool mats, and wax flowers. There were also a row of emu eggs on the mantelpiece, a cutlass on the wall, and a grimy line of hard-looking little books, set in a stiff row on a shelf, presumably for ornament, for their appearance in no way tempted one to read them.

The furniture was of horsehair, and everything was hard and shiny, so when the stranger sat down in the slippery-looking arm-chair that Mrs. Hableton pushed towards him; he could not help thinking it had been stuffed with stones, it felt so cold and hard. The lady herself sat

opposite to him in another hard chair, and having taken the handkerchief off her head, folded it carefully, laid it on her lap, and then looked straight at her unexpected visitor.

"Now then," she said, letting her mouth fly open so rapidly that it gave one the impression that it was moved by strings like a marionette, "Who are you? what are you? and what do you want?"

The stranger put his red silk handkerchief into his hat, placed it on the table, and answered deliberately—

"My name is Gorby. I am a detective. I want Mr. Oliver Whyte."

"He ain't here," said Mrs. Hableton, thinking that Whyte had got into trouble, and was in danger of arrest.

"I know that," answered Mr. Gorby.

"Then where is 'e?"

Mr. Gorby answered abruptly, and watched the effect of his words.

"He is dead."

Mrs. Hableton grew pale, and pushed back her chair. "No," she cried, "he never killed 'im, did 'e?"

"Who never killed him?" queried Mr. Gorby, sharply.

Mrs. Hableton evidently knew more than she intended to say, for, recovering herself with a violent effort, she answered evasively—

"He never killed himself."

Mr. Gorby looked at her keenly, and she returned his gaze with a defiant stare.

"Clever," muttered the detective to himself; "knows something more than she chooses to tell, but I'll get it out of her." He paused a moment, and then went on smoothly,

"Oh, no! he did not commit suicide; what makes you think so?" Mrs. Hableton did not answer, but, rising from her seat, went over to a hard and shiny-looking sideboard, from whence she took a bottle of brandy and a small wine-glass. Half filling the glass, she drank it off, and returned to her seat.

"I don't take much of that stuff," she said, seeing the detective's eyes fixed curiously on her, "but you 'ave given me such a turn that I must take something to steady my nerves; what do you want me to do?"

"Tell me all you know," said Mr. Gorby, keeping his eyes fixed on her face.

"Where was Mr. Whyte killed?" she asked.

"He was murdered in a hansom cab on the St. Kilda Road."

"In the open street?" she asked in a startled tone.

"Yes, in the open street."

"Ah!" she drew a long breath, and closed her lips, firmly. Mr. Gorby said nothing. He saw that she was deliberating whether or not to speak, and a word from him might seal her lips, so, like a wise man, he kept silent. He obtained his reward sooner than he expected.

"Mr. Gorby," she said at length, "I 'ave 'ad a 'ard struggle all my life, which it came along of a bad husband, who was a brute and a drunkard, so, God knows, I ain't got much inducement to think well of the lot of you, but—murder," she shivered slightly, though the room was quite warm, "I didn't think of that."

"In connection with whom?"

"Mr. Whyte, of course," she answered, hurriedly.

"And who else?"

"I don't know."

"Then there is nobody else?"

"Well, I don't know—I'm not sure."

The detective was puzzled.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I will tell you all I know," said Mrs. Hableton, "an' if 'e's innocent, God will 'elp 'im."

"If who is innocent?"

"I'll tell you everythin' from the start," said Mrs. Hableton, "an' you can judge for yourself."

Mr. Gorby assented, and she began:

"It's only two months ago since I decided to take in lodgers; but charin's 'ard work, and sewin's tryin' for the eyes, So, bein' a lone woman, 'avin' bin badly treated by a brute, who is now dead, which I was allays a good wife to 'im, I thought lodgers 'ud 'elp me a little, so I put a notice in the paper, an' Mr. Oliver Whyte took the rooms two months ago."

"What was he like?"

"Not very tall, dark face, no whiskers nor moustache, an' quite the gentleman."

"Anything peculiar about him?"

Mrs. Hableton thought for a moment.

"Well," she said at length, "he 'ad a mole on his left temple, but it was covered with 'is 'air, an' few people 'ud 'ave seen it."

"The very man," said Gorby to himself, "I'm on the right path."

"Mr. Whyte said 'e 'ad just come from England," went on the woman.

"Which," thought Mr. Gorby, "accounts for the corpse not being recognised by friends."

"He took the rooms, an' said 'e'd stay with me for six months, an' paid a week's rent in advance, an' 'e allays paid up reg'ler like a respectable man, tho' I don't believe in 'em myself. He said 'e'd lots of friends, an' used to go out every night."

"Who were his friends?"

"That I can't tell you, for 'e were very close, an' when 'e went out of doors I never knowd where 'e went, which is jest like 'em; for they ses they're goin' to work, an' you finds 'em in the beershop. Mr. Whyte told me 'e was a-goin' to marry a heiress, 'e was."

"Ah!" interjected Mr. Gorby, sapiently.

"He 'ad only one friend as I ever saw—a Mr. Moreland—who comed 'ere with 'm, an' was allays with 'im—brother-like."

"What is this Mr. Moreland like?"

"Good-lookin' enough," said Mrs. Hableton sourly, "but 'is 'abits weren't as good as 'is face—'andsom is as 'andsom does, is what I ses."

"I wonder if he knows anything about this affair," thought Gorby to himself "Where is Mr. Moreland to be found?" he asked.

"Not knowin', can't tell," retorted the landlady, "'e used to be 'ere reg'lar, but I ain't seen 'im for over a week."

"Strange! very!" said Gorby, shaking his head. "I should like to see this Mr. Moreland. I suppose it's probable he'll call again?"

"'Abit bein' second nature I s'pose he will," answered the woman, "'e might call at any time, mostly 'avin' called at night."

"Ah! then I'll come down this evening on chance of seeing him," replied the detective. "Coincidences happen in real life as well as in novels, and the gentleman in question may turn up in the nick of time. Now, what else about Mr. Whyte?"

"About two weeks ago, or three, I'm not cert'in which, a gentleman called to see Mr. Whyte; 'e was very tall, and wore a light coat."

"Ah! a morning coat?"

"No! 'e was in evenin' dress, and wore a light coat over it, an' a soft 'at."

"The very man," said the detective below his breath; "go on."

"He went into Mr. Whyte's room, an' shut the door. I don't know how long they were talkin' together; but I was sittin' in this very room and heard their voices git angry, and they were a-swearin' at one another, which is the way with men, the brutes. I got up and went into the passage in order to ask 'em not to make such a noise, when Mr. Whyte's

door opens, an' the gentleman in the light coat comes out, and bangs along to the door. Mr. Whyte 'e comes to the door of 'is room, an' 'e 'ollers out. 'She is mine; you can't do anything; an' the other turns with 'is 'and on the door an' says, 'I can kill you, an' if you marry 'er I'll do it, even in the open street.'"

"Ah!" said Mr. Gorby, drawing a long breath, "and then?"

"Then he bangs the door to, which it's never shut easy since, an' I ain't got no money to get it put right, an' Mr. Whyte walks back to his room, laughing."

"Did he make any remark to you?"

"No; except he'd been worried by a loonatic."

"And what was the stranger's name?"

"That I can't tell you, as Mr. Whyte never told me. He was very tall, with a fair moustache, an' dressed as I told you."

Mr. Gorby was satisfied.

"That is the man," he said to himself, "who got into the hansom cab, and murdered Whyte; there's no doubt of it! Whyte and he were rivals for the heiress."

"What d'y think of it?" said Mrs. Hableton curiously.

"I think," said Mr. Gorby slowly, with his eyes fixed on her, "I think that there is a woman at the bottom of this crime."

6

Mr. Gorby Makes Further Discoveries

When Mr. Gorby left Possum Villa no doubt remained in his mind as to who had committed the murder. The gentleman in the light coat had threatened to murder Whyte, even in the open street—these last words being especially significant—and there was no doubt that he had carried out his threat. The committal of the crime was merely the fulfilment of the words uttered in anger. What the detective had now to do was to find who the gentleman in the light coat was, where he lived, and, that done, to ascertain his doings on the night of the murder. Mrs. Hableton had described him, but was ignorant of his name, and her very vague description might apply to dozens of young men in Melbourne. There was only one person who, in Mr. Gorby's opinion, could tell the name of the gentleman in the light coat, and that was Moreland, the intimate friend of the dead man. They appeared, from the landlady's description, to have been so friendly that it was more than likely Whyte would have told Moreland all about his angry visitor. Besides, Moreland's knowledge of his dead friend's life and habits might be able to supply information on two points, namely, who was most likely to gain by Whyte's death, and who the heiress was that the deceased boasted he would marry. But the fact that Moreland should be ignorant of his friend's tragic death, notwithstanding that the papers were full of it, and that the reward gave an excellent description of his personal appearance, greatly puzzled Gorby.

The only way in which to account for Moreland's extraordinary silence was that he was out of town, and had neither seen the papers nor heard anyone talking about the murder. If this were the case he might either

stay away for an indefinite time or return after a few days. At all events it was worth while going down to St. Kilda in the evening on the chance that Moreland might have returned to town, and would call to see his friend. So, after his tea, Mr. Gorby put on his hat, and went down to Possum Villa, on what he could not help acknowledging to himself was a very slender possibility.

Mrs. Hableton opened the door for him, and in silence led the way, not into her own sitting-room, but into a much more luxuriously furnished apartment, which Gorby guessed at once was that of Whyte's. He looked keenly round the room, and his estimate of the dead man's character was formed at once.

"Fast," he said to himself, "and a spendthrift. A man who would have his friends, and possibly his enemies, among a very shady lot of people."

What led Mr. Gorby to this belief was the evidence which surrounded him of Whyte's mode of life. The room was well furnished, the furniture being covered with dark-red velvet, while the curtains on the windows and the carpet were all of the same somewhat sombre hue.

"I did the thing properly," observed Mrs. Hableton, with a satisfactory smile on her hard face. "When you wants young men to stop with you, the rooms must be well furnished, an' Mr. Whyte paid well, tho' 'e was rather pertickler about 'is food, which I'm only a plain cook, an' can't make them French things which spile the stomach."

The globes of the gas lamps were of a pale pink colour, and Mrs. Hableton having lit the gas in expectation of Mr. Gorby's arrival, there was a soft roseate hue through the room. Mr. Gorby put his hands in his capacious pockets, and strolled leisurely through the room, examining everything with a curious eye. The walls were covered with pictures of celebrated horses and famous jockeys. Alternating with these were photographs of ladies of the stage, mostly London actresses, Nellie Farnen, Kate Vaughan, and other burlesque stars, evidently being the objects of the late Mr. Whyte's adoration. Over the mantelpiece hung a rack of pipes, above which were two crossed foils, and under these a number of plush frames of all colours, with pretty faces smiling out of them; a remarkable fact being, that all the photographs were of ladies, and not a single male face was to be seen, either on the walls or in the plush frames.

"Fond of the ladies, I see," said Mr. Gorby, nodding his head towards the mantelpiece.

"A set of hussies," said Mrs. Hableton grimly, closing her lips tightly. "I feel that ashamed when I dusts 'em as never was—I don't believe in gals

gettin' their picters taken with 'ardly any clothes on, as if they just got out of bed, but Mr. Whyte seems to like 'em."

"Most young men do," answered Mr. Gorby dryly, going over to the bookcase.

"Brutes," said the lady of the house. "I'd drown 'em in the Yarrer, I would, a settin' 'emself and a callin' 'emself lords of creation, as if women were made for nothin' but to earn money an' see 'em drink it, as my 'usband did, which 'is inside never seemed to 'ave enough beer, an' me a poor lone woman with no family, thank God, or they'd 'ave taken arter their father in 'is drinkin' 'abits."

Mr. Gorby took no notice of this tirade against men, but stood looking at Mr. Whyte's library, which seemed to consist mostly of French novels and sporting newspapers.

"Zola," said Mr. Gorby, thoughtfully, taking down a flimsy yellow book rather tattered. "I've heard of him; if his novels are as bad as his reputation I shouldn't care to read them."

Here a knock came at the front door, loud and decisive. On hearing it Mrs. Hableton sprang hastily to her feet. "That may be Mr. Moreland," she said, as the detective quickly replaced "Zola" in the bookcase. "I never 'ave visitors in the evenin', bein' a lone widder, and if it is 'im I'll bring 'im in 'ere."

She went out, and presently Gorby, who was listening intently, heard a man's voice ask if Mr. Whyte was at home.

"No, sir, he ain't," answered the landlady; "but there's a gentleman in his room askin' after 'im. Won't you come in, sir?"

"For a rest, yes," returned the visitor, and immediately afterwards Mrs. Hableton appeared, ushering in the late Oliver Whyte's most intimate friend. He was a tall, slender man, with a pink and white complexion, curly fair hair, and a drooping straw-coloured moustache—together a strikingly aristocratic individual. He was well-dressed in a suit of check, and had a cool, nonchalant air about him.

"And where is Mr. Whyte to-night?" he asked, sinking into a chair, and taking no more notice of the detective than if he had been an article of furniture.

"Haven't you seen him lately?" asked the detective quickly. Mr. Moreland stared in an insolent manner at his questioner for a few moments, as if he were debating the advisability of answering or not. At last he apparently decided that he would, for slowly pulling off one glove he leaned back in his chair.

"No, I have not," he said with a yawn. "I have been up the country for a few days, and arrived back only this evening, so I have not seen him for over a week. Why do you ask?"

The detective did not answer, but stood looking at the young man before him in a thoughtful manner.

"I hope," said Mr. Moreland, nonchalantly, "I hope you will know me again, my friend, but I didn't know Whyte had started a lunatic asylum during my absence. Who are you?"

Mr. Gorby came forward and stood under the gas light.

"My name is Gorby, sir, and I am a detective," he said quietly.

"Ah! indeed," said Moreland, coolly looking him up and down. "What has Whyte been doing; running away with someone's wife, eh? I know he has little weaknesses of that sort."

Gorby shook his head.

"Do you know where Mr. Whyte is to be found?" he asked, cautiously. Moreland laughed.

"Not I, my friend," said he, lightly. "I presume he is somewhere about here, as these are his head-quarters. What has he been doing? Nothing that can surprise me, I assure you—he was always an erratic individual, and—"

"He paid reg'ler," interrupted Mrs. Hableton, pursing up her lips.

"A most enviable reputation to possess," answered the other with a sneer, "and one I'm afraid I'll never enjoy. But why all this questioning about Whyte? What's the matter with him?"

"He's dead!" said Gorby, abruptly.

All Moreland's nonchalance vanished on hearing this, and he started up from his chair.

"Dead," he repeated mechanically. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that Mr. Oliver Whyte was murdered in a hansom cab." Moreland stared at the detective in a puzzled sort of way, and passed his hand across his forehead.

"Excuse me, my head is in a whirl," he said, as he sat down again.

"Whyte murdered! He was all right when I left him nearly two weeks ago."

"Haven't you seen the papers?" asked Gorby.

"Not for the last two weeks," replied Moreland. "I have been up country, and it was only on arriving back in town tonight that I heard about the murder at all, as my landlady gave me a garbled account of it, but I never for a moment connected it with Whyte, and I came down here to see

him, as I had agreed to do when I left. Poor fellow! poor fellow! poor fellow!" and much overcome, he buried his face in his hands.

Mr. Gorby was touched by his evident distress, and even Mrs. Hableton permitted a small tear to roll down one hard cheek as a tribute of sorrow and sympathy. Presently Moreland raised his head, and spoke to Gorby in a husky tone.

"Tell me all about it," he said, leaning his cheek on his hand. "Everything you know."

He placed his elbows on the table, and buried his face in his hands again, while the detective sat down and related all that he knew about Whyte's murder. When it was done he lifted up his head, and looked sadly at the detective.

"If I had been in town," he said, "this would not have happened, for I was always beside Whyte."

"You knew him very well, sir?" said the detective, in a sympathetic tone.

"We were like brothers," replied Moreland, mournfully.

"I came out from England in the same steamer with him, and used to visit him constantly here."

Mr. Hableton nodded her head to imply that such was the case.

"In fact," said Mr. Moreland, after a moment's thought, "I believe I was with him on the night he was murdered."

Mrs. Hableton gave a slight scream, and threw her apron over her face, but the detective sat unmoved, though Moreland's last remark had startled him considerably.

"What's the matter?" said Moreland, turning to Mrs. Hableton.

"Don't be afraid; I didn't kill him—no—but I met him last Thursday week, and I left for the country on Friday morning at half-past six."

"And what time did you meet Whyte on Thursday night?" asked Gorby.

"Let me see," said Moreland, crossing his legs and looking thoughtfully up to the ceiling, "it was about half-past nine o'clock. I was in the Orient Hotel, in Bourke Street. We had a drink together, and then went up the street to an hotel in Russell Street, where we had another. In fact," said Moreland, coolly, "we had several other drinks."

"Brutes!" muttered Mrs. Hableton, below her breath.

"Yes," said Gorby, placidly. "Go on."

"Well of—it's hardly the thing to confess it," said Moreland, looking from one to the other with a pleasant smile, "but in a case like this, I feel it my duty to throw all social scruples aside. We both became very drunk."

"Ah! Whyte was, as we know, drunk when he got into the cab—and you—?"

"I was not quite so bad as Whyte," answered the other. "I had my senses about me. I fancy he left the hotel some minutes before one o'clock on Friday morning."

"And what did you do?"

"I remained in the hotel. He left his overcoat behind him, and I picked it up and followed him shortly afterwards, to return it. I was too drunk to see in which direction he had gone, and stood leaning against the hotel door in Bourke Street with the coat in my hand. Then some one came up, and, snatching the coat from me, made off with it, and the last thing I remember was shouting out: 'Stop, thief!' Then I must have fallen down, for next morning I was in bed with all my clothes on, and they were very muddy. I got up and left town for the country by the six-thirty train, so I knew nothing about the matter until I came back to Melbourne tonight. That's all I know."

"And you had no impression that Whyte was watched that night?"

"No, I had not," answered Moreland, frankly. "He was in pretty good spirits, though he was put out at first."

"What was the cause of his being put out?"

Moreland arose, and going to a side table, brought Whyte's album, which he laid on the table and opened in silence. The contents were very much the same as the photographs in the room, burlesque actresses and ladies of the ballet predominating; but Mr. Moreland turned over the pages till nearly the end, when he stopped at a large cabinet photograph, and pushed the album towards Mr. Gorby.

"That was the cause," he said.

It was the portrait of a charmingly pretty girl, dressed in white, with a sailor hat on her fair hair, and holding a lawn tennis racquet. She was bending half forward, with a winning smile, and in the background bloomed a mass of tropical plants. Mrs. Hableton uttered a cry of surprise at seeing this.

"Why, it's Miss Frettlby," she said. "How did he know her?"

"Knew her father—letter of introduction, and all that sort of thing," said Mr. Moreland, glibly.

"Ah! indeed," said Mr. Gorby, slowly. "So Mr. Whyte knew Mark Frettlby, the millionaire; but how did he obtain a photograph of the daughter?"

"She gave it to him," said Moreland. "The fact is, Whyte was very much in love with Miss Frettlby."

"And she—"

"Was in love with someone else," finished Moreland. "Exactly! Yes, she loved a Mr. Brian Fitzgerald, to whom she is now engaged. He was mad on her; and Whyte and he used to quarrel desperately over the young lady."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Gorby. "And do you know this Mr. Fitzgerald?"

"Oh, dear, no!" answered the other, coolly. "Whyte's friends were not mine. He was a rich young man who had good introductions. I am only a poor devil on the outskirts of society, trying to push my way in the world."

"You are acquainted with his personal appearance, of course?" observed Mr. Gorby.

"Oh, yes, I can describe that," said Moreland. "In fact, he's not at all unlike me, which I take to be rather a compliment, as he is said to be good-looking. He is tall, rather fair, talks in a bored sort of manner, and is altogether what one would call a heavy swell; but you must have seen him," he went on, turning to Mrs. Hableton, "he was here three or four weeks ago, Whyte told me."

"Oh, that was Mr. Fitzgerald, was it?" said Mrs. Hableton, in surprise.

"Yes, he is rather like you; the lady they quarrelled over must have been Miss Frettlby."

"Very likely," said Moreland, rising. "Well, I'm off; here's my address," putting a card in Gorby's, hand. "I'm glad to be of any use to you in this matter, as Whyte was my dearest friend, and I'll do all in my power to help you to find out the murderer."

"I don't think that is a very difficult matter," said Mr. Gorby, slowly.

"Oh, you have your suspicions?" asked Moreland, looking at him.

"I have."

"Then who do you think murdered Whyte?"

Mr. Gorby paused a moment, and then said deliberately: "I have an idea—but I am not certain—when I am certain, I'll speak."

"You think Fitzgerald killed my friend," said Moreland. "I see it in your face."

Mr. Gorby smiled. "Perhaps," he said, ambiguously. "Wait till I'm certain."

7

The Wool King

The old Greek legend of Midas turning everything he touched into gold, is truer than most people imagine. Mediaeval superstition changed the human being who possessed such a power into the philosopher's stone—the stone which so many alchemists sought in the dark ages. But we of the nineteenth century have given back into human hands this power of transformation.

But we do not ascribe it either to Greek deity, or to superstition; we call it luck. And he who possesses luck should be happy notwithstanding the proverb which hints the contrary. Luck means more than riches—it means happiness in most of those things, which the fortunate possessor of it may choose to touch. Should he speculate, he is successful; if he marry, his wife will surely prove everything to be desired; should he aspire to a position, social or political, he not only attains it, but does so with comparative ease. Worldly wealth, domestic happiness, high position, and complete success—all these things belong to the man who has luck.

Mark Frettlby was one of these fortunate individuals, and his luck was proverbial throughout Australia. If there was any speculation for which Mark Frettlby went in, other men would surely follow, and in every case the result turned out as well, and in many cases even better than they expected. He had come out in the early days of the colony with comparatively little money, but his great perseverance and never-failing luck had soon changed his hundreds into thousands, and now at the age of fifty-five he did not himself know the extent of his income. He had large stations scattered all over the Colony of Victoria, which brought him in a splendid income; a charming country house, where at certain seasons of the year he dispensed hospitality to his friends; and a magnificent

town house down in St. Kilda, which would have been not unworthy of Park Lane.

Nor were his domestic relations less happy—he had a charming wife, who was one of the best known and most popular ladies of Melbourne, and an equally charming daughter, who, being both pretty and an heirless, naturally attracted crowds of suitors. But Madge Frettlby was capricious, and refused innumerable offers. Being an extremely independent young person, with a mind of her own, she decided to remain single, as she had not yet seen anyone she could love, and with her mother continued to dispense the hospitality of the mansion at St. Kilda.

But the fairy prince comes at length to every woman, and in this instance he came at his appointed time, in the person of one Brian Fitzgerald, a tall, handsome, fair-haired young man hailing from Ireland.

He had left behind him in the old country a ruined castle and a few acres of barren land, inhabited by discontented tenants, who refused to pay the rent, and talked darkly about the Land League and other agreeable things. Under these circumstances, with no rent coming in, and no prospect of doing anything in the future, Brian had left the castle of his forefathers to the rats and the family Banshee, and had come out to Australia to make his fortune.

He brought letters of introduction to Mark Frettlby, and that gentleman, taking a fancy to him, assisted him by every means in his power. Under Frettlby's advice Brian bought a station, and, to his astonishment, in a few years he found himself growing rich. The Fitzgeralds had always been more famous for spending than for saving, and it was an agreeable surprise to their latest representative to find the money rolling in instead of out. He began to indulge in castles in the air concerning that other castle in Ireland, with the barren acres and discontented tenants. In his mind's-eye he saw the old place rise up in all its pristine splendour from out its ruins; he saw the barren acres well cultivated, and the tenants happy and content—he was rather doubtful on this latter point, but, with the rash confidence of eight and twenty, determined to do his best to perform even the impossible.

Having built and furnished his castle in the air, Brian naturally thought of giving it a mistress, and this time actual appearance took the place of vision. He fell in love with Madge Frettlby, and having decided in his own mind that she and none other was fitted to grace the visionary halls of his renovated castle, he watched his opportunity, and declared himself. She, woman-like, coquetted with him for some time, but at last, unable to withstand the impetuosity of her Irish lover, confessed in a low

voice, with a pretty smile on her face, that she could not live without him. Whereupon—well—lovers being of a conservative turn of mind, and accustomed to observe the traditional forms of wooing, the result can easily be guessed. Brian hunted all over the jewellers' shops in Melbourne with lover-like assiduity, and having obtained a ring wherein were set turquoise stones as blue as his own eyes, he placed it on her slender finger, and at last felt that his engagement was an accomplished fact.

He next proceeded to interview the father, and had just screwed up his courage to the awful ordeal, when something occurred which postponed the interview indefinitely. Mrs. Frettlby was out driving, and the horses took fright and bolted. The coachman and groom both escaped unhurt, but Mrs. Frettlby was thrown out and killed instantly.

This was the first really great trouble which had fallen on Mark Frettlby, and he seemed stunned by it. Shutting himself up in his room he refused to see anyone, even his daughter, and appeared at the funeral with a white and haggard face, which shocked everyone. When everything was over, and the body of the late Mrs. Frettlby was consigned to the earth, with all the pomp and ceremony which money could give, the bereaved husband rode home, and resumed his old life. But he was never the same again. His face, which had always been so genial and so bright, became stern and sad. He seldom smiled, and when he did, it was a faint wintry smile, which seemed mechanical. His whole interest in life was centred in his daughter. She became the sole mistress of the St. Kilda mansion, and her father idolised her. She was apparently the one thing left to him which gave him a pleasure in existence. In truth, had it not been for her bright presence, Mark Frettlby would fain have been lying beside his dead wife in the quiet graveyard.

After a time Brian again resolved to ask Mr. Frettlby for the hand of his daughter. But for the second time fate interposed. A rival suitor made his appearance, and Brian's hot Irish temper rose in anger at him.

Mr. Oliver Whyte had come out from England a few months previously, bringing with him a letter of introduction to Mr. Frettlby, who received him hospitably, as was his custom. Taking advantage of this, Whyte lost no time in making himself perfectly at home in the St. Kilda mansion.

From the outset Brian took a dislike to the new-comer. He was a student of Lavater, and prided himself on his perspicuity in reading character. His opinion of Whyte was anything but flattering to that gentleman; while Madge shared his repulsion towards the new-comer.

On his part Mr. Whyte was nothing if not diplomatic. He affected not

to notice the coldness of Madge's reception of him. On the contrary he began to pay her the most marked attentions, much to Brian's disgust. At length he asked her to be his wife, and notwithstanding her prompt refusal, spoke to her father on the subject. Much to the astonishment of his daughter, Mr. Frettlby not only consented to Whyte paying his addresses to Madge, but gave that young lady to understand that he wished her to consider his proposals favourably.

In spite of all Madge could say, he refused to alter his decision, and Whyte, feeling himself safe, began to treat Brian with an insolence which was highly galling to Fitzgerald's proud nature. He had called on Whyte at his lodgings, and after a violent quarrel he had left the house vowing to kill him, should he marry Madge Frettlby.

The same night Fitzgerald had an interview with Mr. Frettlby. He confessed that he loved Madge, and that his love was returned. So, when Madge added her entreaties to Brian's, Mr. Frettlby found himself unable to withstand the combined forces, and gave his consent to their engagement.

Whyte was absent in the country for the next few days after his stormy interview with Brian, and it was only on his return that he learnt that Madge was engaged to his rival. He saw Mr. Frettlby, and having learnt from his own lips that such was the case, he left the house at once, and swore that he would never enter it again. He little knew how prophetic were his words, for on that same night he met his death in the hansom cab. He had passed out of the life of both the lovers, and they, glad that he troubled them no more, never suspected for a moment that the body of the unknown man found in Royston's cab was that of Oliver Whyte.

About two weeks after Whyte's disappearance Mr. Frettlby gave a dinner party in honour of his daughter's birthday. It was a delightful evening, and the wide French windows which led on to the verandah were open, letting in a gentle breeze from the ocean. Outside there was a kind of screen of tropical plants, and through the tangle of the boughs the guests, seated at the table, could just see the waters of the bay glittering in the pale moonlight. Brian was seated opposite to Madge, and every now and then he caught a glimpse of her bright face from behind the fruit and flowers, which stood in the centre of the table. Mark Frettlby was at the head of the table, and appeared in very good spirits. His stern features were somewhat relaxed, and he drank more wine than usual.

The soup had just been removed when some one, who was late, entered with apologies and took his seat. Some one in this case was Mr. Felix Rolleston, one of the best known young men in Melbourne. He had an

income of his own, scribbled a little for the papers, was to be seen at every house of any pretensions in Melbourne, and was always bright, happy, and full of news. For details of any scandal you were safe in applying to Felix Rolleston. He knew all that was going on, both at home and abroad. And his knowledge, if not very accurate, was at least extensive, while his conversation was piquant, and at times witty. Calton, one of the leading lawyers of the city, remarked that "Rolleston put him in mind of what Beaconsfield said of one of the personages in *Lothair*, 'He wasn't an intellectual Croesus, but his pockets were always full of sixpences.'" Be it said in his favour that Felix was free with his sixpences.

The conversation, which had shown signs of languishing before his arrival, now brightened up.

"So awfully sorry, don't you know," said Felix, as he slipped into a seat by Madge; "but a fellow like me has got to be careful of his time—so many calls on it."

"So many calls in it, you mean," retorted Madge, with a disbelieving smile. "Confess, now, you have been paying a round of visits."

"Well, yes," assented Mr. Rolleston; "that's the disadvantage of having a large circle of acquaintances. They give you weak tea and thin bread and butter, whereas—"

"You would rather have something else," finished Brian.

There was a laugh at this, but Mr. Rolleston disdained to notice the interruption.

"The only advantage of five o'clock tea," he went on, "is, that it brings people together, and one hears what's going on."

"Ah, yes, Rolleston," said Mr. Frettlby, who was looking at him with an amused smile. "What news have you?"

"Good news, bad news, and such news as you have never heard of," quoted Rolleston gravely. "Yes, I have a bit of news—haven't you heard it?"

Rolleston felt he held sensation in his hands. There was nothing he liked better.

"Well, do you know," he said, gravely fixing in his eyeglass, "they have found out the name of the fellow who was murdered in the hansom cab."

"Never!" cried every one eagerly.

"Yes," went on Rolleston, "and what's more, you all know him."

"It's never Whyte?" said Brian, in a horrified tone.

"Hang it, how did you know?" said Rolleston, rather annoyed at being forestalled. "Why, I just heard it at the St. Kilda station."

"Oh, easily enough," said Brian, rather confused. "I used to meet Whyte constantly, and as I have not seen him for the last two weeks, I thought he might be the victim."

"How did they find out?" asked Mr. Frettlby, idly toying with his wine-glass.

"Oh, one of those detective fellows, you know," answered Felix. "They know everything."

"I'm sorry to hear it," said Frettlby, referring to the fact that Whyte was murdered. "He had a letter of introduction to me, and seemed a clever, pushing young fellow."

"A confounded cad," muttered Felix, under his breath; and Brian, who overheard him, seemed inclined to assent. For the rest of the meal nothing was talked about but the murder, and the mystery in which it was shrouded. When the ladies retired they chatted about it in the drawingroom, but finally dropped it for more agreeable subjects. The men, however, when the cloth was removed, filled their glasses, and continued the discussion with unabated vigour. Brian alone did not take part in the conversation. He sat moodily staring at his untasted wine, wrapped in a brown study.

"What I can't make out," observed Rolleston, who was amusing himself with cracking nuts, "is why they did not find out who he was before."

"That is not hard to answer," said Frettlby, filling his—glass. "He was comparatively little known here, as he had been out from England such a short time, and I fancy that this was the only house at which he visited."

"And look here, Rolleston," said Calton, who was sitting near him, "if you were to find a man dead in a hansom cab, dressed in evening clothes—which nine men out of ten are in the habit of wearing in the evening—no cards in his pockets, and no name on his linen, I rather think you would find it hard to discover who he was. I consider it reflects great credit on the police for finding out so quickly."

"Puts one in mind of 'The Leavenworth Case,' and all that sort of thing," said Felix, whose reading was of the lightest description. "Awfully exciting, like putting a Chinese puzzle together. Gad, I wouldn't mind being a detective myself."

"I'm afraid if that were the case," said Mr. Frettlby, with an amused smile, "criminals would be pretty safe."

"Oh, I don't know so much about that," answered Felix, shrewdly; "some fellows are like trifle at a party, froth on top, but something better underneath."

"What a greedy simile," said Calton, sipping his wine; "but I'm afraid the police will have a more difficult task in discovering the man who committed the crime. In my opinion he's a deuced clever fellow."

"Then you don't think he will be discovered?" asked Brian, rousing himself out of his brown study.

"Well, I don't go as far as that," rejoined Calton; "but he has certainly left no trace behind him, and even the Red Indian, in whom instinct for tracking is so highly developed, needs some sort of a trail to enable him to find out his enemies. Depend upon it," went on Calton, warming to his subject, "the man who murdered Whyte is no ordinary criminal; the place he chose for the committal of the crime was such a safe one."

"Do you think so?" said Rolleston. "Why, I should think that a hansom cab in a public street would be very unsafe."

"It is that very fact that makes it safer," replied Mr. Calton, epigrammatically. "You read De Quincey's account of the Marr murders in London, and you will see that the more public the place the less risk there is of detection. There was nothing about the gentleman in the light coat who murdered Whyte to excite Royston's suspicions. He entered the cab with Whyte; no noise or anything likely to attract attention was heard, and then he alighted. Naturally enough, Royston drove to St. Kilda, and never suspected Whyte was dead till he looked inside and touched him. As to the man in the light coat, he doesn't live in Powlett Street—no—nor in East Melbourne either."

"Why not?" asked Frettlby.

"Because he wouldn't have been such a fool as to leave a trail to his own door; he did what the fox often does—he doubled. My opinion is that he went either right through East Melbourne to Fitzroy, or he walked back through the Fitzroy Gardens into town. There was no one about at that time of the morning, and he could return to his lodgings, hotel, or wherever he is staying, with impunity. Of course, this is a theory that may be wrong; but from what insight into human nature my profession has given me, I think that my idea is a correct one."

All present agreed with Mr. Calton's idea, as it really did seem the most natural thing that would be done by a man desirous of escaping detection.

“Tell you what,” said Felix to Brian, as they were on their way to the drawing-room, “if the fellow that committed the crime, is found out, by gad, he ought to get Calton to defend him.”

8

Brian Takes a Walk and a Drive

When the gentlemen entered the drawing-room a young lady was engaged in playing one of those detestable pieces of the *morceau de salon* order, in which an unoffending air is taken, and variations embroidered on it, till it becomes a perfect agony to distinguish the tune, amid the perpetual rattle of quavers and demi-semi-quavers. The melody in this case was “Over the Garden Wall,” with variations by Signor Thumpanini, and the young lady who played it was a pupil of that celebrated Italian musician. When the male portion of the guests entered, the air was being played in the bass with a great deal of power (that is, the loud pedal was down), and with a perpetual rattle of treble notes, trying with all their shrill might to drown the tune.

“Gad! it’s getting over the garden wall in a hailstorm,” said Felix, as he strolled over to the piano, for he saw that the musician was Dora Featherweight, an heiress to whom he was then paying attention, in the hope that she might be induced to take the name of Rolleston. So, when the fair Dora had paralysed her audience with one final bang and rattle, as if the gentleman going over the garden wall had tumbled into the cucumber-frame, Felix was loud in his expressions of delight.

“Such power, you know, Miss Featherweight,” he said, sinking into a chair, and mentally wondering if any of the piano strings had given way at that last crash. “You put your heart into it—and all your muscle, too, by gad,” he added mentally.

“It’s nothing but practice,” answered Miss Featherweight, with a modest blush. “I am at the piano four hours every day.”

“Good heavens!” thought Felix, “what a time the family must have of it.” But he kept this remark to himself, and, screwing his eye-glass into his left organ of vision, merely ejaculated, “Lucky piano.”

Miss Featherweight, not being able to think of any answer to this, looked down and blushed, while the ingenuous Felix looked up and sighed. Madge and Brian were in a corner of the room talking over Whyte's death.

"I never liked him," she said, "but it is horrible to think of him dying like that."

"I don't know," answered Brian, gloomily; "from all I can hear dying by chloroform is a very easy death."

"Death can never be easy," replied Madge, "especially to a young man so full of health and spirits as Mr. Whyte was."

"I believe you are sorry he's dead," said Brian, jealously.

"Aren't you?" she asked in some surprise.

"*De mortuis nil nisi bonum*," quoted Fitzgerald. "But as I detested him when alive, you can't expect me to regret his end."

Madge did not answer him, but glanced quickly at his face, and for the first time it struck her that he looked ill.

"What is the matter with you, dear?" she asked, placing her hand on his arm. "You are not looking well."

"Nothing—nothing," he answered hurriedly. "I've been a little worried about business lately—but come," he said, rising, "let us go outside, for I see your father has got that girl with the steam-whistle voice to sing."

The girl with the steam-whistle voice was Julia Featherweight, the sister of Rolleston's innamorata, and Madge stifled a laugh as she went on to the verandah with Fitzgerald.

"What a shame of you," she said, bursting into a laugh when they were safely outside; "she's been taught by the best masters."

"How I pity them," retorted Brian, grimly, as Julia wailed out, "Meet me once again," with an ear-piercing shrillness.

"I'd much rather listen to our ancestral Banshee, and as to meeting her again, one interview would be more than enough." Madge did not answer, but leaning lightly over the high rail of the verandah looked out into the beautiful moonlit night. There were a number of people passing along the Esplanade, some of whom stopped and listened to Julia's shrill notes. One man in particular seemed to have a taste for music, for he persistently stared over the fence at the house. Brian and Madge talked of divers subjects, but every time Madge looked up she saw the man watching the house.

"What does that man want, Brian?" she asked.

"What man?" asked Brian, starting. "Oh," he went on indifferently, as the watcher moved away from the gate and crossed the road on to the footpath, "he's taken up with the music, I suppose; that's all."

Madge said nothing, but she could not help thinking there was more in it than the music. Presently Julia ceased, and she proposed to go in.

"Why?" asked Brian, who was lying back in a comfortable seat, smoking a cigarette. "It's nice enough here."

"I must attend to my guests," she answered, rising. "You stop here and finish your cigarette," and with a gay laugh she flitted into the house.

Brian sat and smoked, staring out into the moonlight the while. Yes, the man was certainly watching the house, for he sat on one of the seats, and kept his eyes fixed on the brilliantly-lighted windows. Brian threw away his cigarette and shivered slightly.

"Could anyone have seen me?" he muttered, rising uneasily.

"Pshaw! of course not; and the cabman would never recognise me again. Curse Whyte, I wish I'd never set eyes upon him."

He gave one glance at the dark figure on the seat, and then, with a shiver, passed into the warm, well-lighted room. He did not feel easy in his mind, and he would have felt still less so had he known that the man on the seat was one of the cleverest of the Melbourne detectives.

Mr. Gorby had been watching the Frettlby mansion the whole evening, and was getting rather annoyed. Moreland did not know where Fitzgerald lived, and as that was one of the primary facts the detective wished to ascertain, he determined to watch Brian's movements, and to trace him home.

"If he's the lover of that pretty girl, I'll wait till he leaves the house," argued Mr. Gorby to himself, as he took his seat on the Esplanade. "He won't long remain away from her, and once he leaves the house it will be no difficult matter to find out where he lives."

When Brian made his appearance early in the evening, on his way to Mark Frettlby's mansion, he wore evening dress, a light overcoat, and a soft hat.

"Well, I'm dashed!" ejaculated Mr. Gorby, when he saw Fitzgerald disappear; "if he isn't a fool I don't know who is, to go about in the very clothes he wore when he polished Whyte off, and think he won't be recognised. Melbourne ain't Paris or London, that he can afford to be so careless, and when I put the darbies on him he will be astonished. Ah, well," he went on, lighting his pipe and taking a seat on the Esplanade, "I suppose I'll have to wait here till he comes out."

Mr. Gorby's patience was pretty severely tried, for hour after hour passed, and no one appeared. He smoked several pipes, and watched the people strolling along in the soft silver moonlight. A bevy of girls passed by with their arms round one another's waists. Then a young man and woman, evidently lovers, came walking along. They sat down by Mr. Gorby and looked hard at him, to hint that he need not stay. But the detective took no heed of them, and kept his eyes steadily upon the great house opposite. Finally, the lovers took themselves off with a very bad grace.

Then Mr. Gorby saw Madge and Brian come out on to the verandah, and heard in the stillness of the night, a sound weird and unearthly. It was Miss Featherweight singing. He saw Madge go in, shortly followed by Brian. The latter turned and stared at him for a moment.

"Ah," said Gorby to himself as he re-lit his pipe; "your conscience is a-smiting you, is it? Wait a bit, my boy, till I have you in gaol."

Then the guests came out of the house, and their black figures disappeared one by one from the moonlight as they shook hands and said good-night.

Shortly after Brian came down the path with Frettlby at his side, and Madge hanging on her father's arm. Frettlby opened the gate and held out his hand.

"Good-night, Fitzgerald," he said, in a hearty voice; "come soon again."

"Good-night, Brian, dearest," said Madge, kissing him, "and don't forget to-morrow."

Then father and daughter closed the gate, leaving Brian outside, and walked back to the house.

"Ah!" said Mr. Gorby to himself, "if you only knew what I know, you wouldn't be so precious kind to him."

Brian strolled along the Esplanade, and crossing over, passed by Gorby and walked on till he was opposite the Esplanade Hotel. Then he leaned his arms on the fence, and, taking off his hat, enjoyed the calm beauty of the hour.

"What a good-looking fellow," murmured Mr. Gorby, in a regretful tone.

"I can hardly believe it of him, but the proofs are too clear."

The night was perfectly still. Not a breath of wind stirred, for what breeze there had been had long since died away. But Brian could see the white wavelets breaking lightly on the sands. The long narrow pier ran out like a black thread into the sheet of gleaming silver, and away in the distance the line of the Williamstown lights sparkled like some fairy illumination.

Over all this placid scene of land and water was a sky such as Dore loved—a great heavy mass of rain-clouds heaped one on top of the other, as the rocks the Titans piled to reach Olympus. Then a break in the woof, and a bit of dark blue sky could be seen glittering with stars, in the midst of which sailed the serene moon, shedding down her light on the cloudland beneath, giving to it all, one silver lining.

Somewhat to the annoyance of Mr. Gorby, who had no eye for the picturesque, Brian gazed at the sky for several minutes, admiring the wonderful beauty of its broken masses of light and shade. At length he lit a cigarette and walked down the steps on to the pier.

“Oh, suicide, is it?” muttered Mr. Gorby. “Not if I can help it.” And he lit his pipe and followed him.

He found Brian leaning over the parapet at the end of the pier, looking at the glittering waters beneath, which kept rising and falling in a dreamy rhythm, that soothed and charmed the ear. “Poor girl! poor girl!” the detective heard him mutter as he came up. “If she only knew all! If she—”

At this moment he heard the approaching step, and turned round sharply. The detective saw that his face was ghastly pale in the moonlight, and his brows wrinkled in anger.

“What the devil do you want?” he burst out, as Gorby paused.

“What do you mean by following me all over the place?”

“Saw me, watching the house,” said Gorby to himself. “I’m not following you, sir,” he said aloud. “I suppose the pier ain’t private property. I only came down here for a breath of fresh air.”

Fitzgerald did not answer, but turned sharply on his heel, and walked quickly up the pier, leaving Gorby staring after him.

“He’s getting frightened,” soliloquised the detective to himself, as he strolled easily along, keeping the black figure in front well in view. “I’ll have to keep a sharp eye on him or he’ll be clearing out of Victoria.”

Brian walked rapidly up to the St. Kilda station, for on looking at his watch he found that he would just have time to catch the last train. He arrived a few minutes before it started, so, getting into the smoking carriage at the near end of the platform, he lit a cigarette, and, leaning back in his seat, watched the late comers hurrying into the station. Just as the last bell rang he saw a man rush along, to catch the train. It was the same man who had been watching him the whole evening, and Brian felt confident that he was being followed. He comforted himself, however, with the thought that this pertinacious follower might lose the train, and, being in the last carriage himself, he kept a look out

along the platform, expecting to see his friend of the Esplanade standing disappointed on it. There was no appearance of him, so Brian, sinking back into his seat, lamented his ill-luck in not shaking off this man who kept him under such strict surveillance.

"Confound him!" he muttered softly. "I expect he will follow me to East Melbourne, and find out where I live, but he shan't if I can help it."

There was no one but himself in the carriage, and he felt relieved at this because he was in no humour to hear chatter.

"Murdered in a cab," he said, lighting a fresh cigarette, and blowing a cloud of smoke. "A romance in real life, which beats Miss Braddon hollow. There is one thing certain, he won't come between Madge and me again. Poor Madge!" with an impatient sigh. "If she only knew all, there would not be much chance of our marriage; but she can never find out, and I don't suppose anyone else will."

Here a thought suddenly struck him, and rising out of his seat, he walked to the other end of the carriage, and threw himself on the cushions, as if desirous to escape from himself.

"What grounds can that man have for suspecting me?" he said aloud. "No one knows I was with Whyte on that night, and the police can't possibly bring forward any evidence to show that I was. Pshaw!" he went on, impatiently buttoning up his coat. "I am like a child, afraid of my shadow—the fellow on the pier is only some one out for a breath of fresh air, as he said himself—I am quite safe."

At the same time, he felt by no means easy in his mind, and as he stepped out on to the platform at the Melbourne station he looked round apprehensively, as if he half expected to feel the detective's hand upon his shoulder. But he saw no one at all like the man he had met on the St. Kilda pier, and with a sigh of relief he left the station. Mr. Gorby, however, was not far away. He was following at a safe distance. Brian walked slowly along Flinders Street apparently deep in thought. He turned up Russell Street and did not stop until he found himself close to the Burke and Wills' monument—the exact spot where the cab had stopped on the night of Whyte's murder.

"Ah!" said the detective to himself, as he stood in the shadow on the opposite side of the street. "You're going to have a look at it, are you?—I wouldn't, if I were you—it's dangerous."

Fitzgerald stood for a few minutes at the corner, and then walked up Collins Street. When he got to the cab-stand, opposite the Melbourne Club, still suspecting he was followed, he hailed a hansom, and drove away in the direction of Spring Street. Gorby was rather perplexed at

this sudden move, but without delay, he hailed another cab, and told the driver to follow the first till it stopped.

"Two can play at that game," he said, settling himself back in the cab, "and I'll get the better of you, clever as you are—and you are clever," he went on in a tone of admiration, as he looked round the luxurious hansom, "to choose such a convenient place for a murder; no disturbance and plenty of time for escape after you had finished; it's a pleasure going after a chap like you, instead of after men who tumble down like ripe fruit, and ain't got any brains to keep their crime quiet."

While the detective thus soliloquised, his cab, following on the trail of the other, had turned down Spring Street, and was being driven rapidly along the Wellington Parade, in the direction of East Melbourne. It then turned up Powlett Street, at which Mr. Gorby was glad.

"Ain't so clever as I thought," he said to himself. "Shows his nest right off, without any attempt to hide it."

The detective, however, had reckoned without his host, for the cab in front kept driving on, through an interminable maze of streets, until it seemed as though Brian were determined to drive the whole night.

"Look 'ere, sir!" cried Gorby's cabman, looking through his trap-door in the roof of the hansom, "'ow long's this 'ere game agoin' to larst? My 'oss is knocked up, 'e is, and 'is blessed old legs is agivin' way under 'im!"

"Go on! go on!" answered the detective, impatiently; "I'll pay you well."

The cabman's spirits were raised by this, and by dint of coaxing and a liberal use of the whip, he managed to get his jaded horse up to a pretty good pace. They were in Fitzroy by this time, and both cabs turned out of Gertrude Street into Nicholson Street; thence passed on to Evelyn Street and along Spring Street, until Brian's cab stopped at the corner of Collins Street, and Gorby saw him alight and dismiss his cab-man. He then walked down the street and disappeared into the Treasury Gardens.

"Confound it," said the detective, as he got out and paid his fare, which was by no means a light one, but over which he had no time to argue, "we've come in a circle, and I do believe he lives in Powlett Street after all."

He went into the gardens, and saw Brian some distance ahead of him, walking rapidly. It was bright moonlight, and he could easily distinguish Fitzgerald by his light coat.

As he went along that noble avenue with its elms in their winter dress, the moon shining through their branches wrought a fantastic tracery,

on the smooth asphalte. And on either side Gorby could see the dim white forms of the old Greek gods and goddesses—Venus Victrix, with the apple in her hand (which Mr. Gorby, in his happy ignorance of heathen mythology, took for Eve offering Adam the forbidden fruit); Diana, with the hound at her feet, and Bacchus and Ariadne (which the detective imagined were the Babes in the Wood). He knew that each of the statues had queer names, but thought they were merely allegorical. Passing over the bridge, with the water rippling quietly underneath, Brian went up the smooth yellow path to where the statue of Hebe, holding the cup, seems instinct with life; and turning down the path to the right, he left the gardens by the end gate, near which stands the statue of the Dancing Faun, with the great bush of scarlet geranium burning like an altar before it. Then he went along the Wellington Parade, and turned up Powlett Street, where he stopped at a house near Cairns' Memorial Church, much to Mr. Gorby's relief, who, being like Hamlet, "fat and scant of breath," found himself rather exhausted. He kept well in the shadow, however, and saw Fitzgerald give one final look round before he disappeared into the house. Then Mr. Gorby, like the Robber Captain in Ali Baba, took careful stock of the house, and fixed its locality and appearance well in his mind, as he intended to call at it on the morrow.

"What I'm going to do," he said, as he walked slowly back to Melbourne, "is to see his landlady when he's out, and find out what time he came in on the night of the murder. If it fits into the time he got out of Rankin's cab, I'll get out a warrant, and arrest him straight off."

9

Mr. Gorby is Satisfied at Last

In spite of his long walk, and still longer drive, Brian did not sleep well that night. He kept tossing and turning, or lying on his back, wide awake, looking into the darkness and thinking of Whyte. Towards dawn, when the first faint glimmer of morning came through the venetian blinds, he fell into a sort of uneasy doze, haunted by horrible dreams. He thought he was driving in a hansom, when suddenly he found Whyte by his side, clad in white cerements, grinning and gibbering at him with ghastly merriment. Then the cab went over a precipice, and he fell from a great height, down, down, with the mocking laughter still sounding in his ears, until he woke with a loud cry, and found it was broad daylight, and that drops of perspiration were standing on his brow. It was no use trying to sleep any longer, so, with a weary sigh, he arose and went to his tub, feeling jaded and worn out by worry and want of sleep. His bath did him some good. The cold water brightened him up and pulled him together. Still he could not help giving a start of surprise when he saw his face reflected in the mirror, old and haggard-looking, with dark circles round the eyes.

"A pleasant life I'll have of it if this sort of thing goes on," he said, bitterly, "I wish I had never seen, or heard of Whyte."

He dressed himself carefully. He was not a man to neglect his toilet, however worried and out of sorts he might happen to feel. Yet, notwithstanding all his efforts the change in his appearance did not escape the eye of his landlady. She was a small, dried-up little woman, with a wrinkled yellowish face. She seemed parched up and brittle. Whenever she moved she crackled, and one went in constant dread of seeing a wizen-looking limb break off short like the branch of some dead tree. When she spoke it was in a voice hard and shrill, not unlike the chirp

of a cricket. When—as was frequently the case—she clothed her attenuated form in a faded brown silk gown, her resemblance to that lively insect was remarkable.

And, as on this morning she crackled into Brian's sitting-room with the ARGUS and his coffee, a look of dismay at his altered appearance, came over her stony little countenance.

"Dear me, sir," she chirped out in her shrill voice, as she placed her burden on the table, "are you took bad?"

Brian shook his head.

"Want of sleep, that's all, Mrs. Sampson," he answered, unfolding the Argus.

"Ah! that's because ye ain't got enough blood in yer 'ead," said Mrs. Sampson, wisely, for she had her own ideas on the subject of health. "If you ain't got blood you ain't got sleep."

Brian looked at her as she said this, for there seemed such an obvious want of blood in her veins that he wondered if she had ever slept in all her life.

"There was my father's brother, which, of course, makes 'im my uncle," went on the landlady, pouring out a cup of coffee for Brian, "an' the blood 'e 'ad was somethin' astoundin', which it made 'im sleep that long as they 'ad to draw pints from 'im afore 'e'd wake in the mornin'."

Brian had the ARGUS before his face, and under its friendly cover he laughed quietly to himself.

"His blood poured out like a river," went on the landlady, still drawing from the rich stores of her imagination, "and the doctor was struck dumb with astonishment at seein' the Nigagerer which burst from 'im—but I'm not so full-blooded myself."

Fitzgerald again stifled a laugh, and wondered that Mrs. Sampson was not afraid of being treated as were Ananias and Sapphira. However, he said nothing, but merely intimated that if she would leave the room he would take his breakfast.

"An' if you wants anythin' else, Mr. Fitzgerald," she said, going to the door, "you knows your way to the bell as easily as I do to the kitching," and, with a final chirrup, she crackled out of the room.

As soon as the door was closed, Brian put down his paper and roared, in spite of his worries. He had that extraordinary vivacious Irish temperament, which enables a man to put all trouble behind his back, and thoroughly enjoy the present. His landlady, with her Arabian Night-like romances, was a source of great amusement to him, and he felt

considerably cheered by the odd turn her humour had taken this morning. After a time, however, his laughter ceased, and his troubles came crowding on him again. He drank his coffee, but pushed away the food which was before him; and looked through the *Argus*, for the latest report about the murder case. What he read made his cheek turn a shade paler than before. He could feel his heart thumping wildly.

"They've found a clue, have they?" he muttered, rising and pacing restlessly up and down. "I wonder what it can be? I threw that man off the scent last night, but if he suspects me, there will be no difficulty in his finding out where I live. Bah! What nonsense I am talking. I am the victim of my own morbid imagination. There is nothing to connect me with the crime, so I need not be afraid of my shadow. I've a good mind to leave town for a time, but if I am suspected that would excite suspicion. Oh, Madge! my darling," he cried passionately, "if you only knew what I suffer, I know that you would pity me—but you must never know the truth—Never! Never!" and sinking into a chair by the window, he covered his face with his hands. After remaining in this position for some minutes, occupied with his own gloomy thoughts, he arose and rang the bell. A faint crackle in the distance announced that Mrs. Sampson had heard it, and she soon came into the room, looking more like a cricket than ever. Brian had gone into his bedroom, and called out to her from there—

"I am going down to St. Kilda, Mrs. Sampson," he said, "and probably I shall not be back all day."

"Which I 'opes it 'ull do you good," she answered, "for you've eaten nothin', an' the sea breezes is miraculous for makin' you take to your victuals. My mother's brother, bein' a sailor, an' wonderful for 'is stomach, which, when 'e 'ad done a meal, the table looked as if a low-cuss had gone over it."

"A what?" asked Fitzgerald, buttoning his gloves.

"A low-cuss!" replied the landlady, in surprise at his ignorance, "as I've read in 'Oly Writ, as 'ow John the Baptist was partial to 'em, not that I think they'd be very fillin', tho', to be sure, 'e 'ad a sweet tooth, and ate 'oney with 'em."

"Oh! you mean locusts," said Brian now enlightened.

"An' what else?" asked Mrs. Sampson, indignantly; "which, tho' not bein' a scholar'd, I speaks English, I 'opes, my mother's second cousin 'avin' 'ad first prize at a spellin' bee, tho' 'e died early through brain fever, 'avin' crowded 'is 'ead over much with the dictionary."

"Dear me!" answered Brian, mechanically. "How unfortunate!" He was not listening to Mrs. Sampson's remarks. He suddenly remembered an arrangement which Madge had made, and which up till now had slipped his memory.

"Mrs. Sampson," he said, turning round at the door, "I am going to bring Mr. Frettlby and his daughter to have a cup of afternoon tea here, so you might have some ready."

"You 'ave only to ask and to 'ave," answered Mrs. Sampson, hospitably, with a gratified crackle of all her joints. "I'll make the tea, sir, an' also some of my own perticler cakes, bein' a special kind I 'ave, which my mother showed me 'ow to make, 'avin' been taught by a lady as she nussed thro' the scarlet fever, tho' bein' of a weak constitootion, she died soon arter, bein' in the 'abit of contractin' any disease she might chance on."

Brian hurried off lest in her Poe-like appreciation of them, Mrs. Sampson should give vent to more charnel-house horrors.

At one period of her life, the little woman had been a nurse, and it was told of her that she had frightened one of her patients into convulsions during the night by narrating to her the history of all the corpses she had laid out. This ghoulish tendency in the end proved fatal to her professional advancement.

As soon as Fitzgerald had gone, she went over to the window and watched him as he walked slowly down the street—a tall, handsome man, of whom any woman would be proud.

"What an awful thing it are to think 'e'll be a corpse some day," she chirped cheerily to herself, "tho' of course bein' a great swell in 'is own place, 'e'll 'ave a nice airy vault, which 'ud be far more comfortable than a close, stuffy grave, even tho' it 'as a tombstone an' vi'lets over it. Ah, now! Who are you, impertinence?" she broke off, as a stout man in a light suit of clothes crossed the road and rang the bell, "a-pullin' at the bell as if it were a pump 'andle."

As the gentleman at the door, who was none other than Mr. Gorby, did not hear her, he of course did not reply, so she hurried down the stairs, crackling with anger at the rough usage her bell had received.

Mr. Gorby had seen Brian go out, and deeming it a good opportunity for enquiry had lost no time in making a start.

"You nearly tore the bell down," said Mrs. Sampson, as she presented her thin body and wrinkled face to the view of the detective.

"I'm very sorry," answered Gorby, meekly. "I'll knock next time."

"Oh, no you won't," said the landlady, tossing her head, "me not 'avin' a knocker, an' your 'and a-scratchin' the paint off the door, which it ain't been done over six months by my sister-in-law's cousin, which 'e is a painter, with a shop in Fitzroy, an' a wonderful heye to colour."

"Does Mr. Fitzgerald live here?" asked Mr. Gorby, quietly.

"He do," replied Mrs. Sampson, "but 'e's gone out, an' won't be back till the arfternoon, which any messige 'ull be delivered to 'im punctual on 'is arrival."

"I'm glad he's not in," said Mr. Gorby. "Would you allow me to have a few moments' conversation?"

"What is it?" asked the landlady, her curiosity being roused.

"I'll tell you when we get inside," answered Mr. Gorby.

She looked at him with her sharp little eyes, and seeing nothing disreputable about him, led the way upstairs, crackling loudly the whole time. This so astonished Mr. Gorby that he cast about in his own mind for an explanation of the phenomenon.

"Wants oiling about the jints," was his conclusion, "but I never heard anything like it, and she looks as if she'd snap in two, she's that brittle."

Mrs. Sampson took Gorby into Brian's sitting-room, and having closed the door, sat down and prepared to hear what he had to say for himself.

"I 'ope it ain't bills," she said. "Mr. Fitzgerald 'avin' money in the bank, and everythin' respectable like a gentleman as 'e is, tho', to be sure, your bill might come down on him unbeknown, 'e not 'avin' kept it in mind, which it ain't everybody as 'ave sich a good memory as my aunt on my mother's side, she 'avin' been famous for 'er dates like a 'istory, not to speak of 'er multiplication tables, and the numbers of people's 'ouses."

"It's not bills," answered Mr. Gorby, who, having vainly attempted to stem the shrill torrent of words, had given in, and waited mildly until she had finished; "I only want to know a few things about Mr. Fitzgerald's habits."

"And what for?" asked Mrs. Sampson, indignantly. "Are you a noospaper a-putin' in articles about people who don't want to see 'emselves in print, which I knows your 'abits, my late 'usband 'avin' bin a printer on a paper which bust up, not 'avin' the money to pay wages, thro' which, there was doo to him the sum of one pound seven and sixpence half-penny, which I, bein' 'is widder, ought to 'ave, not that I expects to see it on this side of the grave—oh, dear, no!" and she gave a shrill, elfish laugh.

Mr. Gorby, seeing that unless he took the bull by the horns, he would never be able to get what he wanted, grew desperate, and plunged in medias res.

"I am an insurance agent," he said, rapidly, so as to prevent any interruption, "and Mr. Fitzgerald desires to insure his life in our company. I, therefore, want to find out if he is a good life to insure; does he live temperately? keep early hours? and, in fact, all about him?"

"I shall be 'appy to answer any enquiries which may be of use to you, sir," replied Mrs. Sampson; "knowin' as I do, 'ow good a insurance is to a family, should the 'ead of it be taken off unexpected, leavin' a widder, which, as I know, Mr. Fitzgerald is a-goin' to be married soon, an' I 'opes 'e'll be 'appy, tho' thro' it I loses a lodger as 'as allays paid regler, an' be'aved like a gentleman."

"So he is a temperate man?" said Mr. Gorby, feeling his way cautiously.

"Not bein' a blue ribbing all the same," answered Mrs. Sampson; "and I never saw him the wuss for drink, 'e being allays able to use his latch-key, and take 'is boots off afore going to bed, which is no more than a woman ought to expect from a lodger, she 'avin' to do 'er own washin'."

"And he keeps good hours?"

"Allays in afore the clock strikes twelve," answered the landlady; "tho', to be sure, I uses it as a figger of speech, none of the clocks in the 'ouse strikin' but one, which is bein' mended, 'avin' broke through overwindin'."

"Is he always in before twelve?" asked Mr. Gorby, keenly disappointed at this answer.

Mrs. Sampson eyed him waggishly, and a smile crept over her wrinkled little face.

"Young men, not bein' old men," she replied, cautiously, "and sinners not bein' saints, it's not nattral as latch-keys should be made for ornament instead of use, and Mr. Fitzgerald bein' one of the 'andsomest men in Melbourne, it ain't to be expected as 'e should let 'is latch-key git rusty, tho' 'avin' a good moral character, 'e uses it with moderation."

"But I suppose you are seldom awake when he comes in really late," said the detective.

"Not as a rule," assented Mrs. Sampson; "bein' a 'eavy sleeper, and much disposed for bed, but I 'ave 'eard 'im come in arter twelve, the last time bein' Thursday week."

"Ah!" Mr. Gorby drew a long breath, for Thursday week was the night upon which the murder was committed.

"Bein' troubled with my 'ead," said Mrs. Sampson, "thro' 'avin' been out in the sun all day a-washin', I did not feel so partial to my bed that night as in general, so went down to the kitching with the intent of getting a linseed poultice to put at the back of my 'ead, it being calculated to remove pain, as was told to me, when a nuss, by a doctor in the horspital, 'e now bein' in business for hisself, at Geelong, with a large family, 'avin' married early. Just as I was leavin' the kitching I 'eard Mr. Fitzgerald a-comin' in, and, turnin' round, looked at the clock, that 'avin' been my custom when my late 'usband came in, in the early mornin', I bein' a-preparin' 'is meal."

"And the time was?" asked Mr. Gorby, breathlessly.

"Five minutes to two o'clock," replied Mrs. Sampson. Mr. Gorby thought for a moment.

"Cab was hailed at one o'clock—started for St. Kilda at about ten minutes past—reached Grammar School, say, at twenty-five minutes past—Fitzgerald talks five minutes to cabman, making it half-past—say, he waited ten minutes for other cab to turn up, makes it twenty minutes to two—it would take another twenty minutes to get to East Melbourne—and five minutes to walk up here—that makes it five minutes past two instead of before—confound it. 'Was your clock in the kitchen right?" he asked, aloud.

"Well, I think so," answered Mrs. Sampson. "It does get a little slow sometimes, not 'avin' been cleaned for some time, which my nevy bein' a watchmaker I allays 'ands it over to 'im."

"Of course it was slow on that night," said Gorby, triumphantly.

"He must have come in at five minutes past two—which makes it right."

"Makes what right?" asked the landlady, sharply. "And 'ow do you know my clock was ten minutes wrong?"

"Oh, it was, was it?" asked Gorby, eagerly.

"I'm not denyin' of it," replied Mrs. Sampson; "clocks ain't allays to be relied on more than men an' women—but it won't be anythin' agin' 'is insurance, will it, as in general 'e's in afore twelve?"

"Oh, all that will be quite safe," answered the detective, delighted with the information he had obtained. "Is this Mr. Fitzgerald's room?"

"Yes, it is," replied the landlady; "but 'e furnished it 'imself, bein' of a luxus turn of mind, not but what 'is taste is good, tho' far be it from me to deny I 'elped 'im to select; but 'avin' another room of the same to let, any friends as you might 'ave in search of a 'ome 'ud be well looked arter, my references bein' very 'igh, an' my cookin' tasty—an' if—"

Here a ring at the front door bell called Mrs. Sampson away, so with a hurried word to Gorby she crackled downstairs. Left to himself, Mr. Gorby arose and looked round the room. It was excellently furnished, and the pictures were good. At one end of the room, by the window, there was a writing-table covered with papers.

"It's no good looking for the papers he took out of Whyte's pocket, I suppose," said the detective to himself, as he turned over some letters, "as I don't know what they are, and I couldn't tell them if I saw them; but I'd like to find that missing glove and the bottle that held the chloroform—unless he's done away with them. There doesn't seem any sign of them here, so I'll have a look in his bedroom."

There was no time to lose, as Mrs. Sampson might return at any moment, so Mr. Gorby walked quickly into the bedroom, which opened off the sitting-room. The first thing that caught the detective's eye was a large photograph, in a plush frame, of Madge Frettlby. It stood on the dressing-table, and was similar to that one which he had already seen in Whyte's album. He took it up with a laugh.

"You're a pretty girl," he said, apostrophising the picture, "but you give your photograph to two young men, both in love with you, and both hot-tempered. The result is that one is dead, and the other won't survive him long. That's what you've done."

He put it down again, and looking round the room, caught sight of a light covert coat hanging behind the door and also a soft hat.

"Ah," said the detective, going up to the door, "here is the very coat you wore when you killed that poor fellow wonder what you have in the pockets," and he plunged his hand into them in turn. There were an old theatre programme and a pair of brown gloves in one, but in the second pocket Mr. Gorby made a discovery—none other than that of the missing glove. There it was—a soiled white glove for the right hand, with black bands down the back; and the detective smiled in a gratified manner as he put it carefully in his pocket.

"My morning has not been wasted," he said to himself. "I've found out that he came in at a time which corresponds to all his movements after one o'clock on Thursday night, and this is the missing glove, which clearly belonged to Whyte. If I could only get hold of the chloroform bottle I'd be satisfied."

But the chloroform bottle was not to be found, though he searched most carefully for it. At last, hearing Mrs. Sampson coming upstairs again, he gave up the search, and came back to the sitting-room.

"Threw it away, I suspect," he said, as he sat down in his, old place; "but it doesn't matter. I think I can form a chain of evidence, from what I have discovered, which will be sufficient to convict him. Besides, I expect when he is arrested he will confess everything; he seems to feel remorse for what he has done."

The door opened, and Mrs. Sampson entered the room in a state of indignation.

"One of them Chinese 'awkers," she explained, "'e's bin a-tryin' to git the better of me over carrots—as if I didn't know what carrots was—and 'im a-talkin' about a shillin' in his gibberish, as if 'e 'adn't been brought up in a place where they don't know what a shillin' is. But I never could abide furreigners ever since a Frenchman, as taught me 'is language, made orf with my mother's silver tea-pot, unbeknown to 'er, it bein' set out on the sideboard for company."

Mr. Gorby interrupted these domestic reminiscences of Mrs. Sampson's by stating that, now she had given him all necessary information, he would take his departure.

"An' I 'opes," said Mrs. Sampson, as she opened the door for him, "as I'll 'ave the pleasure of seein' you again should any business on be'alf of Mr. Fitzgerald require it."

"Oh, I'll see you again," said Mr. Gorby, with heavy jocularly, "and in a way you won't like, as you'll be called as a witness," he added, mentally. "Did I understand you to say, Mrs. Sampson," he went on, "that Mr. Fitzgerald would be at home this afternoon?"

"Oh, yes, sir, 'e will," answered Mrs. Sampson, "a-drinkin' tea with his young lady, who is Miss Frettlby, and 'as got no end of money, not but what I mightn't 'ave 'ad the same 'ad I been born in a 'igher spear."

"You need not tell Mr. Fitzgerald I have been here," said Gorby, closing the gate; "I'll probably call and see him myself this afternoon."

"What a stout person 'e are," said Mrs. Sampson to herself, as the detective walked away, "just like my late father, who was allays fleshy, bein' a great eater, and fond of 'is glass, but I took arter my mother's family, they bein' thin-like, and proud of keeping 'emselves so, as the vinegar they drank could testify, not that I indulge in it myself."

She shut the door, and went upstairs to take away the breakfast things, while Gorby was being driven along at a good pace to the police office, to obtain a warrant for Brian's arrest, on a charge of wilful murder.

10

In the Queen's Name

It was a broiling hot day—one of those cloudless days, with the blazing sun beating down on the arid streets, and casting deep, black shadows—a real Australian December day dropped by mistake of the clerk of the weather into the middle of August. The previous week having been really chilly, it was all the more welcome.

It was Saturday morning, and fashionable Melbourne was “doing the Block.” Collins Street is to the Southern city what Bond Street and the Row are to London, and the Boulevards to Paris.

It is on the Block that people show off their new dresses, bow to their friends, cut their enemies, and chatter small talk. The same thing no doubt occurred in the Appian Way, the fashionable street of Imperial Rome, when Catullus talked gay nonsense to Lesbia, and Horace received the congratulations of his friends over his new volume of society verses. History repeats itself, and every city is bound by all the laws of civilisation to have one special street, wherein the votaries of fashion can congregate.

Collins Street is not, of course, such a grand thoroughfare as those above mentioned, but the people who stroll up and down the broad pavement are quite as charmingly dressed, and as pleasant as any of the peripatetics of those famous cities. As the sun brings out bright flowers, so the seductive influence of the hot weather had brought out all the ladies in gay dresses of innumerable colours, which made the long street look like a restless rainbow.

Carriages were bowling smoothly along, their occupants smiling and bowing as they recognised their friends on the side walk. Lawyers, their legal quibbles finished for the week, were strolling leisurely with their black bags in their hands; portly merchants, forgetting Flinder's Lane

and incoming ships, walked beside their pretty daughters; and the representatives of sweldom were stalking along in their customary apparel of curly brimmed hats, high collars, and immaculate suits. Altogether, it was a pleasant and animated scene, which would have delighted the heart of anyone who was not dyspeptic, or in love—dyspeptic people and lovers (disappointed ones, of course) being wont to survey the world in a cynical vein.

Madge Frettlby was engaged in that occupation so dear to every female heart—shopping. She was in Moubray, Rowan, and Hicks', turning over ribbons and laces, while the faithful Brian waited for her outside, and amused himself by looking at the human stream which flowed along the pavement.

He disliked shopping quite as much as the majority of his sex, and though as a lover he felt a certain amount of self-abnegation to be becoming in him, it was difficult to drive away the thoughts of his pleasant club, where he could be reading and smoking, with, perchance, something cooling in a glass beside him.

However, after she had purchased a dozen or more articles she did not want, Madge remembered that Brian was waiting for her, and hurried to the door.

"I haven't been many minutes, have I, dear?" she said, touching him lightly on the arm.

"Oh, dear no," answered Brian, looking at his watch, "only thirty—a mere nothing, considering a new dress was being discussed."

"I thought I had been longer," said Madge, her brow clearing; "but still I am sure you feel a martyr."

"Not at all," replied Fitzgerald, handing her into the carriage; "I enjoyed myself very much."

"Nonsense," she laughed, opening her sunshade, while Brian took his seat beside her; "that's one of those social stories—which every one considers themselves bound to tell from a sense of duty. I'm afraid I did keep you waiting—though, after all," she went on, with a true feminine idea as to the flight of time, "I was only a few minutes."

"And the rest," said Brian, quizzically looking at her pretty face, so charmingly flushed under her great white hat.

Madge disdained to notice this interruption.

"James," she cried to the coachman, "drive to the Melbourne Club. Papa will be there, you know," she said to Brian, "and we'll take him off to have tea with us."

"But it's only one o'clock," said Brian, as the Town Hall clock came in sight. "Mrs. Sampson won't be ready."

"Oh, anything will do," replied Madge, "a cup of tea and some thin bread and butter isn't hard to prepare. I don't feel like lunch, and papa eats so little in the middle of the day, and you—"

"Eat a great deal at all times," finished Brian with a laugh.

Madge went on chattering in her usual lively manner, and Brian listened to her with delight. Her pleasant talk drove away the evil spirit which had been with him for the last three weeks. Suddenly Madge made an observation as they were passing the Burke and Wills' monument, which startled him.

"Isn't that the place where Mr. Whyte got into the cab?" she asked, looking at the corner near the Scotch Church, where a vagrant of musical tendencies was playing "Just before the Battle, Mother," on a battered old concertina.

"So the papers say," answered Brian, listlessly, without turning his head.

"I wonder who the gentleman in the light coat could have been," said Madge, as she settled herself again.

"No one seems to know," he replied evasively.

"Ah, but they have a clue," she said. "Do you know, Brian," she went on, "that he was dressed just like you in a light overcoat and soft hat?"

"How remarkable," said Fitzgerald, speaking in a slightly sarcastic tone, and as calmly as he was able. "He was dressed in the same manner as nine out of every ten young fellows in Melbourne."

Madge looked at him in surprise at the tone in which he spoke, so different from his usual nonchalant way of speaking. She was about to answer when the carriage stopped at the door of the Melbourne Club. Brian, anxious to escape any more remarks about the murder, sprang quickly out, and ran up the steps into the building. He found Mr. Frettlby smoking complacently, and reading the Age. As Fitzgerald entered he looked up, and putting down the paper, held out his hand, which the other took.

"Ah! Fitzgerald," he said, "have you left the attractions of Collins Street for the still greater ones of Clubland?"

"Not I," answered Brian. "I've come to carry you off to afternoon tea with Madge and myself."

"I don't mind," answered Mr. Frettlby rising; "but, isn't afternoon tea at half-past one rather an anomaly?"

"What's in a name?" said Fitzgerald, absently, as they left the room.

"What have you been doing all morning?"

"I've been in here for the last half-hour reading," answered the other, carelessly.

"Wool market, I suppose?"

"No, the hansom cab murder."

"Oh, d_ that thing!" said Brian, hastily; then, seeing his companion looking at him in surprise, he apologised. "But, indeed," he went on, "I'm nearly worried to death by people asking about Whyte, as if I knew all about him, whereas I know nothing."

"Just as well you don't," answered Mr. Frettlby, as they descended the steps together; "he was not a very desirable companion."

It was on the tip of Brian's tongue to say, "And yet you wanted him to marry your daughter," but he wisely refrained, and they reached the carriage in silence.

"Now then, papa," said Madge, when they were all settled in the carriage, and it was rolling along smoothly in the direction of East Melbourne, "what have you been doing?"

"Enjoying myself," answered her father, "until you and Brian came, and dragged me out into this blazing sunshine."

"Well, Brian has been so good of late," said Madge, "that I had to reward him, so I knew that nothing would please him better than to play host."

"Certainly," said Brian, rousing himself out of a fit of abstraction, "especially when one has such charming visitors."

Madge laughed at this, and made a little grimace.

"If your tea is only equal to your compliments," she said lightly, "I'm sure papa will forgive us for dragging him away from his club."

"Papa will forgive anything," murmured Mr. Frettlby, tilting his hat over his eyes, "so long as he gets somewhere out of the sun. I can't say I care about playing the parts of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace of a Melbourne hot day."

"There now, papa is quite a host in himself," said Madge mischievously, as, the carriage drew up at Mrs. Sampson's door.

"No, you are wrong," said Brian, as he alighted and helped her out; "I am the host in myself this time."

"If there is one thing I hate above another," observed Miss Frettlby, calmly, "it's a pun, and especially a bad one."

Mrs. Sampson was very much astonished at the early arrival of her lodger's guests, and did not hesitate to express her astonishment.

"Bein' taken by surprise," she said, with an apologetic cackle, "it ain't to be suppose as miraculs can be performed with regard to cookin', the

fire havin' gone out, not bein' kept alight on account of the 'eat of the day, which was that 'ot as never was, tho', to be sure, bein' a child in the early days, I remember it were that 'ot as my sister's aunt was in the 'abit of roastin' her jints in the sun."

After telling this last romance, and leaving her visitors in doubt whether the joints referred to belonged to an animal or to her sister's aunt or to herself, Mrs. Sampson crackled away downstairs to get things ready.

"What a curious thing that landlady of yours is, Brian," said Madge, from the depths of a huge arm-chair. "I believe she's a grasshopper from the Fitzroy Gardens."

"Oh, no, she's a woman," said Mr. Frettlby, cynically. "You can tell that by the length of her tongue."

"A popular error, papa," retorted Madge, sharply. "I know plenty of men who talk far more than any woman."

"I hope I'll never meet them, then," said Mr. Frettlby, "for if I did I should be inclined to agree with De Quincey on murder as a fine art."

Brian winced at this, and looked apprehensively at Madge, and saw with relief that she was not paying attention to her father, but was listening intently.

"There she is," as a faint rustle at the door announced the arrival of Mrs. Sampson and the tea-tray. "I wonder, Brian, you don't think the house is on fire with that queer noise always going on—she wants oil!"

"Yes, St. Jacob's oil," laughed Brian, as Mrs. Sampson entered, and placed her burden on the table.

"Not 'avin' any cake," said that lady, "thro' not being forewarned as to the time of arrival—tho' it's not oftning I'm taken by surprise—except as to a 'eadache, which, of course, is accidental to every pusson—I ain't got nothin' but bread and butter, the baker and grocer both bein' all that could be desired, except in the way of worryin' for their money, which they thinks as 'ow I keeps the bank in the 'ouse, like Allading's cave, as I've 'eard tell in the Arabian Nights, me 'avin' gained it as a prize for English in my early girl'ood, bein' then considered a scholar and an 'industrus."

Mrs. Sampson's shrill apologies for the absence of cake having been received, she hopped out of the room, and Madge made the tea. The service was a quaint Chinese one, which Brian had picked up in his wanderings. He used it only on special occasions. As he watched Madge he could not help thinking how pretty she looked, with her hands moving deftly among the cups and saucers, so bizarre-looking with their sprawling dragons of yellow and green. He half smiled to himself as

he thought, "If they knew all, I wonder if they would sit with me so unconcernedly."

Mr. Frettlby, too, as he looked at his daughter, thought of his dead wife and sighed.

"Well," said Madge, as she handed them their tea, and helped herself to some thin bread and butter, "you two gentlemen are most delightful company—papa is sighing like a furnace, and Brian is staring at me with his eyes like blue china saucers. You ought both to be turned forth to funerals like melancholy."

"Why like melancholy?" queried Brian, lazily.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Fitzgerald," said the young lady with a smile in her pretty black eyes, "that you are not a student of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream.'"

"Very likely not," answered Brian; "midsummer out here is so hot that one gets no sleep, and, consequently no dreams. Depend upon it, if the four lovers whom Puck treated so badly had lived in Australia they wouldn't have been able to sleep for the mosquitoes."

"What nonsense you two young people do talk," said Mr. Frettlby, with an amused smile, as he stirred his tea.

"*Dulce est desipere in loco*," observed Brian, gravely, "a man who can't carry out that observation is sure not to be up to much."

"I don't like Latin," said Miss Frettlby, shaking her pretty head. "I agree with Heine's remark, that if the Romans had been forced to learn it they would not have found time to conquer the world."

"Which was a much more agreeable task," said Brian.

"And more profitable," finished Mr. Frettlby.

They chattered in this desultory fashion for a considerable time, till at last Madge rose and said they must go.

Brian proposed to dine with them at St. Kilda, and then they would all go to Brock's Fireworks. Madge consented to this, and she was just pulling on her gloves when suddenly they heard a ring at the front door, and presently Mrs. Sampson talking in an excited manner at the pitch of her voice.

"You shan't come in, I tell you," they heard her say shrilly, "so it's no good trying, which I've allays 'eard as an Englishman's 'ouse is 'is castle, an' you're a-breakin' the law, as well as a-spilin' the carpets, which 'as bin newly put down."

Some one made a reply; then the door of Brian's room was thrown open, and Gorby walked in, followed by another man. Fitzgerald turned as

white as a sheet, for he felt instinctively that they had come for him. However, pulling himself together, he demanded, in a haughty tone, the reason of the intrusion.

Mr. Gorby walked straight over to where Brian was standing, and placed his hand on the young man's shoulder.

"Brian Fitzgerald," he said, in a clear voice, "I arrest you in the Queen's name."

"For what?" asked Brian, steadily.

"The murder of Oliver Whyte."

At this Madge gave a cry.

"It is not true!" she said, wildly. "My God, it's not true."

Brian did not answer, but, ghastly pale, held out his hands. Gorby slipped the handcuffs on to his wrists with a feeling of compunction, despite his joy in running his Man down. This done, Fitzgerald turned round to where Madge was standing, pale and still, as though turned into stone.

"Madge," he said, in a clear, low voice, "I am going to prison—perhaps to death; but I swear to you, by all that I hold most sacred, that I am innocent of this murder."

"My darling!" She made a step forward, but her father stepped before her.

"Keep back," he said, in a hard voice; "there is nothing between you and that man now."

She turned round with an ashen face, but with a proud look in her clear eyes.

"You are wrong," she answered, with a touch of scorn in her voice. "I love him more now than ever." Then, before her father could stop her, she placed her arms round her lover's neck, and kissed him wildly.

"My darling," she said, with the tears streaming down her white cheeks, "whatever the world may say, you are always dearest of all to me."

Brian kissed her passionately, and moved away. Madge fell down at her father's feet in a dead faint.

11

Counsel for the Prisoner

Brian Fitzgerald was arrested at a few minutes past three o'clock, and by five all Melbourne was ringing with the news that the perpetrator of the now famous hansom cab murder had been caught. The evening papers were full of the affair, and the Herald went through several editions, the demand being far in the excess of the supply. Such a crime had not been committed in Melbourne since the Greer shooting case in the Opera House, and the mystery by which it was surrounded, made it even more sensational. The committal of the crime in such an extraordinary place as a hansom cab had been startling enough, but the discovery that the assassin was one of the most fashionable young men in Melbourne was still more so. Brian Fitzgerald being well known in society as a wealthy squatter, and the future husband of one of the richest and prettiest girls in Victoria, it was no wonder that his arrest caused some sensation. The Herald, which was fortunate enough to obtain the earliest information about the arrest, made the best use of it, and published a flaming article in its most sensational type, somewhat after this fashion:—

HANSOM CAB TRAGEDY. ARREST OF THE SUPPOSED MURDERER. STARTLING REVELATIONS IN HIGH LIFE.

It is needless to say that some of the reporters had painted the lily pretty freely, but the public were ready to believe everything that came out in the papers.

Mr. Frettlby, the day after Brian's arrest, had a long conversation with his daughter, and wanted her to go up to Yabba Yallook Station until the public excitement had somewhat subsided. But this Madge flatly refused to do.

"I'm not going to desert him when he most needs me," she said, resolutely; "everybody has turned against him, even before they have heard the facts of the case. He says he is not guilty, and I believe him."

"Then let him prove his innocence," said her father, who was pacing slowly up and down the room; "if he did not get into the cab with Whyte he must have been somewhere else; so he ought to set up the defence of an alibi."

"He can easily do that," said Madge, with a ray of hope lighting up her sad face, "he was here till eleven o'clock on Thursday night."

"Very probably," returned her father, dryly; "but where was he at one o'clock on Friday morning?"

"Besides, Mr. Whyte left the house long before Brian did," she went on rapidly. "You must remember—it was when you quarrelled with Mr. Whyte."

"My dear Madge," said Frettlby, stopping in front of her with a displeased look, "you are incorrect—Whyte and myself did not quarrel. He asked me if it were true that Fitzgerald was engaged to you, and I answered 'Yes.' That was all, and then he left the house."

"Yes, and Brian didn't go until two hours after," said Madge, triumphantly. "He never saw Mr. Whyte the whole night."

"So he says," replied Mr. Frettlby, significantly. "I believe Brian before any one else in the world," said his daughter, hotly, with flushed cheeks and flashing eyes.

"Ah! but will a jury?" queried her father.

"You have turned against him, too," answered Madge, her eyes filling with tears. "You believe him guilty."

"I am not prepared either to deny or confirm his guilt," said Mr. Frettlby, coldly. "I have done what I could to help him—I have engaged Calton to defend him, and, if eloquence and skill can save him, you may set your mind at rest."

"My dear father," said Madge, throwing her arms round his neck, "I knew you would not desert him altogether, for my sake."

"My darling," replied her father, in a faltering voice, as he kissed her, "there is nothing in the world I would not do for your sake."

Meanwhile Brian was sitting in his cell in the Melbourne Jail, thinking sadly enough about his position. He saw no hope of escape except one, and that he did not intend to take advantage of.

"It would kill her; it would kill her," he said, feverishly, as he paced to and fro over the echoing stones. "Better that the last of the Fitzgeralds

should perish like a common thief than that she should know the bitter truth. If I engage a lawyer to defend me," he went on, "the first question he will ask me will be where was I on that night, and if I tell him all will be discovered, and then—no—no—I cannot do it; it would kill her, my darling," and throwing himself down on the bed, he covered his face with his hands.

He was roused by the opening of the door of his cell, and on looking up saw that it was Calton who entered. He was a great friend of Fitzgerald's, and Brian was deeply touched by his kindness in coming to see him.

Duncan Calton had a kindly heart, and was anxious to help Brian, but there was also a touch of self interest in the matter. He had received a note from Mr. Frettlby, asking him to defend Fitzgerald, which he agreed to do with avidity, as he foresaw in this case an opportunity for his name becoming known throughout the Australian colonies. It is true that he was already a celebrated lawyer, but his reputation was purely a local one, and as he foresaw that Fitzgerald's trial for murder would cause a great sensation throughout Australia and New Zealand, he determined to take advantage of it as another step in the ladder which led to fame, wealth, and position. So this tall, keen-eyed man, with the clean shaven face and expressive mouth, advanced into the cell, and took Brian by the hand.

"It is very kind of you to come and see me," said Fitzgerald; "it is at a time like this that one appreciates friendship."

"Yes, of course," answered the lawyer, fixing his keen eyes on the other's haggard face, as if he would read his innermost thoughts. "I came partly on my own account, and partly because Frettlby asked me to see you as to your defence."

"Mr. Frettlby?" said Brian, in a mechanical way. "He is very kind; I thought he believed me guilty."

"No man is considered guilty until he has been proved so," answered Calton, evasively.

Brian noticed how guarded the answer was, for he heaved an impatient sigh.

"And Miss Frettlby?" he asked, in a hesitating manner. This time he got a decided answer.

"She declines to believe you guilty, and will not hear a word said against you."

"God bless her," said Brian, fervently; "she is a true woman. I suppose I am pretty well canvassed?" he added, bitterly.

"Nothing else talked about," answered Calton, calmly. "Your arrest has for the present suspended all interest in theatres, cricket matches, and balls, and you are at the present moment being discussed threadbare in Clubs and drawing-rooms."

Fitzgerald writhed. He was a singularly proud man, and there was something inexpressibly galling in this unpleasant publicity.

"But this is all idle chatter," said Calton, taking a seat.

"We must get to business. Of course, you will accept me as your counsel."

"It's no good my doing so," replied Brian, gloomily. "The rope is already round my neck."

"Nonsense," replied the lawyer, cheerfully, "the rope is round no man's neck until he is on the scaffold. Now, you need not say a word," he went on, holding up his hand as Brian was about to speak; "I intend to defend you, whether you like it or not. I do not know all the facts, except what the papers have stated, and they exaggerate so much that one can place no reliance on them. At all events, I believe from my heart that you are innocent, and you must walk out of the prisoner's dock a free man, if only for the sake of that noble girl who loves you."

Brian did not answer, but put out his hand, which the other grasped warmly.

"I will not deny," went on Calton, "that there is a little bit of professional curiosity about me. This case is such an extraordinary one, that I feel as if I were unable to let slip an opportunity of doing something with it. I don't care for your humdrum murders with the poker, and all that sort of thing, but this is something clever, and therefore interesting. When you are safe we will look together for the real criminal, and the pleasure of the search will be proportionate to the excitement when we find him out."

"I agree with everything you say," said Fitzgerald, calmly, "but I have no defence to make."

"No defence? You are not going to confess you killed him?"

"No," with an angry flush, "but there are certain circumstances which prevent me from defending myself."

"What nonsense," retorted Calton, sharply, "as if any circumstances should prevent a man from saving his own life. But never mind, I like these objections; they make the nut harder to crack—but the kernel must be worth getting at. Now, I want you to answer certain questions."

"I won't promise."

"Well, we shall see," said the lawyer, cheerfully, taking out his notebook, and resting it on his knee. "First, where were you on the Thursday night preceding the murder?"

"I can't tell you."

"Oh, yes, you can, my friend. You left St. Kilda, and came up to town by the eleven o'clock train."

"Eleven-twenty," corrected Brian.

Calton smiled in a gratified manner as he noted this down. "A little diplomacy is all that's required," he said mentally.

"And where did you go then?" he added, aloud.

"I met Rolleston in the train, and we took a cab from the Flinders Street station up to the Club."

"What Club?"

"The Melbourne Club."

"Yes?" interrogatively.

"Rolleston went home, and I went into the Club and played cards for a time."

"When did you leave the Club?"

"A few minutes to one o'clock in the morning."

"And then, I suppose, you went home?"

"No; I did not."

"Then where did you go?"

"Down the street."

"Rather vague. I presume you mean Collins Street?"

"Yes."

"You were going to meet some one, I suppose?"

"I never said so."

"Probably not; but young men don't wander about the streets at night without some object."

"I was restless and wanted a walk."

"Indeed! How curious you should prefer going into the heart of the dusty town for a walk to strolling through the Fitzroy Gardens, which were on your way home! It won't do; you had an appointment to meet some one."

"Well—er—yes."

"I thought as much. Man or woman?"

"I cannot tell you."

"Then I must find out for myself."

"You can't."

"Indeed! Why not?"

"You don't know where to look for her."

"Her," cried Calton, delighted at the success of his craftily-put question.

"I knew it was a woman."

Brian did not answer, but sat biting his lips with vexation.

"Now, who is this woman?"

No answer.

"Come now, Fitzgerald, I know that young men will be young men, and, of course, you don't like these things talked about; but in this case your character must be sacrificed to save your neck. What is her name?"

"I can't tell you."

"Oh! you know it, then?"

"Well, yes."

"And you won't tell me?"

"No!"

Calton, however, had found out two things that pleased him; first, that Fitzgerald had an appointment, and, second that it had been with a woman. He pursued another line.

"When did you last see Whyte!"

Brian answered with great reluctance, "I saw him drunk by the Scotch Church."

"What! you were the man who hailed the hansom?"

"Yes," assented the other, hesitating slightly, "I was!"

The thought flashed through Calton's brain as to whether the young man before him was guilty or not, and he was obliged to confess that things looked very black against him.

"Then what the newspapers said was correct?"

"Partly."

"Ah!" Calton drew a long breath—here was a ray of hope.

"You did not know it was Whyte when you found him lying drunk near the Scotch Church?"

"No, I did not. Had I known it was he I would not have picked him up."

"Of course, you recognised him afterwards?"

"Yes I did. And, as the paper stated, I dropped him and walked away."

"Why did you leave him so abruptly?"

Brian looked at his questioner in some surprise.

"Because I detested him," he said, shortly.

"Why did you detest him?"

No answer. "Was it because he admired Miss Frettlby, and from all appearances, was going to marry her?"

"Well, yes," sullenly.

"And now," said Calton, impressively, "this is the whole point upon which the case turns. Why did you get into the cab with him?"

"I did not get into the cab."

"The cabman declares that you did."

"He is wrong. I never came back after I recognised Whyte."

"Then who was the man who got into the cab with Whyte?"

"I don't know."

"You have no idea?"

"Not the least."

"You are certain?"

"Yes, perfectly certain."

"He seems to have been dressed exactly like you."

"Very probably. I could name at least a dozen of my acquaintances who wear light coats over their evening dress, and soft hats."

"Do you know if Whyte had any enemies?"

"No, I don't; I know nothing about him, beyond that he came from England a short time ago with a letter of introduction to Mr. Frettlby, and had the impertinence to ask Madge to marry him."

"Where did Whyte live?"

"Down in St. Kilda, at the end of Grey Street."

"How do you know?"

"It was in the papers, and—and—" hesitatingly, "I called on him."

"Why?"

"To see if he would cease his attentions to Madge, and to tell him that she was engaged to me."

"And what did he say?"

"Laughed at me. Curse him."

"You had high words, evidently?"

Brian laughed bitterly.

"Yes, we had."

"Did anyone hear you?"

"The landlady did, I think. I saw her in the passage as I left the house."

"The prosecution will bring her forward as a witness."

"Very likely," indifferently.

"Did you say anything likely to incriminate yourself?" Fitzgerald turned away his head.

"Yes," he answered in a low voice, "I spoke very wildly—indeed, I did not know at the time what I said."

"Did you threaten him?"

"Yes, I did. I told him I would kill him if he persisted in his plan of marrying Madge."

"Ah! if the landlady can swear that she heard you say so, it will form a strong piece of evidence against you. So far as I can see, there is only one defence, and that is an easy one—you must prove an alibi."

No answer.

"You say you did not come back and get into the cab?" said Calton, watching the face of the other closely.

"No, it was some one else dressed like me."

"And you have no idea who it was?"

"No, I have not."

"Then, after you left Whyte, and walked along Russel! Street, where did you go?"

"I can't tell you."

"Were you intoxicated?"

"No!" indignantly.

"Then you remember?"

"Yes."

"And where were you?"

"I can't tell you."

"You refuse."

"Yes, I do."

"Take time to consider. You may have to pay a heavy price for your refusal."

"If necessary, I will pay it."

"And you won't tell me where you were?"

"No, I won't."

Calton was beginning to feel annoyed.

"You're very foolish," he said, "sacrificing your life to some feeling of false modesty. You must prove an alibi."

No answer.

"At what hour did you get home?"

"About two o'clock in the morning."

"Did you walk home?"

"Yes—through the Fitzroy Gardens."

"Did you see anyone on your way home?"

"I don't know. I wasn't paying attention."

"Did anyone see you?"

"Not that I know of."

"Then you refuse to tell me where you were between one and two o'clock on Friday morning?"

"Absolutely!"

Calton thought for a moment, to consider his next move.

"Did you know that Whyte carried valuable papers about with him?"

Fitzgerald hesitated, and turned pale.

"No! I did not know," he said, reluctantly.

The lawyer made a master stroke.

"Then why did you take them from him?"

"What! Had he it with him?"

Calton saw his advantage, and seized it at once.

"Yes, he had it with him. Why did you take it?"

"I did not take it. I didn't even know he had it with him."

"Indeed! Will you kindly tell me what 'it' is Brian saw the trap into which he had fallen."

"No! I will not," he answered steadily.

"Was it a jewel?"

"No!"

"Was it an important paper?"

"I don't know."

"Ah! It was a paper. I can see it in your face. And was that paper of importance to you?"

"Why do you ask?"

Calton fixed his keen grey eyes steadily on Brian's face.

"Because," he answered slowly, "the man to whom that paper was of such value murdered Whyte."

Brian started up, ghastly pale.

"My God!" he almost shrieked, stretching out his hands, "it is true after all," and he fell down on the stone pavement in a dead faint.

Calton, alarmed, summoned the gaoler, and between them they placed him on the bed, and dashed some cold water over his face. He recovered, and moaned feebly, while Calton, seeing that he was unfit to be spoken

to, left the prison. When he got outside he stopped for a moment and looked back on the grim, grey walls.

“Brian Fitzgerald,” he said to himself “you did not commit the murder yourself, but you know who did.”

12

She was a True Woman

Melbourne society was greatly agitated over the hansom cab murder. Before the assassin had been discovered it had been looked upon merely as a common murder, and one of which society need take no cognisance beyond the bare fact of its committal. But now that one of the most fashionable young men in Melbourne had been arrested as the assassin, it bade fair to assume gigantic proportions. Mrs. Grundy was shocked, and openly talked about having nourished in her bosom a viper which had unexpectedly turned and stung her.

Morn, noon, and night, in Toorak drawing-rooms and Melbourne Clubs, the case formed the principal subject of conversation. And Mrs. Grundy was horrified.

Here was a young man, “well born—the Fitzgeralds, my dear, an Irish family, with royal blood in their veins—well-bred—most charming manners, I assure you, and so very good-looking and engaged to one of the richest girls in Melbourne—pretty enough, madam, no doubt, but he wanted her money, sly dog;” and this young man, who had been petted by the ladies, voted a good fellow by the men, and was universally popular, both in drawing-room and club, had committed a vulgar murder—it was truly shocking. What was the world coming to, and what were gaols and lunatic asylums built for if men of young Fitzgerald’s calibre were not put in them, and kept from killing people? And then, of course, everybody asked everybody else who Whyte was, and why he had never been heard of before. All people who had met Mr. Whyte were worried to death with questions about him, and underwent a species of social martyrdom as to who he was, what he was like, why he was killed, and all the rest of the insane questions which some people will ask. It was talked about everywhere—in fashion-

able drawing-rooms at five o'clock tea, over thin bread and butter and souchong; at clubs, over brandies and sodas and cigarettes; by working men over their mid-day pint, and by their wives in the congenial atmosphere of the back yard over the wash-tub. The papers were full of paragraphs about the famous murder, and the society papers gave an interview with the prisoner by their special reporters, which had been composed by those gentlemen out of the floating rumours which they heard around, and their own fertile imaginations.

As to the prisoner's guilt, everyone was certain of it. The cabman Royston had sworn that Fitzgerald had got into the cab with Whyte, and when he got out Whyte was dead. There could be no stronger proof than that, and the general opinion was that the prisoner would put in no defence, but would throw himself on the mercy of the court. Even the church caught the contagion, and ministers—Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Presbyterian, together with the lesser lights of minor denominations—took the hansom cab murder as a text whereon to preach sermons on the profligacy of the age, and to point out that the only ark which could save men from the rising flood of infidelity and immorality was their own particular church. "Gad," as Calton remarked, after hearing five or six ministers each claim their own church as the one special vessel of safety, "there seems to be a whole fleet of arks!"

For Mr. Felix Rolleston, acquainted as he was with all concerned, the time was one of great and exceeding joy. He was ever to the fore in retailing to his friends, plus certain garnishments of his own, any fresh evidence that chanced to come to light. His endeavour was to render it the more piquant, if not dramatic. If you asked him for his definite opinion as to the innocence or guilt of the accused, Mr. Felix shook his head sagaciously, and gave you to understand that neither he, nor his dear friend Calton—he knew Calton to nod to—had yet been able to make up their minds about the matter.

"Fact is, don't you know," observed Mr. Rolleston, wisely, "there's more in this than meets the eye, and all that sort of thing—think 'tective fellers wrong myself—don't think Fitz killed Whyte; jolly well sure he didn't." This would be followed invariably by a query in chorus of "who killed him then?"

"Aha," Felix would retort, putting his head on one side, like a meditative sparrow; "'tective fellers can't find out; that's the difficulty. Good mind to go on the prowl myself, by Jove."

"But do you know anything of the detective business?" some one would ask.

"Oh, dear yes," with an airy wave of his hand; "I've read Gaboreau, you know; awfully jolly life, 'tectives."

Despite this evasion, Rolleston, in his heart of hearts, believed Fitzgerald guilty. But he was one of those persons, who having either tender hearts or obstinate natures—the latter is perhaps the more general—deem it incumbent upon them to come forward in championship of those in trouble. There are, doubtless, those who think that Nero was a pleasant young man, whose cruelties were but the resultant of an overflow of high spirits; and who regard Henry VIII in the light of a henpecked husband unfortunate in the possession of six wives. These people delight in expressing their sympathy with great scoundrels of the Ned Kelly order. They view them as the embodiment of heroism, unsympathetically and disgracefully treated by the narrow understanding of the law. If one half the world does kick a man when he is down, the other half invariably consoles the prostrate individual with half-pence.

And therefore, even while the weight of public opinion was dead against Fitzgerald he had his share of avowed sympathy. There was a comfort in this for Madge. Not that if the whole countryside had unanimously condemned her lover she would have believed him guilty. The element of logic does not enter into the championship of woman. Her love for a man is sufficient to exalt him to the rank of a demi-god. She absolutely refuses to see the clay feet of her idol. When all others forsake she clings to him, when all others frown she smiles on him, and when he dies she reveres his memory as that of a saint and a martyr. Young men of the present day are prone to disparage their womenkind; but a poor thing is the man, who in time of trouble has no woman to stand by him with cheering words and loving comfort. And so Madge Frettlby, true woman that she was, had nailed her colours to the mast. She refused surrender to anyone, or before any argument. He was innocent, and his innocence would be proved, for she had an intuitive feeling that he would be saved at the eleventh hour. How, she knew not; but she was certain that it would be so. She would have gone to see Brian in prison, but that her father absolutely forbade her doing so. Therefore she was dependent upon Calton for all the news respecting him, and any message which she wished conveyed.

Brian's persistent refusal to set up the defence of an alibi, annoyed Calton, the more so as he could conceive no reason sufficiently worthy of the risk to which it subjected his client.

"If it's for the sake of a woman," he said to Brian, "I don't care who she

is, it's absurdly Quixotic. Self-preservation is the first law of nature, and if my neck was in danger I'd spare neither man, woman, nor child to save it."

"I dare say," answered Brian; "but if you had my reasons you might think differently."

Yet in his own mind the lawyer had a suspicion which he thought might perhaps account for Brian's obstinate concealment of his movements on the fatal night. He had admitted an appointment with a woman. He was a handsome young fellow, and probably his morals were no better than those of his fellows. There was perhaps some intrigue with a married woman. He had perchance been with her on that night, and it was to shield her that he refused to speak.

"Even so," argued Calton, "let him lose his character rather than his life; indeed the woman herself should speak. It would be hard upon her I admit; yet when a man's life is in danger, surely nothing should stop her."

Full of these perplexing thoughts, Calton went down to St. Kilda to have a talk with Madge. He intended to ask her to assist him towards obtaining the information he needed. He had a great respect for Madge, and thought her a really clever woman. It was just possible, he argued, that Brian's great love might cause him to confess everything to her, at her urgent request. He found Madge awaiting his arrival with anxiety.

"Where have you been all this time?" she said as they sat down; "I have been counting every moment since I saw you last. How is he?"

"Just the same," answered Calton, taking off his gloves, "still obstinately refusing to save his own life. Where's your father?" he asked, suddenly.

"Out of town," she answered, impatiently. "He will not be back for a week—but what do you mean that he won't save his own life?"

Calton leaned forward, and took her hand.

"Do you want to save his life?" he asked.

"Save his life," she reiterated, starting up out of her chair with a cry.

"God knows, I would die to save him."

"Pish," murmured Calton to himself, as he looked at her glowing face and outstretched hands, "these women are always in extremes. The fact is," he said aloud, "Fitzgerald is able to prove an alibi, and he refuses to do so."

"But why?"

Calton shrugged his shoulders.

"That is best known to himself—some Quixotic idea of honour, I fancy. Now, he refuses to tell me where he was on that night; perhaps he won't

refuse to tell you—so you must come up and see him with me, and perhaps he will recover his senses, and confess.”

“But my father,” she faltered.

“Did you not say he was out of town?” asked Calton.

“Yes,” hesitated Madge. “But he told me not to go.”

“In that case,” said Calton, rising and taking up his hat and gloves, “I won’t ask you.”

She laid her hand on his arm.

“Stop! will it do any good?”

Calton hesitated a moment, for he thought that if the reason of Brian’s silence was, as he surmised, an intrigue with a married woman, he might not tell the girl he was engaged to about it—but, on the other hand, there might be some other reason, and Calton trusted to Madge to find it out. With these thoughts in his mind he turned round.

“Yes,” he answered, boldly, “it may save his life.”

“Then I shall go,” she answered, recklessly “He is more to me than my father, and if I can save him, I will. Wait,” and she ran out of the room.

“An uncommonly plucky girl,” murmured the lawyer, as he looked out of the window. “If Fitzgerald is not a fool he will certainly tell her all—that is, of course, if he is able to—queer things these women are—I quite agree with Balzac’s saying that no wonder man couldn’t understand woman, seeing that God who created her failed to do so.”

Madge came back dressed to go out, with a heavy veil over her face.

“Shall I order the carriage?” she asked, pulling on her gloves with trembling fingers.

“Hardly,” answered Calton, dryly, “unless you want to see a paragraph in the society papers to the effect that Miss Madge Frettlby visited Mr. Fitzgerald in gaol—no—no—we’ll get a cab. Come, my dear,” and taking her arm he led her away.

They reached the station, and caught a train just as it started, yet notwithstanding this Madge was in a fever of impatience.

“How slowly it goes,” she said, fretfully.

“Hush, my dear,” said Calton, laying his hand on her arm. “You will betray yourself—we’ll arrive soon—and save him.”

“Oh, God grant we may,” she said with a low cry, clasping her hands tightly together, while Calton could see the tears falling from under her thick veil.

“This is not the way to do so,” he said, almost roughly, “you’ll be in hysterics soon—control yourself for his sake.”

"For his sake," she muttered, and with a powerful effort of will, calmed herself. They soon arrived in Melbourne, and, getting a hansom, drove up quickly to the gaol. After going through the usual formula, they entered the cell where Brian was, and, when the warder who accompanied them opened the door, they found the young man seated on his bed. He looked up, and, on seeing Madge, rose and held out his hands with a cry of delight. She ran forward, and threw herself on his breast with a stifled sob. For a short time no one spoke—Calton being at the other end of the cell, busy with some notes which he had taken from his pocket, and the warder having retired.

"My poor darling," said Madge, stroking back the soft, fair hair from his flushed forehead, "how ill you look."

"Yes!" answered Fitzgerald, with a hard laugh. "Prison does not improve a man—does it?"

"Don't speak in that tone, Brian," she said; "it is not like you—let us sit down and talk calmly over the matter."

"I don't see what good that will do," he answered, wearily, as they sat down hand-in-hand. "I have talked about it to Calton till my head aches, and it is no good."

"Of course not," retorted the lawyer, sharply, as he also sat down. "Nor will it be any good until you come to your senses, and tell us where you were on that night."

"I tell you I cannot."

"Brian, dear," said Madge, softly, taking his hand, "you must tell all—for my sake."

Fitzgerald sighed—this was the hardest temptation he had yet been subjected to—he felt half inclined to yield, and chance the result—but one look at Madge's pure face steeled him against doing so. What could his confession bring but sorrow and regret to one whom he loved better than his life.

"Madge!" he answered, gravely, taking her hand again, "you do not know what you ask."

"Yes, I do!" she replied, quickly. "I ask you to save yourself—to prove that you are not guilty of this terrible crime, and not to sacrifice your life for the sake of—of—"

Here she stopped, and looked helplessly at Calton, for she had no idea of the reason of Fitzgerald's refusal to speak.

"For the sake of a woman," finished Calton, bluntly.

"A woman!" she faltered, still holding her lover's hand.

"Is—is—is that the reason?"

Brian averted his face.

"Yes!" he said, in a low, rough voice.

A sharp expression of anguish crossed her pale face, and, sinking her head on her hands, she wept bitterly. Brian looked at her in a dogged kind of way, and Calton stared grimly at them both.

"Look here," he said, at length, to Brian, in an angry voice; "if you want my opinion of your conduct I think it's infamous—begging your pardon, Miss Frettlby, for the expression. Here is this noble gill, who loves you with her whole heart, and is ready to sacrifice everything for your sake, comes to implore you to save your life, and you coolly turn round and acknowledge another woman."

Brian lifted his head haughtily, and his face flushed.

"You are wrong," he said, turning round sharply; "there is the woman for whose sake I keep silence;" and, rising up from the bed, he pointed to Madge, as she sobbed bitterly on it. She lifted up her haggard face with an air of surprise.

"For my sake!" she cried in a startled voice.

"Oh, he's mad," said Calton, shrugging his shoulders; "I shall put in a defence of insanity."

"No, I am not mad," cried Fitzgerald, wildly, as he caught Madge in his arms. "My darling! My darling! It is for your sake that I keep silence, and I shall do so though my life pays the penalty. I could tell you where I was on that night and save myself: but if I did, you would learn a secret which would curse your life, and I dare not speak—I dare not."

Madge looked up into his face with a pitiful smile as her—tears fell fast.

"Dearest!" she said, softly. "Do not think of me, but only of yourself; better that I should endure misery than that you should die. I do not know what the secret can be, but if the telling of it will save your life, do not hesitate. See," she cried, falling on her knees, "I am at your feet—I implore you by all the love you ever had for me, to save yourself, whatever the consequences may be to me."

"Madge," said Fitzgerald, as he raised her in his arms, "at one time I might have done so, but now it is too late. There is another and stronger reason for my silence, which I have only found out since my arrest. I know that I am closing up the one way of escape from this charge of murder, of which I am innocent; but as there is a God in heaven, I swear that I will not speak."

There was a silence in the cell, broken only by Madge's convulsive sobs, and even Calton, cynical man of the world as he was, felt his eyes grow wet. Brian led Madge over to him, and placed her in his arms.

"Take her away," he said, in a broken voice, "or I shall forget that I am a man;" and turning away he threw himself on his bed, and covered his face with his hands. Calton did not answer him, but summoned the warder, and tried to lead Madge away. But just as they reached the door she broke away from him, and, running back, flung herself on her lover's breast.

"My darling! My darling!" she sobbed, kissing him, "you shall not die. I shall save you in spite of yourself;" and, as if afraid to trust herself longer, she ran out of the cell, followed by the barrister.

13

Madge Makes a Discovery

Madge stepped into the cab, and Calton paused a moment to tell the cabman to drive to the railway station. Suddenly she stopped him. “Tell him to drive to Brian’s lodgings in Powlett Street,” she said, laying her hand on Calton’s arm.

“What for?” asked the lawyer, in astonishment.

“And also to go past the Melbourne Club, as I want to stop there.”

“What the deuce does she mean?” muttered Calton, as he gave the necessary orders, and stepped into the cab.

“And now,” he asked, looking at his companion, who had let down her veil, while the cab rattled quickly down the street, “what do you intend to do?”

She threw back her veil, and he was astonished to see the sudden change which had come over her. There were no tears now, and her eyes were hard and glittering, while her mouth was firmly closed. She looked like a woman who had determined to do a certain thing, and would carry out her intention at whatever cost.

“I intend to save Brian in spite of himself,” she said, very distinctly.

“But how?”

“Ah, you think that, being a woman, I can do nothing,” she said, bitterly.

“Well, you shall see.”

“I beg your pardon,” retorted Calton, with a grim smile, “my opinion of your sex has always been an excellent one—every lawyer’s is; stands to reason that it should be so, seeing that a woman is at the bottom of nine cases out of ten.”

“The old cry.”

"Nevertheless a true one," answered Calton. "Ever since the time of Father Adam it has been acknowledged that women influence the world either for good or evil more than men. But this is not to the point," he went on, rather impatiently.

"What do you propose to do?"

"Simply this," she answered. "In the first place, I may tell you that I do not understand Brian's statement that he keeps silence for my sake, as there are no secrets in my life that can justify his saying so. The facts of the case are simply these: Brian, on the night in question, left our house at St. Kilda, at eleven o'clock. He told me that he would call at the Club to see if there were any letters for him, and then go straight home."

"But he might have said that merely as a blind."

Madge shook her head.

"No, I don't think so. I did not ask him where he was going. He told me quite spontaneously. I know Brian's character, and he would not tell a deliberate lie, especially when there was no necessity for it. I am quite certain that he intended to do as he said, and go straight home. When he got to the Club, he found a letter there, which caused him to alter his mind."

"From whom was the letter?"

"Can't you guess," she said impatiently. "From the person, man or woman, who wanted to see him and reveal this secret about me, whatever it is. He got the letter at his Club, and went down Collins Street to meet the writer. At the corner of the Scotch Church he found Mr. Whyte, and on recognising him, left in disgust, and walked down Russell Street to keep his appointment."

"Then you don't think he came back."

"I am certain he did not, for, as Brian told you, there are plenty of young men who wear the same kind of coat and hat as he does. Who the second man who got into the cab was I do not know, but I will swear that it was not Brian."

"And you are going to look for that letter?"

"Yes, in Brian's lodgings."

"He might have burnt it."

"He might have done a thousand things, but he did not," she answered.

"Brian is the most careless man in the world; he would put the letter into his pocket, or throw it into the waste-paper basket, and never think of it again."

"In this case he did, however."

"Yes, he thought of the conversation he had with the writer, but not of the letter itself. Depend upon it, we shall find it in his desk, or in one of the pockets of the clothes he wore that night."

"Then there's another thing," said Calton, thoughtfully. "The letter might, have been delivered to him between the Elizabeth Street Railway Station and the Club."

"We can soon find out about that," answered Madge; "for Mr. Rolleston was with him at the time."

"So he was," answered Calton; "and here is Rolleston coming down the street. We'll ask him now."

The cab was just passing the Burke and Wills' monument, and Calton's quick eye had caught a glimpse of Rolleston walking down the left-hand side. What first attracted Calton's attention was the glittering appearance of Felix. His well-brushed top hat glittered, his varnished boots glittered, and his rings and scarf-pin glittered; in fact, so resplendent was his appearance that he looked like an animated diamond coming along in the blazing sunshine.

The cab drove up to the kerb, and Rolleston stopped short, as Calton sprang out directly in front of him. Madge lay back in the cab and pulled down her veil, not wishing to be recognised by Felix, as she knew that if he did it would soon be all over the town.

"Hallo! old chap," said Rolleston, in considerable astonishment. "Where did you spring from?"

"From the cab, of course," answered Calton, with a laugh.

"A kind of DEUS EX MACHINA," replied Rolleston, attempting a bad pun.

"Exactly," said Calton. "Look here, Rolleston, do you remember the night of Whyte's murder—you met Fitzgerald at the Railway Station."

"In the train," corrected Felix.

"Well, well, no matter, you came up with him to the Club."

"Yes, and left him there."

"Did you notice if he received any message while he was with you?"

"Any message?" repeated Felix. "No, he did not; we were talking together the whole time, and he spoke to no one but me."

"Was he in good spirits?"

"Excellent, made me laugh awfully—but why all this thusness?"

"Oh, nothing," answered Calton, getting back into the cab. "I wanted a little information from you; I'll explain next time I see you—Good-bye!"

"But I say," began Felix, but the cab had already rattled away, so Mr. Rolleston turned angrily away.

"I never saw anything like these lawyers," he said to himself.

"Calton's a perfect whirlwind, by Jove."

Meanwhile Calton was talking to Madge.

"You were right," he said, "there must have been a message for him at the Club, for he got none from the time he left your place."

"And what shall we do now?" asked Madge, who, having heard all the conversation, did not trouble to question the lawyer about it.

"Find out at the Club if any letter was waiting for him on that night," said Calton, as the cab stopped at the door of the Melbourne Club. "Here we are," and with a hasty word to Madge, he ran up the steps.

He went to the office of the Club to find out if any letters had been waiting for Fitzgerald, and found there a waiter with whom he was pretty well acquainted.

"Look here, Brown," said the lawyer, "do you remember on that Thursday night when the hansom cab murder took place if any letters were waiting here for Mr. Fitzgerald?"

"Well, really, sir," hesitated Brown, "it's so long ago that I almost forget." Calton gave him a sovereign.

"Oh! it's not that, Mr. Calton," said the waiter, pocketing the coin, nevertheless. "But I really do forget."

"Try and remember," said Calton, shortly.

Brown made a tremendous effort of memory, and at last gave a satisfactory answer.

"No, sir, there were none!"

"Are you sure?" said Calton, feeling a thrill of disappointment.

"Quite sure, sir," replied the other, confidently, "I went to the letter rack several times that night, and I am sure there were none for Mr. Fitzgerald."

"Ah! I thought as much," said Calton, heaving a sigh.

"Stop!" said Brown, as though struck with a sudden idea. "Though there was no letter came by post, sir, there was one brought to him on that night."

"Ah!" said Calton, turning sharply. "At what time?"

"Just before twelve o'clock, sir."

"Who brought it?"

"A young woman, sir," said Brown, in a tone of disgust. "A bold thing, beggin' your pardon, sir; and no better than she should be. She bounced

in at the door as bold as brass, and sings out, 'Is he in?' 'Get out,' I says, 'or I'll call the perlice.' 'Oh no, you won't,' says she. 'You'll give him that,' and she shoves a letter into my hands. 'Who's him?' I asks. 'I dunno,' she answers. 'It's written there, and I can't read; give it him at once.' And then she clears out before I could stop her."

"And the letter was for Mr. Fitzgerald?"

"Yes, sir; and a precious dirty letter it was, too."

"You gave it to him, of course?"

"I did, sir. He was playing cards, and he put it in his pocket, after having looked at the outside of it, and went on with his game."

"Didn't he open it?"

"Not then, sir; but he did later on, about a quarter to one o'clock. I was in the room, and he opens it and reads it. Then he says to himself, 'What d--d impertinence,' and puts it into his pocket."

"Was he disturbed?"

"Well, sir, he looked angry like, and put his coat and hat on, and walked out about five minutes to one."

"Ah! and he met Whyte at one," muttered Calton. "There's no doubt about it. The letter was an appointment, and he was going to keep it. What kind of a letter was it?" he asked.

"Very dirty, sir, in a square envelope; but the paper was good, and so was the writing."

"That will do," said Calton; "I am much obliged to you," and he hurried down to where Madge awaited him in the cab.

"You were right," he said to her, when the cab was once more in motion. "He got a letter on that night, and went to keep his appointment at the time he met Whyte."

"I knew it," cried Madge with delight. "You see, we will find it in his lodgings."

"I hope so," answered Calton; "but we must not be too sanguine; he may have destroyed it."

"No, he has not," she replied. "I am convinced it is there."

"Well," answered Calton, looking at her, "I don't contradict you, for your feminine instincts have done more to discover the truth than my reasonings; but that is often the case with women—they jump in the dark where a man would hesitate, and in nine cases out of ten land safely."

"Alas for the tenth!" said Miss Frettlby. "She has to be the one exception to prove the rule."

She had in a great measure recovered her spirits, and seemed confident that she would save her lover. But Mr. Calton saw that her nerves were strung up to the highest pitch, and that it; was only her strong will that kept her from breaking down altogether.

"By Jove," he muttered, in an admiring tone, as he watched her. "She's a plucky girl, and Fitzgerald is a lucky man to have the love of such a woman."

They soon arrived at Brian's lodgings, and the door was opened by Mrs. Sampson, who looked very disconsolate indeed. The poor cricket had been blaming herself severely for the information she had given to the false insurance agent, and the floods of tears which she had wept had apparently had an effect on her physical condition, for she cracked less loudly than usual, though her voice was as shrill as ever.

"That sich a thing should 'ave 'appened to 'im," she wailed, in her thin, high voice. "An' me that proud of 'im, not 'avin' any family of my own, except one as died and went up to 'eaving arter 'is father, which I 'opes as they both are now angels, an' friendly, as 'is nature 'ad not developed in this valley of the shadder to determine 'is feelin's towards is father when 'e died, bein' carried off by a chill, caused by the change from 'ot to cold, the weather bein' that contrary."

They had arrived in Brian's sitting-room by this time, and Madge sank into a chair, while Calton, anxious to begin the search, hinted to Mrs. Sampson that she could go.

"I'm departin', sir," piped the cricket, with a sad shake of her head, as she opened the door; "knowin', as I do, as 'e's as innocent as an unborn babe, an' to think of me 'avin' told that 'orrid pusson who 'ad no regard for the truth all about 'im as is now in a cold cell, not as what the weather ain't warm, an' 'e won't want a fire as long as they allows 'im blankets."

"What did you tell him?" asked Calton, sharply.

"Ah! you may well say that," lamented Mrs. Sampson, rolling her dingy handkerchief into a ball, and dabbing at her red-rimmed eyes, which presented quite a bacchanalian appearance, due, be it said in justice, to grief, not to liquor. "'Avin' bin beguiled by that serping in light clothes as wanted to know if 'e allays come 'ome afore twelve, which I said 'e was in the 'abit of doin', tho', to be sure, 'e did sometimes use 'is latch-key."

"The night of the murder, for instance."

"Oh! don't say that, sir," said Mrs. Sampson, with a terrified crackle. "Me bein' weak an' ailin', tho' comin' of a strong family, as allays lived

to a good age, thro' bein' in the 'abit of wearin' flannels, which my mother's father thought better nor a-spilin' the inside with chemistry." "Clever man, that detective," murmured Calton to himself. "He got out of her by strategy what he never would have done by force. It's a strong piece of evidence against Fitzgerald, but it does not matter much if he can prove an alibi. You'll likely be called as a witness for the prosecution," he said aloud.

"Me, sir!" squeaked Mrs. Sampson, trembling violently, and thereby producing a subdued rustle, as of wind in the trees. "As I've never bin in the court, 'cept the time as father tooked me for a treat, to 'ear a murder, which there's no denyin' is as good as a play, 'e bein' 'ung, 'avin' 'it 'is wife over the 'ead with the poker when she weren't lookin', and a-berryin' 'er corpse in a back garding, without even a stone to mark the place, let alone a line from the Psalms and a remuneration of 'er virtues."

"Well, well," said Calton, rather impatiently, as he opened the door for her, "leave us for a short time, there's a good soul. Miss Frettlby and I want to rest, and we will ring for you when we are going."

"Thank you, sir," said the lachrymose landlady, "an' I 'opes they won't 'ang 'im, which is sich a choky way of dyin'; but in life we are in death," she went on, rather incoherently, "as is well known to them as 'as diseases, an' may be corpsed at any minute, and as—"

Here Calton, unable to restrain his impatience any longer, shut the door, and they heard Mrs. Sampson's shrill voice and subdued cracklings die away in the distance.

"Now then," he said, "now that we have got rid of that woman and her tongue, where are we to begin?"

"The desk," replied Madge, going over to it. "it's the most likely place."

"Don't think so," said Calton, shaking his head. "If, as you say, Fitzgerald is a careless man, he would not have troubled to put it there. However; perhaps we'd better look."

The desk was very untidy ("Just like Brian," as Madge remarked)—full of paid and unpaid bills, old letters, play-bills, ball-programmes, and withered flowers.

"Reminiscences of former flirtations," said Calton, with a laugh, pointing to these.

"I should not wonder," retorted Miss Frettlby, coolly. "Brian always was in love with some one or other; but you know what Lytton says, 'There are many counterfeits, but only one Eros,' so I can afford to forget these things."

The letter, however, was not to be found in the desk, nor was it in the sitting-room. They tried the bedroom, but with no better result. Madge was about to give up the search in despair, when suddenly Calton's eye fell on the waste-paper basket, which, by some unaccountable reason, they had over-looked. The basket was half-full, in fact; more than half, and, on looking at it, a sudden thought struck the lawyer. He rang the bell, and presently Mrs. Sampson made her appearance.

"How long has that waste-paper basket been standing like that?" he asked, pointing to it.

"It bein' the only fault I 'ad to find with 'im," said Mrs. Sampson, "'e bein' that untidy that 'e a never let me clean it out until 'e told me pussonly. 'E said as 'ow 'e throwed things into it as 'e might 'ave to look up again; an' I 'aven't touched it for more nor six weeks, 'opin' you won't think me a bad 'ousekeeper, it bein' 'is own wish—bein' fond of litter an' sich like."

"Six weeks," repeated Calton, with a look at Madge. "Ah, and he got the letter four weeks ago. Depend upon it, we shall find it there."

Madge gave a cry, and falling on her knees, emptied the basket out on the floor, and both she and Calton were soon as busy among the fragments of paper as though they were rag-pickers.

"Opin they ain't orf their 'eads," murmured Mrs. Sampson, as she went to the door, "but it looks like it, they bein'—"

Suddenly a cry broke from Madge, as she drew out of the mass of paper a half-burnt letter, written on thick and creamy-looking paper.

"At last," she cried, rising off her knees, and smoothing it out; "I knew he had not destroyed it."

"Pretty nearly, however," said Calton, as his eye glanced rapidly over it; "it's almost useless as it is. There's no name to it."

He took it over to the window, and spread it out upon the table. It was dirty, and half burnt, but still it was a clue. Here is a FAC-SIMILE of the letter:—

"There is not much to be gained from that, I'm afraid," said Madge, sadly. "It shows that he had an appointment—but where?"

Calton did not answer, but, leaning his head on his hands, stared hard at the paper. At last he jumped up with a cry—

"I have it," he said, in an excited tone. "Look at that paper; see how creamy and white it is, and above all, look at the printing in the corner—'OT VILLA, TOORAK.'"

"Then he went down to Toorak?"

"In an hour, and back again—hardly!"

"Then it was not written from Toorak?"

"No, it was written in one of the Melbourne back slums."

"How do you know?"

"Look at the girl who brought it," said Calton, quickly. "A disreputable woman, one far more likely to come from the back slums than from Toorak. As to the paper, three months ago there was a robbery at Toorak, and this is some of the paper that was stolen by the thieves."

Madge said nothing, but her sparkling eyes and the nervous trembling of her hands showed her excitement.

"I will see a detective this evening," said Calton, exultingly, "find out where this letter came from, and who wrote it. We'll save him yet," he said, placing the precious letter carefully in his pocket-book.

"You think that you will be able to find the woman who wrote that?"

"Hum," said the lawyer, looking thoughtful, "she may be dead, as the letter says she is in a dying condition. However, if I can find the woman who delivered the letter at the Club, and who waited for Fitzgerald at the corner of Bourke and Russell Streets, that will be sufficient. All I want to prove is that he was not in the hansom cab with Whyte."

"And do you think you can do that?"

"Depends upon this letter," said Calton, tapping his pocket-book with his finger. "I'll tell you to-morrow."

Shortly afterwards they left the house, and when Calton put Madge safely into the St. Kilda train, her heart felt lighter than it had done since Fitzgerald's arrest.

14

Another Richmond in the Field

There is an old adage that says “Like draws to like.” The antithesis of this is probably that “Unlike repels unlike.” But there are times when individualism does not enter into the matter, and Fate alone, by throwing two persons together, sets up a state, congenial or uncongenial, as the case may be. Fate chose to throw together Mr. Gorby and Mr. Kilsip, and each was something more than uncongenial to the other. Each was equally clever in their common profession; each was a universal favourite, yet each hated the other. They were as fire and water to one another, and when they came together, invariably there was trouble.

Kilsip was tall and slender; Gorby was short and stout. Kilsip looked clever; Gorby wore a smile of self-satisfaction; which alone was sufficient to prevent his doing so. Yet, singularly enough, it was this very smile that proved most useful to Gorby in the pursuit of his calling. It enabled him to come at information where his sharp-looking colleague might try in vain. The hearts of all went forth to Gorby’s sweet smile and insinuating manner. But when Kilsip appeared people were wont to shut up, and to retire promptly, like alarmed snails, within their shells. Gorby gave the lie direct to those who hold that the face is ever the index to the mind. Kilsip, on the other hand, with his hawk-like countenance, his brilliant black eyes, hooked nose, and small thin-lipped mouth, endorsed the theory. His complexion was quite colourless, and his hair was jet black. Altogether, he could not be called fair to look upon. His craft and cunning were of the snake-like order. So long as he conducted his enquiries in secret he was generally successful; but once let him appear personally on the scene, and failure was assured to him. Thus, while Kilsip passed as the cleverer, Gorby was invariably

the more successful—at all events, ostensibly.

When, therefore, this hansom cab murder case was put into Gorby's hands, the soul of Kilsip was smitten with envy, and when Fitzgerald was arrested, and all the evidence collected by Gorby seemed to point so conclusively to his guilt, Kilsip writhed in secret over the triumph of his enemy. Though he would only have been too glad to say that Gorby had got hold of the wrong man, yet the evidence was so conclusive that such a thought never entered his head until he received a note from Mr. Calton, asking him to call at his office that evening at eight o'clock, with reference to the murder.

Kilsip knew that Calton was counsel for the prisoner. He guessed that he was wanted to follow up a clue. And he determined to devote himself to whatever Calton might require of him, if only to prove Gorby to be wrong. So pleased was he at the mere possibility of triumphing over his rival, that on casually meeting him, he stopped and invited him to drink.

The primary effect of his sudden and unusual hospitality was to arouse all Gorby's suspicions; but on second thoughts, deeming himself quite a match for Kilsip, both mentally and physically, Gorby accepted the invitation.

"Ah!" said Kilsip, in his soft, low voice, rubbing his lean white hands together, as they sat over their drinks, "you're a lucky man to have laid your hands on that hansom cab murderer so quickly."

"Yes; I flatter myself I did manage it pretty well," said Gorby, lighting his pipe. "I had no idea that it would be so simple—though, mind you, it required a lot of thought before I got a proper start."

"I suppose you're pretty sure he's the man you want?" pursued Kilsip, softly, with a brilliant flash of his black eyes.

"Pretty sure, indeed!" retorted Mr. Gorby, scornfully, "there ain't no pretty sure about it. I'd take my Bible oath he's the man. He and Whyte hated one another. He says to Whyte, 'I'll kill you, if I've got to do it in the open street.' He meets Whyte drunk, a fact which he acknowledges himself; he clears out, and the cabman swears he comes back; then he gets into the cab with a living man, and when he comes out leaves a dead one; he drives to East Melbourne and gets into the house at a time which his landlady can prove—just the time that a cab would take to drive from the Grammar School on the St. Kilda Road. If you ain't a fool, Kilsip, you'll see as there's no doubt about it."

"It looks all square enough," said Kilsip, who wondered what evidence Calton could have found to contradict such a plain statement of fact.

"And what's his defence?"

"Mr. Calton's the only man as knows that," answered Gorby, finishing his drink; "but, clever and all as he is, he can't put anything in, that can go against my evidence."

"Don't you be too sure of that," sneered Kilsip, whose soul was devoured with envy.

"Oh! but I am," retorted Gorby, getting as red as a turkey-cock at the sneer. "You're jealous, you are, because you haven't got a finger in the pie."

"Ah! but I may have yet."

"Going a-hunting yourself, are you?" said Gorby, with an indignant snort. "A-hunting for what—for a man as is already caught?"

"I don't believe you've got the right man," remarked Kilsip, deliberately. Mr. Gorby looked upon him with a smile of pity.

"No! of course you don't, just because I've caught him; perhaps, when you see him hanged, you'll believe it then?"

"You're a smart man, you are," retorted Kilsip; "but you ain't the Pope to be infallible."

"And what grounds have you for saying he's not the right man?" demanded Gorby.

Kilsip smiled, and stole softly across the room like a cat.

"You don't think I'm such a fool as to tell you? But you ain't so safe nor clever as you think," and, with another irritating smile, he went out.

"He's a regular snake," said Gorby to himself, as the door closed on his brother detective; "but he's bragging now. There isn't a link missing in the chain of evidence against Fitzgerald, so I defy him. He can do his worst."

At eight o'clock on that night the soft-footed and soft-voiced detective presented himself at Calton's office. He found the lawyer impatiently waiting for him. Kilsip closed the door softly, and then taking a seat opposite to Calton, waited for him to speak. The lawyer, however, first handed him a cigar, and then producing a bottle of whisky and two glasses from some mysterious recess, he filled one and pushed it towards the detective. Kilsip accepted these little attentions with the utmost gravity, yet they were not without their effect on him, as the keen-eyed lawyer saw. Calton was a great believer in diplomacy, and never lost an opportunity of inculcating it into young men starting in life. "Diplomacy," said Calton, to one young aspirant for legal honours, "is the oil we cast on the troubled waters of social, professional, and

political life; and if you can, by a little tact, manage mankind, you are pretty certain to get on in this world."

Calton was a man who practised what he preached. He believed Kilsip to have that feline nature, which likes to be stroked, to be made much of, and he paid him these little attentions, knowing full well they would bear their fruit. He also knew that Kilsip entertained no friendly feeling for Gorby, that, in fact, he bore him hatred, and he determined that this feeling which existed between the two men, should serve him to the end he had in view.

"I suppose," he said, leaning back in his chair, and watching the wreaths of blue smoke curling from his cigar, "I suppose you know all the ins and the outs of the hansom cab murder?"

"I should rather think so," said Kilsip, with a curious light in his queer eyes. "Why, Gorby does nothing but brag about it, and his smartness in catching the supposed murderer!"

"Aha!" said Calton, leaning forward, and putting his arms on the table. "Supposed murderer. Eh! Does that mean that he hasn't been convicted by a jury, or that you think that Fitzgerald is innocent?"

Kilsip stared hard at the lawyer, in a vague kind of way, slowly rubbing his hands together.

"Well," he said at length, in a deliberate manner, "before I got your note, I was convinced Gorby had got hold of the right man, but when I heard that you wanted to see me, and knowing you are defending the prisoner, I guessed that you must have found something in his favour which you wanted me to look after."

"Right!" said Calton, laconically.

"As Mr. Fitzgerald said he met Whyte at the corner and hailed the cab—" went on the detective.

"How do you know that?" interrupted Calton, sharply.

"Gorby told me."

"How the devil did he find out?" cried the lawyer, with genuine surprise.

"Because he is always poking and prying about," said Kilsip, forgetting, in his indignation, that such poking and prying formed part of detective business. "But, at any rate," he went on quickly, "if Mr. Fitzgerald did leave Mr. Whyte, the only chance he's got of proving his innocence is that he did not come back, as the cabman alleged."

"Then, I suppose, you think that Fitzgerald will prove an alibi," said Calton.

"Well, sir," answered Kilsip, modestly, "of course you know more about the case than I do, but that is the only defence I can see he can make."

"Well, he's not going to put in such a defence."

"Then he must be guilty," said Kilsip, promptly.

"Not necessarily," returned the barrister, drily.

"But if he wants to save his neck, he'll have to prove an alibi," persisted the other.

"That's just where the point is," answered Calton. "He doesn't want to save his neck."

Kilsip, looking rather bewildered, took a sip of whisky, and waited to hear what Mr. Calton had to say.

"The fact is," said Calton, lighting a fresh cigar, "he has some extraordinary idea in his head. He refuses absolutely to say where he was on that night."

"I understand," said Kilsip, nodding his head. "Woman?"

"No, nothing of the kind," retorted Calton, hastily. "I thought so at first, but I was wrong. He went to see a dying woman, who wished to tell him something."

"What about?"

"That's just what I can't tell you," answered Calton quickly. "It must have been something important, for she sent for him in great haste—and he was by her bedside between the hours of one and two on Friday morning."

"Then he did not return to the cab?"

"No, he did not, he went to keep his appointment, but, for some reason or other, he won't tell where this appointment was. I went to his rooms to-day and found this half-burnt letter, asking him to come."

Calton handed the letter to Kilsip, who placed it on the table and examined it carefully.

"This was written on Thursday," said the detective.

"Of course—you can see that from the date; and Whyte was murdered on Friday, the 27th."

"It was written at something Villa, Toorak," pursued Kilsip, still examining the paper. "Oh! I understand; he went down there."

"Hardly," retorted Calton, in a sarcastic tone. "He couldn't very well go down there, have an interview, and be back in East Melbourne in one hour—the cabman Royston can prove that he was at Russell Street at one o'clock, and his landlady that he entered his lodging in East Melbourne at two—no, he wasn't at Toorak."

"When was this letter delivered?"

"Shortly before twelve o'clock, at the Melbourne Club, by a girl, who, from what the waiter saw of her, appears to be a disreputable individual—you will see it says bearer will wait him at Bourke Street, and as another street is mentioned, and as Fitzgerald, after leaving Whyte, went down Russell Street to keep his appointment, the most logical conclusion is that the bearer of the letter waited for him at the corner of Bourke and Russell Streets. Now," went on the lawyer, "I want to find out who the girl that brought the letter is!"

"But how?"

"God bless my soul, Kilsip! How stupid you are," cried Calton, his irritation getting the better of him. "Can't you understand—that paper came from one of the back slums—therefore it must have been stolen."

A sudden light flashed into Kilsip's eyes.

"Talbot Villa, Toorak," he cried quickly, snatching up the letter again, and examining it with great attention, "where that burglary took place."

"Exactly," said Calton, smiling complacently. "Now do you understand what I want—you must take me to the crib in the back slums where the articles stolen from the house in Toorak were hidden. This paper"—pointing to the letter—"is part of the swag left behind, and must have been used by someone there. Brian Fitzgerald obeyed the directions given in the letter, and he was there, at the time of the murder."

"I understand," said Kilsip, with a gratified purr. "There were four men engaged in that burglary, and they hid the swag at Mother Guttersnipe's crib, in a lane off Little Bourke Street—but hang it, a swell like Mr. Fitzgerald, in evening dress, couldn't very well have gone down there unless—"

"He had some one with him well-known in the locality," finished Calton, rapidly. "Exactly, that woman who delivered the letter at the Club guided him. Judging from the waiter's description of her appearance, I should think she was pretty well known about the slums."

"Well," said Kilsip, rising and looking at his watch, "it is now nine o'clock, so if you like we will go to the old hag's place at once—dying woman," he said, as if struck by a sudden thought, "there was a woman who died there about four weeks ago."

"Who was she?" asked Calton, who was putting on his overcoat.

"Some relation of Mother Guttersnipe's, I fancy," answered Kilsip, as they left the office. "I don't know exactly what she was—she was called the 'Queen,' and a precious handsome woman she must have been—came from Sydney about three months ago, and from what I can make

out, was not long from England, died of consumption on the Thursday night before the murder.”

15

A Woman of the People

Bourke Street is a more crowded thoroughfare than Collins Street, especially at night. The theatres that it contains are in themselves sufficient for the gathering of a considerable crowd. It is a grimy crowd for the most part. Round the doors of the hotels a number of ragged and shabby-looking individuals collect, waiting till some kind friend shall invite them to step inside. Further on a knot of horsey-looking men are to be seen standing under the Opera House verandah giving and taking odds about the Melbourne Cup, or some other meeting. Here and there are ragged street Arabs, selling matches and newspapers; and against the verandah post, in the full blaze of the electric light, leans a weary, draggled-looking woman, one arm clasping a baby to her breast, and the other holding a pile of newspapers, while she drones out in a hoarse voice, “’ERALD, third ’dition, one penny!” until the ear wearies of the constant repetition. Cabs rattle incessantly along the street; here, a fast-looking hansom, with a rakish horse, bearing some gilded youth to his Club—there, a dingy-looking vehicle, drawn by a lank quadruped, which staggers blindly down the street. Alternating with these, carriages dash along with their well-groomed horses, and within, the vision of bright eyes, white dresses, and the sparkle of diamonds. Then, further up, just on the verge of the pavement, three violins and a harp are playing a German waltz to an admiring crowd of attentive spectators. If there is one thing which the Melbourne folk love more than another, it is music. Their fondness for it is only equalled by their admiration for horse-racing. Any street band which plays at all decently, may be sure of a good audience, and a substantial remuneration for their performance. Some writer has described Melbourne, as Glasgow with the sky of Alexandria; and certainly the beautiful climate

of Australia, so Italian in its brightness, must have a great effect on the nature of such an adaptable race as the Anglo-Saxon. In spite of the dismal prognostications of Marcus Clarke regarding the future Australian, whom he describes as being "a tall, coarse, strong-jawed, greedy, pushing, talented man, excelling in swimming and horsemanship," it is more likely that he will be a cultured, indolent individual, with an intense appreciation of the arts and sciences, and a dislike to hard work and utilitarian principles. Climatic influence should be taken into account with regard to the future Australian, and our posterity will no more resemble us than the luxurious Venetians resembled their hardy forefathers, who first started to build on those lonely sandy islands of the Adriatic.

This was the conclusion at which Mr. Calton arrived as, he followed his guide through the crowded streets, and saw with what deep interest the crowd listened to the rhythmic strains of Strauss and the sparkling melodies of Offenbach. The brilliantly-lit street, with the never-ceasing stream of people pouring along; the shrill cries of the street Arabs, the rattle of vehicles, and the fitful strains of music, all made up a scene which fascinated him, and he could have gone on wandering all night, watching the myriad phases of human character constantly passing before his eyes. But his guide, with whom familiarity with the proletarians had, in a great measure, bred indifference, hurried him away to Little Bourke Street, where the narrowness of the thoroughfare, with the high buildings on each side, the dim light of the sparsely scattered gas-lamps, and the few ragged-looking figures slouching along, formed a strong contrast to the brilliant and crowded scene they had just left. Turning off Little Bourke Street, the detective led the way down a dark lane. It was as hot as a furnace from the accumulated heat of the day. To look up at the clear starlit sky was to experience a sensation of delicious coolness.

"Keep close to me," whispered Kilsip, touching the barrister on the arm; "we may meet some nasty customers about here."

It was not quite dark, for the atmosphere had that luminous kind of haze so observable in Australian twilights, and this weird light was just sufficient to make the darkness visible. Kilsip and the barrister kept for safety in the middle of the alley, so that no one could spring upon them unaware, and they could see sometimes on the one side, a man cowering back into the black shadow, or on the other, a woman with disordered hair and bare bosom, leaning out of a window trying to get a breath of fresh air. There were also some children playing in the dried-up gutter, and their shrill young voices came echoing strangely through the gloom, mingling with a bacchanalian sort of song, sung by a man,

as he slouched along unsteadily over the rough stones. Now and then a mild-looking string of Chinamen stole along, clad in their dull-hued blue blouses, either chattering shrilly, like a lot of parrots, or moving silently down the alley with a stolid Oriental apathy on their yellow faces. Here and there came a stream of warm light through an open door, and within, the Mongolians were gathered round the gambling-tables, playing fan-tan, or leaving the seductions of their favourite pastime, to glide soft-footed to the many cook-shops, where enticing-looking fowls and turkeys already cooked were awaiting purchasers. Kilsip turning to the left, led the barrister down another and still narrower lane, the darkness and gloom of which made the lawyer shudder, as he wondered how human beings could live in such murky places.

At last, to Calton's relief, for he felt somewhat bewildered by the darkness and narrowness of the lanes through which he had been taken, the detective stopped before a door, which he opened, and stepping inside, beckoned to the barrister to follow. Calton did so, and found himself in a low, dark, ill-smelling passage. At the end a faint light glimmered. Kilsip caught his companion by the arm and guided him carefully along the passage. There was much need of this caution, for Calton could feel that the rotten boards were full of holes, into which one or the other of his feet kept slipping from time to time, while he could hear the rats squeaking and scampering away on all sides. Just as they got to the end of this tunnel, for it could be called nothing else, the light suddenly went out, and they were left in complete darkness.

"Light that," cried the detective in a preemptory tone of voice. "What do you mean by dowsing the glim?"

Thieves' argot was, evidently, well understood here, for there was a shuffle in the dark, a muttered voice, and someone lit a candle. Calton saw that the light was held by an elfish-looking child. Tangled masses of black hair hung over her scowling white face. As she crouched down on the floor against the damp wall she looked up defiantly yet fearfully at the detective.

"Where's Mother Guttersnipe?" asked Kilsip, touching her with his foot.

She seemed to resent the indignity, and rose quickly to her feet.

"Upstairs," she replied, jerking her head in the direction of the right wall.

Following her direction, Calton—his eyes now somewhat accustomed to the gloom—could discern a gaping black chasm, which he presumed was the stair alluded to.

"Yer won't get much out of 'er to-night; she's a-going to start 'er booze, she is."

"Never mind what she's doing or about to do," said Kilsip, sharply, "take me to her at once."

The girl looked him sullenly up and down, then she led the way into the black chasm and up the stairs. They were so shaky as to make Calton fear they might give way. As they toiled slowly up the broken steps he held tightly to his companion's arm. At last they stopped at a door through the cracks of which a faint glimmer of light was to be seen. Here the girl gave a shrill whistle, and the door opened. Still preceded by their elfish guide, Calton and the detective stepped through the doorway. A curious scene was before them. A small square room, with a low roof, from which the paper mildewed and torn hung in shreds; on the left hand, at the far end, was a kind of low stretcher, upon which a woman, almost naked, lay, amid a heap of greasy clothes. She appeared to be ill, for she kept tossing her head from side to side restlessly, and every now and then sang snatches of song in a cracked voice. In the centre of the room was a rough deal table, upon which stood a guttering tallow candle, which but faintly illuminated the scene, and a half empty rectangular bottle of Schnapps, with a broken cup beside it. In front of these signs of festivity sat an old woman with a pack of cards spread out before her, and from which she had evidently been telling the fortune of a villainous-looking young man who had opened the door, and who stood looking at the detective with no very friendly expression of countenance. He wore a greasy brown velvet coat, much patched, and a black wide-awake hat, pulled down over his eyes. From his expression—so scowling and vindictive was it—the barrister judged his ultimate destiny to lie between Pentridge and the gallows.

As they entered, the fortune-teller raised her head, and, shading her eyes with one skinny hand, looked curiously at the new comers. Calton thought he had never seen such a repulsive-looking old crone; and, in truth, her ugliness was, in its very grotesqueness well worthy the pencil of a Dore. Her face was seamed and lined with innumerable wrinkles, clearly defined by the dirt which was in them; bushy grey eyebrows, drawn frowningly over two piercing black eyes, whose light was undimmed by age; a hook nose, like the beak of a bird of prey, and a thin-lipped mouth devoid of teeth. Her hair was very luxurious and almost white, and was tied up in a great bunch by a greasy bit of black ribbon. As to her chin, Calton, when he saw it wagging to and fro, involuntarily quoted Macbeth's lines—

"Ye should be women, And yet your beards forbid me to interpret That ye are so."

She was no bad representative of the weird sisters.

As they entered she eyed them viciously, demanding,

"What the blazes they wanted."

"Want your booze," cried the child, with an elfish laugh, as she shook back her tangled hair.

"Get out, you whelp," croaked the old hag, shaking one skinny fist at her, "or I'll tear yer 'eart out."

"Yes, she can go," said Kilsip, nodding to the girl, "and you can clear, too," he added, sharply, turning to the young man, who stood still holding the door open.

At first he seemed inclined to dispute the detective's order, but ultimately obeyed him, muttering, as he went out, something about "the blooming cheek of showin' swells cove's cribs." The child followed him out, her exit being accelerated by Mother Guttersnipe, who, with a rapidity only attained by long practice, seized the shoe from one of her feet, and flung it at the head of the rapidly retreating girl.

"Wait till I ketches yer, Lizer," she shrieked, with a volley of oaths, "I'll break yer 'ead for ye!"

Lizer responded with a shrill laugh of disdain, and vanished through the shaky door, which she closed after her.

When she had disappeared Mother Guttersnipe took a drink from the broken cup, and, gathering all her greasy cards together in a business-like way, looked insinuatingly at Calton, with a suggestive leer.

"It's the future ye want unveiled, dearie?" she croaked, rapidly shuffling the cards; "an' old mother 'ull tell—"

"No she won't," interrupted the detective, sharply. "I've come on business."

The old woman started at this, and looked keenly at him from under her bushy eyebrows.

"What 'av the boys been up to now?" she asked, harshly. "There ain't no swag 'ere this time."

Just then the sick woman, who had been restlessly tossing on the bed, commenced singing a snatch of the quaint old ballad of "Barbara Allen"—

"Oh, mither, mither, mak' my bed,
An' mak' it saft an' narrow;
Since my true love died for me to-day

I'll die for him to-morrow."

"Shut up, cuss you!" yelled Mother Guttersnipe, viciously, "or I'll knock yer bloomin' 'ead orf," and she seized the square bottle as if to carry out her threat; but, altering her mind, she poured some of its contents into the cup, and drank it off with avidity.

"The woman seems ill," said Calton, casting a shuddering glance at the stretcher.

"So she are," growled Mother Guttersnipe, angrily. "She ought to be in Yarrer Bend, she ought, instead of stoppin' 'ere an' singin' them beastly things, which makes my blood run cold. Just 'ear 'er," she said, viciously, as the sick woman broke out once more—

"Oh, little did my mither think, When first she cradled me, I'd die sa far away fra home, Upon the gallows tree."

"Yah!" said the old woman, hastily, drinking some more gin out of the cup. "She's allays a-talkin' of dyin' an' gallers, as if they were nice things to jawr about."

"Who was that woman who died here three or four weeks ago?" asked Kilsip, sharply.

"Ow should I know?" retorted Mother Guttersnipe, sullenly. "I didn't kill 'er, did I? It were the brandy she drank; she was allays drinkin', cuss her."

"Do you remember the night she died?"

"No, I don't," answered the *beldame*, frankly. "I were drunk—blind, bloomin', blazin' drunk—s'elp me."

"You're always drunk," said Kilsip.

"What if I am?" snarled the woman, seizing her bottle. "You don't pay fur it. Yes, I'm drunk. I'm allays drunk. I was drunk last night, an' the night before, an' I'm a-goin' to git drunk to-night"—with an impressive look at the bottle—"an' to-morrow night, an' I'll keep it up till I'm rottin' in the grave."

Calton shuddered, so full of hatred and suppressed malignity was her voice, but the detective merely shrugged his shoulders.

"More fool you," he said, briefly. "Come now, on the night the 'Queen,' as you call her, died, there was a gentleman came to see her?"

"So she said," retorted Mother Guttersnipe; "but, lor, I dunno anythin', I were drunk."

"Who said—the 'Queen?'"

"No, my gran'darter, Sal. The 'Queen,' sent 'er to fetch the toff to see 'er cut 'er lucky. Wanted 'im to look at 'is work, I s'pose, cuss 'im; and Sal

prigged some paper from my box," she shrieked, indignantly; "prigged it w'en I were too drunk to stop 'er?"

The detective glanced at Calton, who nodded to him with a gratified expression on his face. They were right as to the paper having been stolen from the Villa at Toorak.

"You did not see the gentleman who came?" said Kilsip, turning again to the old hag.

"Not I, cuss you," she retorted, politely. "'E came about 'arf-past one in the morning, an' you don't expects we can stop up all night, do ye?"

"Half-past one o'clock," repeated Calton, quickly. "The very time. Is this true?"

"Wish I may die if it ain't," said Mother Guttersnipe, graciously. "My gran'darter Sal kin tell ye."

"Where is she?" asked Kilsip, sharply.

At this the old woman threw back her head, and howled dismay.

"She's 'ooked it," she wailed, drumming on the ground with her feet. "Gon' an' left 'er pore old gran' an' joined the Army, cuss 'em, a-comin' round an' a-spilin' business."

Here the woman on the bed broke out again—

"Since the flowers o' the forest are a' wed awa."

"'Old yer jawr," yelled Mother Guttersnipe, rising, and making a dart at the bed. "I'll choke the life out ye, s'elp me. D'y want me to murder ye, singin' 'em funeral things?"

Meanwhile the detective was talking rapidly to Mr. Calton.

"The only person who can prove Mr. Fitzgerald was here between one and two o'clock," he said, quickly, "is Sal Rawlins, as everyone else seems to have been drunk or asleep. As she has joined the Salvation Army, I'll go to the barracks the first thing in the morning and look for her."

"I hope you'll find her," answered Calton, drawing a long breath. "A man's life hangs on her evidence."

They turned to go, Calton having first given Mother Guttersnipe some loose silver, which she seized on with an avaricious clutch.

"You'll drink it, I suppose?" said the barrister, shrinking back from her.

"Werry likely," retorted the hag, with a repulsive grin, tying the money up in a piece of her dress, which she tore off for the purpose. "I'm a forting to the public-'ouse, I am, an' it's the on'y pleasure I 'ave in my life, cuss it."

The sight of money had a genial effect on her nature, for she held the candle at the head of the stairs, as they went down, so that they should not break their heads. As they arrived safely, they saw the light vanish, and heard the sick woman singing, "The Last Rose of Summer."

The street door was open, and, after groping their way along the dark passage, with its pitfalls, they found themselves in the open street.

"Thank heaven," said Calton, taking off his hat, and drawing a long breath. "Thank heaven we are safely out of that den!"

"At all events, our journey has not been wasted," said the detective, as they walked along. "We've found out where Mr. Fitzgerald was on the night of the murder, so he will be safe."

"That depends upon Sal Rawlins," answered Calton, gravely; "but come, let us have a glass of brandy, for I feel quite ill after my experience of low life."

16

Missing

The next day Kilsip called at Calton's office late in the afternoon, and found the lawyer eagerly expecting him. The detective's face, however, looked rather dismal, and Calton was not reassured.

"Well!" he said, impatiently, when Kilsip had closed the door and taken his seat. "Where is she?"

"That's just what I want to know," answered the detective, coolly; "I went to the Salvation Army headquarters and made enquiries about her. It appears that she had been in the Army as a hallelujah lass, but got tired of it in a week, and went off with a friend of hers to Sydney. She carried on her old life of dissipation, but, ultimately, her friend got sick of her, and the last thing they heard about her was that she had taken up with a Chinaman in one of the Sydney slums. I telegraphed at once to Sydney, and got a reply that there was no person of the name of Sal Rawlins known to the Sydney police, but they said they would make enquiries, and let me know the result."

"Ah! she has, no doubt, changed her name," said Calton, thoughtfully, stroking his chin. "I wonder why?"

"Wanted to get rid of the Army, I expect," answered Kilsip, drily. "The straying lamb did not care about being hunted back to the fold."

"And when did she join the Army?"

"The very day after the murder."

"Rather sudden conversion?"

"Yes, but she said the death of the woman on Thursday night had so startled her, that she went straight off to the Army to get her religion properly fixed up."

"The effects of fright, no doubt," said Calton, dryly. "I've met a good many examples of these sudden conversions, but they never last long as a rule—it's a case of 'the devil was sick, the devil a monk would be,' more than anything else. Good-looking?"

"So-so, I believe," replied Kilsip, shrugging his shoulders.

"Very ignorant—could neither read nor write."

"That accounts for her not asking for Fitzgerald when she called at the Club—she probably did not know whom she had been sent for. It will resolve itself into a question of identification, I expect. However, if the police can't find her, we will put an advertisement in the papers offering a reward, and send out handbills to the same effect. She must be found. Brian Fitzgerald's life hangs on a thread, and that thread is Sal Rawlins."

"Yes!" assented Kilsip, rubbing his hands together. "Even if Mr. Fitzgerald acknowledges that he was at Mother Guttersnipe's on the night in question, she will have to prove that he was there, as no one else saw him."

"Are you sure of that?"

"As sure as anyone can be in such a case. It was a late hour when he came, and everyone seems to have been asleep except the dying woman and Sal; and as one is dead, the other is the only person that can prove that he was there at the time when the murder was being committed in the hansom."

"And Mother Guttersnipe?"

"Was drunk, as she acknowledged last night. She thought that if a gentleman did call it must have been the other one."

"The other one?" repeated Calton, in a puzzled voice. "What other one?"

"Oliver Whyte."

Calton arose from his seat with a blank air of astonishment.

"Oliver Whyte!" he said, as soon as he could find his voice. "Was he in the habit of going there?"

Kilsip curled himself up in his seat like a sleek cat, and pushing forward his head till his nose looked like the beak of a bird of prey, looked keenly at Calton.

"Look here, sir," he said, in his low, purring voice, "there's a good deal in this case which don't seem plain—in fact, the further we go into it,—the more mixed up it seems to get. I went to see Mother Guttersnipe this morning, and she told me that Whyte had visited the 'Queen' several times while she lay ill, and that he seemed to be pretty well acquainted with her."

"But who the deuce is this woman they call the 'Queen'?" said Calton, irritably. "She seems to be at the bottom of the whole affair—every path we take leads to her."

"I know hardly anything about her," replied Kilsip, "except that she was a good-looking woman, of about forty-nine—she come out from England to Sydney a few months ago, then on here—how she got to Mother Guttersnipe's I can't find out, though I've tried to pump that old woman, but she's as close as wax, and it's my belief she knows more about this dead woman than she chooses to tell."

"But what could she have told Fitzgerald to make him act in this silly manner? A stranger who comes from England, and dies in a Melbourne slum, can't possibly know anything about Miss Frettlby."

"Not unless Miss Frettlby was secretly married to Whyte," suggested Kilsip, "and the 'Queen' knew it."

"Nonsense," retorted Calton, sharply. "Why, she hated him and loves Fitzgerald; besides, why on earth should she marry secretly, and make a confidant of a woman in one of the lowest parts of Melbourne? At one time her father wanted her to marry Whyte, but she made such strong opposition, that he eventually gave his consent to her engagement with Fitzgerald."

"And Whyte?"

"Oh, he had a row with Mr. Frettlby, and left the house in a rage. He was murdered the same night, for the sake of some papers he carried."

"Oh, that's Gorby's idea," said Kilsip, scornfully, with a vicious snarl.

"And it's mine too," answered Calton, firmly. "Whyte had some valuable papers, which he always carried about with him. The woman who died evidently told Fitzgerald that he did so; I gathered as much from an accidental admission he made."

Kilsip looked puzzled.

"I must confess that it is a riddle," he said at length; "but if Mr. Fitzgerald would only speak, it would clear everything up."

"Speak about what—the man who murdered Whyte?"

"Well, if he did not go quite so far as that he might at least supply the motive for the crime."

"Perhaps so," answered Calton, as the detective rose to go; "but it's no use. Fitzgerald for some reason or another, has evidently made up his mind not to speak, so our only hope in saving him lies in finding this girl."

"If she's anywhere in Australia you may be sure she'll be found," answered Kilsip, confidently, as he took his departure. "Australia isn't so over-crowded as all that."

But if Sal Rawlins was in Australia at all she certainly must have been in some very remote part. All efforts to find her proved futile. It was an open question if she was alive or dead; she seemed to have vanished completely. She was last seen in a Sydney den with a Chinaman whom afterwards she appears to have left. Since then, nothing whatever was known of her. Notices offering large rewards for her discovery were inserted in all the newspapers, Australian and New Zealand; but nothing came of them. As she herself was unable to read there seemed little chance of her knowing of them; and, if, as Calton surmised she had changed her name, no one would be likely to tell her of them. There was only the bare chance that she might hear of them casually, or that she might turn up of her own accord. If she returned to Melbourne she would certainly go to her grandmother's. She had no motive for not doing so. So Kilsip kept a sharp watch on the house, much to Mrs. Rawlins' disgust, for, with true English pride, she objected to this system of espionage.

"Cuss 'im," she croaked over her evening drink, to an old crone, as withered and evil-looking as herself, "why can't 'e stop in 'is own bloomin' 'ouse, an' leave mine alone—a-comin' round 'ere a-pokin' and pryin' and a-perwentin' people from earnin' their livin' an' a-gittin' drunk when they ain't well."

"What do 'e want?" asked her friend, rubbing her weak old knees.

"Wants?—'e wants 'is throat cut," said Mother Guttersnipe, viciously. "An' s'elp me I'll do for 'im some night w'en 'e's a watchin' round 'ere as if it were Pentridge—'e can git what he can out of that whelp as ran away, but I knows suthin' 'e don't know, cuss 'im."

She ended with a senile laugh, and her companion having taken advantage of the long speech to drink some gin out of the broken cup, Mother Guttersnipe seized the unfortunate old creature by the hair, and in spite of her feeble cries, banged her head against the wall.

"I'll have the perlice in at yer," whimpered the assaulted one, as she tottered as quickly away as her rheumatics would allow her. "See if I don't."

"Get out," retorted Mother Guttersnipe, indifferently, as she filled herself a fresh cup. "You come a-falutin' round 'ere agin priggin' my drinks, cuss you, an' I'll cut yer throat an' wring yer wicked old 'ead orf."

The other gave a howl of dismay at hearing this pleasant proposal, and tottered out as quickly as possible, leaving Mother Guttersnipe in undisputed possession of the field.

Meanwhile Calton had seen Brian several times, and used every argument in his power to get him to tell everything, but he either maintained an obstinate silence, or merely answered,

"It would only break her heart."

He admitted to Calton, after a good deal of questioning, that he had been at Mother Guttersnipe's on the night of the murder. After he had left Whyte by the corner of the Scotch Church, as the cabman—Royston—had stated, he had gone along Russell Street, and met Sal Rawlins near the Unicorn Hotel. She had taken him to Mother Guttersnipe's, where he had seen the dying woman, who had told him something he could not reveal.

"Well," said Mr. Calton, after hearing the admission, "you might have saved us all this trouble by admitting this before, and yet kept your secret, whatever it may be. Had you done so, we might have got hold of Sal Rawlins before she left Melbourne; but now it's a mere chance whether she turns up or not."

Brian did not answer to this; in fact, he seemed hardly to be thinking of what the lawyer was saying; but just as Calton was leaving, he asked—"How is Madge?"

"How can you expect her to be?" said Calton, turning angrily on him. "She is very ill, owing to the worry she has had over this affair."

"My darling! My darling!" cried Brian, in agony, clasping his hands above his head. "I did it only to save you."

Calton approached him, and laid his hand lightly on his shoulder.

"My dear fellow," he said, gravely, "the confidences between lawyer and client are as sacred as those between priest and penitent. You must tell me this secret which concerns Miss Frettlby so deeply."

"No," said Brian, firmly, "I will never repeat what that wretched woman told me. When I would not tell you before, in order to save my life, it is not likely I am going to do so now, when I have nothing to gain and everything to lose by telling it."

"I will never ask you again," said Calton, rather annoyed, as he walked to the door. "And as to this accusation of murder, if I can find this girl, you are safe."

When the lawyer left the gaol, he went to the Detective Office to see Kilsip, and ascertain if there was any news of Sal Rawlins; but, as usual, there was none.

"It is fighting against Fate," he said, sadly, as he went away; "his life hangs on a mere chance."

The trial was fixed to come off in September, and, of course, there was great excitement in Melbourne as the time drew near. Great, therefore, was the disappointment when it was discovered that the prisoner's counsel had applied for an adjournment of the trial till October, on the ground that an important witness for the defence could not be found.

17

The Trial

In spite of the utmost vigilance on the part of the police, and the offer of a large reward, both by Calton, on behalf of the accused, and by Mr. Frettlby, the much-desired Sal Rawlins still remained hidden. The millionaire had maintained a most friendly attitude towards Brian throughout the whole affair. He refused to believe him guilty, and when Calton told him of the defence of proving an alibi by means of Sal Rawlins, he immediately offered a large reward, which was in itself enough to set every person with any time on their hands hunting for the missing witness.

All Australia and New Zealand rang with the extremely plebeian name of Sal Rawlins, the papers being full of notices offering rewards; and handbills of staring red letters were posted up in all railway stations, in conjunction with "Liquid Sunshine" Rum and "D.W.D." Whisky. She had become famous without knowing it, unless, indeed, she had kept herself concealed purposely, but this was hardly probable, as there was no apparent motive for her doing so. If she was above ground she must certainly have seen the handbills, if not the papers; and though not able to read, she could hardly help hearing something about the one topic of conversation throughout Australia. Notwithstanding all this, Sal Rawlins was still undiscovered, and Calton, in despair, began to think that she must be dead. But Madge, though at times her courage gave way, was still hopeful.

"God will not permit such a judicial crime as the murder of an innocent man to be committed," she declared.

Mr. Calton, to whom she said this, shook his head doubtfully.

"God has permitted it to take place before," he answered softly; "and we can only judge the future by the past."

At last, the day of the long-expected trial came, and as Calton sat in his office looking over his brief, a clerk entered and told him Mr. Frettlby and his daughter wished to see him. When they came in, the barrister saw that the millionaire looked haggard and ill, and there was a worried expression on his face.

"There is my daughter, Calton," he said, after hurried greetings had been exchanged. "She wants to be present in Court during Fitzgerald's trial, and nothing I can say will dissuade her."

Calton turned, and looked at the girl in some surprise.

"Yes," she answered, meeting his look steadily, though her face was very pale; "I must be there. I shall go mad with anxiety unless I know how the trial goes on."

"But think of the disagreeable amount of attention you will attract," urged the lawyer.

"No one will recognise me," she said calmly, "I am very plainly dressed, and I will wear this veil;" and, drawing one from her pocket, she went to a small looking-glass which was hanging on the wall, and tied it over her face.

Calton looked in perplexity at Mr. Frettlby.

"I'm afraid you must consent," he said.

"Very well," replied the other, almost sternly, while a look of annoyance passed over his face. "I shall leave her in your charge."

"And you?"

"I'm not coming," answered Frettlby, quickly, putting on his hat. "I don't care about seeing a man whom I have had at my dinner-table, in the prisoner's dock, much as I sympathise with him. Good-day;" and with a curt nod he took his leave. When the door closed on her father, Madge placed her hand on Calton's arm.

"Any hope?" she whispered, looking at him through the black veil.

"The merest chance," answered Calton, putting his brief into his bag. "We have done everything in our power to discover this girl, but without result. If she does not come at the eleventh hour I'm afraid Brian Fitzgerald is a doomed man."

Madge fell on her knees, with a stifled cry.

"Oh, God of Mercy," she cried, raising her hands as if in prayer, "save him. Save my darling, and let him not die for the crime of another. God—"

She dropped her face in her hands and wept convulsively, as the lawyer touched her lightly on the shoulder.

"Come!" he said kindly. "Be the brave girl you were, and we may save him yet. The hour is darkest before the dawn, you know."

Madge dried her tears, and followed the lawyer to the cab, which was waiting for them at the door. They drove quickly up to the Court, and Calton put her in a quiet place, where she could see the dock, and yet be unobserved by the people in the body of the Court. Just as he was leaving her she touched his arm.

"Tell him," she whispered, in a trembling voice, "tell him I am here."

Calton nodded, and hurried away to put on his wig and gown, while Madge looked hurriedly round the Court from her point of vantage.

It was crowded with fashionable Melbourne of both sexes, and they were all talking together in subdued whispers, The popular character of the prisoner, his good looks, and engagement to Madge Frettlby, together with the extraordinary circumstances of the case, had raised public curiosity to the highest pitch, and, consequently, everybody who could possibly manage to gain admission was there.

Felix Rolleston had secured an excellent seat beside the pretty Miss Featherweight, whom he admired so much, and he was chattering to her with the utmost volubility.

"Puts me in mind of the Coliseum and all that sort of thing, you know," he said, putting up his eye-glass and starting round. "Butchered to make a Roman holiday by jove."

"Don't say such horrid things, you frivolous creature," simpered Miss Featherweight, using her smelling-bottle. "We are all here out of sympathy for that poor dear Mr. Fitzgerald."

The mercurial Felix, who had more cleverness in him than people gave him credit for, smiled outright at this eminently feminine way of covering an overpowering curiosity.

"Ah, yes," he said lightly; "exactly. I daresay Eve only ate the apple because she didn't like to see such a lot of good fruit go to waste."

Miss Featherweight eyed him doubtfully. She was not quite certain whether he was in jest or earnest. Just as she was about to reply to the effect that she thought it wicked to make the Bible a subject for joking, the Judge entered and the Court rose.

When the prisoner was brought in, there was a great flutter among the ladies, and some of them even had the bad taste to produce opera-glasses. Brian noticed this, and he flushed up to the roots of his fair hair, for he felt his degradation acutely. He was an intensely proud man, and to be placed in the criminal dock, with a lot of frivolous people, who had called themselves his friends, looking at him as though he were a new

actor or a wild animal, was galling in the extreme. He was dressed in black, and looked pale and worn, but all the ladies declared that he was as good-looking as ever, and they were sure he was innocent.

The jury were sworn in, and the Crown Prosecutor rose to deliver his opening address.

Most of those present knew the facts only through the medium of the newspapers, and such floating rumours as they had been able to gather. They were therefore unaware of the true history of events which had led to Fitzgerald's arrest, and they prepared to listen to the speech with profound attention.

The ladies ceased to talk, the men to stare round, and nothing could be seen but row after row of eager and attentive faces, hanging on the words that issued from the lips of the Crown Prosecutor. He was not a great orator, but he spoke clearly and distinctly, and every word could be heard in the dead silence.

He gave a rapid sketch of the crime—merely a repetition of what had been published in the newspapers—and then proceeded to enumerate the witnesses for the prosecution.

He would call the landlady of the deceased to show that ill-feeling existed between the prisoner and the murdered man, and that the accused had called on the deceased a week prior to the committal of the crime, and threatened his life. (There was great excitement at this, and several ladies decided, on the spur of the moment, that the horrid man was guilty, but the majority of them still refused to believe in the guilt of such a good-looking young fellow.) He would call a witness who could prove that Whyte was drunk on the night of the murder, and went along Russell Street, in the direction of Collins Street; the cabman Royston could swear to the fact that the prisoner had hailed the cab, and after going away for a short time, returned and entered the cab with the deceased. He would also prove that the prisoner left the cab at the Grammar School, in the St. Kilda Road, and on the arrival of the cab at the junction, he discovered the deceased had been murdered. The cabman Rankin would prove that he drove the prisoner from the St. Kilda Road to Powlett Street in East Melbourne, where he got out; and he would call the prisoner's landlady to prove that the prisoner resided in Powlett Street, and that on the night of the murder he had not reached home till shortly after two o'clock. He would also call the detective who had charge of the case, to prove the finding of a glove belonging to the deceased in the pocket of the coat which the prisoner wore on the night of the murder; and the doctor who had examined the

body of the deceased would give evidence that the death was caused by inhalation of chloroform. As he had now fully shown the chain of evidence which he proposed to prove, he would call the first witness, Malcolm Royston.

Royston, on being sworn, gave the same evidence as he had given at the inquest, from the time that the cab was hailed up to his arrival at the St. Kilda Police Station with the dead body of Whyte. In the cross-examination, Calton asked him if he was prepared to swear that the man who hailed the cab, and the man who got in with the deceased, were one and the same person.

WITNESS: I am.

CALTON: You are quite certain?

WITNESS: Yes; quite certain.

CALTON: Do you then recognise the prisoner as the man who hailed the cab?

WITNESS (hesitatingly): I cannot swear to that. The gentleman who hailed the cab had his hat pulled down over his eyes, so that I could not see his face; but the height and general appearance of the prisoner are the same.

CALTON: Then it is only because the man who got into the cab was dressed like the prisoner on that night that you thought they were both the same?

WITNESS: It never struck me for a minute that they were not the same. Besides, he spoke as if he had been there before. I said, "Oh, you've come back," and he said, "Yes; I'm going to take him home," and got into my cab.

CALTON: Did you notice any difference in his voice?

WITNESS: No; except that the first time I saw him he spoke in a loud voice, and the second time he came back, very low.

CALTON: You were sober, I suppose?

WITNESS (indignantly): Yes; quite sober.

CALTON: Ah! You did not have a drink, say at the Oriental Hotel, which, I believe, is near the rank where your cab stands?

WITNESS (hesitating): Well, I might have had a glass.

CALTON: So you might; you might have had several.

WITNESS (sulkily): Well, there's no law against a cove feeling thirsty.

CALTON: Certainly not; and I suppose you took advantage of the absence of such a law.

WITNESS (defiantly): Yes, I did.

CALTON: And you were elevated?

WITNESS: Yes; on my cab.—(Laughter.)

CALTON (severely): You are here to give evidence, sir, not to make jokes, however clever they may be. Were you, or were you not, slightly the worse for drink?

WITNESS: I might have been.

CALTON: So you were in such a condition that you did not observe very closely the man who hailed you?

WITNESS: No, I didn't—there was no reason why I should—I didn't know a murder was going to be committed.

CALTON: And it never struck you it might be a different man?

WITNESS: No; I thought it was the same man the whole time.

This closed Royston's evidence, and Calton sat down very dissatisfied at not being able to elicit anything more definite from him. One thing appeared clear, that someone must have dressed himself to resemble Brian, and have spoken in a low voice for fear of betraying himself.

Clement Rankin, the next witness, deposed to having picked up the prisoner on the St. Kilda Road between one and two on Friday morning, and driven him to Powlett Street, East Melbourne. In the cross-examination, Calton elicited one point in the prisoner's favour.

CALTON: Is the prisoner the same gentleman you drove to Powlett Street?

WITNESS (confidently): Oh, yes.

CALTON: How do you know? Did you see his face?

WITNESS: No, his hat was pulled down over his eyes, and I could only see the ends of his moustache and his chin, but he carried himself the same as the prisoner, and his moustache is the same light colour.

CALTON: When you drove up to him on the St. Kilda Road, where was he, and what was he doing?

WITNESS: He was near the Grammar School, walking quickly in the direction of Melbourne, and was smoking a cigarette.

CALTON: Did he wear gloves?

WITNESS: Yes, one on the left hand, the other was bare.

CALTON: Did he wear any rings on the right hand?

WITNESS: Yes, a large diamond one on the forefinger.

CALTON: Are you sure?

WITNESS: Yes, because I thought it a curious place for a gentleman to wear a ring, and when he was paying me my fare, I saw the diamond glitter on his finger in the moonlight.

CALTON: That will do.

The counsel for the defence was pleased with this bit of evidence, as Fitzgerald detested rings, and never wore any; so he made a note of the matter on his brief.

Mrs. Hableton, the landlady of the deceased, was then called, and deposed that Oliver Whyte had lodged with her for nearly two months. He seemed a quiet enough young man, but often came home drunk. The only friend she knew he had was a Mr. Moreland, who was often with him. On the 14th July, the prisoner called to see Mr. Whyte, and they had a quarrel. She heard Whyte say, "She is mine, you can't do anything with her," and the prisoner answered, "I can kill you, and if you marry her I shall do so in the open street." She had no idea at the time of the name of the lady they were talking about. There was a great sensation in the court at these words, and half the people present looked upon such evidence as being sufficient in itself to prove the guilt of the prisoner.

In cross-examination, Calton was unable to shake the evidence of the witness, as she merely reiterated the same statements over and over again.

The next witness was Mrs. Sampson, who crackled into the witness-box dissolved in tears, and gave her answers in a piercingly shrill tone of anguish. She stated that the prisoner was in the habit of coming home early, but on the night of the murder, had come in shortly before two o'clock.

CROWN PROSECUTOR (referring to his brief): You mean after two.

WITNESS: 'Avin made a mistake once, by saying five minutes after two to the policeman as called hisself a insurance agent, which 'e put the words into my mouth, I ain't a goin' to do so again, it bein' five minutes afore two, as I can swear to.

CROWN PROSECUTOR: You are sure your clock was right?

WITNESS: It 'adn't bin, but my nevy bein' a watchmaker, called unbeknown to me, an' made it right on Thursday night, which it was Friday mornin' when Mr. Fitzgerald came 'ome.

Mrs. Sampson bravely stuck to this statement, and ultimately left the witness-box in triumph, the rest of her evidence being comparatively unimportant as compared with this point of time. The witness Rankin, who drove the prisoner to Powlett Street (as sworn to by him) was recalled, and gave evidence that it was two o'clock when the prisoner got down from his cab in Powlett Street.

CROWN PROSECUTOR: How do you know that?

WITNESS: Because I heard the Post Office clock strike.

CROWN PROSECUTOR: Could you hear it at East Melbourne?

WITNESS: It was a very still night, and I heard the chimes and then the hour strike quite plainly.

This conflicting evidence as to time was a strong point in Brian's favour. If, as the landlady stated, on the authority of the kitchen clock, which had been put right on the day previous to the murder, Fitzgerald had come into the house at five minutes to two, he could not possibly be the man who had alighted from Rankin's cab at two o'clock at Powlett Street.

The next witness was Dr. Chinston, who swore to the death of the deceased by means of chloroform administered in a large quantity, and he was followed by Mr. Gorby, who deposed as to the finding of the glove belonging to the deceased in the pocket of the prisoner's coat.

Roger Moreland, an intimate friend of the deceased, was next called. He stated that he had known the deceased in London, and had met him in Melbourne. He was with him a great deal. On the night of the murder he was in the Orient Hotel in Bourke Street. Whyte came in, and was greatly excited. He was in evening dress, and wore a light coat. They had several drinks together, and then went up to an hotel in Russell Street, and had some more drinks there. Both witness and deceased were intoxicated. Whyte took off his light coat, saying he felt warm,

and went out shortly afterwards, leaving witness asleep in the bar. He was awakened by the barman, who wanted him to leave the hotel. He saw that Whyte had left his coat behind him, and took it up with the intention of giving it to him. As he stood in the street some one snatched the coat from him and made off with it. He tried to follow the thief, but he could not do so, being too intoxicated. He then went home, and to bed, as he had to leave early for the country in the morning. In cross-examination:—

CALTON: When you went into the street, after leaving the hotel, did you see the deceased?

WITNESS: NO, I did not; but I was very drunk, and unless deceased had spoken to me, I would not have noticed him.

CALTON: What was deceased excited about when you met him?

WITNESS: I don't know. He did not say.

CALTON: What were you talking about?

WITNESS: All sorts of things. London principally.

CALTON: Did the deceased mention anything about papers?

WITNESS (surprised): No, he did not.

CALTON: Are you sure?

WITNESS: Quite sure.

CALTON: What time did you get home?

WITNESS: I don't know; I was too drunk to remember.

This closed the case for the Crown, and as it was now late the case was adjourned till the next day.

The Court was soon emptied of the busy, chattering crowd, and Calton, on looking over his notes, found that the result of the first day's trial was two points in favour of Fitzgerald. First: the discrepancy of time in the evidence of Rankin and the landlady, Mrs. Sampson. Second: the evidence of the cabman Royston, as to the wearing of a ring on the forefinger of the right hand by the man who murdered Whyte, whereas the prisoner never wore rings.

These were slender proofs of innocence to put against the overwhelming mass of evidence in favour of the prisoner's guilt. The opinions of all were pretty well divided, some being in favour and others against, when suddenly an event happened which surprised everyone. All over Melbourne extras were posted, and the news passed from lip to lip like wildfire—"Return of the Missing Witness, Sal Rawlins!"

18

Sal Rawlins Tells All She Knows

And, indeed, such was the case. Sal Rawlins had made her appearance at the eleventh hour, to the heartfelt thankfulness of Calton, who saw in her an angel from heaven, sent to save the life of an innocent man.

It was at the conclusion of the trial; and, together with Madge, he had gone down to his office, when his clerk entered with a telegram. The lawyer opened it hastily, and, with a silent look of pleasure on his face, handed the telegram to Madge.

She, womanlike, being more impulsive, gave a cry when she read it, and, falling on her knees, thanked God for having heard her prayers, and saved her lover's life.

"Take me to her at once," she implored the lawyer.

She was anxious to hear from Sal Rawlins' own lips the joyful words which would save Brian from a felon's death.

"No, my dear," answered Calton, firmly, but kindly. "I can hardly take a lady to the place where Sal Rawlins lives. You will know all to-morrow, but, meanwhile, you must go home and get some sleep."

"And you will tell him?" she whispered, clasping her hands on Calton's arm.

"At once," he answered promptly. "And I will see Sal Rawlins to-night, and hear what she has to say. Rest content, my dear," he added, as he placed her in the carriage, "he is perfectly safe now."

Brian heard the good news with a deep feeling of gratitude, knowing that his life was safe, and that he could still keep his secret. It was the

natural revulsion of feeling after the unnatural life he had been leading since his arrest. When one is young and healthy, and has all the world before one, it is a terrible thing to contemplate a sudden death. And yet, in spite of his joy at being delivered from the hangman's rope, there mingled with his delight the horror of that secret which the dying woman had told him with such malignant joy.

"I had rather she had died in silence than she should have bequeathed me this legacy of sorrow."

And the gaoler, seeing his haggard face the next morning, muttered to himself, "He war blest if the swell warn't sorry he war safe."

So, while Brian was pacing up and down his cell during the weary watches of the night, Madge, in her own room, was kneeling beside her bed and thanking God for His great mercy; and Calton, the good fairy of the two lovers, was hurrying towards the humble abode of Mrs. Rawlins, familiarly known as Mother Guttersnipe. Kilsip was beside him, and they were talking eagerly about the providential appearance of the invaluable witness.

"What I like," observed Kilsip, in his soft, purring tone, "is the sell it will be for that Gorby. He was so certain that Mr. Fitzgerald was the man, and when he gets off to-morrow Gorby will be in a rage."

"Where was Sal the whole time?" asked Calton, absently, not thinking of what the detective was saying.

"Ill," answered Kilsip. "After she left the Chinaman she went into the country, caught cold by falling into some river, and ended up by getting brain fever. Some people found her, took her in, and nursed her. When she got well she came back to her grandmother's."

"But why didn't the people who nursed her tell her she was wanted? They must have seen the papers."

"Not they," retorted the detective. "They knew nothing."

"Vegetables!" muttered Calton, contemptuously. "How can people be so ignorant! Why, all Australia has been ringing with the case. At any rate, it's money out of their pocket. Well?"

"There's nothing more to tell," said Kilsip, "except that she turned up to-night at five o'clock, looking more like a corpse than anything else."

When they entered the squalid, dingy passage that led to Mother Guttersnipe's abode, they saw a faint light streaming down the stair. As they climbed up they could hear the rancorous voice of the old hag pouring forth alternate blessings and curses on her prodigal offspring, and the low tones of a girl's voice in reply. On entering the room Calton

saw that the sick woman, who had been lying in the corner on the occasion of his last visit, was gone. Mother Guttersnipe was seated in front of the deal table, with a broken cup and her favourite bottle of spirits before her. She evidently intended to have a night of it, in order to celebrate Sal's return, and had commenced early, so as to lose no time. Sal herself was seated on a broken chair, and leaned wearily against the wall. She stood up as Calton and the detective entered, and they saw that she was a tall, slender woman of about twenty-five, not bad-looking, but with a pallid and haggard appearance from recent illness. She was clothed in a kind of tawdry blue dress, much soiled and torn, and had over her shoulders an old tartan shawl, which she drew tightly across her breast as the strangers entered. Her grandmother, who looked more weird and grotesquely horrible than ever, saluted Calton and the detective on their entrance with a shrill yell, and a volley of choice language.

"Oh, ye've come again, 'ave ye," she screeched, raising her skinny arms, "to take my gal away from 'er pore old gran'mother, as nussed 'er, cuss her, when 'er own mother had gone a-gallivantin' with swells. I'll 'ave the lawr of ye both, s'elp me, I will."

Kilsip paid no attention to this outbreak of the old fury, but turned to the girl.

"This is the gentleman who wants to speak to you," he said, gently, making the girl sit on the chair again, for indeed she looked too ill to stand. "Just tell him what you told me."

"'Bout the 'Queen,' sir?" said Sal, in a low, hoarse voice, fixing her wild eyes on Calton. "If I'd only known as you was a-wantin' me I'd 'ave come afore."

"Where were you?" asked Calton, in a pitying tone.

"Noo South Wales," answered the girl with a shiver. "The cove as I went with t' Sydney left me—yes, left me to die like a dog in the gutter."

"Cuss 'im!" croaked the old woman in a sympathetic manner, as she took a drink from the broken cup.

"I tooked up with a Chinerman," went on her granddaughter, wearily, "an' lived with 'im for a bit—it's orful, ain't it?" she said with a dreary laugh, as she saw the disgust on the lawyer's face. "But Chinermen ain't bad; they treat a pore girl a dashed sight better nor a white cove does. They don't beat the life out of 'em with their fists, nor drag 'em about the floor by the 'air."

"Cuss 'em!" croaked Mother Guttersnipe, drowsily, "I'll tear their 'earts out."

"I think I must have gone mad, I must," said Sal, pushing her tangled hair off her forehead, "for arter I left the Chiner cove, I went on walkin' and walkin' right into the bush, a-tryin' to cool my 'ead, for it felt on fire like. I went into a river an' got wet, an' then I took my 'at an' boots orf an' lay down on the grass, an' then the rain comed on, an' I walked to a 'ouse as was near, where they tooked me in. Oh, sich kind people," she sobbed, stretching out her hands, "that didn't badger me 'bout my soul, but gave me good food to eat. I gave 'em a wrong name. I was so 'fraid of that Army a-findin' me. Then I got ill, an' knowd nothin' for weeks. They said I was orf my chump. An' then I came back 'ere to see gran'."

"Cuss ye," said the old woman, but in such a tender tons that it sounded like a blessing.

"And did the people who took you in never tell you anything about the murder?" asked Calton.

Sal shook her head.

"No, it were a long way in the country, and they never knowd anythin', they didn't."

"Ah! that explains it," muttered Calton to himself.

"Come, now," he said cheerfully, "tell me all that happened on the night you brought Mr. Fitzgerald to see the 'Queen.'"

"Who's 'e?" asked Sal, puzzled.

"Mr. Fitzgerald, the gentleman you brought the letter for to the Melbourne Club."

"Oh, 'im?" said Sal, a sudden light breaking over her wan face. "I never knowd his name afore."

Calton nodded complacently.

"I knew you didn't," he said, "that's why you didn't ask for him at the Club."

"She never told me 'is name," said Sal, jerking her head in the direction of the bed.

"Then whom did she ask you to bring to her?" asked Calton, eagerly.

"No one," replied the girl. "This was the way of it. On that night she was orfil ill, an' I sat beside 'er while gran' was asleep."

"I was drunk," broke in gran', fiercely, "none of yer lies; I was blazin' drunk."

"An' ses she to me, she ses," went on the girl, indifferent to her grandmother's interruption, "'Get me some paper an' a pencil, an' I'll write a

note to 'im, I will.' So I goes an' gits 'er what she arsk's fur out of gran's box."

"Stole it, cuss ye," shrieked the old hag, shaking her fist.

"Hold your tongue," said Kilsip, in a peremptory tone.

Mother Guttersnipe burst into a volley of oaths, and having run rapidly through all she knew, subsided into a sulky silence.

"She wrote on it," went on Sal, "an' then arsked me to take it to the Melbourne Club an' give it to 'im. Ses I, 'Who's 'im?' Ses she, 'It's on the letter; don't you arsk no questions an' you won't 'ear no lies, but give it to 'im at the Club, an' wait for 'im at the corner of Bourke Street and Russell Street.' So out I goes, and gives it to a cove at the Club, an' then 'e comes along, an' ses 'e, 'Take me to 'er,' and I tooked 'im."

"And what like was the gentleman?"

"Oh, werry good lookin'," said Sal. "Werry tall, with yellor 'air an' mous-tache. He 'ad party clothes on, an' a masher coat, an' a soft 'at."

"That's Fitzgerald right enough," muttered Calton. "And what did he do when he came?"

"He goes right up to 'er, and she ses, 'Are you 'e?' and 'e ses, 'I am.' Then ses she, 'Do you know what I'm a-goin' to tell you?' an' 'e says, 'No.' Then she ses, 'It's about 'er;' and ses 'e, lookin' very white, "Ow dare you 'ave 'er name on your vile lips?' an' she gits up an' screeches, 'Turn that gal out, an' I'll tell you;' an' 'e takes me by the arm, an' ses 'e, "Ere git out, an' I gits out, an' that's all I knows."

"And how long was he with her?" asked Calton, who had been listening attentively.

"'Bout arf-a-hour," answered Sal. "I takes 'im back to Russell Street 'bout twenty-five minutes to two, 'cause I looked at the clock on the Post Office, an' 'e gives me a sov., an' then he goes a-tearin' up the street like anything."

"Take him about twenty minutes to walk to East Melbourne," said Calton to himself "So he must just have got in at the time Mrs. Sampson said. He was in with the 'Queen' the whole time, I suppose?" he asked, looking keenly at Sal.

"I was at that door," said Sal, pointing to it, "an' 'e couldn't 'ave got out unless I'd seen 'im."

"Oh, it's all right," said Calton, nodding to Kilsip, "there won't be any difficulty in proving an alibi. But I say," he added, turning to Sal, "what were they talking about?"

"I dunno," answered Sal. "I was at the door, an' they talks that quiet I couldn't 'ear 'em. Then he sings out, 'My G—it's too horrible!' an' I 'ear

'er a larfin' like to bust, an' then 'e comes to me, and ses, quite wild like, 'Take me out of this 'ell!' an' I tooked 'im."

"And when you came back?"

"She was dead."

"Dead?"

"As a blessed door-nail," said Sal, cheerfully.

"An' I never knowd I was in the room with a corpse," wailed Mother Guttersnipe, waking up. "Cuss 'er, she was allays a-doin' contrary things."

"How do you know?" said Calton, sharply, as he rose to go.

"I knowd 'er longer nor you," croaked the old woman, fixing one evil eye on the lawyer; "an' I know what you'd like to know; but ye shan't, ye shan't."

Calton turned from her with a shrug of his shoulders.

"You will come to the Court to-morrow with Mr. Kilsip," he said to Sal, "and tell what you have just now told me."

"It's all true, s'elp me," said Sal, eagerly; "'e was 'ere all the time."

Calton stepped towards the door, followed by the detective, when Mother Guttersnipe rose.

"Where's the money for finin' her?" she screeched, pointing one skinny finger at Sal.

"Well, considering the girl found herself," said Calton, dryly, "the money is in the bank, and will remain there."

"An' I'm to be done out of my 'ard earned tin, s'elp me?" howled the old fury. "Cuss ye, I'll 'ave the lawr of ye, and get ye put in quod."

"You'll go there yourself if you don't take care," said Kilsip, in his soft, purring tones.

"Yah!" shrieked Mother Guttersnipe, snapping her fingers at him.

"What do I care about yer quod? Ain't I bin in Pentrig', an' it ain't 'urt me, it ain't? I'm as lively as a gal, I am."

And the old fury, to prove the truth of her words, danced a kind of war dance in front of Mr. Calton, snapping her fingers and yelling out curses, as an accompaniment to her ballet. Her luxurious white hair streamed out during her gyrations, and with her grotesque appearance and the faint light of the candle, she presented a gruesome spectacle.

Calton remembered the tales he had heard of the women of Paris, at the revolution, and the way they danced "*La Carmagnole*." Mother Guttersnipe would have been in her element in that sea of blood and turbulence he thought. But he merely shrugged his shoulders, and walked out

of the room, as with a final curse, delivered in a hoarse voice, Mother Guttersnipe sank exhausted on the floor, and yelled for gin.

19

The Verdict of the Jury

Next morning the Court was crowded, and numbers were unable to gain admission. The news that Sal Rawlins, who alone could prove the innocence of the prisoner, had been found, and would appear in Court that morning, had spread like wildfire, and the acquittal of the prisoner was confidently expected by a large number of sympathising friends, who seemed to have sprung up on all sides, like mushrooms, in a single night. There were, of course, plenty of cautious people left who waited to hear the verdict of the jury before committing themselves, and who still believed him to be guilty. But the unexpected appearance of Sal Rawlins had turned the great tide of public feeling in favour of the prisoner, and many who had been loudest in their denunciations of Fitzgerald, were now more than half convinced of his innocence. Pious clergymen talked in an incoherent way about the finger of God and the innocent not suffering unjustly, which was a case of counting unhatched chickens, as the verdict had yet to be given.

Felix Rolleston awoke, and found himself famous in a small way. Out of good-natured sympathy, and a spice of contrariness, he had declared his belief in Brian's innocence, and now, to his astonishment, he found that his view of the matter was likely to prove correct. He received so much praise on all sides for his presumed perspicuity, that he soon began to think that he had believed in Fitzgerald's innocence by a calm course of reasoning, and not because of a desire to differ from every one else in their opinion of the case. After all, Felix Rolleston is not the only man who has been astonished to find greatness thrust upon him, and come to believe himself worthy of it. He was a wise man, however, and while in the full tide of prosperity he seized the flying moment, and proposed to Miss Featherweight, who, after some hesitation, agreed to endow him

with herself and her thousands. She decided that her future husband was a man of no common intellect, seeing that he had long ago arrived at a conclusion which the rest of Melbourne were only beginning to discover now, so she determined that, as soon as she assumed marital authority, Felix, like Strephon in "Iolanthe," should go into Parliament, and with her money and his brains she might some day be the wife of a premier. Mr. Rolleston had no idea of the political honours which his future spouse intended for him, and was seated in his old place in the court, talking about the case.

"Knew he was innocent, don't you know," he said, with a complacent smile "Fitzgerald's too jolly good-looking a fellow, and all that sort of thing, to commit murder."

Whereupon a clergyman, happening to overhear the lively Felix make this flippant remark, disagreed with it entirely, and preached a sermon to prove that good looks and crime were closely connected, and that both Judas Iscariot and Nero were beauty-men.

"Ah," said Calton, when he heard the sermon, "if this unique theory is a true one, what a truly pious man that clergyman must be!" This allusion to the looks of the reverend gentleman was rather unkind, for he was by no means bad-looking. But then Calton was one of those witty men who would rather lose a friend than suppress an epigram.

When the prisoner was brought in, a murmur of sympathy ran through the crowded Court, so ill and worn-out he looked; but Calton was puzzled to account for the expression of his face, so different from that of a man whose life had been saved, or, rather, was about to be saved, for in truth it was a foregone conclusion.

"You know who stole those papers," he thought, as he looked at Fitzgerald, keenly, "and the man who did so is the murderer of Whyte."

The judge having entered, and the Court being opened, Calton rose to make his speech, and stated in a few words the line of defence he intended to take.

He would first call Albert Dendy, a watchmaker, to prove that on Thursday night, at eight o'clock in the evening, he had called at the prisoner's, lodgings while the landlady was out, and while there had put the kitchen clock right, and had regulated the same. He would also call Felix Rolleston, a friend of the prisoners, to prove that the prisoner was not in the habit of wearing rings, and frequently expressed his detestation of such a custom. Sebastian Brown, a waiter at the Melbourne Club, would be called to prove that on Thursday night a letter was delivered to the prisoner at the Club by one Sarah Rawlins, and that the prisoner left

the Club shortly before one o'clock on Friday morning. He would also call Sarah Rawlins, to prove that she had delivered a note to Sebastian Brown for the prisoner, at the Melbourne Club, at a quarter to twelve on Thursday Night, and that at a few minutes past one o'clock on Friday morning she had conducted the prisoner to a slum off Little Bourke Street, and that he was there between one and two on Friday morning, the hour at which the murder was alleged to have taken place. This being his defence to the charge brought against the prisoner, he would call Albert Dendy.

Albert Dendy, duly sworn, stated—

I am a watchmaker, and carry on business in Fitzroy. I remember Thursday, the 26th of July last. On the evening of that day I called at Powlett Street East Melbourne, to see my aunt, who is the landlady of the prisoner. She was out at the time I called, and I waited in the kitchen till her return. I looked at the kitchen clock to see if it was too late to wait, and then at my watch I found that the clock was ten minutes fast, upon which I put it right, and regulated it properly.

CALTON: At what time did you put it right?

WITNESS: About eight o'clock.

CALTON: Between that time and two in the morning, was it possible for the clock to gain ten minutes?

WITNESS: No, it was not possible.

CALTON: Would it gain at all?

WITNESS: Not between eight and two o'clock—the time was not long enough.

CALTON: Did you see your aunt that night?

WITNESS: Yes, I waited till she came in.

CALTON: And did you tell her you had put the clock right?

WITNESS: No, I did not; I forgot all about it.

CALTON: Then she was still under the impression that it was ten minutes fast?

WITNESS: Yes, I suppose so.

After Dendy had been cross-examined, Felix Rolleston was called, and deposed as follows:—

I am an intimate friend of the prisoner. I have known him for five or six years, and I never saw him wearing a ring during that time. He

has frequently told me he did not care for rings, and would never wear them.

In cross-examination:—

CROWN PROSECUTOR: You have never seen the prisoner wearing a diamond ring?

WITNESS: No, never.

CROWN PROSECUTOR: Have you ever seen any such ring in his possession?

WITNESS: No, I have seen him buying rings for ladies, but I never saw him with any ring such as a gentleman would wear.

CROWN PROSECUTOR: Not even a seal ring.

WITNESS: No, not even a seal ring.

Sarah Rawlins was then placed in the witness-box, and, after having been sworn, deposed—

I know the prisoner. I delivered a letter, addressed to him at the Melbourne Club, at a quarter to twelve o'clock on Thursday, 26th July. I did not know what his name was. He met me shortly after one, at the corner of Russell and Bourke Streets, where I had been told to wait for him. I took him to my grandmother's place, in a lane off Little Bourke Street. There was a dying woman there, who had sent for him. He went in and saw her for about twenty minutes, and then I took him back to the corner of Bourke and Russell Streets. I heard the three-quarters strike shortly after I left him.

CROWN PROSECUTOR: You are quite certain that the prisoner was the man you met on that night?

WITNESS: Quite certin', s'elp me G—.

CROWN PROSECUTOR: And he met you a few minutes past one o'clock?

WITNESS: Yes, 'bout five minutes—I 'eard the clock a-strikin' one just afore he came down the street, and when I leaves 'im agin, it were about twenty-five to two, 'cause it took me ten minits to git 'ome, and I 'eard the clock go three-quarters, jest as I gits to the door.

CROWN PROSECUTOR: How do you know it was exactly twenty-five to two when you left him?

WITNESS: 'Cause I sawr the clocks—I left 'im at the corner of Russell Street, and comes down Bourke Street, so I could see the Post Orffice clock as plain as day, an' when I gets into Swanston Street, I looks at the Town 'All premiscus like, and sees the same time there.

CROWN PROSECUTOR: And you never lost sight of the prisoner the whole time?

WITNESS: No, there was only one door by the room, an' I was a-sittin' outside it, an' when he comes out he falls over me.

CROWN PROSECUTOR: Were you asleep?

WITNESS: Not a blessed wink.

Calton then directed Sebastian Brown to be called. He deposed—
I know the prisoner. He is a member of the Melbourne Club, at which I am a waiter. I remember Thursday, 26th July. On that night the last witness came with a letter to the prisoner. It was about a quarter to twelve. She just gave it to me, and went away. I delivered it to Mr. Fitzgerald. He left the Club at about ten minutes to one.

This closed the evidence for the defence, and after the Crown Prosecutor had made his speech, in which he pointed out the strong evidence against the prisoner, Calton arose to address the jury. He was a fine speaker, and made a splendid defence. Not a single point escaped him, and that brilliant piece of oratory is still remembered and spoken of admiringly in the purlieus of Temple Court and Chancery Lane.

He began by giving a vivid description of the circumstances, of the murder—of the meeting of the murderer and his victim in Collins Street East—the cab driving down to St. Kilda—the getting out of the cab of the murderer after committing the crime—and the way in which he had secured himself against pursuit.

Having thus enchained the attention of the jury by the graphic manner in which he described the crime, he pointed out that the evidence brought forward by the prosecution was purely circumstantial, and that they had utterly failed to identify the prisoner in the dock with the man who entered the cab. The supposition that the prisoner and the man in the light coat were one and the same person, rested solely upon the evidence of the cabman, Royston, who, although not intoxicated, was—judging from his own statements, not in a fit state to distinguish between the man who hailed the cab, and the man who got in. The crime was committed by means of chloroform; therefore, if the prisoner was guilty, he must have purchased the chloroform in some shop,

or obtained it from some friends. At all events, the prosecution had not brought forward a single piece of evidence to show how, and where the chloroform had been obtained. With regard to the glove belonging to the murdered man found in the prisoner's pocket, he picked it up off the ground at the time when he first met Whyte, when the deceased was lying drunk near the Scotch Church. Certainly there was no evidence to show that the prisoner had picked it up before the deceased entered the cab; but, on the other hand, there was no evidence to show that it had been picked up in the cab. It was far more likely that the glove, and especially a white glove, would be picked up under the light of the lamp near the Scotch Church, where it was easily noticeable, than in the darkness of a cab, where there was very little room, and where it would be quite dark, as the blinds were drawn down. The cabman, Royston, swore positively that the man who got out of his cab on the St. Kilda Road wore a diamond ring on the forefinger of his right hand, and the cabman, Rankin, swore to the same thing about the man who got out at Powlett Street. Against this could be placed the evidence of one of the prisoner's most intimate friends—one who had seen him almost daily for the last five years, and he had sworn positively that the prisoner was not in the habit of wearing rings.

The cabman Rankin had also sworn that the man who entered his cab on the St. Kilda Road alighted at Powlett Street, East Melbourne, at two o'clock on Friday morning, as he heard that hour strike from the Post Office clock, whereas the evidence of the prisoner's landlady showed plainly that he entered the house five minutes previously, and her evidence was further supported by that of the watchmaker, Dendy. Mrs. Sampson saw the hand of her kitchen clock point to five minutes to two, and, thinking it was ten minutes slow, told the detective that the prisoner did not enter the house till five minutes past two, which would just give the man who alighted from the cab (presuming him to have been the prisoner) sufficient time to walk up to his lodgings. The evidence of the watchmaker, Dendy, however, showed clearly that he had put the clock right at the hour of eight on Thursday night; that it was impossible for it to gain ten minutes before two on Friday morning, and therefore, the time, five minutes to two, seen by the landlady was the correct one, and the prisoner was in the house five minutes before the other man alighted from the cab in Powlett Street.

These points in themselves were sufficient to show that the prisoner was innocent, but the evidence of the woman Pawlins must prove conclusively to the jury that the prisoner was not the man who committed the crime. The witness Brown had proved that the woman Rawlins had

delivered a letter to him, which he gave to the prisoner and that the prisoner left the Club, to keep the appointment spoken of in the letter, which letter, or, rather, the remains of it had been put in evidence. The woman Rawlins swore that the prisoner met her at the corner of Russell and Bourke Streets, and had gone with her to one of the back slums, there to see the writer of the letter. She also proved that at the time of the committal of the crime the prisoner was still in the back slum, by the bed of the dying woman, and, there being only one door to the room, he could not possibly have left without the witness seeing him. The woman Rawlins further proved that she left the prisoner at the corner of Bourke and Russell Streets at twenty-five minutes to two o'clock, which was five minutes before Royston drove his cab up to the St. Kilda Police Station, with the dead body inside. Finally, the woman Rawlins proved her words by stating that she saw both the Post Office and Town Hall clocks; and supposing the prisoner started from the corner of Bourke and Russell Streets, as she says he did, he would reach East Melbourne in twenty minutes, which made it five minutes to two on Friday morning, the time at which, according to the landlady's statement, he entered the house.

All the evidence given by the different witnesses agreed completely, and formed a chain which showed the whole of the prisoner's movements at the time of the committal of the murder. Therefore, it was absolutely impossible that the murder could have been committed by the man in the dock. The strongest piece of evidence brought forward by the prosecution was that of the witness Hableton, who swore that the prisoner used threats against the life of the deceased. But the language used was merely the outcome of a passionate Irish nature, and was not sufficient to prove the crime to have been committed by the prisoner. The defence which the prisoner set up was that of an alibi, and the evidence of the witnesses for the defence proved conclusively that the prisoner could not, and did not, commit the murder. Finally, Calton wound up his, elaborate and exhaustive speech, which lasted for over two hours, by a brilliant peroration, calling upon the jury to base their verdict upon the plain facts of the case, and if they did so they could hardly fail in bringing in a verdict of "Not Guilty."

When Calton sat down a subdued murmur of applause was heard, which was instantly suppressed, and the judge began to sum up, strongly in favour of Fitzgerald. The jury then retired, and immediately there was a dead silence in the crowded Court—an unnatural silence, such as must have fallen on the blood-loving Roman populace when they saw the Christian martyrs kneeling on the hot yellow sands of the arena,

and watched the long, lithe forms of lion and panther creeping steadily towards their prey. The hour being late the gas had been lighted, and there was a sickly glare through the wide hall.

Fitzgerald had been taken out of court on the retiring of the jury, but the spectators stared steadily at the empty dock, which seemed to enchain them by some indescribable fascination. They conversed among themselves only in whispers, until even the whispering ceased, and nothing could be heard but the steady ticking of the clock, and now and then the quick-drawn breath of some timid on-looker. Suddenly, a woman, whose nerves were over-strung, shrieked, and the cry rang weirdly through the crowded hall. She was taken out, and again there was silence, every eye being now fixed on the door through which the jury would re-issue with their verdict of life or death. The hands of the clock moved slowly round—a quarter—a half—three quarters—and then the hour sounded with a silvery ring which startled everyone. Madge, sitting with her hands tightly clasped together, began to fear that her highly-strung nerves would give way.

“My God,” she muttered softly to herself; “will this suspense never end?” Just then the door opened, and the jury re-entered. The prisoner was again placed in the dock, and the judge resumed his seat, this time with the black cap in his pocket, as everyone guessed.

The usual formalities were gone through, and when the foreman of the jury stood up every neck was craned forward, and every ear was on the alert to catch the words that fell from his lips. The prisoner flushed a little and then grew pale as death, giving a quick, nervous glance at the quiet figure in black, of which he could just catch a glimpse. Then came the verdict, sharp and decisive, “NOT GUILTY.”

On hearing this a cheer went up from everyone in the court, so strong was the sympathy with Brian.

In vain the crier of the Court yelled, “Order!” until he was red in the face. In vain the judge threatened to commit all present for contempt of court—his voice being inaudible, it did not matter much—the enthusiasm could not be restrained, and it was five minutes before order was obtained. The judge, having recovered his composure, delivered his judgment, and discharged the prisoner, in accordance with the verdict. Calton had won many cases, but it is questionable if he had ever heard a verdict which gave him so much satisfaction as that which proclaimed Fitzgerald innocent.

And Brian, stepping down from the dock a free man, passed through a crowd of congratulating friends to a small room off the Court, where a

woman was waiting for him—a woman who clung round his neck, and sobbed out—

“My darling! My darling! I knew that God would save you.”

20

The ARGUS Gives Its Opinion

THE morning after the trial was concluded the following article in reference to the matter appeared in the ARGUS—

During the past three months we have frequently in our columns commented on the extraordinary case which is now so widely known as “The Hansom Cab Tragedy.” We can safely say that it is the most remarkable case which has ever come under the notice of our Criminal Court, and the verdict given by the jury yesterday has enveloped the matter in a still deeper mystery. By a train of strange coincidences, Mr. Brian Fitzgerald, a young squatter, was suspected of having murdered Whyte, and had it not been for the timely appearance of the woman Rawlins who turned up at the eleventh hour, we feel sure that a verdict of guilty would have been given, and an innocent man would have suffered punishment for the crime of another. Fortunately for the prisoner, and for the interests of justice, his counsel, Mr. Calton, by unwearied diligence, was able to discover the last witness, and prove an alibi. Had it not been for this, in spite of the remarks made by the learned counsel in his brilliant speech yesterday, which resulted in the acquittal of the prisoner, we question very much if the rest of the evidence in favour of the accused would have been sufficient to persuade the jury that he was an innocent man. The only points in favour of Mr. Fitzgerald were the inability of the cabman Royston to swear to him as the man who had got into the cab with Whyte, the wearing of a diamond ring on the forefinger of the right hand (whereas Mr. Fitzgerald wears no rings), and the difference in time sworn to by the cabman Rankin and the landlady. Against these points, however, the prosecution placed a mass of evidence, which seemed conclusively to prove the guilt of the prisoner; but the appearance of Sal Rawlins in the witness-box put an end to all doubt. In language which could not be mistaken for anything else than the truth, she positively swore that Mr. Fitzgerald was in one of the slums off

Bourke Street, between the hours of one and two on Friday morning, at which time the murder was committed. Under these circumstances, the jury unanimously agreed, and returned a verdict of "Not guilty," and the prisoner was forthwith acquitted. We have to congratulate his counsel, Mr. Calton, for the able speech he made for the defence, and also Mr. Fitzgerald, for his providential escape from a dishonourable and undeserved punishment. He leaves the court without a stain on his character, and with the respect and sympathy of all Australians, for the courage and dignity with which he comported himself throughout, while resting under the shadow of such a serious charge.

But now that it has been conclusively proved that he is innocent, the question arises in every one's mind, "Who is the murderer of Oliver Whyte?" The man who committed this dastardly crime is still at large, and, for all we know, may be in our midst. Emboldened by the impunity with which he has escaped the hands of justice, he may be walking securely down our streets, and talking of the very crime of which he is the perpetrator. Secure in the thought that all traces of him have been lost for ever, from the time he alighted from Rankin's cab, at Powlett Street, he has ventured probably to remain in Melbourne, and, for all that anyone knows, he may have been in the court during the late trial. Nay, this very article, may meet his eye, and he may rejoice at the futile efforts which have been made to find him. But let him beware, Justice is not blind, but blind-folded, and when he least expects it, she will tear the bandage from her keen eyes, and drag him forth to the light of day to receive the reward of his deed. Owing to the strong evidence against Fitzgerald, that is the only direction in which the detectives have hitherto looked, but baffled on one side, they will look on the other, and this time may be successful.

That such a man as the murderer of Oliver Whyte should be at large is a matter of danger, not only to individual citizens, but to the community at large; for it is a well-known fact that a tiger who once tastes human blood never overcomes his craving for it; and, without doubt the man who so daringly and coolly murdered a drunken, and therefore defenceless man, will not hesitate to commit a second crime. The present feeling of all classes in Melbourne must be one of terror, that such a man should be at large, and must, in a great measure, resemble the fear which filled everyone's heart in London when the Marr murders were committed, and it was known that the murderer had escaped. Anyone who has read De Quincy's graphic description of the crime perpetrated by Williams must tremble to think that such another devil incarnate is in our midst. It is an imperative necessity that such a feeling should be done away with. But how is this to be managed? It is one thing to speak, and another to act. There seems to be no possible clue discoverable at present which can lead to the discovery of the real murderer. The man in the light coat who got out of

Rankin's cab at Powlett Street, East Melbourne (designedly, as it now appears, in order to throw suspicion on Fitzgerald), has vanished as completely as the witches in *Macbeth*, and left no trace behind. It was two o'clock in the morning when he left the cab, and, in a quiet suburb like East Melbourne, no one would be about, so that he could easily escape unseen. There seems to be only one chance of ever tracing him, and that is to be found in the papers which were stolen from the pocket of the dead man. What they were, only two persons knew, and one knows now. The first two were Whyte and the woman who was called 'The Queen,' and both of them are now dead. The other who knows now is the man who committed the crime. There can be no doubt that these papers were the motive for the crime, as no money was taken from the pockets of the deceased. The fact, also, that the papers were carried in a pocket made inside the waistcoat of the deceased shows that they were of value.

Now, the reason we think that the dead woman knew of the existence of these papers is simply this. It appears that she came out from England with Whyte as his mistress, and after staying some time in Sydney came on to Melbourne. How she came into such a foul and squalid den as that she died in, we are unable to say, unless, seeing that she was given to drink, she was picked up drunk by some Samaritan of the slums, and carried to Mrs. Rawlins' humble abode. Whyte visited her there frequently, but appears to have made no attempt to remove her to a better place, alleging as his reason that the doctor said she would die if taken into the air. Our reporter learned from one of the detectives that the dead woman was in the habit of talking to Whyte about certain papers, and on one occasion was overheard to say to him, "They'll make your fortune if you play your cards well." This was told to the detective by the woman Rawlins, to whose providential appearance Mr. Fitzgerald owes his escape. From this it can be gathered that the papers—whatever they might be—were of value, and sufficient to tempt another to commit a murder in order to obtain them. Whyte, therefore, being dead, and his murderer having escaped, the only way of discovering the secret which lies at the root of this tree of crime, is to find out the history of the woman who died in the slum. Traced back for some years, circumstances may be discovered which will reveal what these papers contained, and once that is found, we can confidently say that the murderer will soon be discovered. This is the only chance of finding out the cause, and the author of this mysterious murder; and if it fails, we fear the hansom cab tragedy will have to be relegated to the list of undiscovered crimes, and the assassin of Whyte will have no other punishment than that of the remorse of his own conscience.

21

Three Months Afterwards

A hot December day, with a cloudless blue sky, and a sun blazing down on the earth, clothed in all the beauty of summer garments. Such a description of snowy December sounds perchance a trifle strange to English ears. It may strike them as being somewhat fantastic, as was the play in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” to Demetrius when he remarked, “This is hot ice and wondrous cold fire.”

But here in Australia we are in the realm of contrariety, and many things other than dreams go by contrary. Here black swans are an established fact, and the proverb concerning them, made when they were considered as mythical a bird as the Phoenix, has been rendered null and void by the discoveries of Captain Cook. Here ironwood sinks and pumice stone floats, which must strike the curious spectator as a queer freak on the part of Dame Nature. At home the Edinburgh mail bears the hardy traveller to a cold climate, with snowy mountains and wintry blasts; but here the further north one goes the hotter it gets, till one arrives in Queensland, where the heat is so great that a profane traveller of an epigrammatic turn of mind once fittingly called it, “An amateur hell.”

But however contrary, as Mrs. Gamp would say, Nature may be in her dealings, the English race out in this great continent are much the same as in the old country—John Bull, Paddy, and Sandy, all being of a conservative turn of mind, and with strong opinions as to the keeping up of old customs. Therefore, on a hot Christmas day, with the sun one hundred odd in the shade, Australian revellers sit down to the roast beef and plum-pudding of Old England, which they eat contentedly as the orthodox thing, and on New Year’s Eve the festive Celt repairs to the doors of his “freends” with a bottle of whisky and a cheering verse of

Auld Lang Syne.

Still it is these peculiar customs that give an individuality to a nation, and John Bull abroad loses none of his insular obstinacy; but keeps his Christmas in the old fashion, and wears his clothes in the new fashion, without regard to heat or cold. A nation that never surrenders to the fire of an enemy cannot be expected to give in to the fire of the sun, but if some ingenious mortal would only invent some light and airy costume, after the fashion of the Greek dress, and Australians would consent to adopt the same, life in Melbourne and her sister cities would be much cooler than it is at present.

Madge was thinking somewhat after this fashion as she sat on the wide verandah, in a state of exhaustion from the heat, and stared out at the wide plains lying parched and arid under the blazing sun. There was a dim kind of haze rising from the excessive heat, hanging midway between heaven and earth, and through its tremulous veil the distant hills looked aerial and unreal.

Stretched out before her was the garden with its intensely vivid flowers. To look at them merely was to increase one's caloric condition. Great bushes of oleanders, with their bright pink blossoms, luxurious rose trees, with their yellow, red, and white blooms, and all along the border a rainbow of many-coloured flowers, with such brilliant tints that the eye ached to see them in the hot sunshine, and turned restfully to the cool green of the trees which encircled the lawn. In the centre was a round pool, surrounded by a ring of white marble, and containing a still sheet of water, which flashed like a mirror in the blinding light.

The homestead of Yabba Yallook station was a long low house, with no upper-storey, and with a wide verandah running nearly round it. Cool green blinds were hung between the pillars to keep out the sun, and all along were scattered lounging chairs of basket-work, with rugs, novels, empty soda-water bottles, and all the other evidences that Mr. Frettlby's guests had been wise, and stayed inside during the noonday heat.

Madge was seated in one of these comfortable chairs, and she divided her attention between the glowing beauty of the world outside, which she could see through a narrow slit in the blinds. But she did not seem greatly interested in her book, and it was not long before she let it fall unheeded to the ground and took refuge in her own thoughts. The trial through which she had so recently passed had been a great one, and it had not been without its outward result. It had left its impress on her beautiful face, and there was a troubled look in her eyes. After Brian's acquittal of the murder of Oliver Whyte, she had been taken

by her father up to the station, in the hope that it would restore her to health. The mental strain which had been on her during the trial had nearly brought on an attack of brain fever; but here, far from the excitement of town life, in the quiet seclusion of the country, she had recovered her health, but not her spirits. Women are more impressionable than men, and it is, perhaps, for this reason that they age quicker. A trouble which would pass lightly over a man, leaves an indelible mark on a woman, both physically and mentally, and the terrible episode of Whyte's murder had changed Madge from a bright and merry girl into a grave and beautiful woman. Sorrow is a potent enchantress. Once she touches the heart, life can never be quite the same again. We never more surrender ourselves entirely to pleasure; and often we find so many of the things we have longed for are after all but dead sea fruit. Sorrow is the veiled Isis of the world, and once we penetrate her mystery and see her deeply-furrowed face and mournful eyes, the magic light of romance dies all away, and we realise the hard bitter fact of life in all its nakedness.

Madge felt something of all this. She saw the world now, not as the fantastic fairyland of her girlish dreams, but as the sorrowful vale of tears through which we must all walk till we reach the "Promised Land."

And Brian, he also had undergone a change, for there were a few white hairs now amid his curly, chestnut locks, and his character, from being gay and bright, had become moody and irritable. After the trial he had left town immediately, in order to avoid meeting with his friends, and had gone up to his station, which was next to that of the Frettlbys'. There he worked hard all day, and smoked hard all night, thinking ever the secret which the dead woman had told him, and which threatened to overshadow his life. Every now and then he rode over and saw Madge. But this was generally when he knew her father to be away from Melbourne, for of late he had disliked the millionaire. Madge could not but condemn his attitude, remembering how her father had stood beside him in his recent trouble. Yet there was another reason why Brian kept aloof from Yabba Yallook station. He did not wish to meet any of the gay society which was there, knowing that since his trial he was an object of curiosity and sympathy to everyone—a position galling enough to his proud nature.

At Christmas time Mr. Frettlby had asked several people up from Melbourne, and though Madge would rather have been left alone, yet she could not refuse her father, and had to play hostess with a smiling brow and aching heart.

Felix Rolleston, who a month since had joined the noble army of benedicts, was there with Mrs. Rolleston, nee Miss Featherweight, who ruled him with a rod of iron. Having bought Felix with her money, she had determined to make good use of him, and, being ambitious to shine in Melbourne society, had insisted upon Felix studying politics, so that when the next general election came round he could enter Parliament. Felix had rebelled at first, but ultimately gave way, as he found that when he had a good novel concealed among his parliamentary papers time passed quite pleasantly, and he got the reputation of a hard worker at little cost. They had brought up Julia with them, and this young person had made up her mind to become the second Mrs. Frettlby. She had not received much encouragement, but, like the English at Waterloo, did not know when she was beaten, and carried on the siege of Mr. Frettlby's heart in an undaunted manner.

Dr. Chinston had come up for a little relaxation, and gave never a thought to his anxious patients or the many sick-rooms he was in the habit of visiting. A young English fellow, called Peterson, who amused himself by travelling; an old colonist, full of reminiscences of the old days, when, "by gad, sir, we hadn't a gas lamp in the whole of Melbourne," and several other people, completed the party. They had all gone off to the billiard-room, and left Madge in her comfortable chair, half-asleep.

Suddenly she started, as she heard a step behind her, and turning, saw Sal Rawlins, in the neatest of black gowns, with a coquettish white cap and apron, and an open book. Madge had been so delighted with Sal for saving Brian's life that she had taken her into her service as maid. Mr. Frettlby had offered strong opposition at first that a fallen woman like Sal should be near his daughter; but Madge was determined to rescue the unhappy girl from the life of sin she was leading, and so at last he reluctantly consented. Brian, too, had objected, but ultimately yielded, as he saw that Madge had set her heart on it. Mother Guttersnipe objected at first, characterising the whole affair as "cussed 'umbug," but she, likewise, gave in, and Sal became maid to Miss Frettlby, who immediately set to work to remedy Sal's defective education by teaching her to read. The book she held in her hand was a spelling-book, and this she handed to Madge.

"I think I knows it now, miss," she said, respectfully, as Madge looked up with a smile.

"Do you, indeed?" said Madge, gaily. "You will be able to read in no time, Sal."

"Read this?" said Sal, touching "Tristan: A Romance, by Zoe."

"Hardly!" said Madge, picking it up, with a look of contempt.

"I want you to learn English, and not a confusion of tongues like this thing. But it's too hot for lessons, Sal," she went on, leaning back in her seat, "so get a chair and talk to me."

Sal complied, and Madge looked out at the brilliant flower-beds, and at the black shadow of the tall witch elm which grew on one side of the lawn. She wanted to ask a certain question of Sal, and did not know how to do it. The moodiness and irritability of Brian had troubled her very much of late, and, with the quick instinct of her sex, she ascribed it indirectly to the woman who had died in the back slum. Anxious to share his troubles and lighten his burden, she determined to ask Sal about this mysterious woman, and find out, if possible, what secret had been told to Brian which affected him so deeply.

"Sal," she said, after a short pause, turning her clear grey eyes on the woman, "I want to ask you something."

The other shivered and turned pale.

"About—about that?"

Madge nodded.

Sal hesitated for a moment, and then flung herself at the feet of her mistress.

"I will tell you," she cried. "You have been kind to me, an' have a right to know. I will tell you all I know."

"Then," asked Madge, firmly, as she clasped her hands tightly together, "who was this woman whom Mr. Fitzgerald went to see, and where did she come from?"

"Gran' an' me found her one evenin' in Little Bourke Street," answered Sal, "just near the theatre. She was quite drunk, an' we took her home with us."

"How kind of you," said Madge.

"Oh, it wasn't that," replied the other, dryly. "Gran' wanted her clothes; she was awful swell dressed."

"And she took the clothes—how wicked!"

"Anyone would have done it down our way," answered Sal, indifferently; "but Gran' changed her mind when she got her home. I went out to get some gin for Gran', and when I came back she was huggin' and kissin' the woman."

"She recognised her."

"Yes, I s'pose so," replied Sal, "an' next mornin', when the lady got square, she made a grab at Gran', an' hollered out, 'I was comin' to see you.'"

"And then?"

"Gran' chucked me out of the room, an' they had a long jaw; and then, when I come back, Gran' tells me the lady is a-goin' to stay with us 'cause she was ill, and sent me for Mr. Whyte."

"And he came?"

"Oh, yes—often," said Sal. "He kicked up a row when he first turned up, but when he found she was ill, he sent a doctor; but it warn't no good. She was two weeks with us, and then died the mornin' she saw Mr. Fitzgerald."

"I suppose Mr. Whyte was in the habit of talking to this woman?"

"Lots," returned Sal; "but he always turned Gran' an' me out of the room afore he started."

"And"—hesitating—"did you ever overhear one of these conversations?"

"Yes—one," answered the other, with a nod. "I got riled at the way he cleared us out of our own room; and once, when he shut the door and Gran' went off to get some gin, I sat down at the door and listened. He wanted her to give up some papers, an' she wouldn't. She said she'd die first; but at last he got 'em, and took 'em away with him."

"Did you see them?" asked Madge, as the assertion of Gorby that Whyte had been murdered for certain papers flashed across her mind.

"Rather," said Sal, "I was looking through a hole in the door, an' she takes 'em from under her pillar, an' 'e takes 'em to the table, where the candle was, an' looks at 'em—they were in a large blue envelop, with writing on it in red ink—then he put 'em in his pocket, and she sings out: 'You'll lose 'em,' an' 'e says: 'No, I'll always 'ave 'em with me, an' if 'e wants 'em 'e'll have to kill me fust afore 'e gits 'em.'"

"And you did not know who the man was to whom the papers were of such importance?"

"No, I didn't; they never said no names."

"And when was it Whyte got the papers?"

"About a week before he was murdered," said Sal, after a moment's thought. "An' after that he never turned up again. She kept watchin' for him night an' day, an' 'cause he didn't come, got mad at him. I hear her sayin', 'You think you've done with me, my gentleman, an' leaves me here to die, but I'll spoil your little game,' an' then she wrote that letter to Mr. Fitzgerald, an' I brought him to her, as you know."

"Yes, yes," said Madge, rather impatiently. "I heard all that at the trial, but what conversation passed between Mr. Fitzgerald and this woman? Did you hear it?"

"Bits of it," replied the other. "I didn't split in Court, 'cause I thought the lawyer would be down on me for listening. The first thing I heard Mr. Fitzgerald sayin' was, 'You're mad—it ain't true,' an' she ses, 'S'elp me it is, Whyte's got the proof,' an' then he sings out, 'My poor girl,' and she ses, 'Will you marry her now?' and ses he, 'I will, I love her more than ever,' and then she makes a grab at him, and says, 'Spile his game if you can,' and says he, 'What's yer name?' and she says—"

"What?" asked Madge, breathlessly.

"Rosanna Moore!"

There was a sharp exclamation as Sal said the name, and, turning round quickly, Madge found Brian standing beside her, pale as death, with his eyes fixed on the woman, who had risen to her feet.

"Go on!" he said sharply.

"That's all I know," she replied, in a sullen tone. Brian gave a sigh of relief.

"You can go," he said slowly; "I wish to speak with Miss Frettlby alone."

Sal looked at him for a moment, and then glanced at her mistress, who nodded to her as a sign that she might withdraw. She picked up her book, and with another sharp enquiring look at Brian, turned and walked slowly into the house.

22

A Daughter of Eve

After Sal had gone, Brian sank into a chair beside Madge with a weary sigh. He was in riding dress, which became his stalwart figure well, and he looked remarkably handsome but ill and worried.

"What on earth were you questioning that girl about?" he said abruptly, taking his hat off, and tossing it and his gloves on to the floor.

Madge flushed crimson for a moment, and then taking Brian's two strong hands in her own, looked steadily into his frowning face.

"Why don't you trust me?" she asked, in a quiet tone.

"It is not necessary that I should," he answered moodily. "The secret that Rosanna Moore told me on her death-bed is nothing that would benefit you to know."

"Is it about me?" she persisted.

"It is, and it is not," he answered, epigrammatically.

"I suppose that means that it is about a third person, and concerns me," she said calmly, releasing his hands.

"Well, yes," impatiently striking his boot with his riding whip. "But it is nothing that can harm you so long as you do not know it; but God help you should anyone tell it to you, for it would embitter your life."

"My life being so very sweet now," answered Madge, with a slight sneer.

"You are trying to put out a fire by pouring oil on it, and what you say only makes me more determined to learn what it is."

"Madge, I implore you not to persist in this foolish curiosity," he said, almost fiercely, "it will bring you only misery."

"If it concerns me I have a right to know it," she answered curtly. "When I marry you how can we be happy together, with the shadow of a secret between us?"

Brian rose, and leaned against the verandah post with a dark frown on his face.

"Do you remember that verse of Browning's," he said, coolly—

'Where the apple reddens Never pry, Lest we lose our Edens, Eve and I.'

"Singularity applicable to our present conversation, I think."

"Ah," she said, her pale face flushing with anger, "you want me to live in a fool's paradise, which may end at any moment."

"That depends upon yourself," he answered coldly. "I never roused your curiosity by telling you that there was a secret, but betrayed it inadvertently to Calton's cross-questioning. I tell you candidly that I did learn something from Rosanna Moore, and it concerns you, though only indirectly through a third person. But it would do no good to reveal it, and would ruin both our lives."

She did not answer, but looked straight before her into the glowing sunshine.

Brian fell on his knees beside her, and stretched out his hands with an entreating gesture.

"Oh, my darling," he cried sadly, "cannot you trust me? The love which has stood such a test as yours cannot fail like this. Let me bear the misery of knowing it alone, without blighting your young life with the knowledge of it. I would tell you if I could, but, God help me, I cannot—I cannot," and he buried his face in his hands.

Madge closed her mouth firmly, and touched his comely head with her cool, white fingers. There was a struggle going on in her breast between her feminine curiosity and her love for the man at her feet—the latter conquered, and she bowed her head over his.

"Brian," she whispered softly, "let it be as you wish. I will never again try to learn this secret, since you do not desire it."

He arose to his feet, and caught her in his strong arms, with a glad smile.

"My dearest," he said, kissing her passionately, and then for a few moments neither of them spoke. "We will begin a new life," he said, at length. "We will put the sad past away from us, and think of it only as a dream."

"But this secret will still fret you," she murmured.

"It will wear away with time and with change of scene," he answered sadly.

"Change of scene!" she repeated in a startled tone. "Are you going away?"

"Yes; I have sold my station, and intend leaving Australia for ever during the next three months."

"And where are you going?" asked the girl, rather bewildered.

"Anywhere," he said a little bitterly. "I am going to follow the example of Cain, and be a wanderer on the face of the earth!"

"Alone!"

"That is what I have come to see you about," said Brian, looking steadily at her. "I have come to ask you if you will marry me at once, and we will leave Australia together."

She hesitated.

"I know it is asking a great deal," he said, hurriedly, "to leave your friends, your position, and"—with hesitation—"your father; but think of my life without you—think how lonely I shall be, wandering round the world by myself; but you will not desert me now I have so much need of you—you will come with me and be my good angel in the future as you have been in the past?"

She put her hand on his arm, and looking at him with her clear, grey eyes, said—"Yes!"

"Thank God for that," said Brian, reverently, and there was again a silence.

Then they sat down and talked about their plans, and built castles in the air, after the fashion of lovers.

"I wonder what papa will say?" observed Madge, idly twisting her engagement ring round and round.

Brian frowned, and a dark look passed over his face.

"I suppose I must speak to him about it?" he said at length, reluctantly.

"Yes, of course!" she replied, lightly. "It is merely a formality; still, one that must be observed."

"And where is Mr. Frettlby?" asked Fitzgerald, rising.

"In the billiard-room," she answered, as she followed his example. "No!" she continued, as she saw her father step on to the verandah. "Here he is."

Brian had not seen Mark Frettlby for some time, and was astonished at the change which had taken place in his appearance. Formerly, he had been as straight as an arrow, with a stern, fresh-coloured face; but now he had a slight stoop, and his face looked old and withered. His thick, black hair was streaked here and there with white. His eyes alone were unchanged. They were as keen and bright as ever. Brian knew full well how he himself had altered. He knew, too, that Madge was not the

same, and now he could not but wonder whether the great change that was apparent in her father was attributable to the same source—to the murder of Oliver Whyte.

Sad and thoughtful as Mr. Frettlby looked, as he came along, a smile broke over his face as he caught sight of his daughter.

"My dear Fitzgerald," he said, holding out his hand, "this is indeed a surprise! When did you come over?"

"About half-an-hour ago," replied Brian, reluctantly, taking the extended hand of the millionaire. "I came to see Madge, and have a talk with you."

"Ah! that's right," said the other, putting his arm round his daughter's waist. "So that's what has brought the roses to your face, young lady?" he went on, pinching her cheek playfully. "You will stay to dinner, of course, Fitzgerald?"

"Thank you, no!" answered Brian, hastily, "my dress—"

"Nonsense," interrupted Frettlby, hospitably; "we are not in Melbourne, and I am sure Madge will excuse your dress. You must stay."

"Yes, do," said Madge, in a beseeching tone, touching his hand lightly. "I don't see so much of you that I can let you off with half-an-hour's conversation."

Brian seemed to be making a violent effort.

"Very well," he said in a low voice; "I shall stay."

"And now," said Frettlby, in a brisk tone, as he sat down; "the important question of dinner being settled, what is it you want to see me about?—Your station?"

"No," answered Brian, leaning against the verandah post, while Madge slipped her hand through his arm. "I have sold it."

"Sold it!" echoed Frettlby, aghast. "What for?"

"I felt restless, and wanted a change."

"Ah! a rolling stone," said the millionaire, shaking his head, "gathers no moss, you know."

"Stones don't roll of their own accord," replied Brian, in a gloomy tone. "They are impelled by a force over which they have no control."

"Oh, indeed!" said the millionaire, in a joking tone. "And may I ask what is your propelling force?"

Brian looked at the man's face with such a steady gaze that the latter's eyes dropped after an uneasy attempt to return it.

"Well," he said impatiently, looking at the two tall young people standing before him, "what do you want to see me about?"

"Madge has agreed to marry me at once, and I want your consent."

"Impossible!" said Frettlby, curtly.

"There is no such a word as impossible," retorted Brian, coolly, thinking of the famous remark in Richelieu, "Why should you refuse? I am rich now."

"Pshaw!" said Frettlby, rising impatiently. "It's not money I'm thinking about—I've got enough for both of you; but I cannot live without Madge."

"Then come with us," said his daughter, kissing him.

Her lover, however, did not second the invitation, but stood moodily twisting his tawny moustache, and staring out into the garden in an absent sort of manner.

"What do you say, Fitzgerald?" said Frettlby, who was eyeing him keenly.

"Oh, delighted, of course," answered Brian, confusedly.

"In that case," returned the other, coolly, "I will tell you what we will do. I have bought a steam yacht, and she will be ready for sea about the end of January. You will marry my daughter at once, and go round New Zealand for your honeymoon. When you return, if I feel inclined, and you two turtle-doves don't object, I will join you, and we will make a tour of the world."

"Oh, how delightful," cried Madge, clasping her hands. "I am so fond of the ocean with a companion, of course," she added, with a saucy glance at her lover.

Brian's face had brightened considerably, for he was a born sailor, and a pleasant yachting voyage in the blue waters of the Pacific, with Madge as his companion, was, to his mind, as near Paradise as any mortal could get.

"And what is, the name of the yacht?" he asked, with deep interest.

"Her name?" repeated Mr. Frettlby, hastily. "Oh, a very ugly name, and one which I intend to change. At present she is called the ›Rosanna.<"

"Rosanna!"

Brian and his betrothed both started at this, and the former stared curiously at the old man, wondering at the coincidence between the name of the yacht and that of the woman who died in the Melbourne slum.

Mr. Frettlby flushed a little when he saw Brian's eye fixed on him with such an enquiring gaze, and rose with an embarrassed laugh.

"You are a pair of moon-struck lovers," he said, gaily, taking an arm of each, and leading them into the house "but you forget dinner will soon be ready."

23

Across the Walnuts and the Wine

MOORE, sweetest of bards, sings—

Oh, there's nothing half so sweet in life
As love's young dream.

But he made this assertion in his callow days, before he had learned the value of a good digestion. To a young and fervid youth, love's young dream is, no doubt, very charming, lovers, as a rule, having a small appetite; but to a man who has seen the world, and drunk deeply of the wine of life, there is nothing half so sweet in the whole of his existence as a good dinner. "A hard heart and a good digestion will make any man happy." So said Talleyrand, a cynic if you like, but a man who knew the temper of his day and generation. Ovid wrote about the art of love—Brillat Savarin, of the art of dining; yet, I warrant you, the gastronomical treatise of the brilliant Frenchman is more widely read than the passionate songs of the Roman poet. Who does not value as the sweetest in the whole twenty-four the hour when, seated at an artistically-laid table, with delicately-cooked viands, good wines, and pleasant company, all the cares and worries of the day give place to a delightful sense of absolute enjoyment? Dinner with the English people is generally a very dreary affair, and there is a heaviness about the whole thing which communicates itself to the guests, who eat and drink with a solemn persistence, as though they were occupied in fulfilling some sacred rite. But there are men—alas! few and far between—who possess the rare art of giving good dinners—good in the sense of sociality as well as in that of cookery.

Mark Frettlby was one of these rare individuals—he had an innate genius for getting pleasant people together—people, who, so to speak, dove-tailed into one another. He had an excellent cook, and his wines were irreproachable, so that Brian, in spite of his worries, was glad that he had accepted the invitation. The bright gleam of the silver, the glitter of glass, and the perfume of flowers, all collected under the subdued crimson glow of a pink-shaded lamp, which hung from the ceiling, could not but give him a pleasurable sensation.

On one side of the dining-room were the French windows opening on to the verandah, and beyond appeared the vivid green of the trees, and the dazzling colours of the flowers, somewhat tempered by the soft hazy glow of the twilight.

Brian had made himself as respectable as possible under the odd circumstances of dining in his riding-dress, and sat next to Madge, contentedly sipping his wine, and listening to the pleasant chatter which was going on around him.

Felix Rolleston was in great spirits, the more so as Mrs. Rolleston was at the further end of the table, hidden from his view.

Julia Featherweight sat near Mr. Frettlby, and chatted to him so persistently that he wished she would become possessed of a dumb devil.

Dr. Chinston and Peterson were seated on the other side of the table, and the old colonist, whose name was Valpy, had the post of honour, on Mr. Frettlby's right hand.

The conversation had turned on to the subject, ever green and fascinating, of politics, and Mr. Rolleston thought it a good opportunity to air his views as to the Government of the Colony, and to show his wife that he really meant to obey her wish, and become a power in the political world.

"By Jove, you know," he said, with a wave of his hand, as though he were addressing the House; "the country is going to the dogs, and all that sort of thing. What we want is a man like Beaconsfield."

"Ah! but you can't pick up a man like that every day," said Frettlby, who was listening with an amused smile to Rolleston's disquisitions.

"Rather a good thing, too," observed Dr. Chinston, dryly.

"Genius would become too common."

"Well, when I am elected," said Felix, who had his own views, which modesty forbade him to publish, on the subject of the coming colonial Disraeli, "I probably shall form a party."

"To advocate what?" asked Peterson, curiously.

"Oh, well, you see," hesitated Felix, "I haven't drawn up a programme yet, so can't say at present."

"Yes, you can hardly give a performance without a programme," said the doctor, taking a sip of wine, and then everybody laughed.

"And on what are your political opinions founded?" asked Mr. Frettlby, absently, without looking at Felix.

"Oh, you see, I've read the Parliamentary reports and Constitutional history, and—and Vivian Grey," said Felix, who began to feel himself somewhat at sea.

"The last of which is what the author called it, a *lusus naturae*," observed Chinston. "Don't erect your political schemes on such bubble foundations as are in that novel, for you won't find a Marquis Carabas out here."

"Unfortunately, no!" observed Felix, mournfully; "but we may find a Vivian Grey."

Every one smothered a smile, the allusion was so patent.

"Well, he didn't succeed in the end," cried Peterson.

"Of course he didn't," retorted Felix, disdainfully; "he made an enemy of a woman, and a man who is such a fool as to do that deserves to fall."

"You have an excellent opinion of our sex, Mr. Rolleston," said Madge, with a wicked glance at the wife of that gentleman, who was listening complacently to her husband's aimless chatter.

"No better than they deserve," replied Rolleston, gallantly.

"But you have never gone in for politics, Mr. Frettlby?"

"Who?—I—no," said the host, rousing himself out of the brown study into which he had fallen. "I'm afraid I'm not sufficiently patriotic, and my business did not permit me."

"And now?"

"Now," echoed Mr. Frettlby, glancing at his daughter, "I intend to travel."

"The jolliest thing out," said Peterson, eagerly. "One never gets tired of seeing the queer things that are in the world."

"I've seen queer enough things in Melbourne in the early days," said the old colonist, with a wicked twinkle in his eyes.

"Oh!" cried Julia, putting her hands up to her ears, "don't tell me them, for I'm sure they're naughty."

"We weren't saints then," said old Valpy, with a senile chuckle.

"Ah, then, we haven't changed much in that respect," retorted Frettlby, drily.

"You talk of your theatres now," went on Valpy, with the garrulousness of old age; "why, you haven't got a dancer like Rosanna."

Brian started on hearing this name again, and he felt Madge's cold hand touch his.

"And who was Rosanna?" asked Felix, curiously, looking up.

"A dancer and burlesque actress," replied Valpy, vivaciously, nodding his old head. "Such a beauty; we were all mad about her—such hair and eyes. You remember her, Frettlby?"

"Yes," answered the host, in a curiously dry voice.

But before Mr. Valpy had the opportunity to wax more eloquent, Madge rose from the table, and the other ladies followed. The ever polite Felix held the door open for them, and received a bright smile from his wife for, what she considered, his brilliant talk at the dinner table.

Brian sat still, and wondered why Frettlby changed colour on hearing the name—he supposed that the millionaire had been mixed up with the actress, and did not care about being reminded of his early indiscretions—and, after all, who does?

"She was as light as a fairy," continued Valpy, with wicked chuckle.

"What became of her?" asked Brian, abruptly.

Mark Frettlby looked up suddenly, as Fitzgerald asked this question.

"She went to England in 1858," said the aged one. "I'm not quite sure if it was July or August, but it was in 1858."

"You will excuse me, Valpy, but I hardly think that these reminiscences of a ballet-dancer are amusing," said Frettlby, curtly, pouring himself out a glass of wine. "Let us change the subject."

Notwithstanding the plainly-expressed wish of his host Brian felt strongly inclined to pursue the conversation. Politeness, however, forbade such a thing, and he consoled himself with the reflection that, after dinner, he would ask old Valpy about the ballet-dancer whose name caused Mark Frettlby to exhibit such strong emotion. But, to his annoyance, when the gentlemen went into the drawing-room, Frettlby took the old colonist off to his study, where he sat with him the whole evening talking over old times.

Fitzgerald found Madge seated at the piano in the drawing-room playing one of Mendelssohn's Songs without Words.

"What a dismal thing that is you are playing, Madge," he said lightly, as he sank into a seat beside her. "It is more like a funeral march than anything else."

"Gad, so it is," said Felix, who came up at this moment. "I don't care myself about 'Op. 84' and all that classical humbug. Give me something light—'Belle Helene,' with Emelie Melville, and all that sort of thing."

"Felix!" said his wife, in a stern tone.

"My dear," he answered recklessly, rendered bold by the champagne he had taken, "you observed—"

"Nothing particular," answered Mrs. Rolleston, glancing at him with a stony eye, "except that I consider Offenbach low."

"I don't," said Felix, sitting down to the piano, from which Madge had just risen, "and to prove he ain't, here goes."

He ran his fingers lightly over the keys, and dashed into a brilliant Offenbach galop, which had the effect of waking up the people in the drawing-room, who felt sleepy after dinner, and sent the blood tingling through their veins. When they were thoroughly roused, Felix, now that he had an appreciative audience, for he was by no means an individual who believed in wasting his sweetness on the desert air, prepared to amuse them.

"You haven't heard the last new song by Frosti, have you?" he asked, after he had brought his galop to a conclusion.

"Is that the composer of 'Inasmuch' and 'How so?'" asked Julia, clasping her hands. "I do love his music, and the words are so sweetly pretty."

"Infernally stupid, she means," whispered Peterson to Brian. "They've no more meaning in them than the titles."

"Sing us the new song, Felix," commanded his wife, and her obedient husband obeyed her.

It was entitled, "Somewhere," words by Vashti, music by Paola Frosti, and was one of those extraordinary compositions which may mean anything—that is, if the meaning can be discovered. Felix had a pleasant voice, though it was not very strong, and the music was pretty, while the words were mystical. The first verse was as follows:—

"A flying cloud, a breaking wave,
A faint light in a moonless sky:
A voice that from the silent grave
Sounds sad in one long bitter cry.
I know not, sweet, where you may stand,
With shining eyes and golden hair,
Yet I know, I will touch your hand
And kiss your lips somewhere—
Somewhere! Somewhere!—

When the summer sun is fair,
Waiting me, on land or sea,
Somewhere, love, somewhere!"

The second verse was very similar to the first, and when Felix finished a murmur of applause broke from every one of the ladies.

"How sweetly pretty," sighed Julia. "Such a lot in it."

"But what is its meaning?" asked Brian, rather bewildered.

"It hasn't got one," replied Felix, complacently. "Surely you don't want every song to have a moral, like a book of Aesop's Fables?"

Brian shrugged his shoulders, and turned away with Madge.

"I must say I agree with Fitzgerald," said the doctor, quickly. "I like as song with some meaning in it. The poetry of the one you sang is as mystical as Browning, without any of his genius to redeem it."

"Philistine," murmured Felix, under his breath, and then vacated his seat at the piano in favour of Julia, who was about to sing a ballad called, "Going Down the Hill," which had been the rage in Melbourne musical circles during the last two months.

Meanwhile Madge and Brian were walking up and down in the moonlight. It was an exquisite night, with a cloudless blue sky glittering with the stars, and a great yellow moon in the west. Madge seated herself on the side of the marble ledge which girdled the still pool of water in front of the house, and dipped her hand into the cool water. Brian leaned against the trunk of a great magnolia tree, whose glossy green leaves and great creamy blossoms looked fantastic in the moonlight. In front of them was the house, with the ruddy lamplight streaming through the wide windows, and they could see the guests within, excited by the music, waltzing to Rolleston's playing, and their dark figures kept passing and re-passing the windows while the charming music of the waltz mingled with their merry laughter.

"Looks like a haunted house," said Brian, thinking of Poe's weird poem; "but such a thing is impossible out here."

"I don't know so much about that," said Madge, gravely, lifting up some water in the palm of her hand, and letting it stream back like diamonds in the moonlight. "I knew a house in St. Kilda which was haunted."

"By what?" asked Brian, sceptically.

"Noises!" she answered, solemnly.

Brian burst out laughing and startled a bat, which flew round and round in the silver moonlight, and whirled away into the shelter of a witch elm.

"Rats and mice are more common here than ghosts," he said, lightly. "I'm afraid the inhabitants of your haunted house were fanciful."

"So you don't believe in ghosts?"

"There's a Banshee in our family," said Brian, with a gay smile, "who is supposed to cheer our death beds with her howlings; but as I've never seen the lady myself, I'm afraid she's a Mrs. Harris."

"It's aristocratic to have a ghost in a family, I believe," said Madge; "that is the reason we colonials have none."

"Ah, but you will have," he answered with a careless laugh. "There are, no doubt, democratic as well as aristocratic ghosts; but, pshaw!" he went on, impatiently, "what nonsense I talk. There are no ghosts, except of a man's own raising. The ghosts of a dead youth—the ghosts of past follies—the ghosts of what might have been—these are the spectres which are more to be feared than those of the churchyard."

Madge looked at him in silence, for she understood the meaning of that passionate outburst—the secret which the dead woman had told him, and which hung like a shadow over his life. She arose quietly and took his arm. The light touch roused him, and a faint wind sent an eerie rustle through the still leaves of the magnolia, as they walked back in silence to the house.

24

Brian Receives a Letter

Notwithstanding the hospitable invitation of Mr. Frettlby, Brian refused to stay at Yabba Yallook that night, but after saying good-bye to Madge, mounted his horse and rode slowly away in the moonlight. He felt very happy, and letting the reins lie on his horse's neck, he gave himself up unreservedly to his thoughts. *Atra cura* certainly did not sit behind the horseman on this night; and Brian, to his surprise, found himself singing "Kitty of Coleraine," as he rode along in the silver moonlight. And was he not right to sing when the future seemed so bright and pleasant? Oh, yes! they would live on the ocean, and she would find how much pleasanter it was on the restless waters, with their solemn sense of mystery, than on the crowded land.

"Was not the sea Made for the free—Land for courts and slaves alone?"

Moore was perfectly right. She would learn that when with a fair wind, and all sail set, they were flying over the blue Pacific waters.

And then they would go home to Ireland to the ancestral home of the Fitzgeralds, where he would lead her in under the arch, with "CEAD MILLE FAILTHE" on it, and everyone would bless the fair young bride. Why should he trouble himself about the crime of another? No! He had made a resolve and intended to keep it; he would put this secret with which he had been entrusted behind his back, and would wander about the world with Madge and—her father. He felt a sudden chill come over him as he murmured the last words to himself "her father."

"I'm a fool," he said, impatiently, as he gathered up the reins, and spurred his horse into a canter. "It can make no difference to me so long as Madge remains ignorant; but to sit beside him, to eat with him, to have him always present like a skeleton at a feast—God help me!"

He urged his horse into a gallop, and as he rushed over the turf, with the fresh, cool night wind blowing keenly against his face, he felt a sense of relief, as though he were leaving some dark spectre behind. On he galloped, with the blood throbbing in his young veins, over miles of plain, with the dark-blue, star-studded sky above, and the pale moon shining down on him—past a silent shepherd's hut, which stood near a wide creek; splashing through the cool water, which wound through the dark plain like a thread of silver in the moonlight—then, again, the wide, grassy plain, dotted here and there with tall clumps of shadowy trees, and on either side he could see the sheep skurrying away like fantastic spectres—on—on—ever on, until his own homestead appears, and he sees the star-like light shining brightly in the distance—a long avenue of tall trees, over whose wavering shadows his horse thundered, and then the wide grassy space in front of the house, with the clamorous barking of dogs. A groom, roused by the clatter of hoofs up the avenue, comes round the side of the house, and Brian leaps off his horse, and flinging the reins to the man, walks into his own room. There he finds a lighted lamp, brandy and soda on the table, and a packet of letters and newspapers. He flung his hat on the sofa, and opened the window and door, so as to let in the cool breeze; then mixing for himself a glass of brandy and soda, he turned up the lamp, and prepared to read his letters. The first he took up was from a lady. "Always a she correspondent for me," says Isaac Disraeli, "provided she does not cross." Brian's correspondence did not cross, but notwithstanding this, after reading half a page of small talk and scandal, he flung the letter on the table with an impatient ejaculation. The other letters were principally business ones, but the last one proved to be from Calton, and Fitzgerald opened it with a sensation of pleasure. Calton was a capital letter-writer, and his epistles had done much to cheer Fitzgerald in the dismal period which succeeded his acquittal of Whyte's murder, when he was in danger of getting into a morbid state of mind. Brian, therefore, sipped his brandy and soda, and, lying back in his chair, prepared to enjoy himself.

"My dear Fitzgerald," wrote Calton his peculiarly clear handwriting, which was such an exception to the usual crabbed hieroglyphics of his brethren of the bar, "while you are enjoying the cool breezes and delightful freshness of the country, here am I, with numerous other poor devils, cooped up in this hot and dusty city. How I wish I were with you in the land of Goschen, by the rolling waters of the Murray, where everything is bright and green, and unsophisticated—the two latter terms are almost identical—instead

of which my view is bounded by bricks and mortar, and the muddy waters of the Yarra have to do duty for your noble river. Ah! I too have lived in Arcadia, but I don't now: and even if some power gave me the choice to go back again, I am not sure that I would accept. Arcadia, after all, is a lotus-eating Paradise of blissful ignorance, and I love the world with its pomps, vanities, and wickedness. While you, therefore, oh Corydon—don't be afraid, I'm not going to quote Virgil—are studying Nature's book, I am deep in the musty leaves of Themis' volume, but I dare say that the great mother teaches you much better things than her artificial daughter does me. However, you remember that pithy proverb, 'When one is in Rome, one must not speak ill of the Pope,' so being in the legal profession, I must respect its muse.

"I suppose when you saw that this letter came from a law office, you wondered what the deuce a lawyer was writing to you for, and my handwriting, no doubt suggested a writ—pshaw! I am wrong there, you are past the age of writs—not that I hint that you are old; by no means—you are just at that appreciative age when a man enjoys life most, when the fire of youth is tempered by the experience of age, and one knows how to enjoy to the utmost the good things of this world, videlicet—love, wine, and friendship. I am afraid I am growing poetical, which is a bad thing for a lawyer, for the flower of poetry cannot flourish in the arid wastes of the law.

"On reading what I have written, I find I have been as discursive as Praed's Vicar, and as this letter is supposed to be a business one, I must deny myself the luxury of following out a train of idle ideas, and write sense. I suppose you still hold the secret which Rosanna Moore entrusted you with—ah! you see I know her name, and why?—simply because, with the natural curiosity of the human race, I have been trying to find out who murdered Oliver Whyte, and as the ARGUS very cleverly pointed out Rosanna Moore as likely to be at the bottom of the whole affair, I have been learning her past history. The secret of Whyte's murder, and the reason for it, is known to you, but you refuse, even in the interests of justice, to reveal it—why, I don't know; but we all have our little faults, and from an amiable though mistaken sense of—shall I say—duty?—you refuse to deliver up the man whose cowardly crime so nearly cost you your life.

"After your departure from Melbourne every one said, 'The hansom cab tragedy is at an end, and the murderer will never be discovered.'

I ventured to disagree with the wiseacres who made such a remark, and asked myself, 'Who was this woman who died at Mother Guttersnipe's?' Receiving no satisfactory answer from myself, I determined to find out, and took steps accordingly. In the first place, I learned from Roger Moreland, who, if you remember, was a witness against you at the trial, that Whyte and Rosanna Moore had come out to Sydney in the ›John Elder‹ about a year ago as Mr. and Mrs. Whyte. I need hardly say that they did not think it needful to go through the formality of marriage, as such a tie might have been found inconvenient on some future occasion. Moreland knew nothing about Rosanna Moore, and advised me to give up the search, as, coming from a city like London, it would be difficult to find anyone that knew her there.

"Notwithstanding this, I telegraphed home to a friend of mine, who is a bit of an amateur detective, 'Find out the name and all about the woman who left England in the ›John Elder‹ on the 21st day of August, 18_ as wife of Oliver Whyte.' Mirabile dictu, he found out all about her, and knowing, as you do, what a maelstrom of humanity London is, you must admit my friend was clever. It appears, however, that the task I set him was easier than he expected, for the so-called Mrs. Whyte was rather a notorious individual in her own way. She was a burlesque actress at the Frivolity Theatre in London, and, being a very handsome woman, had been photographed innumerable times. Consequently, when she very foolishly went with Whyte to choose a berth on board the boat, she was recognised by the clerks in the office as Rosanna Moore, better known as Musette of the Frivolity. Why she ran away with Whyte I cannot tell you. With reference to men understanding women, I refer you to Balzac's remark anent the same. Perhaps Musette got weary of St. John's Wood and champagne suppers, and longed for the purer air of her native land. Ah! you open your eyes at this latter statement—you are surprised—no, on second thoughts you are not, because she told you herself that she was a native of Sydney, and had gone home in 1858, after a triumphant career of acting in Melbourne. And why did she leave the applauding Melbourne public and the flesh-pots of Egypt? You know this also. She ran away with a rich young squatter, with more money than morals, who happened to be in Melbourne at the time. She seems to have had a weakness for running away. But why she chose Whyte to go with this time puzzles me. He was not rich, not particularly good-looking, had no position, and a bad temper.

“How do I know all these traits of Mr. Whyte’s character, morally and socially? Easily enough; my omniscient friend found them all out. Mr. Oliver Whyte was the son of a London tailor, and his father being well off, retired into a private life, and ultimately went the way of all flesh. His son, finding himself with a capital income, and a pretty taste for amusement, cut the shop of his late lamented parent, found out that his family had come over with the Conqueror—Glanville de Whyte helped to sew the Bayeux tapestry, I suppose—and graduated at the Frivolity Theatre as a masher. In common with the other gilded youth of the day, he worshipped at the gas-lit shrine of Musette, and the goddess, pleased with his incense, left her other admirers in the lurch, and ran off with fortunate Mr. Whyte. So far as this goes there is nothing to show why the murder was committed. Men do not perpetrate crimes for the sake of light o’ loves like Musette, unless, indeed, some wretched youth embezzles money to buy jewellery for his divinity. The career of Musette, in London, was simply that of a clever member of the demi-monde, and, as far as I can learn, no one was so much in love with her as to commit a crime for her sake.

“So far so good; the motive of the crime must be found in Australia. Whyte had spent nearly all his money in England, and, consequently, Musette and her lover arrived in Sydney with comparatively very little cash. However, with an Epicurean-like philosophy, they enjoyed themselves on what little they had, and then came to Melbourne, where they stayed at a second-rate hotel. Musette, I may tell you, had one special vice, a common one—drink. She loved champagne, and drank a good deal of it. Consequently, on arriving at Melbourne, and finding that a new generation had arisen, which knew not Joseph—I mean Musette—she drowned her sorrows in the flowing bowl, and went out after a quarrel with Mr. Whyte, to view Melbourne by night—a familiar scene to her, no doubt. What took her to Little Bourke Street I don’t know. Perhaps she got lost—perhaps it had been a favourite walk of hers in the old days; at all events she was found dead drunk in that unsavoury locality, by Sal Rawlins. I know this is so, because Sal told me so herself. Sal acted the part of the good Samaritan—took her to the squalid den she called home, and there Rosanna Moore fell dangerously ill. Whyte, who had missed her, found out where she was, and that she was too ill to be removed. I presume he was rather glad to get rid of such an encumbrance, so he went back to his lodgings at St. Kilda, which, judging from the landlady’s story, he must have occupied

for some time, while Rosanna Moore was drinking herself to death in a quiet hotel.

“Still he does not break off his connection with the dying woman; but one night is murdered in a hansom cab, and that same night Rosanna Moore dies. So, from all appearance, everything is ended; not so, for before dying Rosanna sends for Brian Fitzgerald at his club, and reveals to him a secret which he locks up in his own heart. The writer of this letter has a theory—a fanciful one, if you will—that the secret told to Brian Fitzgerald contains the mystery of Oliver Whyte’s death. Now then, have I not found out a good deal without you, and do you still decline to reveal the rest? I do not say you know who killed Whyte, but I do say you know sufficient to lead to the detection of the murderer. If you tell me, so much the better, both for your own sense of justice and for your peace of mind; if you do not—well, I shall find out without you. I have taken, and still take, a great interest in this strange case, and I have sworn to bring the murderer to justice; so I make this last appeal to you to tell me what you know. If you refuse, I will set to work to find out all about Rosanna Moore prior to her departure from Australia in 1858, and I am certain sooner or later to discover the secret which led to Whyte’s murder. If there is any strong reason why it should be kept silent, I perhaps, will come round to your view, and let the matter drop; but if I have to find it out myself, the murderer of Oliver Whyte need expect no mercy at my hands.

“So think over what I have said; if I do not hear from you within the next week, I shall regard your decision as final, and pursue the search myself. I am sure, my dear Fitzgerald, you will find this letter too long, in spite of the interesting story it contains, so I will have pity on you, and draw to a close. Remember me to Miss Frettlby and to her father. With kind regards to yourself, I remain, yours very truly,

“Duncan Calton.”

When Fitzgerald had finished the last of the closely-written sheets, he let the letter fall from his hands, and, leaning back in his chair, stared blankly into the dawning light outside. He arose after a few moments, and, pouring himself out a glass of brandy, drank it quickly. Then mechanically lighting a cigar, he stepped out of the door into the fresh beauty of the dawn. There was a soft crimson glow in the east, which announced the approach of the sun, and he could hear the chirping of

the awakening birds in the trees. But Brian did not see the marvellous breaking of the dawn. He stood staring at the red light flaring in the east, and thinking of Calton's letter.

"I can do no more," he said bitterly, leaning his head against the wall of the house. "There is only one way of stopping Calton, and that is by telling him all. My poor Madge! My poor Madge!"

A soft wind arose, and rustled among the trees, and there appeared great shafts of crimson light in the east; then, with a sudden blaze, the sun peered over the brim of the wide plain. The warm yellow rays touched lightly the comely head of the weary man, and, turning round, he held up his arms to the great luminary, as though he were a fire-worshipper. "I accept the omen of the dawn," he cried, "for her life and for mine."

25

What Dr. Chinston Said

His resolution taken, Brian did not let the grass grow under his feet, but rode over in the afternoon to tell Madge of his intended departure.

The servant told him she was in the garden, so he went there, and, guided by the sound of merry voices, and the laughter of pretty women, soon found his way to the lawn—tennis ground. Madge and her guests were there, seated under the shade of a great witch elm, and watching, with great interest, a single-handed match being played between Rolleston and Peterson, both of whom were capital players. Mr. Frettlby was not present. He was inside writing letters, and talking with old Mr. Valpy, and Brian gave a sigh of relief as he noted his absence. Madge caught sight of him as he came down the garden path, and flew quickly towards him with outstretched hands, as he took his hat off.

“How good of you to come,” she said, in a delighted tone, as she took his arm, “and on such a hot day.”

“Yes, it’s something fearful in the shade,” said pretty Mrs. Rolleston, with a laugh, putting up her sunshade.

“Pardon me if I think the contrary,” replied Fitzgerald, bowing, with an expressive look at the charming group of ladies under the great tree.

Mrs. Rolleston blushed and shook her head.

“Ah! it’s easy seen you come from Ireland, Mr. Fitzgerald,” she observed, as she resumed her seat. “You are making Madge jealous.”

“So he is,” answered Madge, with a gay laugh. “I shall certainly inform Mr. Rolleston about you, Brian, if you make these gallant remarks.”

“Here he comes, then,” said her lover, as Rolleston and Peterson, having finished their game, walked off the tennis ground, and joined the group

under the tree. Though in tennis flannels, they both looked remarkably warm, and, throwing aside his racket, Mr. Rolleston sat down with a sigh of relief.

"Thank goodness it's over, and that I have won," he said, wiping his heated brow; "galley slaves couldn't have worked harder than we have done, while all you idle folks sat *sub tegmine fagi*."

"Which means?" asked his wife, lazily.

"That onlookers see most of the game," answered her husband, impudently.

"I suppose that's what you call a free and easy translation," said Peterson, laughing. "Mrs. Rolleston ought to give you something for your new and original adaptation of Virgil."

"Let it be iced then," retorted Rolleston, lying full length on the ground, and staring up at the blue of the sky as seen through the network of leaves. "I always like my 'something' iced."

"It's a way you've got," said Madge, with a laugh, as she gave him a glass filled with some sparkling, golden-coloured liquor, with a lump of ice clinking musically against the side of it.

"He's not the only one who's got that way," said Peterson, gaily, when he had been similarly supplied.

"It's a way we've got in the army, It's a way we've got in the navy, It's a way we've got in the 'Varsity."

"And so say all of us," finished Rolleston, and holding out his glass to be replenished; "I'll have another, please. Whew, it is hot."

"What, the drink?" asked Julia, with a giggle.

"No—the day," answered Felix, making a face at her. "It's the kind of day one feels inclined to adopt Sydney Smith's advice, by getting out of one's skin, and letting the wind whistle through one's bones."

"With such a hot wind blowing," said Peterson, gravely, "I'm afraid they'd soon be broiled bones."

"Go, giddy one," retorted Felix, throwing his hat at him, "or I'll drag you into the blazing sun, and make you play another game."

"Not I," replied Peterson, coolly. "Not being a salamander, I'm hardly used to your climate yet, and there is a limit even to lawn tennis;" and turning his back on Rolleston, he began to talk to Julia Featherweight. Meanwhile, Madge and her lover, leaving all this frivolous chatter behind them, were walking slowly towards the house, and Brian was telling her of his approaching departure, though not of his reasons for it.

"I received a letter last night," he said, turning his face away from her; "and, as it's about some important business, I must start at once."

"I don't think it will be long before we follow," answered Madge, thoughtfully. "Papa leaves here at the end of the week."

"Why?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Madge, petulantly; "he is so restless, and never seems to settle down to anything. He says for the rest of his life he is going to do nothing; but wander all over the world."

There suddenly flashed across Fitzgerald's mind a line from Genesis, which seemed singularly applicable to Mr. Frettlby—"A fugitive and a vagabond thou shalt be in the earth."

"Everyone gets these restless fits sooner or later," he said, idly. "In fact," with an uneasy laugh, "I believe I'm in one myself."

"That puts me in mind of what I heard Dr. Chinston say yesterday," she said. "This is the age of unrest, as electricity and steam have turned us all into Bohemians."

"Ah! Bohemia is a pleasant place," said Brian, absently, unconsciously quoting Thackeray, "but we all lose our way to it late in life."

"At that rate we won't lose our way to it for some time," she said laughing, as they stepped into the drawing-room, so cool and shady, after the heat and glare outside.

As they entered Mr. Frettlby rose from a chair near the window. He appeared to have been reading, for he held a book in his hand.

"What! Fitzgerald," he exclaimed, in a hearty tone, as he held out his hand; "I am glad to see you."

"I let you know I am living, don't I?" replied Brian, his face flushing as he reluctantly took the proffered hand. "But the fact is I have come to say good-bye for a few days."

"Ah! going back to town, I suppose," said Mr. Frettlby, lying back in his chair, and playing with his watch chain. "I don't know that you are wise, exchanging the clear air of the country for the dusty atmosphere of Melbourne."

"Yet Madge tells me you are going back," said Brian, idly toying with a vase of flowers on the table.

"Depends upon circumstances," replied the other carelessly. "I may and I may not. You go on business, I presume?"

"Well, the fact is Calton—" Here Brian stopped suddenly, and bit his lip with vexation, for he had not intended to mention the lawyer's name.

"Yes?" said Mr. Frettlby, interrogatively, sitting up quickly, and looking keenly at Brian.

"Wants to see me on business," he finished, awkwardly.

"Connected with the sale of your station, I suppose," said Frettlby, still keeping his eyes on the young man's face.

"Can't have a better man. Calton's an excellent man of business."

"A little too excellent," replied Fitzgerald, ruefully, "he's a man who can't leave well alone."

"A propos of what?"

"Oh, nothing," answered Fitzgerald, hastily, and just then his eyes met those of Frettlby. The two men looked at one another steadily for a moment, but in that short space of time a single name flashed through their brains—the name of Rosanna Moore. Mr. Frettlby was the first to lower his eyes, and break the spell.

"Ah, well," he said, lightly, as he rose from his chair and held out his hand, "if you are two weeks in town, call at St. Kilda, and it's more than likely you will find us there."

Brian shook hands in silence, and watched him pick up his hat, and move on to the verandah, and then out into the hot sunshine.

"He knows," he muttered involuntarily.

"Knows what, sir?" said Madge, who came silently behind him, and slipped her arm through his. "That you are hungry, and want something to eat before you leave us?"

"I don't feel hungry," said Brian, as they walked towards the door.

"Nonsense," answered Madge, merrily, who, like Eve, was on hospitable thoughts intent. "I'm not going to have you appear in Melbourne a pale, fond lover, as though I were treating you badly. Come, sir—no," she continued, putting up her hand as he tried to kiss her, "business first, pleasure afterwards," and they went into the dining-room laughing.

Mark Frettlby wandered down to the lawn-tennis ground, thinking of the look he had seen in Brian's eyes. He shivered for a moment in the hot sunshine, as though it had grown suddenly chill.

"Someone stepping across my grave," he murmured to himself, with a cynical smile. "Bah! how superstitious I am, and yet—he knows, he knows!"

"Come on, sir," cried Felix, who had just caught sight of him, "a racket awaits you."

Frettlby awoke with a start, and found himself near the lawn-tennis ground, and Felix at his elbow, smoking a cigarette.

He roused himself with a great effort, and tapped the young man lightly on the shoulder.

"What?" he said with a forced laugh, "do you really expect me to play lawn tennis on such a day? You are mad."

"I am hot, you mean," retorted the imperturbable Rolleston, blowing a wreath of smoke.

"That's a foregone conclusion," said Dr. Chinston, who came up at that moment.

"Such a charming novel," cried Julia, who had just caught the last remark.

"What is?" asked Peterson, rather puzzled.

"Howell's book, 'A Foregone Conclusion,'" said Julia, also looking puzzled. "Weren't you talking about it?"

"I'm afraid this talk is getting slightly incoherent," said Felix, with a sigh. "We all seem madder than usual to-day."

"Speak for yourself," said Chinston, indignantly, "I'm as sane as any man in the world."

"Exactly," retorted the other coolly, "that's what I say, and you, being a doctor, ought to know that every man and woman in the world is more or less mad."

"Where are your facts?" asked Chinston, smiling.

"My facts are all visible ones," said Felix, gravely pointing to the company. "They're all crooked on some point or another."

There was a chorus of indignant denial at this, and then every one burst out laughing at the extraordinary way in which Mr. Rolleston was arguing.

"If you go on like that in the House," said Frettlby, amused, "you will, at all events, have an entertaining Parliament."

"Ah! they'll never have an entertaining Parliament till they admit ladies," observed Peterson, with a quizzical glance at Julia.

"It will be a Parliament of love then," retorted the doctor, dryly, "and not mediaeval either."

Frettlby took the doctor's arm, and walked away with him. "I want you to come up to my study, doctor," he said, as they strolled towards the house, "and examine me."

"Why, don't you feel well?" said Chinston, as they entered the house.

"Not lately," replied Frettlby. "I'm afraid I've got heart disease."

The doctor looked sharply at him, and then shook his head.

"Nonsense," he said, cheerfully, "it's a common delusion with people that they have heart disease, and in nine cases, out of ten it's all imagination; unless, indeed," he added waggishly, "the patient happens to be a young man."

"Ah! I suppose you think I'm safe as far as that goes," said Frettlby, as they entered the study; "and what did you think of Rolleston's argument about people being mad?"

"It was amusing," replied Chinston, taking a seat, Frettlby doing the same. "That's all I can say about it, though, mind you, I think there are more mad people at large than the world is aware of."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; do you remember that horrible story of Dickens', in the 'Pickwick Papers,' about the man who was mad, and knew it, yet successfully concealed it for years? Well, I believe there are many people like that in the world, people whose lives are one long struggle against insanity, and yet who eat, drink, talk, and walk with the rest of their fellow-men, apparently as gay and light-hearted as they are."

"How extraordinary."

"Half the murders and suicides are done in temporary fits of insanity," went on Chinston, "and if a person broods over anything, his incipient madness is sure to break out sooner or later; but, of course, there are cases where a perfectly sane person may commit a murder on the impulse of the moment, but I regard such persons as mad for the time being; but, again, a murder may be planned and executed in the most cold-blooded manner."

"And in the latter case," said Frettlby, without looking at the doctor, and playing with a paper knife, "do you regard the murderer as mad?"

"Yes, I do," answered the doctor, bluntly. "He is as mad as a person who kills another because he supposes he has been told by God to do so—only there is method in his madness. For instance, I believe that hansom cab murder, in which you were mixed up—"

"I wasn't mixed up in it," interrupted Frettlby, pale with anger.

"Beg pardon," said Chinston, coolly, "a slip of the tongue; I was thinking of Fitzgerald. Well, I believe that crime to have been premeditated, and that the man who committed it was mad. He is, no doubt, at large now, walking about and conducting himself as sanely as you or I, yet the germ of insanity is there, and sooner or later he will commit another crime."

"How do you know it was premeditated?" asked Frettlby, abruptly.

"Any one can see that," answered the other. "Whyte was watched on that night, and when Fitzgerald went away the other was ready to take his place, dressed the same."

"That's nothing," retorted Frettlby, looking at his companion sharply. "There are dozens of men in Melbourne who wear evening dress, light coats, and soft hats—in fact, I generally wear them myself."

"Well, that might have been a coincidence," said the doctor, rather disconcerted; "but the use of chloroform puts the question beyond a doubt; people don't usually carry chloroform about with them."

"I suppose not," answered the other, and then the matter dropped. Chinston made an examination of Mark Frettlby, and when he had finished, his face was very grave, though he laughed at the millionaire's fears.

"You are all right," he said, gaily. "Action of the heart a little weak, that's all—only," impressively, "avoid excitement—avoid excitement."

Just as Frettlby was putting on his coat, a knock came to the door, and Madge entered.

"Brian is gone," she began. "Oh, I beg your pardon, doctor—but is papa ill?" she asked with sudden fear.

"No, child, no," said Frettlby, hastily, "I'm all right; I thought my heart was affected, but it isn't."

"Not a bit of it," answered Chinston, reassuringly. "All right—only avoid excitement."

But when Frettlby turned to go to the door, Madge, who had her eyes fixed on the doctor's face, saw how grave it was.

"There is danger?" she said, touching his arm as they paused for a moment at the door.

"No! No!" he answered, hastily.

"Yes, there is," she persisted. "Tell me the worst, it is best for me to know."

The doctor looked at her in some doubt for a few moments, and then placed his hand on her shoulder.

"My dear young lady," he said gravely, "I will tell you what I have not dared to tell your father."

"What?" she asked in a low voice, her face growing pale.

"His heart is affected."

"And there is great danger?"

"Yes, great danger. In the event of any sudden shock—" he hesitated.

"Yes—"

“He would probably drop down dead.”

“My God!”

26

Kilsip Has a Theory of His Own

Mr. Calton sat in his office reading a letter he had just received from Fitzgerald, and judging from the complacent smile upon his face it seemed to give him the greatest satisfaction.

"I know," wrote Brian, "that now you have taken up the affair, you will not stop until you find out everything, so, as I want the matter to rest as at present, I will anticipate you, and reveal all. You were right in your conjecture that I knew something likely to lead to the detection of Whyte's murderer; but when I tell you my reasons for keeping such a thing secret, I am sure you will not blame me. Mind you, I do not say that I know who committed the murder; but I have suspicions—very strong suspicions—and I wish to God Rosanna Moore had died before she told me what she did. However, I will tell you all, and leave you to judge as to whether I was justified in concealing what I was told. I will call at your office some time next week, and then you will learn everything that Rosanna Moore told me; but once that you are possessed of the knowledge you will pity me."

"Most extraordinary," mused Calton, leaning back in his chair, as he laid down the letter. "I wonder if he's about to tell me that he killed Whyte after all, and that Sal Rawlins perjured herself to save him! No, that's nonsense, or she'd have turned up in better time, and wouldn't have risked his neck up to the last moment. Though I make it a rule never to be surprised at anything, I expect what Brian Fitzgerald has to tell me will startle me considerably. I've never met with such an extraordinary case, and from all appearances the end isn't reached yet. After all," said Mr. Calton, thoughtfully, "truth is stranger than fiction."

Here a knock came to the door, and in answer to an invitation to enter, it opened, and Kilsip glided into the room.

"You're not engaged, sir?" he said, in his soft, low voice.

"Oh, dear, no," answered Calton, carelessly; "come in—come in!"

Kilsip closed the door softly, and gliding along in his usual velvet-footed manner, sat down in a chair near Calton's, and placing his hat on the ground, looked keenly at the barrister.

"Well, Kilsip," said Calton, with a yawn, playing with his watch chain, "any good news to tell me?"

"Well, nothing particularly new," purred the detective, rubbing his hands together.

"Nothing new, and nothing true, and no matter," said Calton, quoting Emerson. "And what have you come to see me about?"

"The Hansom Cab Murder," replied the other quietly.

"The deuce!" cried Calton, startled out of his professional dignity. "And have you found out who did it?"

"No!" answered Kilsip, rather dismally; "but I have, an idea."

"So had Gorby," retorted Calton, dryly, "an idea that ended in smoke. Have you any practical proofs?"

"Not yet."

"That means you are going to get some?"

"If possible."

"Much virtue in 'if,'" quoted Calton, picking up a pencil, and scribbling idly on his blotting paper. "And to whom does your suspicion point?"

"Aha!" said Mr. Kilsip, cautiously.

"Don't know him," answered the other, coolly; "family name Humbug, I presume. Bosh! Whom do you suspect?"

Kilsip looked round cautiously, as if to make sure they were alone, and then said, in a stage whisper—

"Roger Moreland!"

"That was the young man that gave evidence as to how Whyte got drunk?"

Kilsip nodded.

"Well, and how do you connect him with the murder?"

"Do you remember in the evidence given by the cabmen, Royston and Rankin, they both swore that the man who was with Whyte on that night wore a diamond ring on the forefinger of the right hand?"

"What of that? Nearly every second man in Melbourne wears a diamond ring?"

"But not on the forefinger of the right hand."

"Oh! And Moreland wears a ring in that way?"

"Yes!"

"Merely a coincidence. Is that all your proof?"

"All I can obtain at present."

"It's very weak," said Calton, scornfully.

"The weakest proofs may form a chain to hang a man," observed Kilsip, sententiously.

"Moreland gave his evidence clearly enough," said Calton, rising, and pacing the room. "He met Whyte; they got drunk together. Whyte went out of the hotel, and shortly afterwards Moreland followed with the coat, which was left behind by Whyte, and then someone snatched it from him."

"Ah, did they?" interrupted Kilsip, quickly.

"So Moreland says," said Calton, stopping short. "I understand; you think Moreland was not so drunk as he would make out, and that after following Whyte outside, he put on his coat, and got into the cab with him."

"That is my theory."

"It's ingenious enough," said the barrister; "but why should Moreland murder Whyte? What motive had he?"

"Those papers—"

"Pshaw! another idea of Gorby's," said Calton, angrily. "How do you know there were any papers?"

The fact is, Calton did not intend Kilsip to know that Whyte really had papers until he heard what Fitzgerald had to tell him.

"And another thing," said Calton, resuming his walk, "if your theory is correct, which I don't think it is, what became of Whyte's coat? Has Moreland got it?"

"No, he has not," answered the detective, decisively.

"You seem very positive about it," said the lawyer, after a moment's pause. "Did you ask Moreland about it?"

A reproachful look came into Kilsip's white face.

"Not quite so green," he said, forcing a smile. "I thought you'd a better opinion of me than that, Mr. Calton. Ask him?—no."

"Then how did you find out?"

"The fact is, Moreland is employed as a barman in the Kangaroo Hotel."

"A barman!" echoed Calton; "and he came out here as a gentleman of independent fortune. Why, hang it, man, that in itself is sufficient

to prove that he had no motive to murder Whyte. Moreland pretty well lived on Whyte, so what could have induced him to kill his golden goose, and become a barman—pshaw! the idea is absurd.”

“Well, you may be right about the matter,” said Kilsip, rather angrily; “and if Gorby makes mistakes I don’t pretend to be infallible. But, at all events, when I saw Moreland in the bar he wore a silver ring on the forefinger of his right hand.”

“Silver isn’t a diamond.”

“No; but it shows that was the finger he was accustomed to wear his ring on. When I saw that, I determined to search his room. I managed to do so while he was out, and found—”

“A mare’s nest?”

Kilsip nodded.

“And so your castle of cards falls to the ground,” said Calton, jestingly. “Your idea is absurd. Moreland no more committed the murder than I did. Why, he was too drunk on that night to do anything.”

“Humph—so he says.”

“Well, men don’t calumniate themselves for nothing.”

“It was a lesser danger to avert a greater one,” replied Kilsip, coolly. “I am sure that Moreland was not drunk on that night. He only said so to escape awkward questions as to his movements. Depend upon it he knows more than he lets out.”

“Well, and how do you intend to set about the matter?”

“I shall start looking for the coat first.”

“Ah I you think he has hidden it?”

“I am sure of it. My theory is this. When Moreland got out of the cab at Powlett Street—”

“But he didn’t,” interrupted Calton, angrily.

“Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that he did,” said Kilsip, quietly. “I say when he left the cab he walked up Powlett Street, turned to the left down George Street, and walked back to town through the Fitzroy Gardens, then, knowing that the coat was noticeable, he threw it away, or rather, hid it, and walked out of the Gardens through the town—”

“In evening dress—more noticeable than the coat.”

“He wasn’t in evening dress,” said Kilsip, quietly.

“No, neither was he,” observed Calton, eagerly, recalling the evidence at the trial. “Another blow to your theory. The murderer was in evening dress—the cabman said so.”

"Yes; because he had seen Mr. Fitzgerald in evening dress a few minutes before, and thought that he was the same man who got into the cab with Whyte."

"Well, what of that?"

"If you remember, the second man had his coat buttoned up. Moreland wore dark trousers—at least, I suppose so—and, with the coat buttoned up, it was easy for the cabman to make the mistake, believing, as he did, that it was Mr. Fitzgerald."

"That sounds better," said Calton, thoughtfully. "And what are you going to do?"

"Look for the coat in the Fitzroy Gardens."

"Pshaw! a wild goose chase."

"Possibly," said Kilsip, as he arose to go.

"And when shall I see you again?" said Calton.

"Oh, to-night," said Kilsip, pausing at the door. "I had nearly forgotten, Mother Guttersnipe wants to see you."

"Why? What's up?"

"She's dying, and wants to tell you some secret."

"Rosanna Moore, by Jove!" said Calton. "She'll tell me something about her. I'll get to the bottom of this yet. All right, I'll be here at eight o'clock."

"Very well, sir!" and the detective glided out.

"I wonder if that old woman knows anything?" said Calton to himself, as he, resumed his seat. "She may have overheard some conversation between Whyte and his mistress, and intends to divulge it. Well, I'm afraid when Fitzgerald does confess, I shall know all about it beforehand."

27

Mother Guttersnipe Joins the Majority

Punctual to his appointment, Kilsip called at Calton's office at eight o'clock, in order to guide him through the squalid labyrinths of the slums. He found the barrister waiting impatiently for him. The fact is, Calton had got it into his head that Rosanna Moore was at the bottom of the whole mystery, and every new piece of evidence he discovered went to confirm this belief. When Rosanna Moore was dying, she might have confessed something to Mother Guttersnipe, which would hint at the name of the murderer, and he had a strong suspicion that the old hag had received hush-money in order to keep quiet. Several times before Calton had been on the point of going to her and trying to get the secret out of her—that is, if she knew it; but now fate appeared to be playing into his hands, and a voluntary confession was much more likely to be true than one dragged piecemeal from unwilling lips.

By the time Kilsip made his appearance Calton was in a high state of excitement.

"I suppose we'd better go at once," he said to Kilsip, as he lit a cigar. "That old hag may go off at any moment."

"She might," assented Kilsip, doubtfully; "but I wouldn't be a bit surprised if she pulled through. Some of these old women have nine lives like a cat."

"Not improbable," retorted Calton, as they passed into the brilliantly-lighted street; "her nature seemed to me to be essentially feline. But tell me," he went on, "what's the matter with her—old age?"

"Partly; drink also, I think," answered Kilsip. "Besides, her surroundings are not very healthy, and her dissipated habits have pretty well settled

her.”

“It isn’t anything catching, I hope,” cried the barrister, with a shudder, as they passed into the crowd of Bourke Street.

“Don’t know, sir, not being a doctor,” answered the detective, stolidly.

“Oh!” ejaculated Calton, in dismay.

“It will be all right, sir,” said Kilsip, reassuringly; “I’ve been there dozens of times, and I’m all right.”

“I dare say,” retorted the barrister; “but I may go there once and catch it, whatever it is.”

“Take my word, sir, it’s nothing worse than old age and drink.”

“Has she a doctor?”

“Won’t let one come near her—prescribes for herself.”

“Gin, I suppose? Humph! Much more unpleasant than the usual run of medicines.”

In a short time they found themselves in Little Bourke Street, and after traversing a few dark and narrow lanes—by this time they were more or less familiar to Calton—they found themselves before Mother Guttersnipe’s den.

They climbed the rickety stairs, which groaned and creaked beneath their weight, and found Mother Guttersnipe lying on the bed in the corner. The elfish black-haired child was playing cards with a slatternly-looking girl at a deal table by the faint light of a tallow candle.

They both sprang to their feet as the strangers entered, and the elfish child pushed a broken chair in a sullen manner towards Mr. Calton, while the other girl shuffled into a far corner of the room, and crouched down there like a dog. The noise of their entry awoke the hag from an uneasy slumber into which she had fallen. Sitting up in bed, she huddled the clothes round her. She presented such a gruesome spectacle that involuntarily Calton recoiled. Her white hair was unbound, and hung in tangled masses over her shoulders in snowy profusion. Her face, parched and wrinkled, with the hooked nose, and beady black eyes, like those of a mouse, was poked forward, and her skinny arms, bare to the shoulder, were waving wildly about as she grasped at the bedclothes with her claw-like hands. The square bottle and the broken cup lay beside her, and filling herself a dram, she lapped it up greedily.

The irritant brought on a paroxysm of coughing which lasted until the elfish child shook her well, and took the cup from her.

“Greedy old beast,” muttered this amiable infant, peering into the cup, “ye’d drink the Yarrer dry, I b’lieve.”

"Yah!" muttered the old woman feebly. "Who's they, Lizer?" she said, shading her eyes with one trembling hand, while she looked at Calton and the detective.

"The perlice cove an' the swell," said Lizer, suddenly. "Come to see yer turn up your toes."

"I ain't dead yet, ye whelp," snarled the hag with sudden energy; "an' if I gits up I'll turn up yer toes, cuss ye."

Lizer gave a shrill laugh of disdain, and Kilsip stepped forward.

"None of this," he said, sharply, taking Lizer by one thin shoulder, and pushing her over to where the other girl was crouching; "stop there till I tell you to move."

Lizer tossed back her tangled black hair, and was about to make some impudent reply, when the other girl, who was older and wiser, put out her hand, and pulled her down beside her.

Meanwhile, Calton was addressing himself to the old woman in the corner.

"You wanted to see me?" he said gently, for, notwithstanding his repugnance to her, she was, after all, a woman, and dying.

"Yes, cuss ye," croaked Mother Guttersnipe, lying down, and pulling the greasy bedclothes up to her neck. "You ain't a parson?" with sudden suspicion.

"No, I am a lawyer."

"I ain't a-goin' to have the cussed parsons a-prowlin' round 'ere," growled the old woman, viciously. "I ain't a-goin' to die yet, cuss ye; I'm goin' to get well an' strong, an' 'ave a good time of it."

"I'm afraid you won't recover," said Calton, gently. "You had better let me send for a doctor."

"No, I shan't," retorted the hag, aiming a blow at him with all her feeble strength. "I ain't a-goin' to have my inside spil'd with salts and senner. I don't want neither parsons nor doctors, I don't. I wouldn't 'ave a lawyer, only I'm a-thinkin' of makin' my will, I am."

"Mind I gits the watch," yelled Lizer, from the corner. "If you gives it to Sal I'll tear her eyes out."

"Silence!" said Kilsip, sharply, and, with a muttered curse, Lizer sat back in her corner.

"Sharper than a serpent's tooth, she are," whined the old woman, when quiet was once more restored. "That young devil 'ave fed at my 'ome, an' now she turns, cuss her."

"Well—well," said Calton, rather impatiently, "what is it you wanted to see me about?"

"Don't be in such a 'urry," said the hag, with a scowl, "or I'm blamed if I tell you anything, s'elp me."

She was evidently growing very weak, so Calton turned to Kilsip and told him in a whisper to get a doctor. The detective scribbled a note on some paper, and, giving it to Lizer, ordered her to take it. At this, the other girl arose, and, putting her arm in that of the child's, they left together.

"Them two young 'usseys gone?" said Mother Guttersnipe. "Right you are, for I don't want what I've got to tell to git into the noospaper, I don't."

"And what is it?" asked Calton, bending forward.

The old woman took another drink of gin, and it seemed to put life into her, for she sat up in the bed, and commenced to talk rapidly, as though she were afraid of dying before her secret was told.

"You've been 'ere afore?" she said, pointing one skinny finger at Calton, "and you wanted to find out all about 'er; but you didn't. She wouldn't let me tell, for she was always a proud jade, a-flouncin' round while 'er pore mother was a-starvin'."

"Her mother! Are you Rosanna Moore's mother?" cried Calton, considerably astonished.

"May I die if I ain't," croaked the hag. "'Er pore father died of drink, cuss 'im, an' I'm a-follerin' 'im to the same place in the same way. You weren't about town in the old days, or you'd a-bin after her, cuss ye."

"After Rosanna?"

"The werry girl," answered Mother Guttersnipe. "She were on the stage, she were, an' my eye, what a swell she were, with all the coves a-dyin' for 'er, an' she dancin' over their black 'earts, cuss 'em; but she was allays good to me till 'e came."

"Who came?"

"E!" yelled the old woman, raising herself on her arm, her eyes sparkling with vindictive fury. "'E, a-comin' round with di'monds and gold, and a-ruinin' my pore girl; an' how 'e's 'eld 'is bloomin' 'ead up all these years as if he were a saint, cuss 'im—cuss 'im."

"Whom does she mean?" whispered Calton to Kilsip.

"Mean!" screamed Mother Guttersnipe, whose sharp ears had caught the muttered question. "Why, Mark Frettlby!"

"Good God!" Calton rose up in his astonishment, and even Kilsip's inscrutable countenance displayed some surprise.

"Aye, 'e were a swell in them days," pursued Mother Guttersnipe, "and 'e comes a-philanderin' round my gal, cuss 'im, an' ruins 'er, and leaves 'er an' the child to starve, like a black-'earted villain as 'e were."

"The child! Her name?"

"Bah," retorted the hag, with scorn, "as if you didn't know my gran'-daughter Sal."

"Sal, Mark Frettlby's child?"

"Yes, an' as pretty a girl as the other, tho' she 'appened to be born on the wrong side of the 'edge. Oh, I've seen 'er a-sweepin' along in 'er silks an' satins as tho' we were dirt—an' Sal 'er 'alf sister—cuss 'er."

Exhausted by the efforts she had made, the old woman sank back in her bed, while Calton sat dazed, thinking over the astounding revelation that had just been made. That Rosanna Moore should turn out to be Mark Frettlby's mistress he hardly wondered at; after all, the millionaire was but a man, and in his young days had been no better and no worse than the rest of his friends. Rosanna Moore was pretty, and was evidently one of those women who—rakes at heart—prefer the untrammelled freedom of being a mistress, to the sedate bondage of a wife. In questions of morality, so many people live in glass houses, that there are few nowadays who can afford to throw stones. Calton did not think any the worse of Frettlby for his youthful follies. But what did surprise him was that Frettlby should be so heartless, as to leave his child to the tender mercies of an old hag like Mother Guttersnipe. It was so entirely different from what he knew of the man, that he was inclined to think that the old woman was playing him a trick.

"Did Mr. Frettlby know Sal was his child?" he asked.

"Not 'e," snarled Mother Guttersnipe, in an exultant tone. "'E thought she was dead, 'e did, arter Rosanner gave him the go-by."

"And why did you not tell him?"

"'Cause I wanted to break 'is 'eart, if 'e 'ad any," said the old beldame, vindictively. "Sal was a-goin' wrong as fast as she could till she was tuk from me. If she had gone and got into quod I'd 'ave gone to 'im, and said, 'Look at yer darter! 'Ow I've ruined her as you did mine.'"

"You wicked woman," said Calton, revolted at the malignity of the scheme. "You sacrificed an innocent girl for this."

"None of yer preachin'," retorted the hag sullenly; "I ain't bin brought up for a saint, I ain't—an' I wanted to pay 'im out—'e paid me well to

'old my tongue about my darter, an' I've got it 'ere," laying her hand on the pillow, "all gold, good gold—an' mine, cuss me."

Calton rose, he felt quite sick at this exhibition of human depravity, and longed to be away. As he was putting on his hat, however, the two girls entered with the doctor, who nodded to Kilsip, cast a sharp scrutinising glance at Calton, and then walked over to the bed. The two girls went back to their corner, and waited in silence for the end. Mother Guttersnipe had fallen back in the bed, with one claw-like hand clutching the pillow, as if to protect her beloved gold, and over her face a deadly paleness was spreading, which told the practised eye of the doctor that the end was near. He knelt down beside the bed for a moment, holding the candle to the dying woman's face. She opened her eyes, and muttered drowsily—

"Who's you? get out," but then she seemed to grasp the situation again, and she started up with a shrill yell, which made the hearers shudder, it was so weird and eerie.

"My money!" she yelled, clasping the pillow in her skinny arms. "It's all mine, ye shan't have it—cuss ye."

The doctor arose from his knees, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Not worth while doing anything," he said coolly, "she'll be dead soon." The old woman, mumbling over her pillow, caught the word, and burst into tears.

"Dead! dead! my poor Rosanna, with 'er golden 'air, always lovin' 'er pore mother till 'e took 'er away, an' she came back to die—die—ooh!"

Her voice died away in a long melancholy wail, that made the two girls in the corner shiver, and put their fingers in their ears.

"My good woman," said the doctor, bending over the bed, "would you not like to see a minister?"

She looked at him with her bright, beady eyes, already somewhat dimmed with the mists of death, and said, in a harsh, low whisper—

"Why?"

"Because you have only a short time to live," said the doctor, gently.

"You are dying."

Mother Guttersnipe sprang up, and seized his arm with a scream of terror.

"Dyin', dyin'—no! no!" she wailed, clawing his sleeve. "I ain't fit to die—cuss me; save me—save me; I don't know where I'd go to, s'elp me—save me."

The doctor tried to remove her hands, but she held on with wonderful tenacity.

"It is impossible," he said briefly.

The hag fell back in her bed.

"I'll give you money to save me," she shrieked; "good money—all mine—all mine. See—see—'ere—suverains," and tearing her pillow open, she took out a canvas bag, and from it poured a gleaming stream of gold. Gold—gold—it rolled all over the bed, over the floor, away into the dark corners, yet no one touched it, so enchained were they by the horrible spectacle of the dying woman clinging to life. She clutched some of the shining pieces, and held them up to the three men as they stood silently beside the bed, but her hands trembled so that sovereigns kept falling from them on the floor with metallic clinks.

"All mine—all mine," she shrieked, loudly. "Give me my life—gold—money—cuss ye—I sold my soul for it—save me—give me my life," and, with trembling hands, she tried to force the gold on them. They said no word, but stood silently looking at her, while the two girls in the corner clung together, and trembled with fear.

"Don't look at me—don't," cried the hag, falling down again amid the shining gold. "Ye want me to die,—I shan't—I shan't—give me my gold," clawing at the scattered sovereigns. "I'll take it with me—I shan't die—G—G—" whimpering. "I ain't done nothin'—let me live—give me a Bible—save me, G—cuss it—G—G—." She fell back on the bed, a corpse. The faint light of the candle flickered on the shining gold, and on the dead face, framed in tangled white hair; while the three men, sick at heart, turned away in silence to seek assistance, with that wild cry still ringing in their ears—"G—save me, G—!"

28

Mark Frettlby has a Visitor

According to the copy books of our youth, "Procrastination is the thief of time." Now, Brian found the truth of this. He had been in town almost a week, but he had not yet been to see Calton. Each morning—or something very near it—he set out, determined to go direct to Chancery Lane, but he never arrived there. He had returned to his lodgings in East Melbourne, and had passed his time either in the house or in the garden. When perhaps business connected with the sale of his station compelled his presence in town, he drove straight there and back. Curiously enough he shrank from meeting any of his friends. He felt keenly his recent position in the prisoner's dock. And even when walking by the Yarra, as he frequently did, he was conscious of an uneasy feeling—a feeling that he was an object of curiosity, and that people turned to look at him out of a morbid desire to see one who had been so nearly hanged for murder.

As soon as his station should be sold and he married to Madge he determined to leave Australia, and never set foot on it again. But until he could leave the place he would see no one, nor would he mix with his former friends, so great was his dread of being stared at. Mrs. Sampson, who had welcomed him back with shrill exclamations of delight, was loud in her expressions of disapproval as to the way he was shutting himself up.

"Your eyes bein' 'ollow," said the sympathising cricket, "it is nat'ral as it's want of air, which my 'usband's uncle, being a druggist, an' well-to-do, in Collingwood, ses as 'ow a want of ox-eye-gent, being a French name, as 'e called the atmispeare, were fearful for pullin' people down, an' makin' 'em go off their food, which you hardly eats anythin', an' not bein' a butterfly it's expected as your appetite would be larger."

"Oh, I'm all right," said Brian, absently, lighting a cigarette, and only half listening to his landlady's garrulous chatter, "but if anyone calls tell them I'm not in. I don't want to be bothered by visitors."

"Bein' as wise a thing as Solomon ever said," answered Mrs. Sampson, energetically, "which, no doubt, 'e was in good 'ealth when seein' the Queen of Sheber, as is necessary when anyone calls, and not feelin' disposed to speak, which I'm often that way myself on occasions, my sperits bein' low, as I've 'eard tell soder water 'ave that effect on 'em, which you takes it with a dash of brandy, tho' to be sure that might be the cause of your want of life, and—drat that bell," she finished, hurrying out of the room as the front-door bell sounded, "which my legs is a-givin' way under me thro' bein' overworked."

Meanwhile, Brian sat and smoked contentedly, much relieved by the departure of Mrs. Sampson, with her constant chatter, but he soon heard her mount the stairs again, and she entered the room with a telegram, which she handed to her lodger.

"'Opin' it don't contain bad noose," she said as she retreated to the door again, "which I don't like 'em 'avin' had a shock in early life thro' one 'avin' come unexpected, as my uncle's grandfather were dead, 'avin' perished of consumption, our family all being disposed to the disease—and now, if you'll excuse me, sir, I'll get to my dinner, bein' in the 'abit of takin' my meals reg'lar, and I studies my inside carefully, bein' easily upset, thro' which I never could be a sailor."

Mrs. Sampson, having at last exhausted herself, went out of the room, and crackled loudly down the stairs, leaving Brian to read his telegram. He tore open the envelope and found the message was from Madge, to say that they had returned, and to ask him to dine with them that evening. Fitzgerald folded up the telegram, then rising from his seat, he walked moodily up and down the room with his hands in his pockets.

"So he is there," said the young man aloud; "and I shall have to meet him and shake hands with him, knowing all the time what he is. If it were not for Madge I'd leave this place at once, but after the way she stood by me in my trouble, I should be a coward if I did so."

It was as Madge had predicted—her father was unable to stay long in one place, and had come back to Melbourne a week after Brian had arrived. The pleasant party at the station was broken up, and, like the graves of a household, the guests were scattered far and wide. Peterson had left for New Zealand en route for the wonders of the Hot Lakes, and the old colonist was about to start for England in order to refresh his boyish memories. Mr. and Mrs. Rolleston had come back to Melbourne, where

the wretched Felix was compelled once more to plunge into politics; and Dr. Chinston had resumed his usual routine of fees and patients.

Madge was glad to be back in Melbourne again, as now that her health was restored she craved for the excitement of town life. It was now more than three months since the murder, and the nine days' wonder was a thing of the past. The possibility of a war with Russia was the one absorbing topic of the hour, and the colonists were busy preparing for the attack of a possible enemy. As the Spanish Kings had drawn their treasures from Mexico and Peru, so might the White Czar lay violent hands on the golden stores of Australia; but here there were no uncultured savages to face, but the sons and grandsons of men who had dimmed the glories of the Russian arms at Alma and Balaclava. So in the midst of stormy rumours of wars the tragic fate of Oliver Whyte was quite forgotten. After the trial, everyone, including the detective office, had given up the matter, and mentally relegated it to the list of undiscovered crimes. In spite of the utmost vigilance, nothing new had been discovered, and it seemed likely that the assassin of Oliver Whyte would remain a free man. There were only two people in Melbourne who still held the contrary opinion, and they were Calton and Kilsip. Both these men had sworn to discover this unknown murderer, who struck his cowardly blow in the dark, and though there seemed no possible chance of success, yet they worked on. Kilsip suspected Roger Moreland, the boon companion of the dead man, but his suspicions were vague and uncertain, and there seemed little hope of verifying them. The barrister did not as yet suspect any particular person, though the death-bed confession of Mother Guttersnipe had thrown a new light on the subject, but he thought that when Fitzgerald told him the secret which Rosanna Moore had confided to his keeping, the real murderer would soon be discovered, or, at least, some clue would be found that would lead to his detection. So, as the matter stood at the time of Mark Frettlby's return to Melbourne, Mr. Calton was waiting for Fitzgerald's confession before making a move, while Kilsip worked stealthily in the dark, searching for evidence against Moreland.

On receiving Madge's telegram, Brian determined to go down in the evening, but not to dinner, so he sent a reply to Madge to that effect. He did not want to meet Mark Frettlby, but did not of course, tell this to Madge, so she had her dinner by herself, as her father had gone to his club, and the time of his return was uncertain. After dinner, she wrapped a light cloak round her, and repaired to the verandah to wait for her lover. The garden looked charming in the moonlight, with the black, dense cypress trees standing up against the sky, and the great

fountain splashing cool and silvery. There was a heavily-foliaged oak by the gate, and she strolled down the path, and stood under it in the shadow, listening to the whisper and rustle of its multitudinous leaves. It is curious the unearthly glamour which moonlight seems to throw over everything, and though Madge knew every flower, tree, and shrub in the garden, yet they all looked weird and fantastical in the cold, white light. She went up to the fountain, and seating herself on the edge, amused herself by dipping her hand into the chilly water, and letting it fall, like silver rain, back into the basin. Then she heard the iron gate open and shut with a clash, and springing to her feet, saw someone coming up the path in a light coat and soft wide-awake hat.

"Oh, it's you at last, Brian?" she cried, as she ran down the path to meet him. "Why did you not come before?"

"Not being Brian, I can't say," answered her father's voice. Madge burst out laughing.

"What an absurd mistake," she cried. "Why, I thought you were Brian."
"Indeed!"

"Yes; in that hat and coat I couldn't tell the difference in the moonlight."

"Oh," said her father, with a laugh, pushing his hat back, "moonlight is necessary to complete the spell, I suppose?"

"Of course," answered his daughter. "If there were no moonlight, alas, for lovers!"

"Alas, indeed!" echoed her father. "They would become as extinct as the moa; but where are your eyes, Puss, when you take an old man like me for your gay young Lochinvar?"

"Well, really, papa," answered Madge, deprecatingly, "you do look so like him in that Goat and hat that I could not tell the difference, till you spoke."

"Nonsense, child," said Frettlby, roughly, "you are fanciful;" and turning on his heel, he walked rapidly towards the house, leaving Madge staring after him in astonishment, as well she might, for her father had never spoken to her so roughly before. Wondering at the cause of his sudden anger, she stood spell-bound, until there came a step behind her, and a soft, low whistle. She turned with a scream, and saw Brian smiling at her.

"Oh, it's you," she said, with a pout, as he caught her in his arms and kissed her.

"Only me," said Brian, ungrammatically; "disappointing, isn't it?"

"Oh, fearfully," answered the girl, with a gay laugh, as arm-in-arm they walked towards the house. "But do you know I made such a curious mistake just now; I thought papa was you."

"How strange," said Brian, absently, for indeed he was admiring her charming face, which looked so pure and sweet in the moonlight.

"Yes, wasn't it?" she replied. "He had on a light coat and a soft hat, just like you wear sometimes, and as you are both the same height, I took you for one another."

Brian did not answer, but there was a cold feeling at his heart as he saw a possibility of his worst suspicions being confirmed, for just at that moment there came into his mind the curious coincidence of the man who got into the hansom cab being dressed similarly to himself. What if—"Nonsense," he said, aloud, rousing himself out of the train of thought the resemblance had suggested.

"I'm sure it isn't," said Madge, who had been talking about something else for the last five minutes. "You are a very rude young man."

"I beg your pardon," said Brian, waking up. "You were saying—"

"That the horse is the most noble of all animals—Exactly."

"I don't understand—" began Brian, rather puzzled.

"Of course you don't," interrupted Madge, petulantly; "considering I've been wasting my eloquence on a deaf man for the last ten minutes; and very likely lame as well as deaf."

And to prove the truth of the remark, she ran up the path with Brian after her. He had a long chase of it, for Madge was nimble and better acquainted with the garden than he was but at last he caught her just as she was running up the steps into the house, and then—history repeats itself.

They went into the drawing-room and found that Mr. Frettlby had gone up to his study, and did not want to be disturbed. Madge sat down to the piano, but before she struck a note, Brian took both her hands prisoners. "Madge," he said, gravely, as she turned round, "what did your father say when you made that mistake?"

"He was very angry," she answered. "Quite cross; I'm sure I don't know why."

Brian sighed as he released her hands, and was about to reply when the visitor's bell sounded, they heard the servant answer it, and then someone was taken upstairs to Mr. Frettlby's study.

When the footman came in to light the gas, Madge asked who it was that had come to the door.

"I don't know, miss," he answered; "he said he wanted to see Mr. Frettlby particularly, so I took him up to the study."

"But I thought that papa said he was not to be disturbed?"

"Yes, miss, but the gentleman had an appointment with him."

"Poor papa," sighed Madge, turning again to the piano. "He has always got such a lot to do."

Left to themselves, Madge began playing Waldteufel's last new valse, a dreamy, haunting melody, with a touch of sadness in it, and Brian, lying lazily on the sofa, listened. Then she sang a gay little French song about Love and a Butterfly, with a mocking refrain, which made Brian laugh.

"A memory of Offenbach," he said, rising and coming over to the piano.

"We certainly can't approach the French in writing these airy trifles."

"They're unsatisfactory, I think," said Madge, running her fingers over the keys; "they mean nothing."

"Of course not," he replied, "but don't you remember that De Quincy says there is no moral either big or little in the *Iliad*."

"Well, I think there's more music in Barbara Allan than all those frothy things," said Madge, with fine scorn. "Come and sing it."

"A five-act funeral, it is," groaned Brian, as he rose to obey; "let's have Garry Owen instead."

Nothing else however would suit the capricious young person at the piano, so Brian, who had a pleasant voice, sang the quaint old ditty of cruel Barbara Allan, who treated her dying love with such disdain.

"Sir John Graham was an ass," said Brian, when he had finished; "or, instead of dying in such a silly manner, he'd have married her right off, without asking her permission."

"I don't think she was worth marrying," replied Madge, opening a book of Mendelssohn's duets; "or she wouldn't have made such a fuss over her health not being drunk."

"Depend upon it, she was a plain woman," remarked Brian, gravely, "and was angry because she wasn't toasted among the rest of the country belles. I think the young man had a narrow escape—she'd always have reminded him about that unfortunate oversight."

"You seem to have analysed her nature pretty well," said Madge, a little dryly; "however, we'll leave the failings of Barbara Allan alone, and sing this."

This was Mendelssohn's charming duet, "Would that my Love," which was a great favourite of Brian's. They were in the middle of it when suddenly Madge stopped, as she heard a loud cry, evidently proceeding

from her father's study. Recollecting Dr. Chinston's warning, she ran out of the room, and upstairs, leaving Brian rather puzzled by her unceremonious departure, for though he had heard the cry, yet he did not attach much importance to it.

Madge knocked at the study door, and then she tried to open it, but it was locked.

"Who's there?" asked her father, sharply, from inside.

"Only me, papa," she answered. "I thought you were—"

"No! No—I'm all right," replied her father, quickly. "Go down stairs, I'll join you shortly."

Madge went back to the drawing-room only half satisfied with the explanation. She found Brian waiting at the door, with rather an anxious face.

"What's the matter?" he asked, as she paused a moment at the foot of the stairs.

"Papa says nothing," she replied, "but I am sure he must have been startled, or he would not have cried out like that."

She told him what Dr. Chinston had said about the state of her father's heart, a recital which shocked Brian greatly. They did not return to the drawing-room, but went out on the verandah, where, after wrapping a cloak around Madge, Fitzgerald lit a cigarette. They sat down at the far end of the verandah somewhat in the shadow, and could see the hall door wide open, and a warm flood of mellow light pouring therefrom, and beyond the cold, white moonshine. After about a quarter of an hour, Madge's alarm about her father having somewhat subsided, they were chatting on indifferent subjects, when a man came out of the hall door, and paused for a moment on the steps of the verandah. He was dressed in rather a fashionable suit of clothes, but, in spite of the heat of the night, he had a thick white silk scarf round his throat.

"That's rather a cool individual," said Brian, removing his cigarette from between his lips. "I wonder what—Good God!" he cried, rising to his feet as the stranger turned round to look at the house, and took off his hat for a moment—"Roger Moreland."

The man started, and looked quickly round into the dark shadow of the verandah where they were seated, then, putting on his hat, he ran quickly down the path, and they heard the gate clang after him.

Madge felt a sudden fear at the expression on Brian's face, as revealed by a ray of moonlight streaming full on it.

“Who is Roger Moreland?” she asked, touching his arm—“Ah! I remember,” with sudden horror, “Oliver Whyte’s friend.”

“Yes,” in a hoarse whisper, “and one of the witnesses at the trial.”

29

Mr. Calton's Curiosity Is Satisfied

There was not much sleep for Brian that night. He left Madge almost immediately, and went home, but he did not go to bed. He felt too anxious and ill at ease to sleep, and passed the greater part of the night walking up and down his room, occupied with his own sad thoughts. He was wondering in his own mind what could be the meaning of Roger Moreland's visit to Mark Frettlby. All the evidence that he had given at the trial was that he had met Whyte, and had been drinking with him during the evening. Whyte then went out, and that was the last Moreland had seen of him. Now, the question was, "What did he go to see Mark Frettlby for?" He had no acquaintance with him, and yet he called by appointment. It is true he might have been in poverty, and the millionaire being well-known as an extremely generous man, Moreland might have called on him for money. But then the cry which Frettlby had given after the interview had lasted a short time proved that he had been startled. Madge had gone upstairs and found the door locked, her father refusing her admission. Now, why was he so anxious Moreland should not be seen by any one? That he had made some startling revelation was certain, and Fitzgerald felt sure that it was in connection with the hansom cab murder case. He wearied himself with conjectures about the matter, and towards daybreak threw himself, dressed as he was, on the bed, and slept heavily till twelve o'clock the next day. When he arose and looked at himself in the glass, he was startled at the haggard and worn appearance of his face. The moment he was awake his mind went back to Mark Frettlby and the visit of Roger Moreland.

"The net is closing round him," he murmured to himself. "I don't see how he can escape. Oh! Madge! Madge! if only I could spare you the bitterness of knowing what you must know, sooner or later, and that other unhappy girl—the sins of the fathers will be visited on the children—God help them."

He took his bath, and, after dressing himself, went into his sitting-room, where he had a cup of tea, which refreshed him considerably. Mrs. Sampson came crackling merrily upstairs with a letter, and gave vent to an exclamation of surprise, on seeing his altered appearance.

"Lor, sir!" she exclaimed, "what 'ave you bin a-doin'—me knowin' your 'abits know'd as you'd gone to bed, not to say as it's very temptin' in this 'ot weather, but with excuses, sir, you looks as if you 'adn't slept a blessed wink."

"No, more I have," said Brian, listlessly holding out his hand for the letter. "I was walking up and down my room all last night—I must have walked miles."

"Ah! 'ow that puts me in mind of my pore 'usband," chirped the cricket; "bein' a printer, and accustomed like a howl to the darkness, when 'e was 'ome for the night 'e walked up and down till 'e wore out the carpet, bein' an expensive one, as I 'ad on my marriage, an' the only way I could stop 'im was by givin' 'im something soothin', which you, sir, ought to try—whisky 'ot, with lemon and sugar—but I've 'eard tell as chloroform—"

"No, d_ it," said Brian, hastily, startled out of his politeness, "I've had enough of that."

"Achin' teeth, no doubt," said the landlady, going to the door, "which I'm often taken that way myself, decayed teeth runnin' in the family, tho', to be sure, mine are stronger than former, a lodger of mine 'avin' bin a dentist, an' doin' them beautiful, instead of payin' rent, not avin' ready cash, his boxes bein' filled with bricks on 'is departure from the 'ouse."

As Brian did not appear particularly interested in these domestic reminiscences, and seemed as if he wanted to be left alone, Mrs. Sampson, with a final crackle, went down stairs and talked with a neighbour in the kitchen, as to the desirability of drawing her money out of the Savings Bank, in case the Russians should surprise and capture Melbourne. Brian, left alone, stared out of the window at the dusty road and the black shadows cast by the tall poplars in front of the house.

"I must leave this place," he said to himself; "every chance remark seems to bear on the murder, and I'm not anxious to have it constantly by my

side like the skeleton at the feast."

Suddenly he recollected the letter which he held in his hand, and which he now looked at for the first time. It proved to be from Madge, and tearing it open hastily, he read it.

"I cannot understand what is the matter with papa," she wrote.

"Ever since that man Moreland left last night, he has shut himself up in his study, and is writing there hour after hour. I went up this morning, but he would not let me in. He did not come down to breakfast, and I am getting seriously alarmed. Come down to-morrow and see me, for I am anxious about his state of health, and I am sure that Moreland told him something which has upset him."

"Writing," said Brian, as he put the letter in his pocket, "what about, I wonder? Perhaps he is thinking of committing suicide! if so, I for one will not stop him. It is a horrible thing to do, but it would be acting for the best under the circumstances."

In spite of his determination to see Calton and tell all, Fitzgerald did not go near him that day. He felt ill and weary, the want of sleep, and mental worry, telling on him terribly, and he looked ten years older than he did before the murder of Whyte. It is trouble which draws lines on the smooth forehead and furrows round the mouth. If a man has any mental worry, his life becomes a positive agony to him. Mental tortures are quite as bad as physical ones, if not worse. The last thing before dropping off to sleep is the thought of trouble, and with the first faint light of dawn, it returns and hammers all day at the weary brain. But while a man can sleep, life is rendered at least endurable; and of all the blessings which Providence has bestowed, there is none so precious as that same sleep, which, as wise Sancho Panza says, "Wraps every man like a cloak." Brian felt the need of rest, so sending a telegram to Calton to call on him in the morning, and another to Madge, that he would be down to luncheon next day, he stayed indoors all day, and amused himself with smoking and reading. He went to bed early, and succeeded in having a sound sleep, so when he awoke next morning, he felt considerably refreshed and invigorated.

He was having his breakfast at half-past eight, when he heard the sound of wheels, and immediately afterwards a ring at the bell. He went to the window, and saw Calton's trap was at the door. The owner was shortly afterwards shown into the room.

"Well, you are a nice fellow," cried Calton, after greetings were over. "Here I've been waiting for you with all the patience of Job, thinking you were still up country."

"Will you have some breakfast?" asked Brian, laughing at his indignation.

"What have you got?" said Calton, looking over the table. "Ham and eggs. Humph! Your landlady's culinary ideas are very limited."

"Most landladies' ideas are," retorted Fitzgerald, resuming his breakfast. "Unless Heaven invents some new animal, lodgers will go on getting beef and mutton, alternated with hash, until the end of the world."

"When one is in Rome, one musn't speak ill of the Pope," answered Calton, with a grimace. "Do you think your landlady could supply me with brandy and soda?"

"I think so," answered Fitzgerald, rising, and ringing the bell; "but isn't it rather early for that sort of thing?"

"There's a proverb about glass houses," said Calton, severely, "which applies to you in this particular instance."

Whereupon Fitzgerald laughed, and Calton having been supplied with what he required, prepared to talk business.

"I need hardly tell you how anxious I am to hear what you've got to say," he said, leaning back in his chair, "but I may as well tell you that I am satisfied that I know half your secret already."

"Indeed!" Fitzgerald looked astonished. "In that case, I heed not—"

"Yes, you need," retorted Calton. "I told you I only know half."

"Which half?"

"Hum—rather difficult to answer—however, I'll tell you what I know, and you can supply all deficiencies. I am quite ready—go on—stop—"

He arose and closed the door carefully.

"Well," resuming his seat, "Mother Guttersnipe died the other night."

"Is she dead?"

"As a door nail," answered Calton calmly. "And a horrible death-bed it was—her screams ring in my ears yet—but before she died she sent for me, and said—"

"What?"

"That she was the mother of Rosanna Moore."

"Yes!"

"And that Sal Rawlins was Rosanna's child."

"And the father?" said Brian, in a low voice.

"Was Mark Frettlby."

"Ah!"

"And now what have you to tell me?"

"Nothing!"

"Nothing," echoed Calton, surprised, "then this is what Rosanna Moore told you when she died?"

"Yes!"

"Then why have you made such a mystery about it?"

"You ask that?" said Fitzgerald, looking up, in surprise. "If I had told it, don't you see what difference it would have made to Madge?"

"I'm sure I don't," retorted the barrister, completely mystified. "I suppose you mean Frettlby's connection with Rosanna Moore; well, of course, it was not a very creditable thing for her to have been Frettlby's mistress, but still—"

"His mistress?" said Fitzgerald, looking up sharply "then you don't know all."

"What do you mean—was she not his mistress?"

"No—his wife!" Calton sprang to his feet, and gave a cry of surprise.

"His wife!"

Fitzgerald nodded.

"Why, Mother Guttersnipe did not know this—she thought Rosanna was his mistress."

"He kept his marriage secret," answered Brian, "and as his wife ran away with someone else shortly afterwards, he never revealed it."

"I understand now," said the barrister, slowly. "For if Mark Frettlby was lawfully married to Rosanna Moore—Madge is illegitimate."

"Yes, and she now occupies the place which Sal Rawlins—or rather Sal Frettlby ought to."

"Poor girl," said Calton, a little sadly. "But all this does not explain the mystery of Whyte's murder."

"I will tell you that," said Fitzgerald, quickly. "When Rosanna left her husband, she ran away to England with some young fellow, and when he got tired of her she returned to the stage, and became famous as a burlesque actress, under the name of Musette. There she met Whyte, as your friend found out, and they came out here for the purpose of extorting money from Frettlby. When they arrived in Melbourne, Rosanna let Whyte do all the business, and kept herself quiet. She gave her marriage certificate to Whyte, and he had it on him the night he was murdered."

"Then Gorby was right," interposed Calton, eagerly. "The man to whom those papers were valuable did murder Whyte!"

"Can you doubt it? And that man was—"

"Not Mark Frettlby?" burst out Calton. "Surely not Mark Frettlby?"

Brian nodded, "Yes, Mark Frettlby."

There was a silence for a few moments, Calton being too much startled by the revelation to say anything.

"When did you discover this?" he asked, after a pause.

"At the time you first came to see me in prison," said Brian. "I had no suspicion till then; but when you said that Whyte was murdered for the sake of certain papers, I, knowing full well what they were and to whom they were of value—guessed immediately that Mark Frettlby had killed Whyte in order to obtain them and to keep his secret."

"There can be no doubt of it," said the barrister, with a sigh. "So this is the reason Frettlby wanted Madge to marry Whyte—her hand was to be the price of his silence. When he withdrew his consent, Whyte threatened him with exposure. I remember he left the house in a very excited state on the night he was murdered. Frettlby must have followed him up to town, got into the cab with him, and after killing him with chloroform, must have taken the marriage certificate from his secret pocket, and escaped."

Brian rose to his feet, and walked rapidly up and down the room.

"Now you can understand what a hell my life has been for the last few months," he said, "knowing that he had committed the crime; and yet I had to sit with him, eat with him, and drink with him, with the knowledge that he was a murderer, and Madge—Madge, his daughter!"

Just then a knock came to his door, and Mrs. Sampson entered with a telegram, which she handed to Brian. He tore it open as she withdrew, and glancing over it, gave a cry of horror, and let it flutter to his feet.

Calton turned rapidly on hearing his cry, and seeing him fall into a chair with a white face, snatched up the telegram and read it. When he did so, his face grew as pale and startled as Fitzgerald's, and lifting his hand, he said solemnly—

"It is the judgment of God!"

30

Nemesis

Men, according to the old Greek, “are the sport of the gods,” who, enthroned on high Olympus, put evil desires into the hearts of mortals; and when evil actions were the outcome of evil thoughts, amused themselves by watching the ineffectual efforts made by their victims to escape a relentless deity called Nemesis, who exacted a penalty for their evil deeds. It was no doubt very amusing—to the gods—but it is questionable if the men found it so. They had their revenge, however, for weary of plaguing puny mortals, who whimpered and cried when they saw they could not escape, the inevitable Nemesis turned her attention from actors to spectators, and made a clean sweep of the whole Olympian hierarchy. She smashed their altars, pulled down their statues, and after she had completed her malicious work, found that she had, vulgarly speaking, been cutting off her nose to spite her face, for she, too, became an object of derision and of disbelief, and was forced to retire to the same obscurity to which she had relegated the other deities. But men found out that she had not been altogether useless as a scapegoat upon which to lay the blame of their own shortcomings, so they created a new deity called Fate, and laid any misfortune which happened to them to her charge. Her worship is still very popular, especially among lazy and unlucky people, who never bestir themselves: on the ground that whether they do so or not their lives are already settled by Fate. After all, the true religion of Fate has been preached by George Eliot, when she says that our lives are the outcome of our actions. Set up any idol you please upon which to lay the blame of unhappy lives and baffled ambitions, but the true cause is to be found in men themselves. Every action, good or bad, which we do has its corresponding reward, and Mark Frettlby found it so, for the sins of his

youth were now being punished in his old age. No doubt he had sinned gaily enough in that far-off time when life's cup was still brimming with wine, and no asp hid among the roses; but Nemesis had been an unseen spectator of all his thoughtless actions, and now she came to demand her just dues. He felt somewhat as Faust must have felt when Mephistopheles suggested a visit to Hades, in repayment of those years of magic youth and magic power. So long ago it seemed since he had married Rosanna Moore, that he almost persuaded himself that it had been only a dream—a pleasant dream, with a disagreeable awakening. When she had left him he had tried to forget her, recognising how unworthy she was of a good man's love. He heard that she had died in a London hospital, and with a passionate sigh for a perished love, he had dismissed her from his thoughts for ever. His second marriage had turned out a happy one, and he regretted the death of his wife deeply. Afterwards, all his love centred in his daughter, and he thought he would be able to spend his declining years in peace. This, however, was not to be, and he was thunderstruck when Whyte arrived from England with the information that his first wife still lived, and that the daughter of his second was illegitimate. Sooner than risk exposure, Frettlby agreed to anything; but Whyte's demands became too exorbitant, and he refused to comply with them. On Whyte's death he again breathed freely, when suddenly a second possessor of his fatal secret started up in the person of Roger Moreland. As the murder of Duncan had to be followed by that of Banquo, in order to render Macbeth safe, so he foresaw that while Roger Moreland lived his life would be one long misery. He knew that the friend of the murdered man would be his master, and would never leave him during his life, while after his death he would probably publish the whole ghastly story, and defame the memory of the widely-respected Mark Frettlby. What is it that Shakespeare says?—

“Good name in man or woman
Is the immediate jewel of their souls.”

And after all these years of spotless living and generous use of his wealth, was he to be dragged down to the depths of infamy and degradation by a man like Moreland? Already, in fancy, he heard the jeering cries of his fellow-men, and saw the finger of scorn point at him—he, the great Mark Frettlby, famous throughout Australia for his honesty, integrity, and generosity. No, it could not be, and yet this would surely happen unless he took means to prevent it.

The day after he had seen Moreland, and knew that his secret was no longer safe, since it was in the power of a man who might reveal it at

any moment in a drunken fit, or out of sheer maliciousness, he sat at his desk writing. After a time he laid down his pen, and taking up a portrait of his dead wife which stood just in front of him, he stared at it long and earnestly. As he did so, his mind went back to the time when he had first met and loved her. Even as Faust had entered into the purity and serenity of Gretchen's chamber, out of the coarseness and profligacy of Auerbach's cellar, so he, leaving behind him the wild life of his youth, had entered into the peace and quiet of a domestic home. The old feverish life with Rosanna Moore, seemed to be as unsubstantial and chimerical, as, no doubt, his union with Lillith after he met Eve, seemed to Adam in the old Rabbinical legend. There seemed to be only one way open to him, by which he could escape the relentless fate which dogged his steps. He would write a confession of everything from the time he had first met Rosanna, and then—death. He would cut the Gordian knot of all his difficulties, and then his secret would be safe; safe? no, it could not be while Moreland lived. When he was dead Moreland would see Madge and embitter her life with the story of her father's sins—yes—he must live to protect her, and drag his weary chain of bitter remembrance through life, always with that terrible sword of Damocles hanging over him. But still, he would write out his confession, and after his death, whenever it may happen, it might help if not altogether to exculpate, at least to secure some pity for a man who had been hardly dealt with by Fate.

His resolution taken, he put it into force at once, and sat all day at his desk filling page after page with the history of his past life, which was so bitter to him. He started at first languidly, and as in the performance of an unpleasant but necessary duty. Soon, however, he became interested in it, and took a peculiar pleasure in putting down every minute circumstance which made the case stronger against, himself. He dealt with it, not as a criminal, but as a prosecutor, and painted his conduct as much blacker than it really had been. Towards the end of the day, however, after reading over the earlier sheets, he experienced a revulsion of feeling, seeing how severe he had been on himself, so he wrote a defence of his conduct, showing that fate had been too strong for him. It was a weak argument to bring forward, but still he felt it was the only one that he could make. It was quite dark when he had finished, and while sitting in the twilight, looking dreamily at the sheets scattered all over his desk, he heard a knock at the door, and his daughter's voice asking if he was coming to dinner. All day long he had closed his door against everyone, but now his task being ended, he collected all the closely-written sheets together, placed them in a drawer of his *escri-*

toire, which he locked, and then opened the door.

"Dear papa," cried Madge, as she entered rapidly, and threw her arms around his neck, "what have you been doing here all day by yourself?"

"Writing," returned her father laconically, as he gently removed her arms.

"Why, I thought you were ill," she answered, looking at him apprehensively.

"No, dear," he replied, quietly. "Not ill, but worried."

"I knew that dreadful man who came last night had told you something to worry you. Who is he?"

"Oh! a friend of mine," answered Frettlby, with hesitation.

"What—Roger Moreland?"

Her father started.

"How do you know it was Roger Moreland?"

"Oh! Brian recognised him as he went out."

Mark Frettlby hesitated for a few moments, and then busied himself with the papers on his desk, as he replied in a low voice—

"You are right—it was Roger Moreland—he is very hard up, and as he was a friend of poor Whyte's, he asked me to assist him, which I did."

He hated to hear himself telling such a deliberate falsehood, but there was no help for it—Madge must never know the truth so long as he could conceal it.

"Just like you," said Madge, kissing him lightly with filial pride. "The best and kindest of men."

He shivered slightly as he felt her caress, and thought how she would recoil from him did she know all. "After all," says some cynical writer, "the illusions of youth are mostly due to the want of experience." Madge, ignorant in a great measure of the world, cherished her pleasant illusions, though many of them had been destroyed by the trials of the past year, and her father longed to keep her in this frame of mind.

"Now go down to dinner, my dear," he said, leading her to the door. "I will follow soon."

"Don't be long," replied his daughter, "or I shall come up again," and she ran down the stairs, her heart feeling strangely light.

Her father looked after her until she vanished, then heaving a regretful sigh returned to his study, and taking out the scattered papers fastened them together, and endorsed them, "My Confession." He then placed them in an envelope, sealed it, and put it back in the desk. "If all that

is in that packet were known," he said aloud, as he left the room, "what would the world say?"

That night he was singularly brilliant at the dinner table. Generally a very reticent and grave man, on this night he laughed and talked so gaily that the very servants noticed the change. The fact was he felt a sense of relief at having unburdened his mind, and felt as though by writing out that confession he had laid the spectre which had haunted him for so long. His daughter was delighted at the change in his spirits, but the old Scotch nurse, who had been in the house since Madge was a baby, shook her head—

"He's fey," she said gravely. "He's no lang for the warld."

Of course she was laughed at—people who believe in presentiments generally are—but, nevertheless, she held firmly to her opinion.

Mr. Frettlby went to bed early that night, the excitement of the last few days and the feverish gaiety in which he had lately indulged proving too strong for him. No sooner had he laid his head on his pillow than he dropped off to sleep at once, and forgot in placid slumber the troubles and worries of his waking hours.

It was only nine o'clock, so Madge stayed by herself in the great drawing-room, and read a new novel, which was then creating a sensation, called "Sweet Violet Eyes." It belied its reputation, however, for it was very soon thrown on the table with a look of disgust, and rising from her seat Madge walked up and down the room, and wished some good fairy would hint to Brian that he was wanted. If man is a gregarious animal, how much more, then, is a woman? This is not a conundrum, but a simple truth. "A female Robinson Crusoe," says a writer who prided himself upon being a keen observer of human nature—"a female Robinson Crusoe would have gone mad for want of something to talk to." This remark, though severe, nevertheless contains several grains of truth, for women, as a rule, talk more than men. They are more sociable, and a Miss Misanthrope, in spite of Justin McCarthy's, is unknown—at least in civilised communities. Miss Frettlby, being neither misanthropic nor dumb, began to long for some one to talk to, and, ringing the bell, ordered Sal to be sent in. The two girls had become great friends, and Madge, though by two years the younger, assumed the role of mentor, and under her guidance Sal was rapidly improving. It was a strange irony of fate which brought together these two children of the same father, each with such different histories—the one reared in luxury and affluence, never having known want; the other dragged up in the gutter, all unsexed and besmirched by the life she had led. "The whirligig

of time brings in its revenges," and it was the last thing in the world Mark Frettlby would have thought of seeing: Rosanna Moore's child, whom he fancied dead, under the same roof as his daughter Madge.

On receiving Madge's message Sal came to the drawing room, and the two were soon chatting amicably together. The room was almost in darkness, only one lamp being lighted, Mr. Frettlby very sensibly detested gas, with its glaring light, and had nothing but lamps in his drawing-room. At the end of the apartment, where Sal and Madge were seated, there was a small table. On it stood a large lamp, with an opaque globe, which, having a shade over it, threw a soft and subdued circle of light round the table, leaving the rest of the room in a kind of semi-darkness. Near this sat Madge and Sal, talking gaily, and away on the left-hand side they could see the door open, and a warm flood of light pouring in from the hall.

They had been talking together for some time, when Sal's quick ear caught a footfall on the soft carpet, and, turning rapidly, she saw a tall figure advancing down the room. Madge saw it too, and started up in surprise on recognising her father. He was clothed in his dressing-gown, and carried some papers in his hand.

"Why, papa," said Madge, in surprise. "I—"

"Hush!" whispered Sal, grasping her arms. "He's asleep."

And so he was. In accordance with the dictates of the excited brain, the weary body had risen from the bed and wandered about the house. The two girls, drawing back into the shadow, watched him with bated breath as he came slowly down the room. In a few moments he was within the circle of light, and, moving noiselessly along, he laid the papers he carried on the table. They were in a large blue envelope much worn, with writing in red ink on it. Sal recognised it, at once as the one she had seen in the possession of the dead woman, and with an instinctive feeling that there was something wrong, she tried to draw Madge back, as she watched her father's action with an intensity of feeling which held her spell-bound. Frettlby opened the envelope, and took therefrom a yellow, frayed piece of paper, which he spread out on the table. Madge bent forward to see it, but Sal, with a sudden terror drew her back.

"For God's sake no," she cried.

But it was too late; Madge had caught sight of the names on the paper—"Marriage—Rosanna Moore—Mark Frettlby"—and the whole awful truth flashed upon her. These were the papers Rosanna Moore had handed to Whyte. Whyte had been murdered by the man to whom the papers were of value—

“Oh! My father!”

She staggered blindly forward, and then, with one piercing shriek, fell to the ground. In doing so, she struck against her father, who was still standing beside the table. Awakened suddenly, with that wild cry in his ears, he opened his eyes wide, put out feeble hands, as if to keep something back, and with a strangled cry fell dead on the floor beside his daughter. Sal, horror-struck, did not lose her presence of mind, but, snatching the papers off the table, she thrust them into her pocket, and then called aloud for the servants. But they, already attracted by Madge's wild cry, came hurrying in, to find Mark Frettlby, the millionaire, lying dead, and his daughter in a faint beside her father's corpse.

31

Hush-Money

As soon as Brian received the telegram which announced the death of Mark Frettlby, he put on his hat, stepped into Calton's trap, and drove along to the St. Kilda station in Flinders Street with that gentleman. There Calton dismissed his trap, sending a note to his clerk with the groom, and went down to St. Kilda with Fitzgerald. On arrival they found the whole house perfectly quiet and orderly, owing to the excellent management of Sal Rawlins. She had taken the command in everything, and although the servants, knowing her antecedents, were disposed to resent her doing so, yet such were her administrative powers and strong will, that they obeyed her implicitly. Mark Frettlby's body had been taken up to his bedroom, Madge had been put to bed, and Dr. Chinston and Brian sent for. When they arrived they could not help expressing their admiration at the capital way in which Sal Rawlins had managed things.

"She's a clever girl that," whispered Calton to Fitzgerald. "Curious thing she should have taken up her proper position in her father's house. Fate is a deal cleverer than we mortals think her."

Brian was about to reply when Dr. Chinston entered the room. His face was very grave, and Fitzgerald looked at him in alarm.

"Madge—Miss Frettlby," he faltered.

"Is very ill," replied the doctor; "has an attack of brain fever. I can't answer for the consequences yet."

Brian sat down on the sofa, and stared at the doctor in a dazed sort of way. Madge dangerously ill—perhaps dying. What if she were to die, and he to lose the true-hearted woman who stood so nobly by him in his trouble?

"Cheer up," said Chinston, patting him on the shoulder; "while there's life there's hope, and whatever human aid can do to save her will be done."

Brian grasped the doctor's hand in silence, his heart being too full to speak.

"How did Frettlby die?" asked Calton.

"Heart disease," said Chinston. "His heart was very much affected, as I discovered a week or so ago. It appears he was walking in his sleep, and entering the drawing-room, he alarmed Miss Frettlby, who screamed, and must have touched him. He awoke suddenly, and the natural consequences followed—he dropped down dead."

"What alarmed Miss Frettlby?" asked Brian, in a low voice, covering his face with his hand.

"The sight of her father walking in his sleep, I suppose," said Chinston, buttoning his glove; "and the shock of his death which took place indirectly through her, accounts for the brain fever."

"Madge Frettlby is not the woman to scream and waken a somnambulist," said Calton, decidedly, "knowing as she did the danger. There must be some other reason."

"This young woman will tell you all about it," said Chinston, nodding towards Sal, who entered the room at this moment. "She was present, and since then has managed things admirably; and now I must go," he said, shaking hands with Calton and Fitzgerald. "Keep up your heart, my boy; I'll pull her through yet."

After the doctor had gone, Calton turned sharply to Sal Rawlins, who stood waiting to be addressed.

"Well," he said briskly, "can you tell us what startled Miss Frettlby?"

"I can, sir," she answered quietly. "I was in the drawing-room when Mr. Frettlby died—but—we had better go up to the study."

"Why?" asked Calton, in surprise, as he and Fitzgerald followed her up stairs.

"Because, sir," she said, when they had entered the study and she had locked the door, "I don't want any one but yourselves to know what I tell you."

"More mystery," muttered Calton, as he glanced at Brian, and took his seat at the escritoire.

"Mr. Frettlby went to bed early last night," said Sal, calmly, "and Miss Madge and I were talking together in the drawing-room, when he entered, walking in his sleep, and carrying some papers—"

Both Calton and Fitzgerald started, and the latter grew pale.

"He came down the room, and spread out a paper on the table where the lamp was. Miss Madge bent forward to see what it was. I tried to stop her, but it was too late. She gave a scream, and fell on the floor. In doing so she happened to touch her father. He awoke, and fell down dead."

"And the papers?" asked Calton, uneasily.

Sal did not answer, but producing them from her pocket, laid them in his hands.

Brian bent forward, as Calton opened the envelope in silence, but both gave vent to an exclamation of horror at seeing the certificate of marriage which they knew Rosanna Moore had given to Whyte. Their worst suspicions were confirmed, and Brian turned away his head, afraid to meet the barrister's eye. The latter folded up the papers thoughtfully, and put them in his pocket.

"You know what these are?" he asked Sal, eyeing her keenly.

"I could hardly help knowing," she answered; "it proves that Rosanna Moore was Mr. Frettlby's wife, and—" she hesitated.

"Go on," said Brian, in a harsh tone, looking up.

"And they were the papers she gave Mr. Whyte."

"Well!"

Sal was silent for a moment, and then looked up with a flush.

"You needn't think I'm going to split," she said, indignantly, recurring to her Bourke Street slang in the excitement of the moment. "I know what you know, but I'll be as silent as the grave."

"Thank you," said Brian, fervently, taking her hand; "I know you love her too well to betray this terrible secret."

"I would be a nice 'un, I would," said Sal, with a scorn, "after her lifting me out of the gutter, to round on her—a poor girl like me, without a friend or a relative, now Gran's dead."

Calton looked up quickly. It was plain Sal was quite ignorant that Rosanna Moore was her mother. So much the better; they would keep her in ignorance, perhaps not altogether, but it would be folly to undeceive her at present.

"I'm goin' to Miss Madge now," she said, going to the door, "and I won't see you again; she's getting light-headed, and might let it out; but I'll not let any one in but myself," and so saying, she left the room.

"Cast thy bread upon the waters," said Calton, oracularly. "The kindness of Miss Frettlby to that poor waif is already bearing fruit—gratitude is the rarest of qualities, rarer even than modesty."

Fitzgerald made no answer, but stared out of the window, and thought of his darling lying sick unto death, and he able to do nothing to save her.

"Well," said Calton, sharply.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Fitzgerald, turning in confusion. "I suppose the will must be read, and all that sort of thing."

"Yes," answered the barrister, "I am one of the executors."

"And the others?"

"Yourself and Chinston," answered Calton; "so I suppose," turning to the desk, "we can look at his papers, and see that all is straight."

"Yes, I suppose so," replied Brian, mechanically, his thoughts far away, and then he turned again to the window. Suddenly Calton gave vent to an exclamation of surprise, and, turning hastily, Brian saw him holding a thick roll of papers in his hand, which he had taken out of the drawer.

"Look here, Fitzgerald," he said, greatly excited, "here is Frettlby's confession—look!" and he held it up.

Brian sprang forward in astonishment. So at last the hansom cab mystery was to be cleared up. These sheets, no doubt, contained the whole narration of the crime, and how it was committed.

"We will read it, of course," he said, hesitating, half hoping that Calton would propose to destroy it at once.

"Yes," answered Calton; "the three executors must read it, and then—we will burn it."

"That will be the better way," answered Brian, gloomily. "Frettlby is dead, and the law can do nothing in the matter, so it would be best to avoid the scandal of publicity. But why tell Chinston?"

"We must," said Calton, decidedly. "He will be sure to gather the truth from Madge's ravings, and he may as well know all. He is quite safe, and will be silent as the grave. But I am more sorry to tell Kilsip."

"The detective? Good God, Calton, surely you will not do so!"

"I must," replied the barrister, quietly. "Kilsip is firmly persuaded that Moreland committed the crime, and I have the same dread of his pertinacity as you had of mine. He may find out all."

"What must be, must be," said Fitzgerald, clenching his hands. "But I hope no one else will find out this miserable story. There's Moreland, for instance."

"Ah, true!" said Calton, thoughtfully. "He called and saw Frettlby the other night, you say?"

"Yes. I wonder what for?"

"There is only one answer," said the barrister, slowly. "He must have seen Frettlby following Whyte when he left the hotel, and wanted hush-money."

"I wonder if he got it?" observed Fitzgerald.

"Oh, I'll soon find that out," answered Calton, opening the drawer again, and taking out the dead man's cheque-book. "Let me see what cheques have been drawn lately."

Most of the blocks were filled up for small amounts, and one or two for a hundred or so. Calton could find no large sum such as Moreland would have demanded, when, at the very end of the book, he found a cheque torn off, leaving the block-slip quite blank.

"There you are," he said, triumphantly holding out the book to Fitzgerald. "He wasn't such a fool as to write in the amount on the block, but tore the cheque out, and wrote in the sum required."

"And what's to be done about it?"

"Let him keep it, of course," answered Calton, shrugging his shoulders. "It's the only way to secure his silence."

"I expect he cashed it yesterday, and is off by this time," said Brian, after a moment's pause.

"So much the better for us," said Calton, grimly. "But I don't think he's off, or Kilsip would have let me know. We must tell him, or he'll get everything out of Moreland, and the consequences will be that all Melbourne will know the story; whereas, by showing him the confession, we get him to leave Moreland alone, and thus secure silence in both cases."

"I suppose we must see Chinston?"

"Yes, of course. I will telegraph to him and Kilsip to come up to my office this afternoon at three o'clock, and then we will settle the whole matter."

"And Sal Rawlins?"

"Oh! I quite forgot about her," said Calton, in a perplexed voice. "She knows nothing about her parents, and, of course, Mark Frettlby died in the belief that she was dead."

"We must tell Madge," said Brian, gloomily. "There is no help for it. Sal is by rights the heiress to the money of her dead father."

"That depends upon the will," replied Calton, dryly. "If it specifies that the money is left to 'my daughter, Margaret Frettlby,' Sal Rawlins can have no claim; and if such is the case, it will be no good telling her who she is."

"And what's to be done?"

"Sal Rawlins," went on the barrister, without noticing the interruption, "has evidently never given a thought to her father or mother, as the old hag, no doubt, swore they were dead. So I think it will be best to keep silent—that is, if no money is left to her, and, as her father thought her dead, I don't think there will be any. In that case, it would be best to settle an income on her. You can easily find a pretext, and let the matter rest."

"But suppose, in accordance with the wording of the will, she is entitled to all the money?"

"In that case," said Calton, gravely, "there is only one course open—she must be told everything, and the dividing of the money left to her generosity. But I don't think you need be alarmed, I'm pretty sure Madge is the heiress."

"It's not the money I think about," said Brian, hastily. "I'd take Madge without a penny."

"My boy," said the barrister, placing his hand kindly on Brian's shoulder, "when you marry Madge Frettlby, you will get what is better than money—a heart of gold."

32

De Mortuis Nil Nisi Bonum

Nothing is certain but the unforeseen;" so says a French proverb, and judging from the unexpected things which daily happen to us, it is without doubt a very true one. If anyone had told Madge Frettlby one day that she would be stretched on a bed of sickness the next, and would be quite oblivious of the world and its doings, she would have laughed the prophet to scorn. Yet it was so, and she was tossing and turning on a bed of pain to which the couch of Procustes was one of roses. Sal sat beside her, ever watchful of her wants, and listened through the bright hours of the day, or the still ones of the night, to the wild and incoherent words which issued from her lips. She incessantly called on her father to save himself, and then would talk about Brian, and sing snatches of song, or would sob broken sentences about her dead mother, until the heart of the listener ached to hear her. No one was allowed into the room except Sal, and when Dr. Chinston heard the things she was saying, although used to such cases, he recoiled.

"There is blood on your hands," cried Madge, sitting up in bed, with her hair all tangled and falling over her shoulders; "red blood, and you cannot wash it off. Oh, Cain! God save him! Brian, you are not guilty; my father killed him. God! God!" and she fell back on her disordered pillows weeping bitterly.

Dr. Chinston did not say anything, but shortly afterwards took his leave, after telling Sal on no account to let anyone see the patient.

"Tain't likely," said Sal, in a disgusted tone, as she closed the door after him. "I'm not a viper to sting the bosom as fed me," from which it may be gathered she was advancing rapidly in her education.

Meanwhile Dr. Chinston had received Calton's telegram, and was considerably astonished thereat. He was still more so when, on arriving at

the office at the time appointed, he found Calton and Fitzgerald were not alone, but a third man whom he had never seen was with them. The latter Calton introduced to him as Mr. Kilsip, of the detective office, a fact which made the worthy doctor uneasy, as he could in no wise divine the meaning of it. However, he made no remark, but took the seat handed to him by Mr. Calton and prepared to listen. Calton locked the door of the office, and then went back to his desk, having the other three seated before him in a kind of semi-circle.

"In the first place," said Calton to the doctor, "I have to inform you that you are one of the executors under the will of the late Mr. Frettlby, and that is why I asked you to come here to-day. The other executors are Mr. Fitzgerald and myself."

"Oh, indeed," murmured the doctor, politely.

"And now," said Calton, looking at him, "do you remember the hansom cab murder, which caused such a sensation some months ago?"

"Yes, I do," replied the doctor, rather astonished; "but what has that to do with the will?"

"Nothing to do with the will," answered Calton, gravely; "but the fact is, Mr. Frettlby was implicated in the affair."

Dr. Chinston glanced enquiringly at Brian, but that gentleman shook his head.

"It has nothing to do with my arrest," he said, sadly.

Madge's words, uttered in her delirium, flashed across the doctor's memory.

"What do you mean?" he gasped, pushing back his chair. "How was he implicated?"

"That I cannot tell you," answered Calton, "until I read his confession."

"Ah!" said Kilsip, becoming very attentive.

"Yes," said Calton, turning to Kilsip, "your hunt after Moreland is a wild-goose chase, for the murderer of Oliver Whyte is discovered."

"Discovered!" cried Kilsip and the doctor in one breath.

"Yes, and his name is Mark Frettlby."

Kilsip shot a glance of disdain out of his bright black eyes, and gave a low laugh of disbelief, but the doctor pushed back his chair furiously, and arose to his feet.

"This is monstrous," he cried, in a rage. "I won't sit still and hear this accusation against my dead friend."

"Unfortunately, it is too true," said Brian, sadly.

"How dare you say so?" said Chinston, turning angrily on him. "And you going to marry his daughter!"

"There is only one way to settle the question," said Calton, coldly. "We must read his confession."

"But why the detective?" asked the doctor, ungraciously, as he took his seat.

"Because I want him to hear for himself that Mr. Frettlby committed the crime, that he may keep silence."

"Not till I've arrested him," said Kilsip, determinedly.

"But he's dead," said Brian.

"I'm speaking of Roger Moreland," retorted Kilsip. "For he and no other murdered Oliver Whyte."

"That's a much more likely story," Chinston said.

"I tell you no," said Calton, vehemently. "God knows I would like to preserve Mark Frettlby's good name, and it is with this object I have brought you all together. I will read the confession, and when you know the truth, I want you all to keep silent about it, as Mark Frettlby is dead, and the publication of his crime can do no good to anyone."

"I know," resumed Calton, addressing the detective, "that you are fully convinced in your own mind that you are right and I am wrong, but what if I tell you that Mark Frettlby died holding those very papers for the sake of which the crime was committed?"

Kilsip's face lengthened considerably.

"What were the papers?"

"The marriage certificate of Mark Frettlby and Rosanna Moore, the woman who died in the back slum."

Kilsip was not often astonished; but he was so now. And Dr. Chinston fell back in his chair, staring at the barrister in blank amazement.

"And what's more," went on Calton, triumphantly, "do you know that Moreland went to Frettlby two nights ago and obtained a certain sum for hush-money?"

"What!" cried Kilsip.

"Yes, Moreland, in coming out of the hotel, evidently saw Frettlby, and threatened to expose him unless he paid for his silence."

"Very strange," murmured Kilsip, to himself, with a disappointed look on his face. "But why did Moreland keep still so long?"

"I cannot tell you," replied Calton, "but, no doubt, the confession will explain all."

"Then for Heaven's sake read it," broke in Dr. Chinston, impatiently. "I'm quite in the dark, and all your talk is Greek to me."

"One moment," said Kilsip, dragging a bundle from under his chair, and untying it. "If you are right, what about this?" and he held up a light coat, very much soiled and weather-worn.

"Whose is that?" asked Calton, startled. "Not Whyte's?"

"Yes, Whyte's," repeated Kilsip, with great satisfaction. "I found it in the Fitzroy Gardens, near the gate that opens to George Street, East Melbourne. It was up in a fir-tree."

"Then Mr. Frettlby must have got out at Powlett Street, and walked down George Street, and then through the Fitzroy Gardens into town," said Calton.

Kilsip took no heed of the remark, but took a small bottle out of the pocket of the coat and held it up.

"I also found this," he said.

"Chloroform," cried everyone, guessing at once that it was the missing bottle.

"Exactly," said Kilsip, replacing it. "This was the bottle which contained the poison used by—by—well, call him the murderer. The name of the chemist being on the label, I went to him and found out who bought it. Now, who do you think?" with a look of triumph.

"Frettlby," said Calton, decidedly.

"No, Moreland," burst out Chinston, greatly excited.

"Neither," retorted the detective, calmly. "The man who purchased this was Oliver Whyte himself."

"Himself?" echoed Brian, now thoroughly surprised, as, indeed were all the others.

"Yes. I had no trouble in finding out that, thanks to the 'Poisons Act.' As I knew no one would be so foolish as to carry chloroform about in his pocket for any length of time, I mentioned the day of the murder as the probable date it was bought. The chemist turned up in his book, and found that Whyte was the purchaser."

"And what did he buy it for?" asked Chinston.

"That's more than I can tell you," said Kilsip, with a shrug of his shoulders. "It's down in the book as being bought for medicinal uses, which may mean anything."

"The law requires a witness," observed Calton, cautiously. "Who was the witness?"

Again Kilsip smiled triumphantly.

"I think I can guess," said Fitzgerald. "Moreland?"

Kilsip nodded.

"And I suppose," remarked Calton, in a slightly sarcastic tone, "that is another of your proofs against Moreland. He knew that Whyte had chloroform on him, therefore he followed him that night and murdered him?"

"Well, I—"

"It's a lot of nonsense," said the barrister, impatiently. "There's nothing against Moreland to implicate him. If he killed Whyte, what made him go and see Frettlby?"

"But," said Kilsip, sagely nodding his head, "if, as Moreland Bays, he had Whyte's coat in his possession before the murder how is it that I should discover it afterwards up a fir-tree in the Fitzroy Gardens, with an empty chloroform bottle in the pocket?"

"He may have been an accomplice," suggested Calton.

"What's the good of all this conjecturing?" said Chinston, impatiently, now thoroughly tired of the discussion. "Read the confession, and we will soon know the truth, without all this talk."

Calton assented, and all having settled themselves to listen, he began to read what the dead man had written.

33

The Confession

What I am now about to write is set forth by me so that the true circumstances connected with the 'Hansom Cab Tragedy,' which took place in Melbourne in 18_ may be known. I owe a confession, particularly to Brian Fitzgerald, seeing that he was accused of the crime. Although I know he was rightfully acquitted of the charge, yet I wish him to know all about the case, though I am convinced, from his altered demeanour towards me, that he is better acquainted with it than he chooses to confess. In order to account for the murder of Oliver Whyte, I must go back to the beginning of my life in this colony, and show how the series of events began which culminated in the committal of the crime.

"Should it be necessary to make this confession public, in the interests of justice, I can say nothing against such a course being taken; but I would be grateful if it could be suppressed, both on account of my good name and of my dear daughter Margaret, whose love and affection has so soothed and brightened my life.

"If, however, she should be informed of the contents of these pages, I ask her to deal leniently with the memory of one who was sorely tried and tempted.

"I came to the colony of Victoria, or, rather, as it was called then, New South Wales, in the year 18_. I had been in a merchant's office in London, but not finding much opportunity for advancement, I looked about to see if I could better myself I heard of this new land across the ocean, and though it was not then the El Dorado which it afterwards turned out, and, truth to tell, had rather a shady name, owing to the transportation of convicts, yet I longed to go there and start a new life. Unhappily, however, I had not the means, and saw nothing better before me than the dreary life of a London clerk, as it was impossible that I could save out

of the small salary I got. Just at this time, an old maiden aunt of my mother's died and left a few hundred pounds to me. With this, I came out to Australia, determined to become a rich man. I stayed some time in Sydney, and then came over to Port Phillip, now so widely known as Marvellous Melbourne, where I intended to pitch my tent. I saw that it was a young and rising colony, though, of course, coming as I did, before the days of the gold diggings, I never dreamt it would spring up, as it has done since, into a nation. I was careful and saving in those days, and, indeed, I think it was the happiest time of my life.

"I bought land whenever I could scrape the money together, and, at the time of the gold rush, was considered well-to-do. When, however, the cry that gold had been discovered was raised, and the eyes of all the nations were turned to Australia, with her glittering treasures, men poured in from all parts of the world, and the 'Golden Age' commenced. I began to grow rich rapidly, and was soon pointed out as the wealthiest man in the Colonies. I bought a station, and, leaving the riotous, feverish Melbourne life, went to live on it. I enjoyed myself there, for the wild, open-air life had great charms for me, and there was a sense of freedom to which I had hitherto been a stranger. But man is a gregarious animal, and I, growing weary of solitude and communings with Mother Nature, came down on a visit to Melbourne, where, with companions as gay as myself, I spent my money freely, and, as the phrase goes, saw life. After confessing that I loved the pure life of the country, it sounds strange to say I enjoyed the wild life of the town, but I did. I was neither a Joseph nor a St. Anthony, and I was delighted with Bohemia, with its good fellowship and charming suppers, which took place in the small hours of the morning, when wit and humour reigned supreme.

"It was at one of these suppers that I first met Rosanna Moore, the woman who was destined to curse my existence. She was a burlesque actress, and all the young fellows in those days were madly in love with her. She was not exactly what was called beautiful, but there was a brilliancy and fascination about her which few could resist. On first seeing her I did not admire her much, but laughed at my companions as they raved about her. On becoming personally acquainted with her, however, I found that her powers of fascination had not been over-rated, and I ended by falling desperately in love with her. I made enquiries about her private life, and found that it was irreproachable, as she was guarded by a veritable dragon of a mother, who would let no one approach her daughter. I need not tell about my courtship, as these phases of a man's life are generally the same, but it will be sufficient to prove the depth of my passion for her when I say that I determined to make her my wife. It was on condition,

however, that the marriage should be kept secret until such time as I should choose to reveal it. My reason for such a course was this, my father was still alive, and he, being a rigid Presbyterian, would never have forgiven me for having married a woman of the stage; so, as he was old and feeble, I did not wish him to learn that I had done so, fearing that the shock would be too much for him in his then state of health. I told Rosanna I would marry her, but wanted her to leave her mother, who was a perfect fury, and not an agreeable person to live with. As I was rich, young, and not bad looking, Rosanna consented, and, during an engagement she had in Sydney, I went over there and married her. She never told her mother she had married me, why, I do not know, as I laid no restriction on her doing so. The mother made a great noise over the matter, but I gave Rosanna a large sum of money for her, and this the old harriidan accepted, and left for New Zealand.

“Rosanna went with me to my station, where we lived as man and wife, though, in Melbourne, she was supposed to be my mistress. At last, feeling degraded in my own eyes at the way in which I was supposed to be living, I wanted to reveal our secret, but this Rosanna would not consent to. I was astonished at this, and could never discover the reason, but in many ways Rosanna was an enigma to me. She then grew weary of the quiet country life, and longed to return to the glitter and glare of the footlights. This I refused to let her do, and from that moment she took a dislike to me. A child was born, and for a time she was engrossed with it, but soon wearied of the new plaything, and again pressed me to allow her to return to the stage. I again refused, and we became estranged from one another. I grew gloomy and irritable, and was accustomed to take long rides by myself, frequently being away for days.

“There was a great friend of mine who owned the next station, a fine, handsome young fellow, called Frank Kelly, with a gay, sunny disposition, and a wonderful flow of humour. When he found I was so much away, thinking Rosanna was only my mistress, he began to console her, and succeeded so well that one day, on my return from a ride, I found she had fled with him, and had taken the child with her. She left a letter saying that she had never really cared for me, but had married me for my money—she would keep our marriage secret, and was going to return to the stage. I followed my false friend and false wife down to Melbourne, but arrived too late, as they had just left for England.

“Disgusted with the manner in which I had been treated, I plunged into a whirl of dissipation, trying to drown the memory of my married life. My friends, of course, thought that my loss amounted to no more than that of a mistress, and I soon began myself to doubt that I had ever been

married, so far away and visionary did my life of the previous year seem. I continued my fast life for about six months, when suddenly I was arrested upon the brink of destruction by—an angel. I say this advisedly, for if ever there was an angel upon earth, it was she who afterwards became my wife. She was the daughter of a doctor, and it was her influence which drew me back from the dreary path of profligacy and dissipation which I was then leading. I paid her great attention, and we were, in fact, looked upon as good as engaged; but I knew that I was still linked to that accursed woman, and could not ask her to be my wife.

“At this second crisis of my life Fate again intervened, for I received a letter from England, which informed me that Rosanna Moore had been run over in the streets of London, and had died in an hospital. The writer was a young doctor who had attended her, and I wrote home to him, begging him to send out a certificate of her death, so that I might be sure she was no more. He did so, and also enclosed an account of the accident, which had appeared in a newspaper. Then, indeed, I felt that I was free, and closing, as I thought, for ever the darkest page of my life’s history, I began to look forward to the future. I married again, and my domestic life was a singularly happy one.

“As the colony grew greater, with every year I became even more wealthy than I had been, and was looked up to and respected by my fellow-citizens. When my dear daughter Margaret was born, I felt that my cup of happiness was full, but suddenly I received a disagreeable reminder of the past. Rosanna’s mother made her appearance one day—a disreputable-looking creature, smelling of gin, in whom I could not recognise the respectably-dressed woman who used to accompany Rosanna to the theatre. She had spent long ago all the money I had given her, and had sank lower and lower, until she now lived in a slum off Little Bourke Street. I made enquiries after the child, and she told me it was dead. Rosanna had not taken it to England with her, but had left it in her mother’s charge, and, no doubt, neglect and want of proper nourishment was the cause of its death. There now seemed to be no link to bind me to the past with the exception of the old hag, who knew nothing about the marriage. I did not attempt to undeceive her, but agreed to allow her enough to live on if she promised never to trouble me again, and to keep quiet about everything which had reference to my connection with her daughter. She promised readily enough, and went back to her squalid dwelling in the slums, where, for all I know, she still lives, as money has been paid to her regularly every month by my solicitors. I heard nothing more about the matter, and now felt quite satisfied that I had heard the last of Rosanna.

“As years rolled on, things prospered with me, and so fortunate was I in all speculations that my luck became proverbial. Then, alas! when all things seemed to smile upon me, my wife died, and the world has never seemed the same to me since. But I had my dear daughter to console me, and in her love and affection I became reconciled to the loss of my wife. A young Irish gentleman, called Brian Fitzgerald, came out to Australia, and I soon saw that my daughter was in love with him, and that he reciprocated that affection, whereat I was glad, as I have always esteemed him highly. I looked forward to their marriage, when suddenly a series of events occurred, which must be fresh in the memory of those who read these pages.

“Mr. Oliver Whyte, a gentleman from London, called on me and startled me with the news that my first wife, Rosanna Moore, was still living, and that the story of her death had been an ingenious fabrication in order to deceive me. She had met with an accident, as stated in the newspaper, and had been taken to an hospital, where she recovered. The young doctor, who had sent me the certificate of her death, had fallen in love with her, and wanted to marry her, and had told me that she was dead in order that her past life might be obliterated. The doctor, however, died before the marriage, and Rosanna did not trouble herself about undeceiving me. She was then acting on the burlesque stage under the name of ‘Musette,’ and seemed to have gained an unenviable notoriety by her extravagance and infamy. Whyte met her in London, and she became his mistress. He seemed to have had a wonderful influence over her, for she told him all her past life, and about her marriage with me. Her popularity being on the wane in London, as she was now growing old, and had to make way for younger actresses, Whyte proposed that they should proceed to the colonies and extort money from me, and he had come to me for that purpose.

“The villain told me all this in the coolest manner, and I, knowing he held the secret of my life, was unable to resent it. I refused to see Rosanna, but told Whyte I would agree to his terms, which were, first, a large sum of money was to be paid to Rosanna, and, secondly, that he should marry my daughter. I, at first, absolutely declined to sanction the latter proposal, but as he threatened to publish the story, and that meant the proclamation to the world of my daughter’s illegitimacy, I at last—agreed, and he began to pay his addresses to Madge. She, however, refused to marry him, and told me she was engaged to Fitzgerald, so, after a severe struggle with myself, I told Whyte that I would not allow him to marry Madge, but would give him whatever sum he liked to name.

“On the night he was murdered he came to see me, and showed me the

certificate of marriage between myself and Rosanna Moore. He refused to take a sum of money, and said that unless I consented to his marriage with Madge he would publish the whole affair. I implored him to give me time to think, so he said he would give me two days, but no more, and left the house, taking the marriage certificate with him.

"I was in despair, and saw that the only way to save myself was to obtain possession of the marriage certificate and deny everything. With this idea in my mind I followed him up to town and saw him meet Moreland, and drink with him. They went into the hotel in Russell Street, and when Whyte came out, at half-past twelve, he was quite intoxicated. I saw him go along to the Scotch Church, near the Bourke and Wills' monument, and cling to the lamp-post at the corner. I thought I would then be able to get the certificate from him, as he was so drunk, when I saw a gentleman in a light coat—I did not know it was Fitzgerald—come up to him and hail a cab for him. I saw there was nothing more to be done at that time, so, in despair, went home and waited for the next day, in fear lest he should carry out his determination.

"Nothing, however, turned up, and I was beginning to think that Whyte had abandoned his purpose, when I heard that he had been murdered in the hansom cab. I was in great fear lest the marriage certificate should be found on him, but nothing was said about it. This I could not understand at all. I knew he had it on him, and I could only conclude that the murderer, whoever he was, had taken it from the body, and would sooner or later come to me to extort money, knowing that I dare not denounce him. Fitzgerald was arrested, and afterwards acquitted, so I began to think that the certificate had been lost, and my troubles were at an end.

"However, I was always haunted by a dread that the sword was hanging over my head, and would fall sooner or later. I was right, for two nights ago Roger Moreland, who was an intimate friend of Whyte's, called on me, and produced the marriage certificate, which he offered to sell to me for five thousand pounds. In horror, I accused him of murdering Whyte, which he denied at first, but afterwards acknowledged, stating that I dare not betray him for my own sake. I was nearly mad with the horror I was placed in, either to denounce my daughter as illegitimate or let a murderer escape the penalty of his crime. At last I agreed to keep silent, and handed him a cheque for five thousand pounds, receiving in return the marriage certificate. I then made Moreland swear to leave the colony, which he readily agreed to do, saying Melbourne was dangerous.

"When he left I reflected upon the awfulness of my position, and I had

almost determined to commit suicide, but, thank God, I was saved from that crime. I write this confession in order that after my death the true story of the murder of Whyte may be known, and that any one who may hereafter be accused of the murder may not be wrongfully punished. I have no hopes of Moreland ever receiving the penalty of his crime, as when this is opened all trace of him will, no doubt, be lost. I will not destroy the marriage certificate, but place it with these papers, so that the truth of my story can be seen. In conclusion, I would ask forgiveness of my daughter Margaret for my sins, which have been visited on her, but she can see for herself that circumstances were too strong for me. May she forgive me, as I hope God in His infinite mercy will, and may she come sometimes and pray over my grave, nor think too hardly upon her dead father.”

34

The Hands of Justice

Calton's voice faltered a little when he read those last sad words, and he laid the manuscript down on the table, amid a dead silence, which was first broken by Brian.

"Thank God," he said, reverently, "thank God that he was innocent of the crime!"

"No," said Calton, a little cynically, "the riddle which has perplexed us so long is read, and the Sphinx is silent for evermore."

"I knew he was incapable of such a thing," cried Chinston, whom emotion had hitherto kept silent.

Meanwhile Kilsip listened to these eulogistic remarks on the dead man, and purred to himself, in a satisfied sort of way, like a cat who has caught a mouse.

"You see, sir," he said, addressing the barrister, "I was right after all."

"Yes," answered Calton, frankly, "I acknowledge my defeat, but now—"

"I'm going to arrest Moreland right off," said Kilsip.

There was a silence for a few moments, and then Calton spoke again.

"I suppose it must be so—poor girl—poor girl."

"I'm very sorry for the young lady myself," said the detective in his soft, low voice; "but you see I cannot let a dangerous criminal escape for a mere matter of sentiment."

"Of course not," said Fitzgerald, sharply. "Moreland must be arrested right off."

"But he will confess everything," said Calton, angrily, "and then everyone will know about this first marriage."

"Let them," retorted Brian, bitterly. "As soon as she is well enough we will marry at once, and leave Australia for ever."

"But—"

"I know her better than you do," said the young man, doggedly; "and I know she would like an end made of this whole miserable business at once. Arrest the murderer, and let him suffer for his crime."

"Well, I suppose it must be so," said Chinston, with a sigh, "but it seems very hard that this slur should be cast upon Miss Frettlby."

Brian turned a little pale.

"The sins of the father are generally visited upon the children by the world," he said bitterly. "But after the first pain is over, in new lands among new faces, she will forget the bitter past."

"Now that it is settled Moreland is to be arrested," said Calton, "how is it to be done? Is he still in Melbourne?"

"Rather," said Kilsip in a satisfied tone; "I've had my eye on him for the last two months, and someone is watching him for me now—trust me, he can't move two steps without my knowing it."

"Ah, indeed!" said Calton, quickly. "Then do you know if he has been to the bank and cashed that cheque for five thousand, which Frettlby gave him?"

"Well, now," observed Kilsip, after a pause, "do you know you rather startled me when you told me he had received a cheque for that amount."

"Why?"

"It's such a large one," replied the detective, "and had I known what sum he had paid into his account I should have been suspicious."

"Then he has been to the bank?"

"To his own bank, yes. He went there yesterday afternoon at two o'clock—that is the day after he got it—so it would be sent round to Mr. Frettlby's bank, and would not be returned till next day, and as he died in the meanwhile I expect it hasn't been honoured, so Mr. Moreland won't have his money yet."

"I wonder what he'll do," said Chinston.

"Go to the manager and kick up a row," said Kilsip, coolly, "and the manager will no doubt tell him he'd better see the executors."

"But, my good friend, the manager doesn't know who the executors are," broke in Calton, impatiently. "You forget the will has yet to be read."

"Then he'll tell him to go to the late Mr. Frettlby's solicitors. I suppose he knows who they are," retorted Kilsip.

"Thinton and Tarbit," said Calton, musingly; "but it's questionable if Moreland would go to them."

"Why shouldn't he, sir?" said Kilsip, quickly. "He does not know anything about this," laying his hand on the confession, "and as the cheque is genuine enough he won't let five thousand pounds go without a struggle."

"I'll tell you what," observed Calton, after a few moments of reflection, "I'll go across the way and telephone to Thinton and Tarbit, and when he calls on them they can send him up to me."

"A very good idea," said Kilsip, rubbing his hands, "and then I can arrest him."

"But the warrant?" interposed Brian, as Calton rose and put on his hat.

"Is here," said the detective, producing it.

"By Jove, you must have been pretty certain of his guilt," remarked Chinston, dryly.

"Of course I was," retorted Kilsip, in a satisfied tone of voice. "When I told the magistrate where I found the coat, and reminded him of Moreland's acknowledgment at the trial, that he had it in his possession before the murder, I soon got him to see the necessity of having Moreland arrested."

"Half-past four," said Calton, pausing for a moment at the door and looking at his watch. "I'm afraid it's rather late to catch Moreland to-day; however, I'll see what Thinton and Tarbit know," and he went out. The rest sat waiting his return, and chatted about the curious end of the hansom cab mystery, when, in about ten minutes, Calton rushed in hurriedly and closed the door after him quickly.

"Fate is playing into our hands," he said, as soon as he recovered his breath. "Moreland called on Thinton and Tarbit, as Kilsip surmised, and as neither of them was in, he said he would call again before five o'clock. I told the clerk to bring him up to me at once, so he may be here at any moment."

"That is, if he's fool enough to come," observed Chinston.

"Oh, he'll come," said the detective, confidently, rattling a pair of handcuffs together. "He is so satisfied that he has made things safe that he'll walk right into the trap."

It was getting a little dusk, and the four men were greatly excited, though they concealed it under an assumed nonchalance.

"What a situation for a drama," said Brian.

"Only," said Chinston, quietly, "it is as realistic as in the old days of the Coliseum, where the actor who played Orpheus was torn to pieces by bears at the end of the play."

"His last appearance on any stage, I suppose," said Calton, a little cruelly, it must be confessed.

Meanwhile, Kilsip remained seated in his chair, humming an operatic air and chinking the handcuffs together, by way of accompaniment. He felt intensely pleased with himself, the more so, as he saw that by this capture he would be ranked far above Gorby. "And what would Gorby say?—Gorby, who had laughed at all his ideas as foolish, and who had been quite wrong from the first. If only—"

"Hush!" said Calton, holding up his finger, as steps were heard echoing on the flags outside. "Here he is, I believe."

Kilsip arose from his chair, and, stealing softly to the window, looked cautiously out. Then he turned round to those inside and, nodding his head, slipped the handcuffs into his pocket. Just as he did so, there was a knock at the door, and, in response to Calton's invitation to enter, Thinton and Tarbit's clerk came in with Roger Moreland. The latter faltered a little on the threshold, when he saw Calton was not alone, and seemed half inclined to retreat. But, evidently, thinking there was no danger of his secret being discovered, he pulled himself together, and advanced into the room in an easy and confident manner.

"This is the gentleman who wants to know about the cheque, sir," said Thinton and Tarbit's clerk to Calton.

"Oh, indeed," answered Calton, quietly. "I am glad to see him; you can go."

The clerk bowed and went out, closing the door after him. Moreland took his seat directly in front of Calton, and with his back to the door. Kilsip, seeing this, strolled across the room in a nonchalant manner, while Calton engaged Moreland in conversation, and quietly turned the key.

"You want to see me, sir?" said Calton, resuming his seat.

"Yes; that is alone," replied Moreland, uneasily.

"Oh, these gentlemen are my friends," said Calton, quietly; "anything you may say is quite safe."

"That they are your friends, and are quite safe, is nothing to me," said Moreland, insolently, "I wish to speak to you in private."

"Don't you think you would like to know my friends?" said Calton, coolly taking no notice of his remark.

"D—your friends, sir!" cried Moreland, furiously, rising from his seat.

Calton laughed, and introduced Mr. Moreland to the others.

"Dr. Chinston, Mr. Kilsip, and—Mr. Fitzgerald."

"Fitzgerald," gasped Moreland, growing pale. "I—I—what's that?" he shrieked, as he saw Whyte's coat, all weather-stained, lying on a chair near him, and which he immediately recognised.

"That is the rope that's going to hang you," said Kilsip, quietly, coming behind him, "for the murder of Oliver Whyte."

"Trapped by G—!" shouted the wretched man, wheeling round, so as to face Kilsip. He sprang at the detective's throat, and they both rolled together on the floor, but the latter was too strong for him, and, after a sharp struggle, he succeeded in getting the handcuffs on Moreland's wrists. The others stood around perfectly quiet, knowing that Kilsip required no assistance. Now that there was no possibility of escape, Moreland seemed to become resigned, and rose sullenly off the floor.

"I'll make you pay for this," he hissed between his teeth, with a white despairing face. "You can't prove anything."

"Can't we?" said Calton, touching the confession. "You are wrong. This is the confession of Mark Frettlby made before he died."

"It's a lie."

"A jury will decide that," said the barrister, dryly. "Meanwhile you will pass the night in the Melbourne Gaol."

"Ah! perhaps they'll give me the same cell as you occupied," said Moreland, with a hard laugh, turning to Fitzgerald. "I should like it for its old associations."

Brian did not answer him, but picking up his hat and gloves, prepared to go.

"Stop!" cried Moreland, fiercely. "I see that it's all up with me, so I'm not going to lie like a coward. I've played for a big stake and lost, but if I hadn't been such a fool I'd have cashed that cheque the next morning, and been far away by this time."

"It certainly would have been wiser," said Calton.

"After all," said Moreland, nonchalantly, taking no notice of his remark, "I don't know that I'm sorry about it. I've had a hell upon earth since I killed Whyte."

"Then you acknowledge your guilt?" said Brian, quietly.

Moreland shrugged his shoulders.

"I told you I wasn't a coward," he answered, coolly. "Yes, I did it; it was Whyte's own fault. When I met him that night he told me how Frettlby wouldn't let him marry his daughter, but said he'd make him,

and showed me the marriage certificate. I thought if I could only get it I'd make a nice little pile out of Frettlby over it; so when Whyte went on drinking I did not. After he had gone out of the hotel, I put on his coat, which he left behind. I saw him standing near the lamp-post, and Fitzgerald come up and then leave him. When you came down the street," he went on, turning to Fitzgerald, "I shrank back into the shadow, and when you passed I ran up to Whyte as the cabman was putting him into the hansom. He took me for you, so I didn't undeceive him, but I swear I had no idea of murdering Whyte when I got into the cab. I tried to get the papers, but he wouldn't let me, and commenced to sing out. Then I thought of the chloroform in the pocket of his coat, which I was wearing. I pulled it out, and found that the cork was loose. Then I took out Whyte's handkerchief, which was also in the coat, and emptied the bottle on it, and put it back in my pocket. I again tried to get the papers, without using the chloroform, but couldn't, so I clapped the handkerchief over his mouth, and he went off after a few minutes, and I got the papers. I thought he was only insensible, and it was only when I saw the newspapers that I knew he was dead. I stopped the cab in St. Kilda Road, got out and caught another cab, which was going to town. Then I got out at Powlett Street, took off the coat, and carried it over my arm. I went down George Street, towards the Fitzroy Gardens, and having hid the coat up a tree, where I suppose you found it," to Kilsip, "I walked home—so I've done you all nicely, but—"

"You're caught at last," finished Kilsip, quietly.

Moreland fell down in a chair, with an air of utter weariness. and lassitude.

"No man can be stronger than Destiny," he said, dreamily. "I have lost and you have won; so life is a chess board, after all, and we are the puppets of Fate."

He refused to utter another word; so leaving Calton and Kilsip with him, Brian and the doctor went out and hailed a cab. It drove up to the entrance of the court, where Calton's office was, and then Moreland, walking as if in a dream, left the room, and got into the cab, followed by Kilsip.

"Do you know," said Chinston, thoughtfully, as they stood and watched the cab drive off, "do you know what the end of that man will be?"

"It requires no prophet to foretell that," said Calton, dryly. "He will be hanged."

"No, he won't," retorted the doctor. "He will commit suicide."

35

“The Love that Lives”

There are certain periods in the life of man when Fate seems to have done her worst, and any further misfortunes which may befall are accepted with a philosophical resignation, begotten by the very severity of previous trials. Fitzgerald was in this state of mind—he was calm, but it was the calmness of despair—the misfortunes of the past year seemed to have come to a climax, and he looked forward to the publication of the whole bitter story with an indifference that surprised himself. His own name, and that of Madge and her dead father, would be on every tongue, yet he felt perfectly callous to whatever might be said on the subject. So long as Madge recovered, and they could go away to another part of the world, leaving Australia, with its bitter memories behind—he did not care. Moreland would suffer the bitter penalty of his crime, and then nothing more would ever be heard of the matter. It would be better for the whole story to be told, and transitory pain endured, than to go on striving to hide the infamy and shame which might be discovered at any moment. Already the news was all over Melbourne that the murderer of Oliver Whyte had been captured, and that his confession would bring to light certain startling facts concerning the late Mark Frettlby. Brian well knew that the world winked at secret vices so long as there was an attempt at concealment, though it was cruelly severe on those which were brought to light, and that many whose lives might be secretly far more culpable than poor Mark Frettlby's, would be the first to slander the dead man. The public curiosity, however, was destined never to be gratified, for the next day it was known that Roger Moreland had hanged himself in his cell during the night, and had left no confession behind him.

When Brian heard this, he breathed a heartfelt prayer of thanks for his deliverance, and went to see Calton, whom he found at his chambers, in deep conversation with Chinston and Kilsip. They all came to the conclusion that as Moreland was now dead, nothing could be gained by publishing the confession of Mark Frettlby, so agreed to burn it, and when Fitzgerald saw in the heap of blackened paper in the fireplace all that remained of the bitter story, he felt a weight lifted off his heart. The barrister, Chinston, and Kilsip, all promised to keep silent, and they kept the promise nobly, for nothing was ever known of the circumstances which led to the death of Oliver Whyte, and it was generally supposed that it must have been caused by some quarrel between the dead man and his friend Roger Moreland.

Fitzgerald, however, did not forget the good service that Kilsip had done him, and gave him a sum of money which made him independent for life, though he still followed his old profession of a detective from sheer love of excitement, and was always looked upon with admiration as the man who had solved the mystery of the famous hansom cab murder. Brian, after several consultations with Calton, at last came to the conclusion that it would be useless to reveal to Sal Rawlins the fact that she was Mark Frettlby's daughter, as by the will the money was clearly left to Madge, and such a revelation could bring her no pecuniary benefit, while her bringing up unfitted her for the position; so a yearly income, more than sufficient for her wants, was settled upon her, and she was allowed to remain in ignorance of her parentage. The influence of Sal Rawlins' old life, however, was very strong on her, and she devoted herself to the task of saving her fallen sisters. Knowing as she did, all the intricacies of the slums, she was enabled to do an immense amount of good, and many an unhappy woman was saved from the squalor and hardship of a gutter life by the kind hand of Sal Rawlins.

Felix Rolleston became a member of Parliament, where his speeches, if not very deep, were at least amusing; and while in the House he always behaved like a gentleman, which could not be said of all his Parliamentary colleagues.

Madge slowly recovered from her illness, and as she had been explicitly named in the will as heiress to Mark Frettlby's great wealth, she placed the management of her estates in the hands of Mr. Calton, who, with Thinton and Tarbit, acted as her agents in Australia. On her recovery she learned the story of her father's early marriage, but both Calton and Fitzgerald were silent about the fact of Sal Rawlins being her half-sister, as such a relation could do no good, and would only create a scandal, as no explanation could be given except the true one. Shortly

afterwards Madge married Fitzgerald, and both of them only too gladly left Australia, with all its sorrows and bitter memories.

Standing with her husband on the deck of one of the P. and O. steamers, as it ploughed the blue waters of Hobson's Bay into foam, they both watched Melbourne gradually fade from their view, under the glow of the sunset. They could see the two great domes of the Exhibition, and the Law Courts, and also Government House, with its tall tower rising from the midst of the green trees. In the background was a bright crimson sky, barred with masses of black clouds, and over all the great city hung a cloud of smoke like a pall. The flaring red light of the sinking sun glared angrily on the heavy waters, and the steamer seemed to be making its way through a sea of blood. Madge, clinging to her husband's arm, felt her eyes fill with tears, as she saw the land of her birth receding slowly.

"Good-bye," she murmured, softly. "Good-bye for ever."

"You do not regret?" he said, bending his head.

"Regret, no," she answered, looking at him with loving eyes. "With you by my side, I fear nothing. Surely our hearts have been tried in the furnace of affliction, and our love has been chastened and purified."

"We are sure of nothing in this world," replied Brian, with a sigh. "But after all the sorrow and grief of the past, let us hope that the future will be peace."

"Peace!"

A white-winged sea-gull rose suddenly from the crimson waters, and circled rapidly in the air above them.

"A happy omen," she said, looking up fondly to the grave face of her husband, "for your life and for mine."

He bent down and kissed her.

The great steamer moved slowly out to sea, and as they stood on the deck, hand clasped in hand, with the fresh salt breeze blowing keenly in their faces, it bore them away into the placid beauty of the coming night, towards the old world and the new life.

THE END

HAGAR OF THE PAWN-SHOP*

*. First Edition: Skeffington & Son, London 1899.

1

The Coming of Hagar

Jacob Dix was a pawnbroker, but not a Jew, notwithstanding his occupation and the Hebraic sound of his baptismal name. He was so old that no one knew his real age; so grotesque in looks that children jeered at him in the streets; so avaricious that throughout the neighbourhood he was called "Skinflint." If he possessed any hidden good qualities to counterbalance his known bad ones, no person had ever discovered them, or even had taken the trouble to look for them. Certainly Jacob, surly and uncommunicative, was not an individual inclined to encourage uninvited curiosity. In his pawn-shop he lived like an ogre in a fairy-tale castle, and no one ever came near him save to transact business, to wrangle during the transaction thereof, and to curse him at its conclusion. Thus it may be guessed that Jacob drove hard bargains.

The pawn-shop – situated in Carby's Crescent, Lambeth – furthermore resembled an ogre's castle inasmuch as, though not filled with dead men's bones, it contained the relics and wreckage, the flotsam and jetsam, of many lives, of many households. Placed in the centre of the dingy crescent, it faced a small open space, and the entrance of the narrow lane which led therefrom to the adjacent thoroughfare. In its windows – begrimed with the dust of years – a heterogeneous mixture of articles was displayed, ranging from silver teapots to well-worn sauce-pans; from gold watches to rusty flatirons; from the chisel of a carpenter to the ivory framed mirror of a fashionable beauty. The contents of Dix's window typified in little the luxury, the meanness, the triviality and the decadence of latter-day civilization.

There was some irony, too, in the disposition of incongruous articles; for the useful and useless were placed significantly in proximity, and the trifles of frivolity were mingled with the necessities of life. Here

a Dresden china figure, bright-hued and dainty, simpered everlastingly at a copper warming-pan; there a silver-handled dagger of the Renaissance lay with a score of those cheap dinner-knives whose bluntness one execrates in third-rate restaurants. The bandaged hand of a Pharaohonic mummy touched an agate saucer holding defaced coins of all ages, of all nations. Watches, in alternate rows of gold and silver, dangled over fantastic temples and ships of ivory carved by laborious Chinese artificers. On a square of rich brocade, woven of silks, multi-coloured as a parrot's plumage, were piled in careless profusion medals, charms, old-fashioned rings set with dim gems, and the frail glass bangles of Indian nautch-girls. A small cabinet of Japanese lacquer, black, with grotesque gilded figures thereon; talismans of coral from Southern Italy, designed to avert the evil eye; jewelled pipes of Turkey, set roughly with blue turquoise stones; Georgian caps with embroideries of tarnished gold; amulets, earrings, bracelets, snuff-boxes and mosaic brooches from Florence – all these frivolities were thrown the one on top of the other, and all were overlaid with fine gray dust. Wreckage of many centuries; dry bones of a hundred social systems, dead or dying! What a commentary on the durability of empire – on the inherent pride of pigmy man!

Within doors the shop was small and dark. A narrow counter, running lengthways, divided the whole into two parts. On the side nearest the entrance three wooden screens by their disposition formed four sentry-boxes, into which customers stepped when bent on business. Jacob, wizen, cunning, and racked by an eternal cough, hovered up and down the space within the counter, wrangling incessantly with his customers, and cheating them on every occasion. He never gave the value of a pawned article: he fought over every farthing; and even when he obtained the goods at his own price he grudged payment; for every coin he put down was a drop of blood wrung from his withered heart. He rarely went outside the shop; he never mingled with his fellow-creatures; and, the day's chicanery ended, he retired invariably into a gloomy back parlour, the principal adornment of which was a gigantic safe built into the wall. Here he counted his gains, and saw doubtful customers not receivable in the shop, who came by stealth to dispose of stolen goods. Here, also, in his lighter moments, he conversed with the only friend he possessed in Carby's Crescent – or, indeed, in London. Jacob was in no danger of becoming a popular idol.

This particular friend was a solicitor named Vark, who carried on a shady business, in a shady manner, for shady clients. His name – as he declared himself – proved him to be of Polish descent; but it was com-

monly reported in the neighbourhood that Vark was made to rhyme with shark, as emblematic of the estimation in which he was held. He was hated only one degree less than Jacob, and the two, – connected primarily as lawyer and client, – later on, had struck up a mistrustful friendship by reason of their mutual reputation and isolation. Neither one believed in the other; each tried to swindle on his own account, and never succeeded; yet the two met nightly and talked over their diverse rascalities in the dingy parlour, with a confidence begotten by an intimate knowledge of each other's character. The reputations of both were so bad that the one did not dare to betray the other. Only on this basis is honour possible among thieves.

Late one foggy November night Jacob was seated with his crony over a pinched little fire which burnt feebly in a rusty iron grate. The old pawnbroker was boiling some gruel, and Vark, with his own private bottle of gin beside him, was drinking a wineglass of it, mixed sparingly with water. Mr. Dix supplied this latter beverage, as it cost nothing, but Vark – on an understanding which dated from the commencement of their acquaintance – always brought his own liquor. A guttering candle in a silver candlestick – a pawned article – was placed on the deal table, and gave forth a miserable light. The fog from without had percolated into the room, so that the pair sat in a kind of misty atmosphere, hardly illuminated by the farthing dip. Such discomfort, such squalor, was only possible in a penurious establishment like that of Jacob.

Vark was a little, lean, wriggling creature, more like a worm than a man made in the image of his Creator. He had a sharp nose, a pimply face, and two shifty, fishy eyes, green in hue like those of a cat. His dress was of rusty black, with a small – very small – display of linen; and he rubbed his hands together with a cringing bow every time Jacob croaked out a remark between his coughs. Mr. Dix coughed in a rich but faded dressing-gown, the relic of some dandy of the Regency; and every paroxysm threatened to shake his frail form to pieces. But the ancient was wonderfully tough, and clung to life with a kind of desperate courage – though Heaven only knows what attraction the old villain found in his squalid existence. This tenacity was not approved of by Vark, who had made Jacob's will, and now wished his client to die, so that he, as executor, might have the fingering of the wealth which Dix was reported to possess. The heir to these moneys was missing, and Vark was determined that he should never be found. Meanwhile, with many schemes in his head, he cringed to Jacob, and watched him cough over his gruel.

"Oh, dear, dear!" sighed Mr. Vark, speaking of his client in the third person, as he invariably did, "how bad Mr. Dix's cough is to-night! Why doesn't he try a taste of gin to moisten his throat?"

"Can't afford it!" croaked Jacob, pouring the gruel into a bowl. "Gin's worth money, and money I ain't got. Make me a little present of a glass, Mr. Vark, just to show that you're glad of my company."

Vark complied very unwillingly with this request, and poured as little as he well could into the proffered bowl. "What an engaging man he is!" said the lawyer, smirking – "so convivial, so full of spirits!"

"Your spirits!" retorted Jacob, drinking his gruel.

"What wit!" cried Vark, slapping his thin knees. "It's better than punch!"

"Gin-punch! gruel-punch!" said Dix, encouraged by this praise.

"He, he! I shall die with laughing! I've paid for worse than that at the theatre!"

"More fool you!" growled Jacob, taking up the tongs. "You shouldn't pay for anything. Here, get out! I'm going to put out the fire. I ain't going to burn this expensive coal to warm you. And the candle's half-burnt too!" concluded Jacob, resentfully.

"I'm going – I'm going," said Vark, slipping his bottle into his pocket.

"But to leave this pleasant company – what a wrench!"

"Here, stop that stuff, you inkpot! Has my son answered that advertisement yet?"

"Mr. Dix's son hasn't sent a line to his sorrowing parent," returned the lawyer. "Oh, what a hard-hearted offspring!"

"You're right there, man," muttered Jacob, gloomily. "Jimmy's left me to die all alone, curse him!"

"Then why leave him your money?" said Vark, changing into the first person, as he always did when business was being discussed.

"Why, you fool? – 'cause he's Hagar's son – the bad son of a good mother."

"Hagar Stanley – your wife – your gipsy wife! Hey, Mr. Dix?"

Jacob nodded. "A pure-blooded Romany. I met her when I was a Crocus."

"Crocus for Cheap Jack!" whined Vark; "the wit this man has!"

"She came along o' me to London when I set up here," continued Jacob, without heeding the interruption, "and town killed her; she couldn't breathe in bricks and mortar after the free air of the road. Dead – poor soul! – dead; and she left me Jimmy – Jimmy, who's left me."

"What a play of fancy – –" began Vark; when, seeing from the fierce look of Jacob that compliments on the score of the dead wife were not likely to be well received, he changed his tone. "He'll spend your money, Mr. Dix."

"Let him! Hagar's dead, and when I die – let him."

"But, my generous friend, if you gave me more power as executor – –"

"You'd take my money to yourself," interrupted Dix with irony. "Not if I know it, you shark! Your duty is to administer the estate by law for Jimmy. I pay you!"

"But so little!" whined Vark, rising; "if you – –"

At this moment there came a sharp knock at the door of the shop, and the two villains, always expectant of the police, stared at one another, motionless with terror for the moment. Vark, who always took care of his skin, snatched up his hat and made for the back-door, whence, in the fog, he could gain his own house unquestioned and unseen. Like a ghost he vanished, leaving Jacob motionless until aroused by a repetition of the knock.

"Can't be peelers," he muttered, taking a pistol out of a cupboard, "but it might be thieves. Well, if it is – –" He smiled grimly, and without finishing his sentence he shuffled along to the door, candle in hand. A third knock came, as the clock in the shop struck eleven.

"Who is there, so late?" demanded Jacob, sharply.

"I am – Hagar Stanley!"

With a cry of terror, Mr. Dix let the candle fall, and in the darkness dropped also. For the moment, – so much had his thoughts been running on the dead wife, – the unexpected mention of her name made him believe that she was standing rigid in her winding-sheet on the other side of the door. One frail partition between the living and the dead! It was terrible!

"The ghost of Hagar!" muttered Dix, white and shaking. "Why has she come out of her grave? – and so expensive it was; bricked; with a marble tombstone."

"Let me in! let me in, Mr. Dix!" cried the visitor, again rapping.

"She never called me by that name," said Jacob, reassured, and scrambling for the candle; then, having lighted it, he added aloud: "I don't know any one called Hagar Stanley."

"Open the door, and you will. I'm your wife's niece."

"Flesh and blood!" said the old man, fumbling at the lock – "I don't mind that."

He flung wide the door, and out of the fog and darkness a young girl of twenty years stepped into the shop. She was dressed in a dark red garment made of some coarse stuff, and over this she wore a short black cloak. Her hands were bare, and also her head, save for a scarlet handkerchief, which was carelessly twisted round her magnificent black hair. The face was of the true Romany type Oriental in its contour and hue, with arched eyebrows over large dark eyes, and a thin-lipped mouth beautifully shaped, under a delicately-curved nose. Face and figure were those of a woman who needed palms and desert sands and golden sunshine, hot and sultry, for an appropriate background; yet this Eastern beauty appeared out of the fog like some dead Syrian princess, and presented herself in all her rich loveliness to the astonished eyes of the old pawnbroker.

"So you are the niece of my dead Hagar?" he said, staring earnestly at her in the thin yellow light of the candle. "Yes, it's true. She looked like you when I met her in the New Forest. What d'ye want?"

"Food and shelter," replied the girl, curtly. "But you'd better shut the door; it might be bad for your reputation if any passer-by saw you speaking to a woman at this time of night."

"My reputation!" chuckled Jacob, closing and bolting the door. "Lord! that's past spoiling. If you knew how bad it is, you wouldn't come here."

"Oh, I can look after myself, Mr. Dix, especially as you're old enough to be my great-grandfather twice over."

"Come, come! Civil words, young woman!"

"I'm civil to those who are civil to me," retorted Hagar, taking the candle out of her host's hands. "Go on, Mr. Dix, show me in; I'm tired, and want to sleep. I'm hungry, and wish food. You must give me bed and board."

"Infernal insolence, young woman! Why?"

"Because I'm kin to your dead Hagar."

"Aye, aye, there's something in that," muttered Dix, and dominated, in spite of his inherent obstinacy, by the imperious spirit of the girl, he led her into the dingy parlour. Here she removed her cloak and sat down, while Jacob, in an unusual spirit of hospitality, induced by the mention of his late wife, produced some coarse victuals.

Without a word he placed the food before his guest; without a word she ate, and was refreshed. Jacob marvelled at the self-possession of the gipsy, and was rather pleased than otherwise with her bold coolness. Only when she had finished the last scrap of bread and cheese did he speak. His first remark was curt and rude – designedly so.

"You can't stay here!" said the amiable old man

The girl retorted in kind: "I can, and I shall, Mr. Dix."

"For what reason, you jade?"

"For several – and all good ones," said Hagar leaning her chin on her hands and looking steadily at his wrinkled face. "I know all about you from a Romany chal who was up here six months ago. Your wife is dead; your son has left you; and here you live alone, disliked and hated by all. You are old and feeble and solitary; but you are by marriage akin to the gentle Romany. For that reason, and because I am of your dead rani's blood, I have come to look after you."

"Jezebel! That is, if I'll let you!"

"Oh, you'll let me fast enough," replied the woman, carelessly. "You are a miser, I have heard; so you won't lose the chance of getting a servant for nothing."

"A servant! You?" said Dix, admiring her imperial air.

"Even so, Mr. Dix. I'll look after you and your house. I'll scrub and cook and mend. If you'll teach me your trade, I'll drive a bargain with any one – and as hard and fast a one as you could drive yourself. And all these things I'll do for nothing."

"There's food and lodging, you hussy."

"Give me dry bread and cold water, your roof to cover me, and a bundle of straw to sleep on. These won't cost you much, and I ask for nothing more – Skinflint."

"How dare you call me that, you wild cat!"

"It's what they call you hereabouts," said Hagar with a shrug. "I think it suits you. Well, Mr. Dix, I have made my offer."

"I haven't accepted it yet," snapped Jacob, puzzled by the girl. "Why do you come to me? Why don't you stay with your tribe?"

"I can explain that in five minutes, Mr. Dix. We Stanleys are just now in the New Forest. You know it?"

"Truly lass," said Dix, sadly. "'Twas there I met my Hagar."

"And it is from there that I, the second Hagar, come," replied the girl. "I was with my tribe and I was happy till Goliath came."

"Goliath?" inquired Jacob, doubtfully.

"He is half a Gorgio and half Romany – a red-haired villain, who chose to fall in love with me. I hated him. I hate him still!" – the woman's bosom rose and fell in short, hurried pantings – "and he would have forced me to be his wife. Pharaoh – our king, you know – would have forced me also to be this man's rani, so I had no one to protect me, and I was miserable. Then I recalled what the chal had told me about you

who wed with one of us; so I fled hither for your protection, and to be your servant."

"But Goliath – this red-haired brute?"

"He does not know where I have gone, he will never find me here. Let me stay, Mr. Dix, and be your servant. I have nowhere to go to, no one to seek, save you, the husband of the dead Hagar, after whom I am named. Am I to stay or go, now that I have told you the truth?"

Jacob looked thoughtfully at the girl, and saw tears glistening in her heavy eyelashes, although her pride kept them from falling. Moved by her helplessness, mindful of the wife whom he had loved so well, and alive to the advantage of possessing a white slave whom he could trust the astute ancient made up his mind.

"Stay," said he, quietly. "I shall see if you will be useful to me – useful and faithful, my girl so, bread and bed shall be yours."

"It's a bargain," said Hagar, with a sigh of relief. "And now, old man, let me rest in peace, am weary, and have walked many a long mile."

So in this fashion came Hagar to the pawnshop; and it was for this reason that Vark, to his great astonishment, found a woman – and what is more, a young and beautiful woman – established in the house of Jacob Dix. The news affected the neighbourhood like a miracle, and new tales were repeated about Dix and his housekeeper, who, report said, was no better than she should be. But Hagar did not mind evil tongues; nor did the old man. Without a spark of love or affection between them, they worked together on a basis of mutual interest; and all the days that Jacob lived Hagar served him faithfully. Whereat Vark wondered.

It was not an easy life for the girl. Jacob was a hard master, and made her pay dearly for bed and board. Hagar scrubbed walls and floors; she mended such pawned dresses as required attention; and cooked the frugal meals of herself and master. The old pawnbroker taught her how to depreciate articles brought to be pawned, how to haggle with their owners, and how to wring the last sixpence out of miserable wretches who came to redeem their pledges. In a short time Hagar became as clever as Jacob himself, and he was never afraid to trust her with the task of making bargains, or with the care of the shop. She acquired a knowledge of pictures, gems, silverware, china – in fact, all the information about such things necessary to an expert. Without knowing it, the untaught gipsy girl became a connoisseur.

It required all Hagar's patience to bear cheerfully the lot which she had chosen voluntarily. Her bed was hard, her food meagre; and the old man's sharp tongue was perpetually goading her by its bitterness.

Jacob, indeed, – sure of his slave, since she had no other roof save his to cover her, – exercised all the petty arts of a tyrant. He vented on her all the rage he felt against the son who had deserted him. Once he went so far as to attempt a blow; but a single glance from the fierce eyes of Hagar made him change his intention; and, cowed for once in his tyranny, Jacob never lifted his hand again against her. He saw plainly enough that if he once raised the devil in this child of the free gipsy race, there would be no laying it again. But, actual violence apart, Hagar's life was as miserable as a human being's well could be.

Stifled in the narrow shop in the crowded neighbourhood, she longed at times for the free life of the road. Her thoughts recalled the green woods, so cool and shady in summer; they dwelt on the brown heath lonely in the starlight, with the red flare of the gipsy fire casting fantastic shadows on caravan and tent. In the darkness of night she would murmur the strange words of the "calo jib," like some incantation to compel memory. To herself, while arranging the curiosities in the shop window, she would sing fragments of Romany songs set in minor keys. The nostalgia of the wilds, of the encampment and the open road, tortured her in the heats of summer; and when winter descended she longed for the chill breath of country winds sweeping across moors laden with snow, over pools rigid in the cold embrace of smooth and glassy ice. In the pawn-shop she was an exile from her dream paradise of roaming liberty.

To make bad worse, Vark fell in love with her. For the first time in his narrow, selfish life, a divine passion touched the gross soul of the thieves' lawyer. Ravished by the dark loveliness of the girl, dominated by her untamed spirit, astonished by her clear mind and unerring judgement, Vark wished to possess this treasure. There was also another reason for the offer of marriage which he made, and this reason he put into words when he asked Hagar to become his wife. It took Vark twelve months to make up his mind to this course; and his wrath may be guessed when Hagar refused him promptly. The miserable wretch could not believe that she was in earnest.

"Oh, dear, sweet Hagar!" he whined, trying to clasp her hand, "you cannot have heard what your slave said!"

Hagar, who was mending some lace and minding the shop in the absence of Jacob, looked up with a scornful smile. "What you call yourself in jest," said she quietly, "I am in reality; I sold myself into bondage for bare existence a year ago. Do you want to marry a slave, Mr. Vark?"

"Yes, yes! Then you will no longer need to work like a servant."

"I would rather be a servant than your wife, Mr. Vark."

"The girl's mad! Why?"

"Because you are a scoundrel."

Vark grinned amiably, in no wise disturbed by this plain-speaking. "My Cleopatra, we are all scoundrels in these parts. Jacob Dix is --"

"Is my master!" interrupted Hagar, sharply. "So leave him alone. But this offer of yours, my friend. What benefit do you propose to gain if I accept it? You're not asking me to be your wife without some motive."

"Why, that's true enough, my beauty!" chuckled Vark. "Lord, how cunning you are to guess! The motive is double: one part love --"

"We'll say nothing about that, man! You don't know what love is! The other motive?"

"Money!" said Vark, curtly, and without wasting words.

"H'm!" replied Hagar, with irony. "Mr. Dix's money?"

"What penetration!" said the lawyer, slapping his knee. "My word, here's intelligence!"

"We'll pass over the usual compliments, Mr. Vark. Well, how is Mr. Dix's money to benefit you through me?"

"Why," said Vark, blinking his green eyes, "the old man's got a fancy for you, my dear; and all the liking he had for me he's given to you. Before you came, he made a will in favor of his lost son, and appointed me executor. Now that he sees what a sharp one you are, he has made a new will --"

"Leaving all the money to me, I suppose? That's a lie!"

"It is a lie," retorted Vark, "but one I wasn't going to tell you. No; the money is still left to the son; but you are the executor under the new will. Now d'ye see?"

"No," said Hagar, folding up her work, "I don't."

"Well, if I marry you, I'll administer the estate in your name --"

"For the benefit of the lost heir? Well?"

"That's just it," said Vark, laying a lean finger on her knee -- "the lost heir. Don't you understand? We needn't look for him, so we can keep the moneys in our own hands, and have some fine pickings out of the estate."

Hagar rose, and smiled darkly. "A nice little scheme, and worthy of you," said she, contemptuously; "but there are two obstacles. I'm not your wife, and I am an honest girl. Try some of your lady clients, Mr. Vark. I'm not for sale!"

When she walked away Vark scowled. A scoundrel himself, he could not understand this honesty which stood in the way of its own advancement. Biting his fingers, he stared after Hagar, and wondered how he could catch her in his net.

"If that old miser would only leave her his heiress!" he thought; "she'd have no scruples about taking the money then; and if she had the money, I'd force her to be my wife. But Jacob is set on giving all his wealth to that infernal son of his, who so often wished his father to die. Aha!" sighed Vark, rubbing his hands, "I wish I could prove that he tried to kill the old man. Jacob wouldn't leave him a penny then, and Hagar should have the money, and I would have her. What a lovely dream! Why can't it come true?"

It was such a lovely dream, and offered such opportunities for scoundrelly dealings, that Vark set to work at once to translate it into actual facts. He had many of the letters and bills of the absent Jimmy, who had been accustomed to come to him for the money refused by the paternal Dix. Counting on the old man's death, Vark had lent the son money for his profligacy at a heavy percentage, and intended to repay himself out of the estate. Now that Hagar was to handle the money instead of himself, he thought that there might be some difficulty over his usury, owing to the girl's absurd honesty. He therefore determined to give proofs to Jacob that the absent son had designed to rid himself of a troublesome father by secret murder. Once Dix got such an idea into his head, he might leave his wealth to Hagar. The heiress would then be wooed and won by skilful, scheming Mr. Vark. It was a beautiful idea, and quite simple.

Among his many shady clients Vark possessed one who was a clever forger, and who occasionally retired to one of Her Majesty's prisons for too frequently exercising his talents in that direction. At the present moment he was at large. Vark gave him a bundle of Jimmy's letters, and the draft of a memorandum which he wished to be imitated in the handwriting of the absent heir. When this was ready, Vark watched his opportunity and slipped it into a Chinese jar in the back parlour, in which he knew Jimmy had been accustomed to keep tobacco. This receptacle stood on a high shelf, and had not been touched by Jacob since his son's departure. Vark, like the clever scoundrel he was, ascertained this fact by the thick and undisturbed dust which coated jar and shelf. The trap being thus prepared, it only remained to lead Jacob into it; and this Mr. Vark arranged to do in the most skilful manner. He quite counted on success, but one necessary element thereto he overlooked, and that was the aid of Hagar. But as he had designed the whole scheme

primarily for her benefit, he never thought she would refuse to forward its aim. Which blindness showed that he was incapable of appreciating or even understanding the honesty of the girl's character.

According to his custom, he came one evening to converse with Jacob. The room with its solitary candle, the starved fire, and the foggy atmosphere, were the same as on the night when Hagar had arrived, save that now Hagar herself sat sewing by the table. She frowned when Vark came cringing into the room, but beyond greeting him with a slight nod she took no notice of the smiling scoundrel. Vark produced his bottle of gin, and set down near the fire, opposite to Jacob, who on this night looked very old and feeble. The old man was breaking up fast, and was more querulous and crabbed than ever. As usual, he asked Vark if Jimmy had answered the advertisement, and as usual he received a negative reply. Jacob groaned.

"I'll die this winter," said he, with moody face, "and no one will be by to close my eyes."

"What is this I hear Mr. Dix say!" cried Vark, smilingly. "He forgets our beautiful Hagar."

"Hagar is all very well, but she is not Jimmy."

"Perhaps, if our dear friend knew all, he would be pleased that she isn't."

Hagar looked up in surprise at the significant tones of Vark, and Jacob scowled. "What d'ye mean, you shark?" he demanded, a light coming into his faded eyes.

"Why," replied the lawyer, luring on the old pawnbroker, "Jimmy was a scoundrel."

"I know that, man!" snapped Jacob.

"He wanted your money."

"I know that also."

"He wished for your death."

"It's probable he did," retorted Jacob, nodding; "but he was content to let me take my own time to die."

"H'm! I'm not so sure of that!"

Guessing that Vark had some scheme in his head which he was striving to bring to fulfilment, Hagar dropped her sewing, and looked sharply at him. As Vark spoke she saw him glance at the Chinese jar, and mentally wondered what possible connection that could have with the subject of conversation. On this point she was soon enlightened.

"Vark," said Dix, seriously, "are you going to tell me that Jimmy wished to kill me?"

The lawyer held up his hands in horror. "Oh, dear, that I should be so misunderstood!" he said in a piteous tone. "Jimmy was not so bad as that, my venerable friend. But if some one else had put you out of the way, he would not have been sorry."

"Do you mean Hagar?"

"Let him dare to say so!" cried the girl, leaping to her feet with flaming eyes. "I do not know your son, Mr. Dix."

"What!" said Vark, softly; "not red-haired Jimmy!"

Hagar sat down with a pale face. "Red-haired!" she muttered. "Goliath! No, it is impossible!"

Vark looked at Hagar, and she stared back at him again. With the approaching senility of old age, Jacob had ceased to take part in the conversation, and was moodily staring at the miserable fire, a trembling and palsied creature. The idea hinted at by Vark – that Hagar had been employed by Jimmy to destroy him – so stupefied his brain that he was incapable of even expressing an opinion. Seeing this, the lawyer glided away from the dangerous topic, to carry out the second part of his scheme.

"Oh, dear, dear!" he said, hunting in his pockets. "My pipe is empty, and I have no tobacco with me."

"Then go without it, Mr. Vark!" said Hagar, sharply. "There's no tobacco here."

"Oh, yes; I think in that jar," said the lawyer, pointing one lean finger at the high shelf – "Jimmy's jar."

"Leave Jimmy's jar alone!" mumbled Jacob, savagely.

"What! will not Mr. Dix spare one tiny pipe of tobacco for his old friend?" whined Vark, going towards the shelf. "Oh, I think so; I am certain," and with this one of his long arms shot upwards to seize the jar. Jacob rose unsteadily as Vark took down the article, and he scowled fiercely at the daring of his visitor. Indifferent to what was going on, Hagar continued her sewing.

"Leave that jar of Jimmy's alone, I tell you!" snarled Dix, seizing the poker. "I'll break your fox's head if you don't!"

"Violence – and from gentle Mr. Dix!" cried Vark, still gripping the jar. "Oh, no, no, not at all! If he – –"

At this moment Jacob lost patience, and delivered a swinging blow at the lawyer's head.

Ever watchful, Vark threw himself to one side, and the poker crashed down on the jar, which he held in his hands. In a moment it lay in frag-

ments on the floor. A pile of broken china, a loose bit of dried tobacco, and a carelessly folded paper.

"See what your angry passion has done!" said Vark, pointing reproachfully to the débris. "You have broken poor Jimmy's jar!"

Jacob threw the poker inside the fender, and bent to pick up the folded paper, which he opened in a mechanical manner. Always methodical, Hagar went out of the room to fetch a dust-pan and broom. Before she could return with them she was recalled by a cry from Vark; and on rushing back she saw Jacob prone on the floor among the broken china. He had fainted, and the paper was still clutched in his hand.

"Bring water – salts!" cried Vark, his eyes filled with a triumphant light at the success of his plot. "My venerable friend is ill!"

"What have you been doing to him?" demanded Hagar, as she loosened the scarf round the old man's neck.

"I? Nothing! He read that paper which fell out of the jar – Jimmy's jar," added Vark, pointedly – "and went down like a ninepin!"

There was a jug of water on the table, used by Vark for diluting his gin, so Hagar sprinkled the wrinkled face of her master with this fluid, and slapped his hands. Vark looked on rather anxiously. He did not wish the old man to die yet; and Jacob was a long time coming out of his swoon.

"This paper made him faint," said Vark, removing it from Jacob's feeble grasp. "Let us see what it says." He knew the contents quite well, but nevertheless he read it aloud in a distinct voice for the benefit of Hagar. Thus ran the words: "Memo.: To extract the juice of foxglove – a poison difficult to trace – nothing can be proved after death. Small doses daily in old man's tea or gruel. He would die in a few weeks without suspicion. Will trust nobody, but will prepare drug myself."

Hagar looked steadily at Vark. "Who wrote that," she said in a low voice – "the old man's son or – you?"

"I?" cried Vark, with well-simulated indignation, "why should I write it? – or how could I write it? The penmanship is that of James Dix; it was concealed in his tobacco-jar; the jar was broken by accident; you saw it yourself. Do you dare to –"

"Be silent!" interrupted Hagar, raising Jacob's head; "he is reviving."

The old pawnbroker opened his eyes and looked wildly around. Little by little his senses returned to him, and he sat up. Then, with the aid of Hagar, he climbed into his chair, and began to talk and sigh.

"Little Jimmy wants me to die," he moaned, feebly. "Hagar's son wants to kill me. Foxglove poison – I know it! Not a trace does it leave after

death. Hagar's son! Hagar's boy! Parricide! Parricide!" he cried, shaking his two fists in the air.

"He wanted the money, you know," hinted Vark, softly.

"He shall not have the money!" said Jacob with unnatural energy. "I'll make a new will – I'll disinherit him! Parricide! Hagar shall have all!"

"I, Mr. Dix? No, no!"

"I say yes, you jade! Don't cross a dying man. I am dying; this is my death-blow. O Jimmy, Jimmy! Wolf's cub! My will! my will!"

Pushing back Hagar, who strove to keep him in his chair, he snatched up the candle and staggered towards the safe to get his will. While he was looking within, Vark hastily fumbled in his capacious pockets. When Jacob replaced the candle on the table, Hagar saw thereon a sheet of paper covered with writing; also pen and ink. Jacob, clutching the will, beheld these things also, and anticipated the question on Hagar's lips.

"What's all this?"

"Your new will, Mr. Dix," explained Vark, smoothly. "I never did trust your son, and I knew some day that you would find him out. I therefore prepared a will by which you left everything to Hagar. Or," added the lawyer, taking another document from his pocket, "if you chose to make me your heir – –"

"You? You? Never!" shrieked Jacob, shaking his fist. "All shall go to Hagar, the namesake of my dead wife. I'm glad you had the sense to see, that failing Jimmy, I'd leave her my money."

"Mr. Dix," interrupted Hagar, firmly, "I do not want your money; and you have no right to rob your son of – –"

"No right! No right, you jade! The money is mine! mine! It shall be yours. I could have forgiven anything to Jimmy save his wish to poison me."

"I don't believe he did wish it," said Hagar, bluntly.

"But the paper – his own handwriting!" cried Vark.

"Yes, yes; I know Jimmy's handwriting," said Jacob, the veins in his forehead swelling with rage. "He is a devil – a par – par – !" The violence of his temper was such that Hagar stepped forward to soothe him. Even Vark felt alarmed.

"Keep quiet, you old fool!" said he, roughly; "you'll break a blood-vessel! Here, sign this will. I'll witness it; and – –" He stopped, and whistled shrilly. A man appeared. "Here is another witness," said Vark. "Sign!"

"It's a plot! a plot!" cried Hagar. "Don't sign, Mr. Dix. I don't want the money."

"I'll make you take it, hussy!" snarled Jacob, crushing the will up in his hand. "I shall leave it to you – not to Jimmy, the parricide. First I'll destroy this." With the old will he approached the fire, and threw it in. With the swiftness of a swallow Hagar darted past him and snatched the document away from the flames before it was even scorched. Jacob staggered back, mad with rage. Vark ground his teeth at her opposition. The stranger witness looked stolidly on.

"No!" cried Hagar, slipping the will into her pocket. "You shall not disinherit your son for me!"

"Give – give – will!" panted Jacob, and, almost inarticulate with rage, he stretched out his hand. Before he could draw it back he reeled and fell; a torrent of blood poured from his mouth. He was dead.

"You fool!" shrieked Vark, stamping. "You've lost a fortune!"

"I've saved my honesty!" retorted Hagar, aghast at the sudden death. "Jimmy shall have the money."

"Jimmy! Jimmy!" sneered Vark, wrathfully. "Do you know who Jimmy is?"

"Yes – the rightful heir!"

"Quite so, you jade – and the red-haired Goliath who drove you to this pawn-shop!"

"It is a lie!"

"It is the truth! You have robbed yourself to enrich your enemy!"

Hagar looked at the sneering face of Vark; at the dead man lying at her feet; at the frightened countenance of the witness. She felt inclined to faint, but, afraid lest Vark should steal the will which she had in her pocket, she controlled herself with a violent effort. Before Vark could stop her, she rushed out of the room, and into her bedroom. The lawyer heard the key turn in the lock.

"I've lost the game," he said, moodily. "Go and get assistance, you fool!" this to the witness; then, when the man had fled away, he continued: "To give up all that money to the red-haired man whom she hated! The girl's mad!"

But she was only honest; therefore her conduct was unintelligible to Vark. So this was how Hagar Stanley came to take charge of the pawn-shop in Carby's Crescent, Lambeth. Her adventures therein may be read hereafter.

2

The First Customer and the Florentine Dante

It has been explained elsewhere how Hagar Stanley, against her own interests, took charge of the pawn-shop and property of Jacob Dix during the absence of the rightful heir. She had full control of everything by the terms of the will. Jacob had made many good bargains in his life, but none better than that which had brought him Hagar for a slave – Hagar, with her strict sense of duty, her upright nature, and her determination to act honestly, even when her own interests were at stake. Such a character was almost unknown amongst the denizens of Carby's Crescent.

Vark, the lawyer, thought her a fool. Firstly, because she refused to make a nest-egg for herself out of the estate; secondly, because she had surrendered a fine fortune to benefit a man she hated; thirdly, because she declined to become Mrs. Vark. Otherwise she was sharp enough – too sharp, the lawyer thought; for with her keen business instinct, and her faculty for organizing and administering and understanding, he found it impossible to trick her in any way. Out of the Dix estate Vark received his due fees and no more, which position was humiliating to a man of his intelligence.

Hagar, however, minded neither Vark nor any one else. She advertised for the absent heir, she administered the estate, and carried on the business of the pawn-shop; living in the back-parlour meanwhile, after the penurious fashion of her late master. It had been a shock to her to learn that the heir of the old pawnbroker was none other than Goliath, the red-haired suitor who had forced her to leave the gipsy camp. Still, her honesty would not permit her to rob him of his heritage; and she at-

tended to his interests as though they were those of the man she loved best in the world. When Jimmy Dix, alias Goliath, appeared to claim the property, Hagar intended to deliver up all to him, and to leave the shop as poor as when she entered it. In the mean time, as the months went by and brought not the claimant, Hagar minded the shop, transacted business, and drove bargains. Also, she became the heroine of several adventures, such as the following:

During a June twilight she was summoned to the shop by a sharp rapping, and on entering she found a young man waiting to pawn a book which he held in his hand. He was tall, slim fair-haired and blue-eyed, with a clever and intellectual face, lighted by rasher dreamy eyes. Quick at reading physiognomies, Hagar liked his appearance at the first glance, and, moreover, admired his good looks.

"I – I wish to get some money on this book," said the stranger in a hesitating manner, a flush invading his fair complexion; "could you – that is, will you – –" He paused in confusion, and held out the book, which Hagar took in silence.

It was an old and costly book, over which a bibliomaniac would have gloated.

The date was that of the fourteenth century the printer a famous Florentine publisher of that epoch; and the author was none other than one Dante Alighieri, a poet not unknown to fame. In short, the volume was a second edition of "*La Divina Commedia*," extremely rare, and worth much money. Hagar, who had learnt many things under the able tuition of Jacob, at once recognized the value of the book; but with keen business instinct – notwithstanding her prepossession concerning the young man – she began promptly to disparage it.

"I don't care for old books," she said, offering it back to him. "Why not take it to a secondhand bookseller?"

"Because I don't want to part with it. At the present moment I need money, as you can see from my appearance. Let me have five pounds on the book until I can redeem it."

Hagar, who already had noted the haggard looks of this customer, and the threadbare quality of his apparel, laid down the Dante with a bang. "I can't give five pounds," she said bluntly. "The book isn't worth it!"

"Shows how much you know of such things, my girl! It is a rare edition of a celebrated Italian poet, and it is worth over a hundred pounds."

"Really?" said Hagar, dryly. "In that case, why not sell?"

"Because I don't want to. Give me five pounds."

"No; four is all that I can advance."

"Four ten," pleaded the customer.

"Four," retorted the inexorable Hagar. "Or else – –"

She pushed the book towards him with one finger. Seeing that he could get nothing more out of her, the young man sighed and relented. "Give me the four pounds," he said, gloomily. "I might have guessed that a Jewess would grind me down to the lowest."

"I am not a Jew, but a gipsy," replied Hagar, making out the ticket.

"A gipsy!" said the other, peering into her face. "And what is a Romany lass doing in this Levitical tabernacle?"

"That's my business!" retorted Hagar, curtly. "Name and address?"

"Eustace Lorn, 4: Castle Road," said the young man, giving an address near at hand. "But I say – if you are true Romany, you can talk the calo jib."

"I talk it with my kind, young man; not with the Gentiles."

"But I am a Romany Rye."

"I'm not a fool, young man! Romany Ryes don't live in cities for choice."

"Nor do gipsy girls dwell in pawn-shops, my lass!"

"Four pounds," said Hagar, taking no notice of this remark; "there it is, in gold; your ticket also – number eight hundred and twenty. You can redeem the book whenever you like, on paying six per cent. interest. Good night."

"But I say' " cried Lorn, as he slipped money and ticket into his pocket,

"I want to speak to you, and – –"

"Good night, sir," said Hagar, sharply, and vanished into the darkness of the shop. Lorn was annoyed by her curt manner and his sudden dismissal; but as there was no help for it, he walked out into the street.

"What a handsome girl!" was his first thought; and "What a spitfire!" was his second.

After his departure, Hagar put away the Dante, and, as it was late, shut up the shop. Then she retired to the back-parlour to eat her supper – dry bread-and-cheese with cold water – and to think over the young man. As a rule, Hagar was far too self-possessed to be impressionable; but there was something about Eustace Lorn – she had the name pat – which attracted her not a little. From the short interview she had not learnt much of his personality. He was poor, proud, rather absent-minded; and – from the fact of his yielding to her on the question of price – rather weak in character. Yet she liked his face, the kindly expression of his eyes, and the sweetness of his mouth. But after all he was only a chance customer; and – unless he returned to redeem the Dante

– she might not see him again. On this thought occurring to her, Hagar called common-sense to her aid, and strove to banish the young man's image from her mind. The task was more difficult than she thought.

A week later, Lorn and his pawning of the book were recalled to her mind by a stranger who entered the shop shortly after midday. This man was short, stout, elderly and vulgar. He was much excited, and spoke badly, as Hagar noted when he laid a pawn-ticket number eight hundred and twenty on the counter.

"Ere, girl," said he in rough tones, "gimme the book this ticket's for."

"You come from Mr. Lorn?" asked Hagar, remembering the Dante.

"Yes; he wants that book. There's the brass. Sharp, now, young woman!"

Hagar made no move to get the volume, or even to take the money. Instead of doing either, she asked a question. "Is Mr. Lorn ill, that he could not come himself?" she demanded, looking keenly at the man's coarse face.

"No; but I've bought the pawn-ticket off him. 'Ere, gimme the book!"

"I cannot at present," replied Hagar, who did not trust the looks of this man, and who wished, moreover, to see Eustace again.

"Dash yer imperance! Why not?"

"Because you did not pawn the Dante; and as it is a valuable book, I might get into trouble if I gave it into other hands than Mr. Lorn's."

"Well, I'm blest! There's the ticket!"

"So I see; but how do I know the way you became possessed of it?"

"Lorn gave it me," said the man, sulkily, "and I want the Dante!"

"I'm sorry for that," retorted Hagar, certain that all was not right, "for no one but Mr. Lorn shall get it. If he isn't ill, let him come and receive it from me."

The man swore and completely lost his temper – a fact which did not disturb Hagar in the least. "You may as well clear out," she said, coldly. "I have said that you shan't have the book, so that closes the question."

"I'll call in the police!"

"Do so; there's a station five minutes' walk from here."

Confounded by her coolness, the man snatched up the pawn-ticket, and stamped out of the shop in a rage. Hagar took down the Dante, looked at it carefully, and considered the position. Clearly there was something wrong, and Eustace was in trouble, else why should he send a stranger to redeem the book upon which he set such store? In an ordinary case, Hagar might have received the ticket and money without

a qualm, so long as she was acting rightly in a legal sense; but Eustace Lorn interested her strangely – why, she could not guess – and she was anxious to guard his interests. Moreover, the emissary possessed an untrustworthy face, and looked a man capable, if not of crime, at least of treachery. How he had obtained the ticket could only be explained by its owner; so, after some cogitation, Hagar sent a message to Lorn. The gist of this was, that he should come to the pawn-shop after closing time.

All the evening Hagar anxiously waited for her visitor, and – such is the inconsequence of maids – she was angered with herself for this very anxiety. She tried to think that it was sheer curiosity to know the truth of the matter that made her impatient for the arrival of Lorn; but deep in her heart there lurked a perception of the actual state of things. It was not curiosity so much as a wish to see the young man's face again, to hear him speak, and feel that he was beside her. Though without a chaperon, though not brought up under parental government, Hagar had her own social code, and that a strict one. In this instance, she thought that her mental attitude was unmaidenly and unworthy of an unmarried girl. Hence, when Eustace made his appearance at nine o'clock, she was brusque to the verge of rudeness.

"Who was that man you sent for your book?" she demanded, abruptly, when Lorn was seated in the back-parlour.

"Jabez Treadle. I could not come myself, so I sent him with the ticket. Why did you not give him the Dante?"

"Because I did not like his face, and I thought he might have stolen the ticket from you. Besides, I" – here Hagar hesitated, for she was not anxious to admit that her real reason had been a desire to see him again – "besides, I don't think he is your friend," she finished, lamely.

"Very probably he is not," replied Lorn, shrugging his shoulders. "I have no friends."

"That is a pity," said Hagar, casting a searching glance at his irresolute face. "I think you need friends – or, at all events, one staunch one."

"May that staunch one be of your own sex," said Lorn, rather surprised at the interest this strange girl displayed in his welfare – "yourself, for instance?"

"If that could be so, I might give you unpalatable advice, Mr. Lorn."

"Such as – what?"

"Don't trust the man you sent here – Mr. Treadle. See, here is your Dante, young man. Pay me the money, and take it away."

"I can't pay you the money, as I have none. I am as poor as Job, but hardly so patient."

"But you offered the money through that Treadle creature."

"Indeed no!" explained Eustace, frankly. "I gave him the ticket, and he wished to redeem the book with his own money."

"Did he really?" said Hagar, thoughtfully. "He does not look like a student – as you do. Why did he want this book?"

"To find out a secret."

"A secret, young man – contained in the Dante?"

"Yes. There is a secret in the book which means money."

"To you or Mr. Treadle?" demanded Hagar.

Eustace shrugged his shoulders. "To either one of us who finds out the secret," he said, carelessly. "But indeed I don't think it will ever be discovered – at all events by me. Treadle may be more fortunate."

"If crafty ways can bring fortune, your man will succeed," said Hagar, calmly. "He is a dangerous friend for you, that Treadle. There is evidently some story about this Dante of yours which he knows, and which he desires to turn to his own advantage. If the story means money, tell it to me, and I may be able to help you to the wealth. I am only a young girl, it is true, Mr. Lorn; still, I am old in experience, and I may succeed where you fail."

"I doubt it," replied Lorn, gloomily; "still, it is kind of you to take this interest in a stranger. I am much obliged to you, Miss – –?"

"Call me Hagar," she interrupted, hastily. "I am not used to fine titles."

"Well, then, Hagar," said he, with a kindly glance, "I'll tell you the story of my Uncle Ben and his strange will."

Hagar smiled to herself. It seemed to be her fate to have dealings with wills – first that of Jacob; now this of Lorn's uncle. However, she knew when to hold her tongue, and saying nothing, she waited for Eustace to explain. This he did at once.

"My uncle, Benjamin Gurth, died six months ago at the age of fifty-eight," said he, slowly. "In his early days he had lived a roving life, and ten years ago he came home with a fortune from the West Indies."

"How much fortune?" demanded Hagar, always interested in financial matters.

"That is the odd part about it," continued Eustace; "nobody ever knew the amount of his wealth, for he was a grumpy old curmudgeon, who confided in no one. He bought a little house and garden at Woking, and there lived for the ten years he was in England. His great luxury was

books, and as he knew many languages – Italian among others – he collected quite a polyglot library.”

“Where is it now?”

“It was sold after his death along with the house and land. A man in the city claimed the money and obtained it.”

“A creditor. What about the fortune?”

“I’m telling you, Hagar, if you’ll only listen,” said Eustace, impatiently.

“Well, Uncle Ben, as I have said, was a miser. He hoarded up all his moneys and kept them in the house, trusting neither to banks nor investments. My mother was his sister, and very poor; but he never gave her a penny, and to me nothing but the Dante, which he presented in an unusual fit of generosity.”

“But from what you said before,” remarked Hagar, shrewdly, “it seemed to me that he had some motive in giving you the Dante.”

“No doubt,” assented Eustace, admiring her sharpness. “The secret of where his money is hidden is contained in that Dante.”

“Then you may be sure, Mr. Lorn, that he intended to make you his heir. But what has your friend Treadle to do with the matter?”

“Oh, Treadle is a grocer in Woking,” responded Lorn. “He is greedy for money, and knowing that Uncle Ben was rich, he tried to get the cash left to him. He wheedled and flattered the old man; he made him presents, and always tried to set him against me as his only relative.”

“Didn’t I say the man was your enemy? Well, go on.”

“There is little more to tell, Hagar. Uncle Ben hid his money away, and left a will which gave it all to the person who should find out where it was concealed. The testament said the secret was contained in the Dante. You may be sure that Treadle visited me at once and asked to see the book. I showed it to him, but neither of us could find any sign in its pages likely to lead us to discover the hidden treasure. The other day Treadle came to see the Dante again. I told him that I had pawned it, so he volunteered to redeem it if I gave him the ticket. I did so, and he called on you. The result you know.”

“Yes; I refused to give it to him,” said Hagar, “and I see now that I was quite right to do so, as the man is your enemy. Well, Mr. Lorn, it seems from your story that a fortune is waiting for you, if you can find it.”

“Very true; but I can’t find it. There isn’t a single sign in the Dante by which I can trace the hiding-place.”

“Do you know Italian?”

“Very well. Uncle Ben taught it to me.”

"That's one point gained," said Hagar, placing the Dante on the table and lighting another candle. "The secret may be contained in the poem itself. However, we shall see. Is there any mark in the book – a marginal mark, I mean?"

"Not one. Look for yourself."

The two comely young heads, one so fair, the other so dark, were bent over the book in that dismal and tenebrous atmosphere. Eustace, the weaker character of the twain, yielded in all things to Hagar. She turned over page after page of the old Florentine edition, but not one pencil or pen-mark marred its pure white surface from beginning to end. From "*L'Inferno*" to "*Il Paradiso*" no hint betrayed the secret of the hidden money. At the last page, Eustace, with a sigh, threw himself back in his chair.

"You see, Hagar, there is nothing. What are you frowning at?"

"I am not frowning, but thinking, young man," was her reply. "If the secret is in this book, there must be some trace of it. Now, nothing appears at present, but later on –"

"Well," said Eustace, impatiently, "later on?"

"Invisible ink."

"Invisible ink!" he repeated, vaguely. "I don't quite understand."

"My late master," said Hagar, without emotion, "was accustomed to deal with thieves, rogues, and vagabonds. Naturally, he had many secrets, and sometimes by force of circumstances, he had to trust these secrets to the post. Naturally, also, he did not wish to risk discovery, so when he sent a letter, about stolen goods for instance, he always wrote it in lemon-juice."

"In lemon-juice! And what good was that?"

"It was good for invisible writing. When the letter was written, it looked like a blank page. No one, you understand, could read what was set out, for to the ordinary eye there was no writing at all."

"And to the cultured eye?" asked Eustace, in ironical tones.

"It appeared the same – a blank sheet," retorted Hagar. "But then the cultured mind came in, young man. The person to whom the letter was sent warmed the seeming blank page over the fire, when at once the writing appeared, black and legible."

"The deuce!" Eustace jumped up in his excitement. "And you think –"

"I think that your late uncle may have adopted the same plan," interrupted Hagar, coolly, "but I am not sure. However, we shall soon see."

She turned over a page or two of the Dante. "It is impossible to heat these over the fire," she added, "as the book is valuable, and we must not spoil it; but I know of a plan."

With a confident smile she left the room and returned with a flat iron, which she placed on the fire. While it was heating Eustace looked at this quick-witted woman with admiration. Not only had she brains, but beauty also; and, man-like, he was attracted by this last in no small degree. Shortly he began to think that this strange and unexpected friendship between himself and the pawnbroking gipsy beauty might develop into something stronger and warmer. But here he sighed; both of them were poor, so it would be impossible to –

"We will not begin at the beginning of the book," said Hagar, taking the iron off the fire, and thereby interrupting his thoughts, "but at the end."

"Why?" asked Eustace, who could see no good reason for this decision.

"Well," said Hagar, poisoning the heated iron over the book, "when I search for an article I find it always at the bottom of a heap of things I don't want. As we began with the first page of this book and found nothing, let us start this time from the end, and perhaps we shall learn your uncle's secret the sooner. It is only a whim of mine, but I should like to satisfy it by way of experiment."

Eustace nodded and laughed, while Hagar placed a sheet of brown paper over the last page of the Dante to preserve the book from being scorched. In a minute she lifted the iron and paper, but the page still showed no mark. With a cheerful air the girl shook her head, and repeated the operation on the second page from the end. This time, when she took away the brown paper, Eustace, who had been watching her actions with much interest, bent forward with an ejaculation of surprise. Hagar echoed it with one of delight; for there was a mark and date on the page, half-way down, as thus:

"There, Mr. Lorn!" cried Hagar, joyously – "there is the secret! My fancy for beginning at the end was right. I was right also about the invisible ink."

"You are a wonder!" said Eustace, with sincere admiration; "but I am as much in the dark as ever. I see a marked line, and a date, the twenty-seventh of December, in the year, I presume, one thousand eight hundred and thirty-eight. We can't make any sense out of that simplicity."

"Don't be in a hurry," said Hagar, soothingly; "we have found out so much, we may learn more. First of all, please to translate those three lines."

"Roughly," said Eustace, reading them, "they run thus: 'O abundant grace, with whom I tried to look through the eternal light so much that I lost my sight.'" He shrugged his shoulders. "I don't see how that transcendentalism can help us."

"What about the date?"

"One thousand eight hundred and thirty-eight," said Lorn, thoughtfully; "and this is ninety-six. Take one from the other, it leaves fifty-eight, the age at which, as I told you before, my uncle died. Evidently this is the date of his birth."

"A date of birth – a line of Dante!" muttered Hagar. "I must say that it is difficult to make sense out of it. Yet, in figures and letters, I am sure the place where the money is concealed is told."

"Well," remarked Eustace, giving up the solution of this problem in despair, "if you can make out the riddle it is more than I can."

"Patience, patience!" replied Hagar, with a nod. "Sooner or later we shall find out the meaning. Could you take me to see your uncle's house at Woking?"

"Oh, yes; it is not yet let, so we can easily go over it. But will you trouble about coming all that way with me?"

"Certainly! I am anxious to know the meaning of this line and date. There may be something about your uncle's house likely to give a clue to its reading. I shall keep the Dante, and puzzle over the riddle; you can call for me on Sunday, when the shop is closed, and we shall go to Woking together."

"O Hagar! how can I ever thank – –"

"Thank me when you get the money, and rid yourself of Mr. Treadle!" said Hagar, cutting him short. "Besides, I am only doing this to satisfy my own curiosity."

"You are an angel!"

"And you a fool, who talks nonsense!" said Hagar, sharply. "Here is your hat and cane. Come out this way by the back. I have an ill enough name already, without desiring a fresh scandal. Good night."

"But may I say – –"

"Nothing, nothing!" retorted Hagar, pushing him out of the door. "Good night."

The door snapped to sharply, and Lorn went out into the hot July night with his heart beating and his blood aflame. He had seen this girl only twice, yet, with the inconsiderate rashness of youth, he was already in love with her. The beauty and kindness and brilliant mind of Hagar

attracted him strongly; and she had shown him such favour that he felt certain she loved him in return. But a girl out of a pawn-shop! He had neither birth nor money, yet he drew back from mating himself with such a one. True, his mother was dead, and he was quite alone in the world – alone and poor. Still, if he found his uncle's fortune, he would be rich enough to marry. Hagar, did she aid him to get the money, might expect reward in the shape of marriage. And she was so beautiful, so clever! By the time he reached his poor lodging Eustace had put all scruples out of his head, and had settled to marry the gipsy as soon as the lost treasure came into his possession. In no other way could he thank her for the interest she was taking in him. This may seem a hasty decision; but young blood is soon heated; young hearts are soon filled with love. Youth and beauty drawn together are as flint and tinder to light the torch of Hymen.

Punctual to the appointed hour, Eustace, as smart as he could make himself with the poor means at his command, appeared at the door of the pawn-shop. Hagar was already waiting for him, with the Dante in her hand. She wore a black dress, a black cloak, and a hat of the same sombre hue – such clothes being the mourning she had worn, and was wearing, for Jacob. Averse as she was to using Goliath's money, she thought he would hardly grudge her these garments of woe for his father. Besides, as manageress of the shop, she deserved some salary.

"Why are you taking the Dante?" asked Eustace, when they set out for Waterloo Station.

"It may be useful to read the riddle," said Hagar.

"Have you solved it?"

"I don't know; I am not sure," she said, meditatively. "I tried by counting the lines on that page up and down. You understand – twenty-seven, twelve, thirty-eight; but the lines I lighted on gave me no clue."

"You didn't understand them?"

"Yes I did," replied Hagar, coolly. "I got a second-hand copy of a translation from the old bookseller in Carby's Crescent, and by counting the lines to correspond with those in the Florentine edition I arrived at the sense."

"And none of them point to the solution of the problem?"

"Not one. Then I tried by pages. I counted twenty-seven pages, but could find no clue; I reckoned twelve pages; also thirty-eight; still the same result. Then I took the twelfth, the twenty-seventh, and the thirty-eighth page by numbers, but found nothing. The riddle is hard to read."

"Impossible, I should say," said Eustace, in despair.

"No; I think I have found out the meaning."

"How? how? Tell me quick!"

"Not now. I found a word, but it seems nonsense, as I could not find it in the Italian dictionary which I borrowed."

"What is the word?"

"I'll tell you when I have seen the house."

In vain Eustace tried to move her from this determination. Hagar was stubborn when she took an idea into her strong brain; so she simply declined to explain until she arrived at Woking – at the house of Uncle Ben. Weak himself, Eustace could not understand how she could hold out so long against his persuasions. Finally he decided in his own mind that she did not care about him. In this he was wrong. Hagar liked him – loved him; but she deemed it her duty to teach him patience – a quality he lacked sadly. Hence her closed mouth.

When they arrived at Woking, Eustace led the way towards his late uncle's house, which was some distance out of the town. He addressed Hagar, after a long silence, when they were crossing a piece of waste land and saw the cottage in the distance.

"If you find this money for me," he said, abruptly, "what service am I to do for you in return?"

"I have thought of that," replied Hagar, promptly. "Find Goliath – otherwise James Dix."

"Who is he?" asked Lorn, flushing. "Some one you are fond of?"

"Some one I hate with all my soul!" she flashed out; "but he is the son of my late master, and heir to the pawn-shop. I look after it only because he is absent; and on the day he returns I shall walk out of it, and never set eyes on it, or him again."

"Why don't you advertise?"

"I have done so for months; so has Vark, the lawyer; but Jimmy Dix never replies. He was with my tribe in the New Forest, and it was because I hated him that I left the Romany. Since then he has gone away, and I don't know where he is. Find him if you wish to thank me, and let me get away from the pawn-shop."

"Very good," replied Eustace, quietly. "I shall find him. In the mean time, here is the hermitage of my late uncle."

It was a bare little cottage, small and shabby, set at the end of a square of ground fenced in from the barren moor. Within the quadrangle there were fruit trees – cherry, apple, plum, and pear; also a large fig-tree in the centre of the unshaven lawn facing the house. All was desolate

and neglected; the fruit trees were unpruned, the grass was growing in the paths, and the flowers were straggling here and there, rich masses of ragged colour. Desolate certainly, this deserted hermitage, but not lonely, for as Hagar and her companion turned in at the little gate a figure rose from a stooping position under an apple-tree. It was that of a man with a spade in his hand, who had been digging for some time, as was testified by the heap of freshly-turned earth at his feet.

"Mr. Treadle!" cried Lorn, indignantly. "What are you doing here?"

"Lookin' fur the old un's cash!" retorted Mr. Treadle, with a scowl directed equally at the young man and Hagar. "An' if I gets it I keeps it. Lord! to think as 'ow I pampered that old sinner with figs and such like – to say nothing of French brandy, which he drank by the quart!"

"You have no business here!"

"No more 'ave you!" snapped the irate grocer. "If I ain't, you ain't, fur till the 'ouse is let it's public property. I s'pose you've come 'ere with that Jezebel to look fur the money?"

Hagar, hearing herself called names, stepped promptly up to Mr. Treadle, and boxed his red ears. "Now then," she said, when the grocer fell back in dismay at this onslaught, "perhaps you'll be civil! Mr. Lorn, sit down on this seat, and I'll explain the riddle."

"The Dante!" cried Mr. Treadle, recognizing the book which lay on Hagar's lap – "an' she'll explain the riddle – swindling me out of my rightful cash!"

"The cash belongs to Mr. Lorn, as his uncle's heir!" said Hagar, wrathfully. "Be quiet, sir, or you'll get another box on the ears!"

"Never mind him," said Eustace, impatiently; "tell me the riddle."

"I don't know if I have guessed it correctly," answered Hagar, opening the book; "but I've tried by line and page and number, all of which revealed nothing. Now I try by letters, and you will see if the word they make is a proper Italian one."

She read out the marked line and the date. "*Ficcar lo viso per la luce eterna*, 27th December, '38." Now," said Hagar, slowly, "if you run all the figures together they stand as 271238."

"Yes, yes!" said Eustace, impatiently; "I see. Go on, please."

Hagar continued: "Take the second letter of the word '*Ficcar*.'"

"'F,'"

"Also the seventh letter from the beginning of the line."

Eustace counted. "'L.' I see," he went on, eagerly. "Also the first letter, 'F,' the second again, 'i,' the third and the eighth, 'c' and 'o.'"

“Good!” said Hagar, writing these down. “Now, the whole make up the word ‘*Ilfico*.’ Is that an Italian word?”

“I’m not sure,” said Eustace, thoughtfully. “‘*Ilfico*.’ No.”

“Shows what eddication ’e’s got!” growled Mr. Treadle, who was leaning on his spade.

Eustace raised his eyes to dart a withering glance at the grocer, and in doing so his vision passed on to the tree looming up behind the man. At once the meaning of the word flashed on his brain.

“‘*Il fico*!’” he cried, rising. “Two words instead of one! You have found it, Hagar! It means the fig-tree – the one yonder. I believe the money is buried under it.”

Before he could advance a step Treadle had leaped forward, and was slashing away at the tangled grass round the fig-tree like a madman.

“If ’tis there, ’tis mine!” he shouted. “Don’t you come nigh me, young Lorn, or I’ll brain you with my spade! I fed up that old uncle of yours like a fighting cock, and now I’m going to have his cash to pay me!”

Eustace leaped forward in the like manner as Treadle had done, and would have wrenched the spade out of his grip, but that Hagar laid a detaining hand on his arm.

“Let him dig,” she said, coolly. “The money is yours; I can prove it. He’ll have the work and you the fortune.”

“Hagar! Hagar! how can I thank you!”

The girl stepped back, and a blush rose in her cheeks. “Find Goliath,” she said, “and let me get rid of the pawn-shop.”

At this moment Treadle gave a shout of glee, and with both arms wrenched a goodly-sized tin box out of the hole he had dug.

“Mine! mine!” he cried, plumping this down on the grass. “This will pay for the dinners I gave him, the presents I made him. I’ve bin castin’ my bread on the waters, and here it’s back again.”

He fell to forcing the lid of the box with the edge of the spade, all the time laughing and crying like one demented. Lorn and Hagar drew near, in the expectation of seeing a shower of gold pieces rain on the ground when the lid was opened. As Treadle gave a final wrench it flew wide, and they saw – an empty box.

“Why – what,” stammered Treadle, thunderstruck – “what does it mean?”

Eustace, equally taken aback, bent down and looked in. There was absolutely nothing in the box but a piece of folded paper. Unable to make a remark, he held it out to the amazed Hagar.

“What the d ... l does it mean?” said Treadle again.

“This explains,” said Hagar, running her eye over the writing. “It seems that this wealthy Uncle Ben was a pauper.”

“A pauper!” cried Eustace and Treadle together.

“Listen!” said Hagar, and read out from the page: “When I returned to England I was thought wealthy, so that all my friends and relations fawned on me for the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. But I had just enough money to rent the cottage for a term of years, and to purchase an annuity barely sufficient for the necessities of life. But, owing to the report of my wealth, the luxuries have been supplied by those who hoped for legacies. This is my legacy to one and all – these golden words, which I have proved true: ‘It is better to be thought rich than to be rich.’”

The paper fell from the hand of Eustace, and Treadle, with a howl of rage, threw himself on the grass, loading the memory of the deceased with opprobrious names. Seeing that all was over, that the expected fortune had vanished into thin air, Hagar left the disappointed grocer weeping with rage over the deceptive tin box, and led Eustace away. He followed her as in a dream, and all the time during their sad journey back to town he spoke hardly a word. What they did say – how Eustace bewailed his fate and Hagar comforted him – is not to the point. But on arriving at the door of the pawn-shop Hagar gave the copy of Dante to the young man. “I give this back to you,” she said, pressing his hand. “Sell it, and with the proceeds build up your own fortune.”

“But shall I not see you again?” he asked, piteously.

“Yes, Mr. Lorn; you shall see me when you bring back Goliath.”

Then she entered the pawn-shop and shut the door. Left alone in the deserted crescent, Eustace sighed and walked slowly away. Hugging to his breast the Florentine Dante, he went away to make his fortune, to find Goliath, and – although he did not know it at the time – to marry Hagar.

3

The Second Customer and the Amber Beads

After the episode of the Florentine Dante, Hagar lost her high spirits. She had sent Eustace away to make his fortune, and to discover, if possible, the lost heir of Jacob Dix. By this act of self-denial, as it really was, she had deprived herself of all pleasure; she had robbed herself of what might have been a bright future; consequently she was less cheerful than of yore. Nevertheless, she felt convinced that Lorn loved her, and that he would earn her gratitude – possibly her hand – by returning with Goliath at his heels. When that event took place she would recover at once her spirits and her lover; but at present the business of the pawn-shop took up her undivided attention, and forced her to put away sad thoughts and melancholy considerations. Also, Providence provided distraction for her dismal humours by sending her a negress to pawn a necklace of amber beads. Although Hagar did not know it at the time, this was the beginning of a second and rather more serious adventure.

It was drawing to night one August evening when the woman made her appearance, and the atmosphere of the pawnshop was darker than usual. Still, it was sufficiently light for Hagar to see that her customer was a tall and bulky negress, arrayed in a gaudy yellow dress, neutralized by trimmings of black jet beading. As the evening was hot and close, she wore neither cloak nor jacket, but displayed her somewhat shapeless figure to the full in this decidedly startling costume. Her hat was a garden of roses – red, white and yellow; she wore a large silver brooch like a shield, an extensive necklace of silver coins, and many bangles of the same metal on her black wrists. As a contrast to

these splendors she wore no gloves, nor did she hide her coal-black face with a veil. Altogether, this odd customer was the blackest and most fantastically-dressed negress that Hagar had ever seen, and in the dim light she looked a striking but rather alarming figure.

On Hagar coming to the counter this black woman produced out of a silver-clasped sealskin satchel a necklace, which she handed silently to Hagar for inspection. As the light was too imperfect to admit of a close examination, Hagar lighted the gas, but when it flamed up the negress, as though unwilling to be seen too clearly in the searching glare, stepped back hastily into the darkness. Hagar put this retrograde movement down to the natural timidity of a person unaccustomed to pawning, and took but little notice of it at the time. Afterwards she had cause to remember it.

The necklace was a string of magnificent amber beads threaded on a slender chain of gold. Each bead was as large as the egg of a sparrow, and round the middle of every single one there was a narrow belt of tiny diamonds. The clasp at the back was of fine gold, square in shape, and curiously wrought to the representation of a hideous Ethiopian face, with diamonds for eyes. This queer piece of jewelry was unique of its kind, and, as Hagar rapidly calculated, of considerable value. Nevertheless, she offered, according to custom, as low a sum as she well could.

"I'll give five pounds on it," said she, returning to the counter.

Rather to her surprise, the negress accepted with a sharp nod, and then took out of her bag a scrap of paper. On this was written laboriously: "Rosa, Marylebone Road." The name and address were so imperfect that Hagar hesitated before making out the pawn-ticket.

"Have you no other name but Rosa?" she asked, sharply.

The negress shook her head, and kept well in the shadow.

"And no more particular address than Marylebone Road?"

Again the black woman made a negative sign, whereat, annoyed by these gestures, Hagar grew angered.

"Can't you speak?" she demanded, tartly. "Are you dumb?"

At once the negress nodded, and laid a finger on her lips. Hagar drew back. This woman was black, she was dumb, she gave half a name, half an address, and she wished to pawn a valuable and unique piece of jewelry. The whole affair was queer, and, as Hagar considered, might be rather dangerous. Perhaps this silent negress was disposing of stolen goods, as the necklace seemed too fine for her to possess. For the moment Hagar was inclined to refuse to do business; but a glance at the amber beads decided her to make the bargain. She could get it cheap;

she was acting well within the legal limits of business; and if the police did appear in the matter, no blame could be attached to her for the transaction. Biased by these considerations, Hagar made out the ticket in the name Rosa, and took a clean new five-pound note out of the cash-box. As she was about to give ticket and money across the counter she paused. "I'll take the number of this note," she thought, going to the desk; "if this negress can't be traced by name or address, the bank-note number will find her if it is necessary."

Deeming this precaution judicious, Hagar hastily scribbled down the number of the five-pound note, and returning to the counter, gave it and the ticket to her queer customer. The negress stretched out her right hand for them; and then Hagar made a discovery which she noted mentally as a mark of identification if necessary. However, she said nothing, but tried to get a good look at the woman's face. The customer, however, kept well in the shadow, and swept note and ticket into her bag hurriedly. Then she bowed and left the shop.

Six days later Hagar received a printed notice from New Scotland Yard, notifying to all pawn-brokers that the police were in search of a necklace of amber beads set with diamonds, and clasped with a negro's face wrought in gold. Notice of its whereabouts was to be sent to the Detective Department without delay. Remembering her suspicions, and recalling the persistent way in which the negress had averted her face, Hagar was not much surprised by this communication. Curious to know the truth, and to learn what crime might be attached to the necklace, she wrote at once about the matter. Within four hours a stranger presented himself to see the amber beads, and to question her concerning the woman who had pawned the same. He was a fat little man, with a healthy red face and shrewd twinkling eyes. Introducing himself as Luke Horval, of the detective service, he asked Hagar to relate the circumstances of the pawning. This the girl did frankly enough, but without communicating her own suspicions. At the conclusion of her narrative she displayed the amber beads, which were carefully examined by Mr. Horval. Then he slapped his knee, and whistled in a thoughtful sort of way.

"I guessed as much," said he, staring hard at Hagar. "The negress did it." "Did what?" asked the girl, curiously.

"Why," said Horval, "murdered the old woman."

Murder! The word had a gruesome and cruel sound, which caused Hagar's cheek to pale when it rang in her ears. She had connected the amber beads with robbery, but scarcely with the taking of life. The

idea that she had been in the company of a murderess gave Hagar a qualm; but, suppressing this as a weakness, she asked Horval to tell her the details of the crime and how it bore on the pawning of the amber beads.

"It's just this way, miss," explained the detective, easily. "This Rosa is the nigger girl of Mrs. Arryford – –"

"Is Rosa her real name?"

"Oh, yes; I s'pose she thought she might lose the beads if she gave a wrong one; but the address ain't right. It's the other end of London as Mrs. Arryford lives – or rather lived," added Horval, correcting himself, "seeing she now occupies a Kensal Green grave – Campden Hill, miss; a sweet little house in Bedford Gardens, where she lived with Rosa and Miss Lyle."

"And who is Miss Lyle?"

"The companion of Mrs. Arryford. A dry stick of a spinster, miss; not to be compared with a fine girl like you."

Hagar did not deign to notice the compliment, but sharply requested Mr. Horval to continue his story, which he did, in no wise abashed by her cold demeanor.

"It's just this way, miss," said he again; "the old lady, the old maid and the nigger wench lived together in Bedford Gardens, a kind of happy family, as one might say. Mrs. Arryford was the widder of a West Indian gent, and as rich as Solomon. She brought those amber beads from Jamaica, and Rosa was always wanting them."

"Why? The necklace was very unsuitable to one of her condition."

"'Twasn't exactly the cost of it as she thought about," said Horval, nursing his chin, "but it seems that the necklace is a fetish, or charm, or lucky-penny, as you might say, to bring good fortune to the wearer. Mrs. Arryford was past wanting good luck, so hadn't no need for the beads. Rosa asked her for them, just for the good luck of them, as you might say. The old girl wouldn't part, as she was as superstitious as Rosa herself over that necklace; so in the end Rosa murdered her to get it."

"How do you know she did?" asked Hagar, doubtfully.

"How do I know?" echoed the detective in surprise. "'Cause I ain't a fool, miss. Last week Mrs. Arryford was found in her bed with a carving knife in her heart, as dead as a door-nail, and the beads were missing. Miss Lyle, she didn't know anything about it, and Rosa swore she hadn't left her room, so, you see, we couldn't quite hit on who finished off Mrs.

Arryford. But now as I know Rosa pawned these beads, I'm sure she did the job."

"What made you think that the beads might have been pawned?"

"Oh, that was Miss Lyle's idea; a sharp old girl she is, miss. She was very fond of Mrs. Arryford, as she well might be, seeing as the old lady was rich and kept her like a princess. Often she heard Rosa ask for those beads, so when Mrs. Arryford was killed and the beads missing she told me as she was sure Rosa had done the trick."

"But the pawning?"

"Well, miss," said Horval, scratching his chin, "it was just this way. Miss Lyle said as how Rosa, to get rid of the necklace until the affair of the murder was blown over, might pawn it. I thought so too, so I sent a printed slip to all the pop-shops in London. You wrote that the beads were here, so it seems as Miss Lyle was right."

"Evidently. By the way, who gets the money of Mrs. Arryford?"

"A Mr. Frederick Jevons; he's a nephew of Miss Lyle's."

"A nephew of Miss Lyle's!" echoed Hagar, in surprise. "And why did Mrs. Arryford leave her money to him instead of to her relatives?"

"Well, it's just this way, miss," said Horval, rising. "She hadn't got no relatives; and as Mr. Jevons was a good-looking young chap, always at the house to see his aunt, she took a fancy to him and left the money his way."

"You are sure that Miss Lyle is no relation to Mrs. Arryford?"

"Quite sure. She was only the old girl's companion."

"Was Mrs. Arryford weak in the head?"

"Not as I ever heard of," said Mr. Horval, with a stare, "but you can find out, if you like, from Miss Lyle."

"Miss Lyle! How am I to see her?"

"Why," said the detective, clapping on his hat, "when you come to see if Rosa is the same nigger as pawned the amber beads. Just leave someone to look after the shop, miss, and come with me right away."

With true feminine curiosity, Hagar agreed at once to accompany the detective to Campden Hill. The shop was delivered into the charge of Bolker, a misshapen imp of sixteen, who for some months had been the plague of Hagar's life. He had a long body and long arms, short legs and a short temper, and also a most malignant eye, which indicated only too truly his spiteful nature. Having given a few instructions to this charming lad, Hagar departed with Horval in the omnibus, and arrived at Bedford Gardens early in the afternoon.

The house was a quaint, pretty cottage, which stood in a delightful garden – once the solace of poor dead Mrs. Arryford’s soul – and was divided from the road by a tall fence of iron railings closed in with wooden planks painted a dark green. The room into which the detective and gipsy were shown was a prim and rather cosy apartment, which bore the impress of Miss Lyle’s old-maidism in the disposition of the furniture. When they were seated here, and were waiting for Miss Lyle, who had been advised of their arrival, Hagar suddenly asked Horval a leading question.

“Is Rosa dumb?” she demanded.

“Bless you, no!” answered Horval. “It’s true as she don’t talk much, but she can use her tongue in nigger fashion. Why do you ask?”

“She said she was dumb when she pawned the beads.”

“Oh, that was ’cause she was too ’cute to let her voice betray her,” replied Horval, smiling. He had humour enough to note Hagar’s unconscious bull; but as she was likely to be useful to him in the conduct of the case, he did not wish to anger her by remarking on it.

When Miss Lyle made her appearance, Hagar, after the manner of women, took immediate note of her looks and manner. The old maid was tall and lean and yellow, with cold gray eyes, and a thin-lipped, hard-tempered mouth, turned down at the curves. Her iron-gray hair was drawn tightly off her narrow forehead and screwed into a hard-looking knob behind. She wore a black stuff gown, somber and lusterless; collar and cuffs of white linen, and cloth slippers, in which she glided noiselessly. Altogether an unpromising, hard woman, acidulated and narrow-minded, who looked disapprovingly on the rich beauty of Hagar, and remarked her graces with a jaundiced eye and a vinegary look. The cough with which she ended her inspection showed that she condemned the girl at first sight.

“Is this young person necessary to your conduct of the case?” said Miss Lyle, addressing herself to Horval, and ignoring Hagar altogether.

“Why, yes, miss,” replied Horval, on whom the antagonistic attitude of the two women was not lost. “She keeps the pawn-shop at which Rosa pawned the beads!”

Miss Lyle gave a start of virtuous horror, and her thin lips wreathed in a viperous smile. “The wretch did kill my poor friend, then,” she said in a soft and fluty voice. “I knew it!”

“She pawned the amber beads, Miss Lyle, but – –”

“Now, don’t say the wretch didn’t kill my martyred friend,” snapped Miss Lyle, going to the bell-rope; “but we’ll have her in, and perhaps this

young person will recognize her as the viper who pawned the beads.”

“It is to be hoped so,” said Hagar, very dryly, not approving of being spoken at in the third person; “but the negress kept her face turned away, and I might not – –”

“It is your duty to recognize her,” exclaimed Miss Lyle, addressing herself to the girl for once. “I am convinced that Rosa is a dangerous criminal. Here she is – the black Jezebel!”

As the last word fell from her mouth the door opened, and Rosa entered the room, whereat Hagar uttered an exclamation of surprise. This negress was rather short, and more than a trifle stout. It is true that she wore a yellow dress trimmed with black jet beading; that silver ornaments were on her neck and wrists; also that she was without the wonderful hat. Still, Hagar was surprised, and explained her ejaculation forthwith.

“That is not the woman who pawned the beads!” she declared, rising.

“Not the woman?” echoed Miss Lyle, virulently. “She must be! This is Rosa!”

“Yis, yis! I Rosa,” said the negress, beginning to weep, “but I no kill my poo’ dear missy. Dat one big lie.”

“Are you sure, miss, that this is not the woman?” asked Horval, rather dismayed.

Hagar stepped forward, and looked sharply at the sobbing negress up and down. Then she glanced at the woman’s hands and shook her head.

“I am prepared to swear in a court of law that this is not the woman,” she said, quietly.

“Rubbish, rubbish!” cried Miss Lyle, flushing. “Rosa coveted the necklace, as it was connected with some debased African superstition, and – –”

“It one ole fetish!” interrupted Rosa, her eyes sparkling fire at the old maid, “and ole missy she did wish to gib it me, but you no let her.”

“Certainly not!” said Miss Lyle, with dignity. “The necklace was not fit for you to wear. And because I persuaded Mrs. Arryford not to give it to you, you murdered her, you wretch! Down on your knees, woman, and confess!”

“I no ’fess!” exclaimed the terrified negress. “I no kill my missy! I no gib dose amber beads for money. If dose beads mine, I keep dem; dey a mighty big fetish, for sure!”

“One moment,” said Horval, as Miss Lyle was about to speak again, “let us conduct this inquiry calmly, and give the accused every chance Miss,”

he said, turning to Hagar, "on what day, at what time, was it that the beads were pawned?"

Hagar calculated rapidly, and answered promptly: "On the evening of the 23rd of August, between six and seven o'clock."

"Ah!" exclaimed Miss Lyle, joyfully – "and on that very evening Rosa was out, and did not return till nine!"

"Me went to see Massa Jevons for you," said Rosa vehemently; "you send me."

"I send you! Just listen to the creature's lies! Besides, Mr. Jevons's rooms are in Duke Street, St James's, whereas it was at Lambeth you were."

"I no go to dat gem'man's house. You send me to de train Waterloo!"

"Waterloo!" said Horval, looking sharply at Rosa. "You were there?"

"Yis, masse; me dere at seven and eight."

"In the neighbourhood of Lambeth," murmured Horval. "She might have gone to the pawn-shop after all."

"Of course she did!" cried Miss Lyle, vindictively – "and pawned the amber beads of my poor dead friend!"

"She did nothing of the sort!" interposed Hagar, with spirit. "Whosoever pawned the beads, it was not this woman. Besides, how do you know that Rosa killed Mrs. Arryford?"

"She wanted the beads, young woman, and she killed my friend to obtain them."

"No, no! dat one big lie!"

"I am sure it is!" said Hagar, her face aflame. "I believe in your innocence, Rosa. Mr. Horval," she added, turning to the detective, "you can't arrest this woman, as you have no grounds to do so."

"Well, if she didn't pawn those beads – –"

"She did not, I tell you."

"She did!" cried Miss Lyle angrily. "I believe you are an accomplice of the creature's!"

What reply Hagar would have made to this accusation it is impossible to say, for at this moment a young man walked into the room. He was good-looking in appearance, and smart in dress, but there was a haggard look about his face which betokened dissipation.

"This," said Miss Lyle, introducing him, "is my nephew, the heir to the property of my late dear friend. He is resolved, as such heir, to find out and punish the assassin of his benefactress. For my part, I believe Rosa to be guilty."

"And I," cried Hagar, with energy, "believe her to be innocent!"

"Let us hope she is," said Jevons, in a weary voice, as he removed his gloves. "I am tired of the whole affair."

"You are bound to punish the guilty!" said Miss Lyle, in hard tones.

"But not the innocent," retorted Hagar, rising.

"Young woman, you are insolent!"

Hagar looked Miss Lyle up and down in the coolest manner; then her eyes wandered to the well-dressed figure of Jevons, the heir. What she saw in him to startle her it is difficult to say; but after a moment's inspection she turned pale with suppressed emotion. Stepping forward, she was about to speak, when, checking herself suddenly, she beckoned to Horval, and advanced towards the door.

"My errand here is fulfilled," she said, quietly. "Mr. Horval, perhaps you will come with me."

"Yes, and you can go also, Rosa," cried Miss Lyle, angered by the insulting gaze of the girl. "I am mistress here in my nephew's house, and I refuse to let a murderess remain under its roof!"

"Be content," said Hagar, pausing at the door. "Rosa shall come with me; and when you see us again with Mr. Horval, you will then learn who killed Mrs. Arryford, and why."

"Insolent hussy!" muttered Miss Lyle, and closed the door on Hagar, Horval and the black woman.

The trio walked away, and shortly afterwards picked up an omnibus, in which they returned to the Lambeth pawnshop. Hagar talked earnestly to Horval the whole way; and from the close attention which the detective paid to her it would seem that the conversation was of the deepest interest. Rosa, a dejected heap of misery, sat with downcast eyes, and at intervals wiped away the tears which ran down her black cheeks. The poor negress, under suspicion as a thief and a murderess, turned out of house and home, desolate and forsaken, was crushed to the earth under the burden of her woes. On her the fetish necklace of amber beads had brought a curse.

On arriving at the shop Hagar conducted Rosa into the back parlour; and after a further conference she dismissed the detective.

"You can stay with me for a week," she said to Rosa.

"And den what you do?"

"Oh," said Hagar, with an agreeable smile, "I shall take you with me to denounce the assassin of your late mistress."

All that week Rosa stayed in the domestic portion of the pawn-shop, and made herself useful in cooking and cleaning. Hagar questioned her

closely concerning the events which had taken place on the night of the murder in the house at Bedford Gardens, and elicited certain information which gave her great satisfaction. This she communicated to Horval when he one day paid her a hurried visit. When in possession of the facts, Horval looked at her with admiration, and on taking his leave he paid her a compliment.

"You ought to be a man, with that head of yours," he said; "you're too good to be a woman!"

"And not bad enough to be a man," retorted Hagar, laughing. "Be off with you, Mr. Horval, and let me know when you want me up West."

In four more days Horval again made his appearance, this time in a state of the greatest excitement. He was closeted with Hagar for over an hour, and at its conclusion he departed in a great hurry. Shortly after noon Hagar resigned the shop into Bolker's charge, put on hat and cloak, and ordered Rosa to come with her. What the reason of this unexpected departure might be she did not inform the negress immediately; but before they reached their destination Rosa knew all, and was much rejoiced thereat.

Hagar took Rosa as far as Duke Street, St James's, and here, at the door of a certain house, they found the detective impatiently waiting for them.

"Well, Mr. Horval," said Hagar, coming to a stop, "is he indoors?"

"Safe and sound!" replied Horval, tapping his breastcoat pocket – "and I have got you know what here. Shall we come up?"

"Not immediately. I wish to see him by myself first. You remain outside his door, and enter with Rosa when I call you."

Mr. Horval nodded, with a full comprehension of what was required of him, and the trio ascended the dark staircase. They paused at a door on the second landing. Then Hagar, motioning to her companions that they should withdraw themselves into the gloom, rapped lightly on the portal. Shortly afterwards it was opened by Mr. Frederick Jevons, who looked inquiringly at Hagar. She turned her face towards the light which fell through the murky staircase window, whereat, recognizing her, he stepped back in dismay.

"The pawn-shop girl!" said he in astonishment. "What do you want?"

"I wish to see you," replied Hagar, composedly, "but it is just as well that our conversation should be in private."

"Why, you can have nothing to say to me but what the whole world might hear!"

"After I have mentioned the object of my visit you may think differently," said Hagar, with some dryness. "However, we'll talk here if you wish."

"No, no; come in," said Jevons, standing on one side. "Since you insist upon privacy, you shall have it. This way."

He showed her into a large and rather badly furnished room. Evidently Mr. Fred Jevons had not been rich until he inherited the fortune of Mrs. Arryford.

"I suppose you will be moving to the Bedford Gardens house soon?" said Hagar, sitting composedly in a large armchair.

"Is that what you came to speak to me about?" retorted Jevons, rudely.

"Not exactly. Perhaps, as you are impatient, we had better get to business."

"Business! What business can I have to do with you?"

"Why," said Hagar, quietly, and looking directly at him, "the business of those amber beads which you – pawned."

"I," stammered Jevons, drawing back with a pale face.

"Also," added Hagar, solemnly, "the business which concerns the commission of a crime."

"A – a – a crime!" gasped the wretched creature.

"Yes – the most terrible of all crimes – murder!"

"What – what – what do you – you mean?"

Hagar rose from her chair, and, drawn to her full height, stretched out an accusing arm towards the young man. "What I mean you know well enough!" she said, sternly. "I mean that you murdered Mrs. Arryford!"

"It's a lie!" cried Jevons, sinking into a chair, for his legs refused to support him longer.

"It is not a lie – it is the truth! I have evidence!"

"Evidence!" He started up with dry and trembling lips.

"Yes. Through her influence over Mrs. Arryford, your aunt induced her to make you her heir. You are fond of money; you are in debt, and you could not wait until the old lady died in the course of nature. On the night of the murder you were in the house."

"No, no! I swear – –"

"You need not; you were seen leaving the house. To throw suspicion on Rosa you disguised yourself as a negress, and came to pawn the amber bead necklace at my shop. I recognized that the supposed black woman was minus the little finger of the right hand. You, Mr. Jevons, are mutilated in the same way. Again, I paid you with a five-pound

note. Of that note I took the number. It has been traced by the number, and you are the man who paid it away. I saw – –”

Jevons jumped up, still white and shaking. “It’s a lie! a lie!” he said, hoarsely. “I did not kill Mrs. Arryford; I did not pawn the beads. I did – –”

“You did both those things!” said Hagar, brushing past him. “I have two witnesses who can prove what I say is true. Rosa! Mr. Horval!”

She flung the outside door wide open, while Jevons again sank into the arm-chair, with an expression of horror on his white face. “Rosa! Horval!” he muttered. “I am lost!”

Rosa and the detective entered quickly in response to Hagar’s call, and with her looked down on the shrinking figure of the accused man.

“These are my witnesses,” said Hagar, slowly. “Rosa!”

“I saw dat man in de house when my missy died,” said the negress. “I hear noise in de night; I come down, and I see Massa Jevons run away from de room of my missy, and Missus Lyle let him out by de side door. He kill my poo’ missy – yes, I tink dat.”

“You hear,” said Hagar to the terrified man. “Now, Mr. Horval.”

“I traced the five-pound note you gave him by its number,” said the detective. “Yes, he paid it away at his club; I can bring a waiter to prove it.”

“You hear,” said Hagar again; “and I know by the evidence of your lost finger that you are the man, disguised as a negress, who pawned the necklace which was stolen from the person of Mrs. Arryford, after you murdered her. The dead woman, as Rosa tells us, wore that necklace night and day. Only with her death could it have been removed. You murdered her; you stole the necklace of amber beads.”

Jevons leaped up: “No, no, no!” he cried, loudly, striking his hands together in despair. “I am innocent!”

“That,” said Horval, slipping the handcuffs on his wrists, “you shall prove before a judge and jury.”

When Jevons, still protesting his innocence, was removed to prison, Hagar and the negress returned to Carby’s Crescent. It can easily be guessed how she had traced the crime home to Jevons. She had noticed that the negress who pawned the beads had no little finger. On being brought face to face with Rosa, she had seen that the woman had not lost the finger; and when Jevons had removed his gloves she had seen in his right hand the evidence that he was one with the mysterious black woman of the pawn-shop. Still, she was not certain; and it was only when

Rosa had deposed to the presence of the man at midnight in the Bedford Gardens house, and when Horval had traced the five-pound note of which she had taken the number, that she was certain that Jevons was the murderer. Hence the accusation; hence the arrest. But now the fact of his guilt was clearly established. To obtain the wealth of Mrs. Arryford the wretched man had committed a crime; to hide that crime and throw the blame on Rosa he had pawned the amber beads; and now the amber beads were about to hang him. In the moment of his triumph, when preparing to enjoy the fruits of his crime, Nemesis had struck him down.

The news of the arrest, the story of the amber beads, was in all the papers next day; and next day, also, Miss Lyle came to see Hagar. Pale and stern, she swept into the shop, and looked at Hagar with a bitter smile.

"Girl!" she said, harshly, "you have been our evil genius!"

"I have been the means of denouncing your accomplice, you mean," returned Hagar, composedly.

"My accomplice; no, my son!"

"Your son!" Hagar recoiled, with a startled expression. "Your son, Miss Lyle?"

"Not Miss, but Mrs. Lyle," returned the gaunt, pale woman; "and Frederick Jevons is my son by my first husband. You think he is guilty; you are wrong, for he is innocent. You believe that you will hang him; but I tell you, girl, he will go free. Read this paper," she said, thrusting an envelope into the hand of Hagar, "and you will see how you have been mistaken. I shall never see you again in this life; but I leave my curse on you!"

Before Hagar could collect her wits, Miss – or rather Mrs. – Lyle, as she called herself, went hurriedly out of the shop. Her manner was so wild, her words so ominous of evil, that Hagar had it on her mind to follow her, and, if possible, prevent the consequences of her despair. She hurried to the door, but Mrs. Lyle had disappeared, and as there was no one to mind the shop, Hagar could not go after her. Luckily, at this moment Horval turned the corner, and at once the girl beckoned to him.

"Miss Lyle – did you see her?"

"Yes," said Horval, with a nod "she's on her way across Westminster Bridge."

"Oh, follow her – follow her quickly!" cried Hagar, wildly, "she is not herself; she is bent on some rash deed!"

Horval paused a moment in bewilderment; then, grasping the situation, he turned, without a word, and raced down the street in the trail of Miss Lyle. Hagar watched his hurrying figure until it turned the corner; then she retreated to the back parlour, and hurriedly opened the envelope. On the sheet of paper she found within the following confession was written:

"I am not a spinster, but a widow," began the document abruptly – "a twice-married woman. By my first husband I had Frederick Jevons, who passes as my nephew, and whom I love better than my own soul. When my second husband, Mr. Lyle, died, I cast about for some means of employment, as I was poor. Mrs. Arryford advertised for an unmarried woman as a companion; she absolutely refused to have any companion but a spinster. To get the situation, which was a good one, as Mrs. Arryford was rich, I called myself Miss Lyle, and obtained the place. Mrs. Arryford had no relatives and much money, so I schemed to obtain her wealth for my son, whom I introduced as my nephew. Rosa, the black maid, had a great deal of influence over her weak-minded mistress, and in some way – I don't know how – she fathomed my purpose. It was a battle between us, as Rosa was determined that I should not get the money of Mrs. Arryford for my son. Finally I triumphed, and Frederick was left sole heir of all the old lady's wealth. Then Rosa learnt, by eavesdropping, the true relationship between myself and Frederick. She told her mistress, and with Mrs. Arryford I had a stormy scene, in which she declared her intention of revoking her will and turning me and my son out on the world as paupers. I begged, I implored, I threatened; but Mrs. Arryford, backed up by that wicked Rosa, was firm. I sent for my son to try and soften the old lady, but he was not in town, and did not come to see me till late at night. When he arrived I told him that I had killed Mrs. Arryford. I did so to prevent her altering her will, and out of love for my dear son, lest he should lose the money. Frederick was horrified, and rushed from the house. I believe Rosa saw me let him out by the side door. I was determined to throw the blame on Rosa, as I hated her so. Knowing that she coveted the necklace of amber beads, I stole it from the neck of the dead woman and gave it to my son next day. I suggested that he should dress up as Rosa, and pawn the necklace, so that she might be suspected. To save me, he did so. I obtained a dress that Rosa was fond of wearing – yellow silk trimmed with black beads; also the jewelry of the creature. Frederick blackened his face, and pawned the beads in a pawn-shop at Lambeth. I sent Rosa on a pretended errand to Waterloo Station, at the time Frederick was pawning the beads, so as to get evidence against her that she was in the neighbourhood. Then I suggested to Horval, the detective, that the beads might have been pawned. He found the shop, and I thought my plot had succeeded; that Rosa would be condemned and hanged. Unfortunately, the woman who kept the pawn-shop was clever, and traced Frederick by means of his mutilated right hand. I hate her! Frederick is now in prison on a charge of murder, which he did not commit. I am guilty. I killed Mrs. Arryford. Frederick knows nothing. He helped me to save myself by trying to throw the blame on Rosa. All useless. I am guilty, and I am determined that he shall not suffer for my sin. Officers

of the law, I command you to release my son and arrest me. I am the murderess of Mrs. Arryford, I swear it.

Julia Lyle.

Witnesses:

Amelia Tyke (housemaid).

Mark Drew (butler)."

Hagar let the document fall from her hands with a sensation of pity for the wretched woman.

"How she must love her son," thought the girl, "to have murdered a kind and good woman for his sake! It is terrible! Well, I suppose he will now be released and will enter into possession of the wealth his mother schemed to obtain for him. But he must do justice to Rosa for all the trouble he has caused her. He must give her an annuity, and also the necklace of amber beads, which has been the cause of tracing the crime home to its door. As for Mrs. Lyle – –"

At this moment, white and breathless, Horval rushed into the parlour. Hagar sprang to her feet, and looked anxiously at him, expectant of bad news. She was right.

"My girl," cried Horval, hoarsely, "Miss Lyle is dead!"

"Dead? Ah!" said Hagar to herself. "I thought as much."

"She threw herself over Westminster Bridge, and has just been picked out of the water – dead!"

"Dead!" said Hagar again. "Dead!"

"As a door-nail!" replied the detective in a perplexed tone. "But why – why did she commit suicide?"

Hagar sighed, and in silence handed to the detective the confession of the dead woman.

4

The Third Customer and the Jade Idol

Hagar was a shrewd, clear-headed girl, who, having been educated in the hard school of Jacob Dix, knew the value of money and the art of driving good bargains. Otherwise she was uncultured and uneducated, although, to speak truly, she had a considerable knowledge of pictures and china, of gems and silverware. But a schoolboy knew more than she did as regards bookish information. She was ignorant of geography, as that science had been taught neither in the gipsy camp nor in the Lambeth pawn-shop. China was to her – ware, and not a vast empire of the East. But when the third customer came to pawn an idol of sea-green jade Hagar learnt something concerning the Celestial Kingdom.

The man was a sailor, with a coarse face reddened by wind and salt water, and two twinkling blue eyes, which peered at her shrewdly from under shaggy eyebrows. He had strong white teeth, which glistened through a heavy mustache, a head of fair curly hair, and a heavily-built figure well supported on stalwart legs. His rough trousers of blue serge, his black pilot jacket with brass buttons, and his gaudy loose cravat were all redolent of the ocean wave. Rings of gold in his large red ears added to his queer aspect; and he rolled into the shop like one to whom the firm earth is strange after the swinging and pitching of a ship.

This mariner cast uneasy glances over his shoulder as he entered the shop, and finally swung into one of the sentry boxes like a vessel coming to anchor. Here he took off his gold-banded cap and wiped his rough brow with a red handkerchief of Chinese silk. Hagar, with her hands resting lightly on the counter, waited for him to speak, and was rather

surprised when he still kept silent, and still continued to glance over his shoulder in the direction of the door. Finally she lost patience.

"Well, what can I do for you?" she asked sharply.

The mariner leant across the counter, and spoke in a hoarse voice like the roaring of waves. "Nathaniel Prime is my name, miss," he said; almost in a whisper – "Nat fur short; and I'm third mate on board a tea ship as trades from Hong Kong to London's port and back agin."

"Well, Mr. Prime," said Hagar, as he paused, "what do you want?"

Nat pulled a small parcel wrapped in a blue check handkerchief out of his pocket, and plumped it on the counter. "I've a small article here, miss, as I wants to lodge with you fur safe keeping."

"Oh," said Hagar, adapting this speech to her own ideas, "you want to pawn something. What is it?"

"It's Kwan-tai – that's what it is, miss."

Hagar drew back. "What gibberish are you talking?" she asked, frowning.

"Chinese," replied the mariner promptly. "Kwan-tai is the god of war in China, miss. This" – he unrolled the handkerchief and displayed a particularly ugly idol – "is his image. I got it from his temple in the Street of the Water Dragon in Canton. Jest look at it, miss – but wait a bit." He rolled back to the door, stepped out on to the pavement, and looked to right and left. Apparently he was satisfied with this survey, for with a complacent whistle he returned to continue the conversation. "I thought that blamed Chinaman might be arter me," said he, slipping a plug of tobacco into his capacious mouth; "he'd knife me like pie to get that d – d thing there."

"Knife you, man! What do you mean?"

"Why," said Mr. Prime, "this China d – Yu-ying is his name – wants to git that there god; so, as I don't want a bowie exploring my inside, I think it's good biz to leave it with you fur safe keeping."

Hagar put down the idol and stepped back. "So you want to transfer the danger to me?" she said, dryly. "No, thank you; take that ugly thing away!"

"Now, don't you make any mistake, miss," said Nat, pushing back the idol in his turn. "Yu-ying don't know as I'm on this lay. All I wants is to leave Kwan-tai in this here shop for a week. There ain't no danger in that."

Hagar picked up the god again and considered. It was a revoltingly ugly figure carved out of green jade, and had diamonds for eyes, crossed legs, and two large, fan-like hands resting on a protuberant stomach. Not a

desirable article to possess, save as a curiosity; but no doubt it had some sacred significance in the almond eyes of Yu-ying; hence his desire to obtain it, even at the cost of a man's life. For a moment or two Hagar hesitated as to taking Kwan-tai in pawn; but as there seemed to be no immediate danger and might not be any, she resolved to trade. Hagar was so far Hebraic that she never lost the chance of making a bargain; but then, according to some folk, the Romany are one of the ten lost tribes.

"I'll give you thirty shillings on it," she said, abruptly.

"Thirty bob it is," assented Nat, promptly, "as all I want is to leave this 'ere idol in your diggings fur safety. If 'twas pawning, I guess thirty quid 'ud be nearer my price. I reckon that there piece of jade is worth two hundred pound!"

"I don't know the market value of jade," retorted Hagar, impatiently. "All my business with you is to lend money on the thing. It's thirty shillings or nothing."

"Don't I tell you it's a deal?" said Mr. Prime, shifting the quid of tobacco to the other side of his mouth. "Give us a scratch of the pen to say as you've got Kwan-tai in charge."

"Name and address?" demanded Hagar, making out the ticket.

"Nathaniel Prime, mariner, 20, Old Cloe Street, Docks," said the sailor. "It's a pub, y' know, miss – the ›Nelson.‹ I'll stand you a drink if you looks me up, and proud to do it fur a slap-up gal like yourself!"

"Here's the ticket and the money, Mr. Prime. If that's all your business, get out sharp!"

"Sharp's the word," said the obedient mariner, slipping the thirty shillings into his pocket; "and if Yu-ying comes smelling round here, jest you up anchor and steer fur me at the Nelson. I'm the bad man from the back of beyond when that heathen's about!"

Mr. Prime nodded in a friendly way to Hagar, and rolled out of the shop door. She heard him singing a chanty as he left Carby's Crescent, and it was only when the roar of his lusty voice died away that she bethought herself of the diamond-eyed idol. Kwan-tai was a very ugly deity, but curious and attractive in his way; so, for the furtherance of business, and to see if there was any truth in Nat's story about Yu-ying, the girl placed the Chinese god in the shop window. He smiled as complacently there, out of his almond eyes, amongst the dusty wrecks as formerly he had beamed on his worshipers in the Street of the Water Dragon in far Canton.

Now, if there be one vice above another which ruins the female sex, it is that of curiosity. Here was Hagar told a surprising fact concerning the idol Kwan-tai, and at once she resolved to test if Nat's story was true. By putting the jade god in the window, she afforded Yu-ying a chance of seeing it; and then, if he wanted to possess the talisman – as it apparently was – she expected that he would enter the shop and offer to purchase it. Not for a moment did she think that he would kill her, or even attempt her life. That statement she believed to be an embellishment of Prime's to adorn his queer story.

"And I don't believe a word of it!" said the doubting Hagar. "However, the jade idol is exposed in the shop window, and we will see what will come of it."

Greatly to her surprise, trouble came of her folly, and that speedily. At noon next day she was eating her simple dinner in the back parlour with the door leading into the shop open, so that she might hear the approach of possible customers. Most of the inhabitants of the Crescent were within doors at the midday meal and the little square was quite deserted. Suddenly Hagar heard the crash of glass, and sat paralyzed for the moment in sheer astonishment at the unusual sound. When she recovered her wits and the use of her limbs, she ran rapidly into the shop, and beheld the warning of Nat Prime verified to the letter. The middle pane of the shop window was broken, and the jade idol was gone. With an ejaculation of surprise and Hagar sprang to the door, and saw a blue-bloused figure racing down the narrow street which led to the thoroughfare.

"The Chinaman! the Chinaman!" cried Hagar, giving chase. "Thief! stop – stop – thief! Yu-ying! Yu-ying!"

Followed by a crowd, which had collected like magic in answer to her cries, Hagar sped as lightly as a deer down the alley. But she was no match for the nimble Chinaman. When she reached the crowded street, Yu-ying – as it doubtless was – could not be seen. She appealed to the bystanders, to a stolid policeman, to the cab-drivers; but all to no purpose. Certainly they had seen the Chinese thief flying out of the Carby Crescent cul-de-sac, but no one had taken particular notice of him. Hagar ran this way, that way; looked, questioned, considered; all in vain. Yu-ying had vanished as though the earth had swallowed him up, and with him the jade idol of Nat Prime. Blaming herself for her credulity and headstrong folly in putting Kwan-tai into the window, Hagar returned crestfallen to the pawn-shop. Having placed a temporary barricade before the broken pane, and having sent for the glazier

to mend it, Hagar sat down to consider what was to be done relative to the theft.

Assuredly Prime would return at the end of the week to redeem the jade god, and Hagar did not know what excuse to make for its loss. Without doubt, Yu-ying had followed Nat to the shop on the previous day, and had ascertained the fact of the pawning. He had watched his opportunity to steal the god, as he evidently preferred this illegitimate way, to buying it in a proper manner. Probably Yu-ying, with the astuteness of the Chinese character, guessed that Hagar could not and would not sell it; hence his raid on the shop window. However, the idol was gone, and Hagar judged it wise to advise Nat Prime immediately of the loss. It might be that he knew the whereabouts of Yu-ying, and could tax him with the theft. Thinking this the best course to adopt under the circumstances, Hagar wrote to Prime at the address he had given her. Then she prepared to receive him, and to make the best of a bad business. In her letter she made no mention of the theft.

It was two days before Prime appeared in person to answer her note; and he explained his negligence by stating that he had been down at Brighton to interview a friend. Then he asked to see the jade idol, to assure himself that it was safe. When Hagar told him of its loss, and of Yu-ying's exploit, his rage was frightful. He swore volubly for ten minutes; and such was his command of bad language that he scarcely repeated himself in delivering a string of oaths. In his subsequent conversation it may be as well to omit these flowers of speech.

"I knew that blamed Chinaman had followed me!" he said, when somewhat calmer, "if y' mind, miss, I went to look if the coast wor clear. He must ha' sneaked round the corner, I guess. Cuss all Celestials, say I!"

"I am sorry the idol is gone, Mr. Prime --"

"Now, miss, don's 'ee say another word. How was a young gal like you to best a Chinky? Why, Yu-ying 'ud have the teeth out of yer 'ead afore ye cud say knife!"

"Still, I am to blame," persisted Hagar. "I should not have put the jade god in the window."

"Winder or no winder, it 'ud have been jest the same," returned Nat, gloomily; "if Yu-ying hadn't got the god so easily, he'd have burgled the shop to get it. Aye, miss, and have cut your throat into the bargain!"

"Why does he want this idol so particularly?"

"Fur the same reason as I do. Fifty thousand pounds is the reason!"

"Fifty thousand pounds!" echoed Hagar, drawing back: "the idol isn't worth that!"

"Not in itself, miss; but it kin git that cash. I reckoned to have it myself, and chuck deep-sea sailing; but now I opines that blamed John Chinaman's scooped the pool."

"Why don't you look up Yu-ying and tax him with the theft?"

"He'd only lie, miss; and as fur looking him up, I guess he's made himself mighty scarce by this time. But I'll go on the trail, anyhow. Good-day t' ye, miss, and don't you put trust in them Chinese devils."

After which speech Nat rolled away with a philosophical air, leaving Hagar very regretful for having contributed to the loss of the idol by her negligence and perverse folly. All the same, she did not believe the statement about the fifty thousand pounds. Yet, as she might have argued, but did not, Nat had told the truth concerning the desire of Yu-ying to possess the idol, so why should he not have spoken truly concerning the money? And, after all, Hagar knew no details likely to confirm the tale. On consideration she dismissed Nat and Yu-ying and the jade Kwan-tai from her thoughts, and considered that she had purchased a new experience at the cost of thirty shillings.

In the meantime, Nat was seated in the taproom of the ›Nelson,‹ down the docks way, with a pipe in his mouth and a tankard of beer before him. For several days he had sat thus alone waiting – as would appear from his expectant attitude – for some visitor. Four days after the loss of the idol, he was no longer by himself, for in a chair near him sat a dried-up, alert man clothed in black, with bright eyes and a keen expression. This individual was a gentleman – a doctor – and the visitor expected by Nat Prime.

"If y'd on'y come a week ago, I'd not have pawned the idol," said Nat, in a gloomy tone, "an' the blamed thing wouldn't have been lost."

"Yes, yes; I see, I see. But why did you pawn it?" asked the doctor, fretfully.

"Why," said Prime, drily, "'cause I didn't want my throat cut by Yu-ying; as long as I carried that idol on me, my life wasn't worth a red cent!"

"How did Yu-ying learn the value of the idol?"

"He was a priest in the war-god's temple, I reckon. I've seed him do joss-pigeon a dozen times; and when he kim on board the Havelock as stewart I guessed as he wos arter the idol. But I slept with one eye open," added Nat, triumphantly, "an' I guess he didn't best me till I put Kwan-tai into that blamed pop-shop!"

"But I don't see how he gained a knowledge of the iron box in London," persisted the doctor, irritably, "or learnt about Poa's treasure."

Prime drank some beer, and leant forward to speak, emphasizing his remarks by means of his pipe stem. "Now, look'ee here, Dr. Dick," said he, slowly, "what wos it y' told me a year ago, afore I went this trip to Chiner?"

"Why," said Dr. Dick, thoughtfully, "I told you that my uncle had been at the sack of the Summer Palace in Pekin. Chinese helped to loot the place as well as the French and English. Among these a priest called Poa collected a number of small gold images of Kwan-tai to the value of fifty thousand pounds, and fled with them to England. He placed these in an iron box, and left it with a countryman of his own in London. After selling a few of the images he returned to China, and to his service as a priest in the Temple of Kwan-tai in Canton. He intended to send for the iron box, and restore the images of the god to his temple; but, struck down by sickness, he was unable to carry out his intention. Fearful of being tortured for sacrilege if he told the truth, Poa wrote in Chinese characters a description of the whereabouts of the treasure in London, and placed the paper in the interior of a small jade idol, with diamond eyes, which stood in the Kwan-tai Temple in the Street of the Water Dragon. My uncle did some service for Poa, who, out of gratitude, told him the secret. Shortly afterwards he died, and my uncle, unable to gain access to the temple and steal the idol, was forced to return to England. He took up his residence at Christchurch, Hants, and died there, leaving a paper telling the story of Poa's treasure. I found the paper two years ago, and knowing you were trading to Canton, I came up to see you."

"Yes," said Prime, taking up the thread of the story, "and you asked me to get the jade idol out of that there temple. Well, I stole it, and I believe that pig of a Yu-ying saw me stealing. Any rate, he turned up aboard of the Havelock, and somehow – I can't guess in what way – he learnt the whole yarn, and tried to git back the idol. I bested him on the voyage; and when I kim ashore I expected to find you and get the iron box right away. I – –"

"I was ill," interrupted Dick, impatiently. "I couldn't come up. You might have got the treasure yourself and then shared it with me."

"Now, that's blamed silly, doctor! I couldn't read the Chinese writing which I found inside the idol; and as you're a Chinese scholar – taught by your uncle, y' said – I waited fur you to kim up and read it. Fur safety, I put the idol in the pop-shop, and Yu-ying – cuss him – followed me and stole it. So I guess by this time he's got the whole lot of the golden gods."

"Probably; but how did he learn that they were in existence, and that the production of the jade idol was necessary to obtain the treasure of Poa?"

"Can't say, sir, unless that Poa told some of his brother priests."

"Poa died fifteen years ago," replied Dick, sharply; "if he had told them on his death-bed, they would not have waited all this time to get the treasure."

"Well, I calc'late as they've annexed the same this trip," said Nat, coolly. While thus conversing, the landlord of the Nelson entered the tap-room, and informed Prime that a lady wished to see him. Rather surprised – for he had few female friends – Nat instructed that the visitor should be admitted. In a moment or so she appeared on the threshold, and, to his still greater surprise, Nat beheld Hagar.

"'Tis the pop-shop gal!" he said, rising. "And what might you want, miss?"

"To restore to you the jade idol," replied Hagar, taking the god Kwan-tai out of her pocket.

"Glory alleluia!" shouted Nat, snatching it from her grasp. "How the creation did you git it?"

"When I opened the shop door this morning, it was hanging to the knob by a string."

"Yu-ying couldn't make anything out of it, I guess. Here, doctor, see if the paper's inside."

Dick, in a state of considerable excitement, having been previously instructed by his uncle's paper how to discover the secret, unscrewed the head of the idol. When removed, a cavity was revealed; inside the cavity a strip of rice paper, scrawled with Chinese characters in vermilion.

While he was deciphering these, Nat turned to Hagar.

"Thankee, miss," he said, graciously. "If we git the money, I'll give 'ee a pound or so."

"I don't want it," replied Hagar, abruptly. "Give me the pawn-ticket and thirty-one shillings – that is, what I gave you, and the percentage. Then I'll go."

Nat produced money and ticket from his pocket, and gave them into her hand. "But I'd like to do summat fur you gitting that idol back," said he, wistfully.

"Well, Mr. Prime," said Hagar, pausing at the door, with a smile, "when you get the fifty thousand pounds you talk about, reward me by coming

to the shop, and telling me the story. I should like to know why Yu-ying stole the god; also why he restored it."

"I'll tell 'ee, never fear, miss; and a rum yarn it is. Y' won't take a drain, miss? No? Well, good day! good day, and thankee."

When Hagar retired Nat came back to the table, and found that Dr. Dick had ascertained the meaning of the Chinese characters. They gave the address of one Yeh, who kept an opium shop – or rather den – in Vesey Street, Whitechapel.

"We must go there," said Dick, rising, "and interview this Yeh. I dare say he has the iron box in charge."

"I guess some Chinky of sorts has the box," assented Nat, "but 'twon't be Yeh. If Poa lef' the box along o' him, I surmise he's dead and buried by this time. Even Chinamen ain't immortal."

"Yeh or another – what does it matter, Prime? All we have to do is to show Kwan-tai's jade image to the custodian of the box, and it will be handed over to us."

"That's so," replied Nat, glancing at his watch. "Seems as we've got the whole artemoon to engineer the job. Let's grub a bit, and start right away for Whitechapel."

While at the meal, Prime seemed thoughtful, and did not respond very enthusiastically to Dr. Dick's delight at discovering the whereabouts of the treasure. Dick commented on this.

"You don't seem over-pleased, Nat," he said; in a piqued tone, "yet your share will be twenty-five thousand pounds; and you ought to be both contented and delighted. What's your trouble?"

"Yu-ying, doctor. I don't trust that heathen a cent. What did he give back the jade god for?"

"Because he couldn't find the secret of opening it," replied Dick; "and seeing that the image was no good, he restored it to its proper owner."

Nat shook his head. "As a priest of the temple, Yu-ying is the proper owner of that there god," said he, doubtfully. "I stole it, y' know, so 'twasn't mine; not much. No, doctor; there's something queer about the biz. Guess this Chinky's rubbin' it in with salt."

"What do you mean, Nat?"

"Why," said Mr. Prime, coolly, "'twouldn't surprise me to find as how Yu-ying has lifted the lot of them gods of gold, and he's sent back Kwan-tai so as we kin take a squint at the empty box. It 'ud be like a Chiner d ... l to play low in that style."

"I hope not, I trust not!" cried Dick, turning pale. "But we had better make certain of what has been done. Come, Nat; let us start for Whitechapel at once."

Still shaking his head, for a long acquaintance with Chinamen had inspired him with a wholesome mistrust of the race, Nat paid his bill, and set out for Whitechapel in the company of Dr. Dick.

"You take my word for it, doctor," said he, when they were in the train, "there's a big sell waiting for us at the end of this trip. I guess 'twasn't honesty has made that Celestial give back the jade idol."

On arriving at Whitechapel, the two adventurers had some difficulty in discovering Vesey Street; and it was quite an hour before they ascertained its whereabouts. It proved to be a narrow and dirty alley of no great length, midway in which was placed the dwelling of Yeh. A red-painted sign, sprinkled with golden Chinese characters, announced that the house was "the Abode of a Hundred Blessings," and that Yeh was a dealer in goods from the Flowery Land. Dick translated this for the benefit of Nat, who could speak but not read Chinese, and commented thereon.

"Either the original Yeh is in existence, or this is a son of his," he said, and on Nat grunting assent they both stopped at the door of the house which they fondly hoped contained the treasure of Poa, the golden idols of the Imperial dynasty of T'sin.

In answer to their knock, a sleek, soft-footed China-boy, dressed in a blue indigo-hued blouse and with his pigtail down, appeared to admit them. Nat, as more experienced in Chinese speech, explained that they wanted to see Yeh. After some hesitation, the boy conducted them through a long dark passage into a rather large room piled up with goods, amongst which moved three or four Chinamen. These packages were the ostensible reason of Yeh's business; but at the back of the shop, through another dark passage, there was an opium den. The boy spoke to a spectacled Chinese merchant about the two Englishmen, whereupon he came forward and addressed them in his own tongue.

"What can your vile slave do for the lords who honor his despicable house?" asked the suave Celestial, with all the flowery humbug of Chinese speech. Nat, conversant with such rhodomontade, replied in a similar fashion. "Your humble guests would see the learned and respectable Yeh."

"He is my worshipful father," said the Chinaman, with a bow. "And what would the gracious lords with the reverend Yeh?"

For answer, Nat pulled the jade idol out of his pocket; at the sight of which the son of Yeh went as green as the god's image. Down he fell on his knees and knocked his forehead three times on the floor; after which, without wasting time in explanation, he conducted the two Europeans into the opium den. Here, on a kind of elevated platform, and under the smiling face of a particularly ugly Joss, sat Yeh, the merchant, a very old and wrinkled man. He wore heavy spectacles with tortoiseshell rims; also a thickly-wadded blouse of red silk embroidered elaborately in gold thread. Like his son, he was likewise greatly struck by the sight of jade Kwan-tai, and, like him, made genuflections.

"The learned Poa was my much-esteemed friend," he said, bowing to the Europeans; "with me he left an iron box, to be delivered to him who showed me the image of the mighty war-god. But Poa did not say that the sacred jade god would be shown twice!"

"Oho!" cried Dick, in disgust. "Yu-ying!"

"You know the name, I see," said Yeh, a trifle grimly; "this priest of the temple in the Street of the Water Dragon is your much-admired friend?"

"Yes, yes!" said Nat, eagerly; "we gave him the jade god so that he should come and look at the iron box of Poa; but we did not tell him to take it away."

"He obeyed your commands, my lord," replied Yeh, rising stiffly; "he looked at the box, but he did not take it away."

Dr. Dick jumped up with a cry of relief and delight. "Then the box is here!" he said, in excited tones. "Take us to see it at once!"

"It waits your noble presence in another room."

So speaking, Yeh, followed by the anxious adventurers, passed through a little door into a kind of strong room, dimly lighted by a small grated window. In a corner, towards which the old Chinaman pointed, there was a large iron box painted black, upon the lid of which were inscribed some Chinese characters in white paint. From a nail above this Yeh took a small copper key, and presented it to Dick with a bow. Then he turned to go, "My lords can look at Poa's secret alone," said he, backing with many bows to the door. "Who am I that I should meddle with the business of those favored by Kwan-tai?"

On being left alone, the two men looked at one another in some surprise and a little doubt. "The job's been easier than I thought," said Nat, after a pause. "All the same, I guess as Yu-ying's got some trick to play us."

"Impossible!" replied Dick, going on his knees before the box. "Here is the key, and within, no doubt, we shall find the golden gods of T'sin."

"Well," said Nat, with a nod, "if everything's square, I'll never cuss a heathen Chineese again. Open the box, doctor."

The key turned easily in the lock, and Dick flung back the lid. In an instant a flare of fire spouted out with a great roar. The two men, the room, and the greater part of Yell's dwelling were blown to shreds. They had expected to find a fortune, instead of which they discovered dynamite and a terrible death.

Two months after this, when London had almost forgotten the mysterious explosion in Vesey Street, Whitechapel, a Chinaman was reporting himself to the priests of Kwan-tai's temple, Canton, in this fashion:

"Most holy men," said he, pointing to a number of golden images which lay on a lacquer table before him, "here are the images of Kwan-tai, the gods of the Imperial House of T'sin, brought back from the dark land of the Outer Barbarians by your servant Yu-ying. When your great-nesses found the confession of the evil priest Poa that he had stolen the gods, and had confided the secret of their whereabouts to the jade image of Kwan-tai, you ordered your unworthy slave to search and find the treasure, so that it should be restored to the temple in the Street of the Water Dragon. But before your servant could depart to the Land of Darkness, a foreign devil, also possessed of Poa's secret, stole the jade image which contained the name of the hiding-place. I, foolish Yu-ying, followed the barbarian in a tea-junk to his own land; but it was many days before I could get the jade image. Then the foreign devil pawned for gold the sacred idol of war, and it was placed in the window of the shop. I broke the window, most reverend priests; I stole the image, and going to the house of Yeh, I recovered the golden idols which are now before you. But I wished to punish Yeh for his sacrilege in conspiring with Poa against Kwan-tai; and also to kill the foreign devil who had thieved the jade god. To this end I removed the golden idols from the box, and in their place I left a dangerous powder of the barbarians, which they call dynamite. This I arranged with care so that when the lid of the box was flung open it would rush out like the breath of the Fire Dragon, and slay those who came to steal the gods. As I intended, holy ones, so it happened, as I have learnt since. The foreign devil and a friend were shattered, and also the house of Yeh was destroyed. It was for this end that I restored the idol Kwan-tai to the pawn-shop; and thus did I lure the foreign devils to their deaths. Now, no one knows the truth, mighty servants of Kwan-tai, save yourselves. Say, have I done well?"

And all the sleek priests answered with one voice: "Yu-ying, you have done well. Your tablet shall be placed in the temple of Kwan-tai."

And while this explanation was being made, Hagar, in far-off London, was waiting for the return of Nat Prime to hear the story of the jade idol. But he never appeared.

5

The Fourth Customer and the Crucifix

Mention has been made of Bolker, the misshapen imp, who was Hagar's factotum and the plague of her life. With her clear brain and strong will, she could manage most people, but not this deformed street arab, whose nature seemed to be compounded of all that was worst in human beings. He lied freely, he absented himself from the shop when he had no business to do so, he even stole little things, when he thought it was safe to run the risk with so vigilant a mistress; but, notwithstanding all these vices, Hagar kept him as servant. Her reason was that he possessed three redeeming virtues: he was an excellent watch-dog, he was admirable at clinching bargains, and he was cunning enough not to lose his situation. Clever servants have been retained by mistrustful mistresses for less reasonable qualities.

When Hagar went out on business – which she frequently did – Bolker stayed to look after the shop, and to receive such customers as might present themselves. To these he gave as little as he possibly could on the articles they wished to pawn; and when Hagar returned he had usually some tales to tell of excellent business having been transacted for the good of the shop. Then Hagar would reward him with a little money and Bolker would take unauthorized leave to misconduct himself generally on the proceeds. This program never varied.

One day Hagar returned late in the evening, having been in the country on an excursion connected with a copper key. This adventure will be related another time, for the present story deals with the strange episode of the silver crucifix. It was this article which Bolker had ready to show Hagar when she entered the pawn-shop at eight o'clock.

"See here, missus!" said Bolker, pointing to the wall at the back of the shop; "there's a fine thing I got for you – cheap!"

It may be here remarked that Bolker had been to school, and having a remarkably clever brain as a set-off against his deformed body, he had succeeded in gaining a certain amount of learning, and also a mode of speaking, as regards both diction and accent, much above the ordinary conversation of his class. Proud of this superiority, the clever imp spoke always slowly and to the point, so that he might preserve his refined speech.

"Dirt cheap, missus!" added Bolker, who used vulgar words when excited, and he was so now. "Ten pound I lent on it; the silver itself is worth more than that!"

"Oh, I can always trust your judgement in these matters," laughed Hagar, and took down the crucifix to examine it more particularly.

It was over a foot long, made of refined silver now somewhat tarnished from neglect and exposure to the air; and the workmanship was peculiarly fine and delicate. The figure of the Christ crowned with a thorn-wreath was exquisite; and the arms of the cross itself, enchased with arabesque patterns, were beyond all praise from an artistic point of view. Altogether, this silver crucifix, obtained by the crafty Bolker for ten pounds – a sum greatly below its real value – was a remarkably fine sample of Renaissance workmanship in the style of Cellini. Learned in such things, Hagar, even in the yellow glow of the badly lighted lamp, saw its magnificence and worth at a glance. She patted Bolker's red head of hair with approval.

"Good little man!" said she, in a pleased tone. "You always do well when I am out of the shop. There is half-a-crown. Go and enjoy yourself, but don't make yourself sick with smoking a pipe as you did last time, my boy But one moment," she added; "who pawned this?"

"Gemma Bardi, 167, Saffron Hill."

"An Italian woman. Like enough, as the crucifix is of the Renaissance," said Hagar, musingly. "What was she like, Bolker?"

"Oh, a fine, handsome girl," replied Bolker, leering in a man-about-town style; "black hair and eyes the same just like yours, missus, only I guess you're the finer woman of the two. Here – don't you box my ears," shouted the imp, wriggling out of Hagar's grip, "or I shan't tell you what I found out!"

"About this crucifix?" asked Hagar, dropping her hands.

"Yes. 'Tain't a crucifix; it's a dagger."

"A dagger, you young fool! What are you talking?"

"Sense, missus – as I always do. Look here, if you don't believe me."

Bolker took the presumed crucifix in his lean, small hands, and with deft fingers he touched a concealed spring set where the four arms of the cross joined. At once the lower and longer arm, with the silver Christ attached thereto, slid down, and lo! the cross was changed into a slender and, sharp-pointed poniard, the handle of which was formed by the upper arms and the, so to speak, haft of the cross. The symbol of Christ, of peace, of faith, had become a deadly and dangerous weapon of bloodshed. Hagar was so startled that Bolker, the discoverer, grinned.

"It's fine, ain't it?" he said, gloating over the shining blade. "It would stick a man like fun! I dare say it's been through lots. My eye, what larks!"

The joy of the boy was so grim and unnatural that Hagar snatched the crucifix – or rather the poniard, as it was now – from his grasp, and pushed him out of the shop with the sharp command that he was to put up the shutters. When he had done so, and all was safe for the night, he went away to enjoy himself with his half-crown; while Hagar carried the newly-pawned article into the back parlour to examine it anew, as she ate her frugal supper. The crucifix, which was at once a symbol of peace and war attracted her strangely.

Why did it possess these dual characteristics? To what end had its maker placed in the hands of priests this deadly and concealed weapon? The hands of the Christ were not attached to the cross bars; and the sheath – as it might be – of the poniard slipped easily off the blade, figure and all. Hagar wondered in her imaginative fashion if it had glimmered, a symbol of Christianity over the dying, or had flashed cruelty into the heart of some helpless human being. From the old bookseller in Carby's Crescent she had heard some strange stories of the Italian Renaissance – that wild and contradictory time. Religion had then gone hand in hand with paganism; Savonarola had grown up beside the Medici; Popes had decreed peace, and had plunged whole nations in war; and the laugh of a friend had oftentimes been but a prelude to the death-blow. Of this many-sided, sinful epoch the crucifix dagger was a symbol; it represented at once its art, its religion, and its lust of blood. Hagar evoked strange visions in her dingy parlour from that strange piece of silver.

Afterwards, in the imperative demands of business, Hagar forgot her dreams about the crucifix, and looked upon it as an article of value merely pawned by its owner, and which would be redeemed in due time. A month later the ticket made out in the name of Gemma Bardi

was brought to her by a man of the same nationality. This tall, slender, supple Italian, with oval olive face and fierce eyes had come to take the crucifix out of pawn. Although he produced the ticket and offered the money, Hagar hesitated at giving the article to him.

"It was pawned by Gemma Bardi," said she, taking down the crucifix from where it hung in the obscurity.

"My wife," replied the man, briefly.

"She sent you to redeem it?"

"*Gran Dio!* Why not?" he broke out, impetuously. "I am Carlino Bardi, her husband. She pawned the crucifix against my will, while I was absent in the country with my organ. Now that I have returned, I come with ticket and money to redeem it. I do not wish to lose the Crucifix of Fiesole."

"The Crucifix of Fiesole," repeated Hagar – "is that what it is called?"

"Of a surety, signorina; and it is worth much money."

"More than ten pounds, I am sure," said Hagar, smiling, as she picked up the note silently placed on the counter by Carlino. "Well, I have no right to refuse you the crucifix. You give me the ticket, principal, and interest, so all is legal and shipshape. Take up your cross."

"My cross!" echoed Carlino, with a flash from his big eyes. "Gemma is my cross."

"Your wife! That is a strange way to speak of one dear to you."

"Dear to me, signorina! That may be; but she is dear also to Pietro Neri. May the pains of hell seize him!"

"Why? What has he done?"

"Run away with Gemma," said Bardi, fiercely. "Oh, she went cheerfully enough. To get the money for my dishonour she pawned the crucifix."

"Oh. So she did not send you to redeem it?"

"No," replied Carlino, with tranquil insolence. "That was a lie I told to get back my property without trouble. But now it is mine" – he clasped the silver Christ convulsively to his breast. "I shall make Gemma and Pietro pay for their evil deed!"

"You speak English well for a foreigner."

"I ought to," answered the man, indifferently. "I have been ten years in England, and I have almost forgotten my Tuscan tongue. But I remember still what Tuscan husbands do to faithless women and their paramours. We kill them!" – his voice leaped an octave to a shrill scream of wrath – "we kill the man and the woman!"

Thrilled by the terrible hatred of this passionate Latin nature, Hagar started back. The man was leaning across the counter, and showed no disposition to depart; nor did she want him to leave her, for there had come upon her a desire to learn the history of the Fiesole crucifix. Bending forward, she touched it lightly with the tips of her fingers.

"How did this come into your possession?" she asked.

"I stole it from a painter in Florence."

"You stole it!" echoed Hagar, confounded by the frankness of this admission.

"Yes. I was the model of an artist – one Signor Ancillotti, who had a studio in Piazza San Spirito, hard by the Ponte Santa Trinita of the Arno. This crucifix hung in his rooms, and once, when I was posing as his model, he told me the legend which gave it the name of the Crucifix of Fiesole. It was the story which made me steal it."

"But why? What is the story?"

"A common one," said Bardi, bitterly – "man's love and a woman's faithlessness to her husband. There was a silversmith in Florence, what time the Magnificent ruled, who was called Guido. He had one fair wife whom he loved very dearly. She did not care for his love, however, and fled with a young Count of good family, one Luigi da Francia. From France, you understand, for from that country the race had come to Florence in the days of the Republic. Luigi was handsome and rich; Guido, ugly and rather poor, although a clever craftsman; so you cannot wonder that the wife – Bianca was her name – fled from the one's arms to the other's palace. Guido determined upon revenge, and manufactured this crucifix."

"But I don't understand how –"

"No more did any one else," said Bardi, cutting her short. "When Guido finished the crucifix he disguised himself as a priest, and went up to see Count Luigi in his palace at Fiesole. Afterwards the nobleman and Bianca were found dead with dagger thrusts in their hearts, and Guido was missing. Between the corpses lay this silver crucifix; but no one ever knew how they died."

"Why not? Guido killed them with his dagger."

"No," said Bardi, shaking his head. "Guido had no dagger with him at the time. Count Luigi was always afraid of assassination, for he had many enemies; and every visitor was searched by his retainers to see that they carried no concealed weapons. Guido, the supposed priest, was searched also, and had nothing on him but the silver crucifix. So the legend grew that whosoever had a faithless wife, the possession of

the Crucifix of Fiesole would give him power to slay her and her lover, as Guido had slain his two deceivers. Therefore," added Bardi, grimly, "as I had then married Gemma, and thought that some day she might be faithless, I stole the crucifix from Signor Ancillotti. It seems I was right to do so."

"A strange story," said Hagar, meditatively "and stranger still that the means by which Guido slew were not discovered long ago."

"Do you know how he killed them?"

"Certainly. By means of that crucifix."

Bardi looked at the cross eagerly, and a lurid light came into his eyes as he gazed. "How?" he questioned, loudly. "Tell me, signorina."

But Hagar refused to impart that knowledge.

The story of the man deserted by his wife was so similar to that of the faithless Bianca and the forsaken Guido that Hagar dreaded lest Bardi should learn the secret of the concealed dagger and repeat the Cinque de Cento tragedy of Fiesole. With this idea in her mind she wished the Italian to depart, ignorant of the devilish ingenuity of the cross. But Fate willed that in her despite Bardi should gain the evil knowledge. He learnt it forthwith from the lips of Bolker.

"Hullo!" cried that imp, as he entered the shop, to see Carlino holding the crucifix. "You have got that dagger?"

"Dagger!" said Bardi, with a start.

"Bolker, you wretched child, hold your tongue!" said Hagar, vehemently.

"Why should I? My tongue's my own, and if that cove wants to know how this crucifix can be changed into a dagger, it's only fair. See here!" and before Hagar could interfere Bolker had the cross in his hands, and a finger on the spring. "You touch this, and the lower part of – –"

"Ah!" cried Bardi, snatching back the cross, and examining the deadly mechanism. "I see now how Guido killed his enemies. Gemma does not know of this; Pietro is ignorant; but they shall learn – both. I – I, the betrayed husband, shall teach it to them."

"Bardi!" said Hagar, catching him by the arm, "do not take – –"

"It is mine – mine!" he interrupted, furiously. "I go to search for the evil ones! I go to put the Crucifix of Fiesole to the use for which it was created by Guido! Look in the papers, signorina, and sooner or later you will see again the tale of Luigi, of Bianca, of the deceived Guido!"

He tore his sleeve from her grip, and rushed furiously from the shop, racing out of the crescent into the crowded streets, wherein he was soon

lost. Hagar ran to the door, but could not stop his mad career; so all she could do was to rage at Bolker, the mischief-maker, who, comprehending nothing of the Italian's excitement, was standing open-mouthed in the shop.

"You imp! You goblin!" raged Hagar, boxing his large ears. "You have put murder into that man's head!"

"Murder!" repeated Bolker, dodging her slaps, "what do you mean?"

"The man's wife has deceived him. He'll kill her with that dagger!"

"Jiminy!" said the imp, a light breaking in on his brain. "Kill her with a crucifix! What a rum murder it will be! I'll keep my eye on the papers, you bet!"

After which speech he ran out of the shop to escape further punishment, while Hagar was left to bewail the perverse fate which had sent the talkative lad to Bardi at so critical a moment. However, it was not her fault that he had gained the fatal knowledge; nor could it be laid to her charge if he did use the crucifix-dagger to kill Gemma and Pietro. Salving her conscience thus, Hagar waited for the consummation of the tragedy, and daily, as advised by the Italian, she read the papers to see if it occurred. But for many weeks nothing came of her reading, and Hagar concluded that either the man had not found his wife, or, having found her, had condoned her offense against his honor. Which conclusion showed how little Hagar knew of the fierce and passionate Tuscan nature.

In the meanwhile Bardi, his heart filled with vengeful hatred, was tracking his runaway wife and her lover with dogged persistence. The cost of his travels was little, as his profession was that of an organ-grinder, and with his box of music he could earn his livelihood on the road. Whither they had gone he did not learn for a long time; but at length he ascertained definitely that the pair were in the southern counties of England. Pietro was an organ-man also; and with Gemma was now no doubt tramping from village to village, earning a pittance. The ten pounds obtained for the crucifix would not last forever, and then the pair would be reduced to gain a livelihood by the organ. Bardi cursed both, as he thought of them living together; and felt that the silver cross was safe in his breast when he started on their trail. With that infernal weapon of Guido's he intended to kill those who had deceived him, and repeat in the nineteenth century the wild tragedy of Fiesole.

For some weeks he saw nothing of the couple, but from sundry sources he discovered their whereabouts. Yet as soon as he arrived in some town or village where he had been advised of their presence he would

learn that they had departed in some unknown direction. Whether they knew, or did not know, that he was tracking them, Bardi could not say; but certainly at many times when just within his reach they would elude him in the most exasperating fashion. Any one less bent upon revenge would have given up the task; but, sustained by undying hatred, Carlino followed the weary trail with the persistence of a bloodhound. As soon might the twain expect to escape death as to elude the betrayed husband, the deceived friend.

It was at Daleminster that he found them, and revenged himself on the infidelity of the one, the treason of the other. Daleminster is a quiet, desolate cathedral town, very quaint, very beautiful, set in the very heart of Midland cornfields, and made up of ancient red-roofed houses which cluster round the great minster of Saint Wulf's. There it rises, a poem in stone, with its great central tower soaring into the misty blue of English skies; and its magnificent facade carved with saints, and angels, and grotesque faces of peering devils – a strange medley of Heaven and hell. Before it, extends a little square, in the centre of which rises an ancient cross sculptured with religious imagery. It was near this relic of medieval piety that Carlino saw his wife.

The day was dull and rainy – April weather, of storm, with occasional bursts of sunshine. In that desolate and forsaken square, where the grass sprang greenly betwixt worn stones, Gemma, in the gay colours of her Neapolitan garb, stood grinding Italian melodies out of the organ. Pietro was not with her, and Carlino wondered for a moment if he had deserted her, now that the moneys obtained for the silver crucifix were expended. The woman appeared sad and lamentable enough as she looked to right and left in the hope of gaining stray coppers. The melancholy music of “*Ah, che la morte*” was sighing forth in the damp air, when her wandering gaze alighted suddenly on the man she had betrayed. With folded arms Bardi looked at her as the music faltered and stopped; but for the time being he said nothing. Nor did the woman; she was as petrified as any of the grim and saintly statues which looked down upon them both.

“Where is he?” demanded Bardi, in the Italian tongue.

Gemma put her hand to the necklace of blue beads dangling from her brown throat, and strove to speak. Her face was set and white, her lips were dry with fear, and she could only stare at Carlino with terrified eyes. The man came a step nearer and laid a persuasive hand on her white linen sleeve. She shuddered and drew away.

"Where is your lover?" demanded Bardi, in silky tones. "Has he left you?"

"No," she replied, hoarsely, finding her voice at last. "He is ill."

"Here – in this town?"

"Yes. He caught cold; it settled on his lungs; he is very ill."

Gemma uttered these staccato sentences in a mechanical manner, as though compelled to do so against her will, under the mesmeric gaze of the man. The unexpected appearance of Bardi stunned and appalled her; she could not think what to do; her brain refused to act. At length a request made by Carlino released her from the mesmeric spell which enchanted and froze her.

"Lead me to him," said he, in a quiet way. "I wish to see him."

Gemma felt the blood rush from her heart to her face, and sprang back with a loud cry, which echoed through the lonely square and down the desolate streets.

"No, no, no!" she cried, vehemently. "You will kill him!"

"Why? I have not killed you, and you are the guiltier of the two. Pietro was my very good friend until you tempted him with your beauty. Kill Pietro!" – the man laughed in a jeering manner – "woman, I have let you live."

"Oh, I hate you! I hate you!" said Gemma, drawing her black brows together, and sending a flash at him from her sombre eyes. "I love Pietro!"

"I know you do. So much that you left me for him, and pawned the silver Christ of Fiesole to pay for the journey."

"I left the pawn-ticket behind," she muttered, sullenly.

"I know it. Here is the crucifix!" and with that Bardi drew it from his bosom to hold it before her eyes. She shrank back before the symbol of faith, and uttered a low cry, at which her husband jeered.

"Dio!" said he, scoffingly. "You have religion still, I see; yet I thought you would have finished with such things when you were base enough to leave me. Why did you sell the crucifix and fly, Gemma? Did I beat you, or starve you?"

"You would not let me have money!" cried Gemma, dashing the tears from her eyes; "whenever I wanted a ribbon or a silver brooch you refused to give me a single soldo."

"And why?" was the swift answer. "Because I was saving all, that we could go back to Italy and buy a little vineyard near my own village – near Lastra-a-Signa. There is one I know of at Mosciano, which my father wrote and told me was for sale at a small price. I have the money

now, and I intended to tell you of it; but I came back to find that you had fled with that infamous Pietro.”

Gemma sobbed. Like most women, she had a practical side to her character, and the vineyard would have been a little heaven to her, setting aside the joy of returning to Signa. She would not have fled had she known of these plans, as she had not loved Pietro overmuch. Besides, he beat her, now that the money was gone; and they earned very little by the organ. It was horrible to think that she had lost all, for a few months of illicit love.

“O Carlino, forgive me!” she moaned, stretching out her arms.

“Lead me to Pietro and I shall see,” he replied, and took her organ – or rather Pietro’s – on his strong shoulders.

Without a word, Gemma led the way out of the square, down tortuous streets into a poor part of the town. She was afraid of Carlino, and could not quite understand what he intended to do to Pietro. Probably he would kill him; and then he would be arrested and hanged. But then the money would come to her, and she would have all the vineyard to herself. Again, Carlino might forgive Pietro, and take her back. Gemma was a clever woman, and trusted to extricate herself out of all difficulties by her wiles. Still, she knew Carlino’s violent temper, and she dreaded the worst. At the door of the poor house where she lived with her lover she stopped, and faced Bardi with a resolute air.

“Pietro is within,” she said, hurriedly, “ill in bed; but I shan’t take you to him unless you swear that you intend him no harm.”

“I swear by this crucifix!” said Bardi, thinking of it as a dagger and not as a cross.

“Have you a knife on you?” demanded Gemma, still doubtful.

“No,” smiled Bardi, thinking how the old Fiesole tragedy was repeating itself. “I have nothing with me but this crucifix.” Then, as she still seemed dubious, he added: “You can see for yourself if you like.”

Not knowing what to make of this smiling complacency, so different to his usual stern demeanor, Gemma passed her hands through his clothes to feel if he had any weapon concealed therein. Her fears were groundless. Bardi wore little clothing, and she assured herself beyond all doubt that he was unarmed; he had nothing wherewith to kill Pietro. Certainly he might strangle him with his bare hands; but that was not the Tuscan fashion of disposing of a rival. Perhaps, after all, he meant to forgive Pietro.

"You see," said Carlino, when her arms dropped, "I am unarmed; I have nothing with me save this silver crucifix. As Pietro is so ill he may like to look at it."

His look as he said this was hardly pleasant, and a glimpse of it might have put the woman on her guard; but it was lost on her, as already she had turned her back, and was climbing the crazy stairs. Bardi followed her, carrying the organ on his broad back, and holding in his two hands the silver crucifix, like some priest bearing the Host to the dying. Gemma conducted him into a bare garret on the topmost story. Here Carlino put down the organ and looked around.

In a corner near the window Pietro, wild-looking, with his unshaven beard of a week's growth, lay on a pile of straw roughly covered with some pieces of coarse sacking. He was emaciated and haggard about the face, and his skin was flushed red with the burning of the fever which consumed him. At times a dry hacking cough would echo through the bleak room, and the man would fall back on the poor bed in a paroxysm of pain. Clearly he was very ill, as Gemma had said, and not long for this world; knowledge that he was dying did not move Carlino's determination. He had come hither to slay Pietro with the crucifix, and he was bent upon executing his purpose.

"Carlino!" cried the sick man, raising himself on one elbow with a look of mingled terror and surprise. "You here?"

"Yes," said Gemma, moving towards her lover; "he has come to forgive you and to take me back."

"That is so," answered Bardi, raising the crucifix aloft. "I swear by this cross. Dear Pietro," he added, moving towards the bed, "I know you were tempted and --"

"Keep off! Keep off!" screamed Neri, shrinking back. "Liar! you have come to kill me. I see it in your eyes!"

"No, no," said Gemma, soothingly; "he has no weapon."

"None, my wife!" echoed Bardi, touching the spring of the cross -- "only this dagger!" and Gemma saw the silver Christ fall on the floor, while the cross which had borne Him remained, a poniard, in the right hand of her deceived husband. With a cry of horror, she flung herself on the sick man.

"Me first! Me first!"

"No! You later!" cried Bardi, dragging her off "This for --"

"Carlino!" shrieked Neri, as the dagger flashed downward -- "for the love of --"

The rest of the cry ended in a gurgle, as a stream of blood burst from his breast and stained the bedclothes.

“Murderer! Assassin!” gasped Gemma, scrambling on her hands and knees towards the door. “I shall – –”

“Die!” snarled Bardi. “Die!”

When it was all over, he stood looking at the two dead bodies, and began to think of his own safety. His plan was soon made.

“I shall wound myself, and say that there was a struggle,” he muttered; “that they tried to kill me, and I struck in self-defence. One little wound will be evidence enough to save my life.”

He placed the dagger at his throat, and setting his teeth with stern determination, he inflicted upon himself a slight gash. Then he rent his clothes as evidence of the clutching of hands, and thrust the stained dagger into the grip of the dead woman.

“She tried to kill me because I slew Pietro in self-defence,” he said, rehearsing the story to himself; “so now I – ah! *Dio!* What is this?”

A cold feeling, as of iced water, was creeping through his veins, a film of gray mist swam before his eyes, and in his throat, where he had inflicted that lying wound, there rose a ball which choked him. He staggered and fell on his knees and hands, striking the silver image of the Christ across the room. The walls spun round and round, his eyes grew dark, and with a sob of agony he pitched forward on to the bodies of his victims – dead.

F.W.H.

One week later Hagar was rewarded for her searching by reading the conclusion of the tragedy of the Fiesole Crucifix. The journal explained the finding of the three dead bodies, and commented upon the deadly ingenuity of the weapon used, which was at once a dagger and a crucifix. It added that one of the men and the woman had been struck to the heart, and so had died; but mentioned that the third corpse had a slight wound only, inflicted on the neck. “Quite insufficient to cause death,” said the sapient reporter; “therefore, how the other man died – his name has been ascertained to be Carlino Bardi – is a mystery.”

It might have been to the Press; but Hagar was better informed. A short time previously, Bolker had confessed that when he discovered the secret of the crucifix a thin piece of paper had been wrapped round the blade of the poniard. This he had kept, not that it was of value, or that he had any reason to withhold it from his mistress, but simply out of a thievish magpie propensity which was inherent in his nature. Finding it one day in his pocket – for he had forgotten all about it – he

gave it to Hagar. As it was written in Italian, and she was ignorant of the language, Hagar took it to the old bookseller, of whom mention has been made, to have it translated. This was done by a customer of his, and the following translation was handed to Hagar the next day:

"I, Guido, of Florence, have manufactured this dagger, hidden in this silver crucifix, to slay Count Louis from France and my faithless wife, Bianca, who with him has deceived me. As I may not be able to strike them to the heart, I have anointed this blade with a deadly poison, so that the slightest scratch of the poniard causes death. I write this warning and place it within the crucifix, so that he who finds it may beware of touching the point; and that he may use it upon a faithless wife, as it is my intention to do."

- Signed at Florence in Tuscany. -

Guido

Hagar looked at this paper, after reading the report of the tragedy, and mused. "So," said she to herself, "Carlino killed his wife and her lover; but how did it come about that he wounded himself, and died of the poison?"

There was no answer to this question, for Hagar never learnt that Bardi had inflicted the wound on himself to save his life, hereby slaying himself as surely as the law would have done.

6

The Fifth Customer and the Copper Key

The several adventures in which she had been engaged begot in Hagar a thirst for the romantic. To find that strange stories were attached to many pawned articles; to ascertain such histories of the past; to follow up their conclusions in the future – these things greatly pleased the girl, and gave her an interest in a somewhat dull life. She began to perceive that there was more romance in modern times than latter-day sceptics are willing to admit. Tropical scenery, ancient inns, ruined castles, are not necessary to engender romance. It is of the human heart, of human life; and even in the dingy Lambeth pawn-shop it blossomed and bloomed like some rare flower thrusting itself upward betwixt the arid city stones. Romance came daily to the gipsy girl, even in her prosaic business existence.

Out of a giant tooth, an unburied bone, a mighty footprint, Cuvier could construct a marvelous and prehistoric world. In like manner, from some trifle upon which she lent money, Hagar would deduce tales as fantastic as the Arabian Nights, as adventurous as the story of Gil Blas. Of such sort was the romance brought about by the pawning of the copper key.

The man who pawned it was in appearance like some Eastern mage; and the key itself, with its curious workmanship, green with verdigris, might have served to unlock the tower of Don Roderick. Its owner entered the shop one morning shortly before noon, and at the sight of his wrinkled face, and the venerable white beard which swept his breast, Hagar felt that he was a customer out of the common. With a gruff salutation, he threw down a paper parcel, which clanged on the counter.

"Look at that," said he, sharply. "I wish to pawn it."

In no wise disturbed by his discourtesy, Hagar opened the package, and found therein a roll of linen; this, when unwound, revealed a slender copper key of no great size. The wards at the lower end were nearly level with the stem of the key itself, as they consisted merely of five or six prickles of copper encircling at irregular intervals the round stem. The handle, however, was ornate and curious, being shaped like a bishop's crozier, while within the crook of the pastoral staff design the letters "C.R." were interwoven in an elaborate monogram. Altogether, this key – apparently very ancient – was a beautiful piece of workmanship, but of no value save to a dealer in rarities. Hagar examined it carefully, shook her head, and tossed it on the counter.

"I wouldn't give you five shillings on it," said she, contemptuously; "it is worth nothing."

"Bah, girl! You do not know what you are talking about. Look at the workmanship."

"Very fine, no doubt; but – –"

"And the monogram, you blind bat!" interrupted the old man. "'C.R.' – that stands for *Carolus Rex*."

"Oh," said Hagar, picking up the key again, and taking it to the light of the window; "it is an historic key, then?"

"Yes. It is said to be the key of the box in which the First Charles kept the treasonous papers which ultimately cost him his head. Oh, you may look! The key is authentic enough. It has been in the Danetree family for close on two hundred and fifty years."

"And are you a Danetree?"

"No; I am Luke Parsons, the steward of the family."

"Indeed!" said Hagar, with a piercing glance. "Then how comes the key into your possession?"

"I don't recognize your right to ask such questions," said Parsons, in an angry tone. "The key came into my possession honestly."

"Very probably; but I should like to know how. Do not get in a rage, Mr. Parsons," added Hagar, hastily; "we pawnbrokers have to be very particular, you know."

"I don't know," snapped the customer; "but if your curiosity must be satisfied, the key came to me from my father Mark, a former steward of the Danetrees. It was given to him by the then head of the family some sixty years ago."

"What are all these figures graven on the stem?" asked Hagar, noting a number of hieroglyphic marks.

"Ordinary Arabic numerals," retorted Parsons. "What they mean I know no more than you do. If I did I should be rich," he added, to himself.

"Ah! there is some secret connected with these figures?" said Hagar, overhearing.

"If there is, you won't find it out," replied the old man, ungraciously; "and it is none of your business, anyhow! What you have to do is to lend money on the key."

Hagar hesitated. The article, notwithstanding its workmanship, its age, and its historical associations, was worth very little. Had its interest consisted of these merely, she would not have taken the key in pawn. But the row of mysterious figures decided her. Here was a secret, connected – as was probable from the remark of the old man – with a hidden treasure. Remembering her experience with the cryptogram of the Florentine Dante, Hagar determined to retain the key, and, if possible, to discover the secret.

"If you are really in want of money, I will let you have a pound on it," she said, casting a glance at the threadbare clothes of her customer.

"If I did not need money, I should not have blundered into your spider's web," he retorted. "A pound will do; make out the ticket in the name of Luke Parsons, The Lodge, Danetree Hall, Buckton, Kent."

In silence Hagar did as she was bid; in silence she gave him ticket and money; and in silence he walked out of the shop. When alone she took up the key, and began to examine the figures without loss of time. The learning of many secrets had created in her a burning desire to learn more. If ingenuity and perseverance could do it, Hagar was bent upon discovering the secret of the copper key.

This mysterious object was so covered with verdigris that she was unable to decipher the marks. With her usual promptness, Hagar got the necessary materials, and cleaned the key thoroughly. The figures – those, as Parsons had said, of Arabic numerals – then appeared clearer, and Hagar noted that they extended the whole length of the copper stem. Taking paper and pencil, she copied them out carefully, with the following result:

"20 21 18 14 11 5 25 12 5 6 20 5 25 5 – H – 3 8 5 18 21 2"

"An odd jumble of figures!" said Hagar, staring at the result of her labours. "I wonder what they mean."

Unversed in the science of unravelling cryptograms, she was unable to answer her own question; and after an hour of profitless investigation, which made her head ache, she numbered the key according to

the numeral of the ticket, and put it away. But the oddity of the affair, the strange circumstance of the figures with the letter "H" stranded among them, often made her reflective, and she was devoured by curiosity – that parent of all great discoveries – to know what key and figures meant. Nevertheless, for all her thought no explanation of the problem presented itself. To her the secret of the key was the secret of the Sphinx – as mysterious, as unguessable.

Then it occurred to her that there might be some story, or legend, or tradition attached to this queer key, which might throw some light on the mystery of the figures. If she learnt the story, it was not improbable that she might gain a hint therefrom. At all events. Parsons had spoken of concealed riches connected with the reading of the cypher. To attempt to unravel the problem without knowing the reason for which the figures were engraved was, vulgarly speaking, putting the cart before the horse. Hagar determined that the cart should be in its proper place, viz., at the tail of the animal. In other words, she resolved first to learn the legend of the key, and afterwards attempt a reading of the riddle. To get at the truth, it was necessary to see Parsons.

No sooner had Hagar made up her mind to this course than she resolved to carry out her plan. Leaving Bolker to mind the shop, she went off down to Kent – to the Lodge, Buckton, that address which Parsons had given to be written on the ticket. With her she took the key, in case it might be wanted, and shortly after midday she alighted at a little rural station.

Oh, it was sweet to be once more in the country, to wander through green lanes o'er-arched with bending hazels, to smell the perfume of Kentish orchards, to run across the springy turf of wide moors golden with gorse! Such a fair expanse was stretched out at the back of the station, and across it – as Hagar was informed by an obliging porter – Danetree Hall was to be found. At the gates thereof, in a pretty and quaint lodge, dwelt surly Mr. Parsons, and thither went Hagar; but in truth she almost forgot her errand in the delights of the country.

Her gipsy blood sang in her veins as she ran across the green sward, and her heart leaped in her bosom for very lightness. She forgot the weary Lambeth pawn-shop; she thought not of Eustace Lorn; she did not let her mind dwell upon the return of Goliath and her subsequent disinheritance; all she knew was that she was a Romany lass, a child of the road, and had entered again into her kingdom. In such a happy vein she saw the red roofs of Danetree Hall rising above the trees of a great park; and almost immediately she arrived at the great iron gates,

behind which, on one side of a stately avenue, she espied the lodge wherein dwelt Parsons.

He was sitting outside smoking a pipe, morose even in the golden sunlight, with the scent of flowers in his nostrils, the music of the birds in his ears. On seeing Hagar peering between the bars of the gate he started up, and literally rushed towards her.

"Pawn-shop girl!" he growled, like an angry bear. "What do you want?"

"Civility in the first place; rest in the second!" retorted Hagar, coolly.

"Let me in, Mr. Parsons. I have come to see you about that copper key."

"You've lost it?" shouted the gruff creature.

"Not I; it's in my pocket. But I wish to know its story."

"Why?" asked Parsons, opening the gates with manifest reluctance.

Without replying Hagar marched past him, into his garden, and the porch of his house. Finally she took her seat in the chair Parsons had vacated. The old man seemed rather pleased with her ungracious behaviour, which matched so well with his own; and after closing the gates he came to stare at her brilliant face.

"You're a handsome woman, and a bold one," said he, slowly. "Come inside, and tell me why you wish to know the story of the key."

Accepting the invitation with civility, Hagar followed her eccentric host into a prim little parlour furnished in the ugly fashion of the early Victorian era. Chairs and sofa were of mahogany and horsehair; a round table, with gilt-edged books lying thereon at regular intervals, occupied the centre of the apartment, and the gilt-framed mirror over the fireplace was swathed in green gauze. Copperplate prints of the Queen and the Prince Consort decorated the crudely-papered walls, and the well-worn carpet was of a dark-green hue sprinkled with bouquets of red flowers. Altogether a painfully ugly room, which made any one gifted with artistic aspirations shudder. Hagar, whose eye was trained to beauty, shuddered duly, and then took her seat on the most comfortable of the ugly chairs.

"Why do you want to know the story of the key?" asked Parsons, throwing his bulky figure on the slippery sofa.

"Because I wish to read the riddle of the key."

Parsons started up, and his face grew red with anger. "No, no! You shall not – you must not! Never will I make her rich!"

"Make who rich?" asked Hagar, astonished at this outburst.

"Marion Danetree – the proud hussey! My son loves her, but she disdains him. He is breaking his heart, while she laughs. If that picture were found she would be rich, and despise my poor Frank the more."

"The picture? What picture?"

"Why, the one that is hidden," said Parsons in surprise. "The clue to the hiding-place is said to be concealed in the figures on the key. If you find the picture, it will sell for thirty thousand pounds, which would go to that cruel Miss Danetree."

"I don't quite understand," said Hagar, rather bewildered. "Would you mind telling me the story from the beginning?"

"As you please," replied the old man, moodily. "I'll make it as short as I can. Squire Danetree, the grandfather of the present lady, who is the only representative of the family, was very rich, and a friend of George the Fourth. Like all the Danetrees, he was a scamp, and squandered the property of the family in entertainments during the Regency. He sold all the pictures of the Hall save one, 'The Nativity,' by Andrea del Castagno, a famous Florentine painter of the Renaissance. The King offered thirty thousand pounds for this gem, as he wished to buy it for the nation. Danetree refused, as he had some compunction at robbing his only son, and wished to leave him the picture as the only thing saved out of the wreck. But as time went on, and money became scarce, he determined to sell this last valuable. Then the picture disappeared."

"How did it disappear?"

"My father hid it," replied Parsons, coolly. "It was not known at the time, but the old man confessed on his death-bed that, determined to save the family from ruin, he had concealed the picture while Squire Danetree was indulging in his mad orgies in London. When my father confessed, the spendthrift squire was dead, and he wished the son – the present Miss Danetree's father – to possess the picture and to sell it, in order to restore the fortunes of the family."

"Well, did he not tell where the picture was hidden?"

"No; he died on the point of revealing the secret," said Parsons. "All he could say was 'The key! the key!' Then I knew that the hiding-place was indicated by the row of figures graven on the stem of the copper key. I tried to make out the meaning; so did my son; so did Squire Danetree and his daughter. But all to no purpose. None can read the riddle."

"But why did you pawn the key?"

"It wasn't for money, you may be sure of that!" snapped the old man – "or I should not have taken a paltry pound for it. No, I pawned it to put it beyond my son's reach. He was always poring over it, so I thought he might guess the meaning and find the picture."

"And why not? Don't you want it found?"

Parsons's face assumed a malignant expression. "No!" said he, sharply – "for then Frank would be foolish enough to give the picture to Miss Danetree – to the woman who despises him. If you guess the riddle, don't tell him, as I don't want to make the proud jade rich."

"I can't guess the riddle," replied Hagar hopelessly. "Your story does not aid me in the least."

While thus speaking, her eyes wandered to the wall at the back of the glum old steward. Thereon she saw in a frame of black wood one of those hideous samplers which our grandmothers were so fond of working. It was a yellow square, embroidered – or rather stitched – with the alphabet in divers colours, and also an array of numerals up to twenty-six. Hagar idly wondered why the worker had stopped at that particular number; and then she noticed that the row of figures was placed directly under the row of letters. At once the means of reading the key riddle flashed on her brain. The cypher was exceedingly simple. All that had to be done was to substitute letters for the figures. Hagar uttered an ejaculation which roused old Parsons from his musings.

"What's the matter?" said he, turning his head: "what are you looking at, girl? Oh," he added, following her gaze, "that sampler; 'twas done by my mother; a rare hand at needlework she was! But never mind her just now. I want to know about that riddle."

"I can't guess it," said Hagar, keeping her own counsel, for reasons to be revealed hereafter. "Do you wish your key back? I have it here."

"No; I don't want my son to get it, and make that proud wench rich by guessing the riddle. Keep the key till I call for it. What! are you going? Have a drink of milk?"

The offer was hospitably made, but Hagar declined it, as she had no desire to break bread with this malignant old man. Making a curt excuse, she took her leave, and within the hour she was on her way back to London, with a clue to the cypher in her brain. The sampler had revealed the secret; for without doubt it was from his wife's needlework that the Parsons of sixty years before had got the idea of constructing his cryptogram. In the sampler the figures were placed thus:

and Parsons had simply substituted figures for letters. The thing was so plain that Hagar wondered why, with the key-sampler staring him in the face, the steward had not succeeded in reading the riddle.

When back in the shop, she applied her test to the figures on the key, and found out the meaning thereof. Then she considered what was the

best course to pursue. Clearly it was not wise to tell Parsons, as he hated Miss Danetree, and if he found the picture through Hagar's aid he might either hide it again or destroy it. Should she tell Miss Danetree herself, or Frank Parsons, the despised lover? After some consideration the girl wrote to the latter, asking him to call on her at the shop. She felt rather a sympathy with his plight after hearing his father's story, and wished to judge for herself if he was an eligible suitor for Miss Danetree's hand. If she liked him, and found him worthy, Hagar was resolved to tell him how to find the picture, and by doing so thus aid him to gain the hand of the disdainful beauty. If, on the other hand, she did not care for him, Hagar concluded to reveal her discovery to Miss Danetree herself. Her resolution thus being taken, she waited quietly for the arrival of the steward's son.

When he presented himself, Hagar liked him very much indeed, for three reasons. In the first place, he was handsome – a sure passport to a woman's favour; in the second, he had a fine frank nature, and a tolerably intelligent brain; in the third, he was deeply in love with Marion Danetree. This last reason influenced Hagar as much as anything, for she was at a romantic age, and took a deep interest in love and lovers. "It is most extraordinary that my father should have pawned the key," said Frank, when Hagar had told her story, less the explanation of the riddle.

"It may be extraordinary, Mr. Parsons, but it is very lucky – for you."

"I don't see it," said Frank, raising his eyebrows. "Why?"

"Why," replied Hagar, drawing the key out of her pocket, "because I have discovered the secret."

"What! Do you know what that line of figures means?"

"Yes. When I paid my visit to your father, I saw an article in his room which gave me a clue. I worked out the cypher, and now I know where the picture is hidden."

Young Parsons sprang to his feet with glowing eyes. "Where – oh, where?" he almost shouted. "Tell me, quick!"

"For you to tell Miss Danetree, no doubt," said Hagar, coolly.

At once his enthusiasm died away, and he sat down, with a frown on his face. "What do you know about Miss Danetree?" he asked, sharply.

"All that your father told me, Mr. Parsons. You love her, but she does not love you; and for that your father hates her."

"I know he does," said the young man, sighing, "and very unjustly. I will be frank with you, Miss Stanley."

"I think it is best for you to be so, as I hold your fate in my hands."

"You hold – fate! What do you mean?"

Hagar shrugged her shoulders in pity at his obtuseness. "Why," she said, quietly, "this picture is worth thirty thousand pounds, and Miss Danetree is worth nothing except that ruined Hall. If I tell you where to find that picture, you will be able to restore her fortunes, and make her a comparatively rich woman. Now you cannot read the cypher; I can; and so – you see!"

Young Parsons laughed outright at her comprehensive view of the situation, although he blushed a little at the same time, and gave an indignant denial to the hinted motive which prompted Hagar's speech. "I am not a fortune-hunter," he said, bluntly; "if I learn the whereabouts of Castagno's 'Nativity,' I shall certainly tell Mar – I mean Miss Danetree. But as for trading on that knowledge to make her marry me against her will, I'd rather die than act so basely!"

"Ah, my dear young man, I am afraid you have no business instincts," said Hagar, dryly. "I thought you loved the lady."

"You are determined to get at the truth, I see. Yes; I do love her."

"And she loves you?"

Parsons hesitated, and blushed again at this downright questioning.

"Yes; I think she does – a little," he said, at length.

"H'm! That means she loves you a great deal."

"Well," said the young man, slyly, "you are a woman, and should be able to read a woman's character. Don't you think so?"

"Perhaps. But you forget that I have not seen this particular woman – or rather angel, as I suppose you call her."

"You are a queer girl!"

"And you – a love-sick young man!" rejoined Hagar, mimicking his tone. "But time passes; tell me about your wooing."

"There is little to tell," rejoined Frank, dolefully. "My father is, as you know, the steward of the Danetree family; but as they were ruined by the Regency squire, his duties are now light enough. Miss Danetree is the last of the race, and all that remains to her is the Hall, the few acres which surround it, and a small income from the rents of two outlying farms. I was brought up from childhood with Marion – I must call her so, as it is the name which comes easiest to my lips – and I loved her always. She loves me also."

"Then why will she not marry you?"

"Because she is poor and I am poor. Oh, my position as son of her steward would not stand in the way could I support her as my wife."

But my father always refused to let me learn a profession or a trade, or even to earn my own livelihood, as he desired me to succeed him as the steward of the Danetree property. In the old days the post was a good one; but now it is worth nothing."

"And your father dislikes Miss Danetree."

"Yes, because he thinks she scorns me – which she does not. But she will not let me tell him the truth until there is a chance of our marriage."

"Well," said Hagar, producing the paper on which was written the line of figures, "I am about to give you that chance. This cypher is quite easy; figures have been substituted for letters – that is all. A is set down as one, B as two, and so on."

"I don't quite understand."

"I will show you. These figures must be divided into numbers, and a letter set over each. Now, the first number is twenty, and the twentieth letter of the alphabet is 'T.' The twenty-first letter is 'U.' Then come the eighteenth and the fourteenth letters. What are they?"

Frank counted. "'R' and 'N,'" he said, after a pause. "Ah! I see the first word is T, U, R, N, – that is turn!"

"Exactly; represented by numbers, 20, 21, 18, 14. Now you understand, so I need not explain further. Here is the cypher written out."

Young Parsons took up the paper and read as follows:

TURN KEY LEFT EYE EIGHTH CHERUB

"Turn key left eye eighth cherub!" repeated Parsons, in puzzled tones.

"I have no doubt that you have solved the problem correctly; but, I do not know what the sentence means."

"Well," said Hagar, rather sharply, "it means, I should think, that the left eye of some cherub's head is a keyhole, into which is to be thrust the copper key upon which the figures are engraved. Doubtless, by turning the key the wall will open, and the picture will be discovered."

"What a clever girl you are!" cried Parsons, in admiration.

"I use my brains, that is all," said Hagar, coolly. "I'm afraid you don't. However, are there a number of sculptured cherubs in Danetree Hall?"

"Yes; there is a room called 'The Cherubs' Room' from a number of carved heads. How did you guess that there was more than one?"

"Because the letter 'H' corresponds with the figure eight; so no doubt there are more than eight heads. All you have to do is to take this copper key, put it into the left eye of the eighth cherub, and find the picture."

Then you can marry Miss Danetree, and the pair of you can live on the thirty thousand pounds. If she is as clever as you, you'll need it all."

Quite impervious to Hagar's irony, Frank Parsons took his leave with many admiring words and protestations of gratitude. When he found the picture he promised to let Hagar know, and to invite her to Danetree Hall to see it. Then he departed, and it was only when she was left alone that Hagar reflected she had not got back the pound lent on the key. But she consoled herself with the reflection that she could demand it when the hidden picture was discovered. Principal and interest was what she required; for Hagar was nothing if not businesslike.

That same evening Frank was seated in the prim little parlour with his dour father. He had been up to the Hall, and had proved the truth of Hagar's reading by discovering the picture; also he had seen Marion Danetree, and told her of the good fortune which was coming. She would be able to buy back the lost acres of the family, to restore and refurnish the old house, to take up her position again in the county, and reign once more as the lady of Danetree Hall. All this Frank told his father, and the old man's brow grew black as night.

"You have made her rich!" he muttered – "that proud girl who looks upon you as dirt beneath her feet."

Frank smiled. He had not told his father the termination of the interview with Marion; nor did he intend to do so at present.

"We'll talk of Marion and her pride to-morrow," he said, rising; "I am going to bed just now; but you know how I discovered the picture, and how it has been restored to the Danetrees as grandfather wished."

When his son left the room, Luke Parsons sat with folded hands and a dull pain in his heart. It was gall and wormwood to him that the woman who rejected Frank should acquire wealth and regain her position through the aid of the man she despised. Oh, if he could only hide the picture, or even destroy it! – anything rather than that proud Marion Danetree should be placed on an eminence to look down on his bright boy. To rob her of this newly-found wealth – to take away the picture – Parsons felt that he would commit even a crime.

And why should he not? Frank had left the key on the table – the copper key which was to be placed in the left eye of the cherub. Parsons knew well enough – from the explanation of his son – how the key was to be used; how his father had designed the hiding-place of the Castagno picture. The lock and key which had belonged to the First Charles had been given to the old man by his master. He had placed the first behind the cherub, with the keyhole in the left eye, so as to keep the panel or

portion of the wall in its place; and on the second he had graven the numbers indicating the locality. Parsons rose to his feet and stretched out his hand for the copper key. When he touched it, all his scruples vanished. He made up his mind then and there to go up that night to the Hall and destroy the picture. Then Marion Danetree would no longer be rich, or benefit by the secret which Frank had discovered. It will be seen that Mr. Parsons never thought of Hagar's share in the reading of the cypher.

As steward he had keys of all the doors in the Hall, and was able easily to gain admission at whatever hour he chose. He chose to enter now, and with a lantern in his hand, and a clasp-knife hidden in his pocket, he went on his errand of destruction. Unlocking a small side door under the greater terrace, he passed along the dark underground passages, ascending to the upper floor, and in a short space of time he found himself in "The Cherubs' Room."

It was a large and lofty apartment, paneled with oak darkened by time and carved with fruit and flowers and foliage after the mode of Grinling Gibbons. Between each panel there was a beautifully-carven cherub's head, with curly hair, and wings placed crosswise under the chin. The moonlight streaming in through the wide and uncurtained windows showed all these things clearly to the wild eyes of the old man; and he made haste to fulfil his task before the moon should set and leave him in darkness. Swinging the lantern so that its yellow light should illuminate the walls, Parsons counted the cherubs' heads between the panels, starting from the door, and was rewarded by finding the one he sought. The left eye of this face was pierced, and into it he inserted the slender copper stem of the key. There was a cracking sound as he turned it, and then the whole of the panel swung outward to the left. On the back of this he beheld the picture of Andrea del Castagno. The sight of it was so unexpected that he started back with a cry, and let fall the lantern, which was immediately extinguished. However, this mattered little, as he had ample light in the rays of the summer moon. In the white radiance he relighted his candle, and then, betwixt the yellow glare of the one and the chill glimmer of the other, he examined the gem of art which, in the interests of mistaken pride, he proposed to destroy. It was beautiful beyond description.

Under a lowly roof of thatched straw lay the Divine Child, stretching up His little Hands to the Holy Mother. With arms crossed upon her breast in ecstatic adoration, Mary bent over Him worshipping; and in the dim obscurity of the humble dwelling could be seen the tall form and reverend head of Joseph. Above spread the dark blue of the night sky, broken

by golden dashes of colour, in which were seen the majestic forms of wide-winged angels looking earthward. At the top of the picture there was a blaze of light radiating from the Godhead, and in the arrowy beam streaming downward floated the white specter of the Holy Dove. The marvellous beauty of the picture lay in the dispersion and disposition of the various lights: that mild lustre which emanated from the Form of the Child, the aureole hovering round the bowed head of Mary; the glory of the golden atmosphere surrounding the angels; and, highest and most wonderful of all, the fierce white light which showered down, blinding the terrible, from the unseen Deity. The picture was majestic, sublime: a dream of lovely piety, a masterpiece of art.

For the moment Parsons was spellbound before this wonderful creation which he intended to destroy. Almost he was tempted to forego his evil purpose, and to spare the beautiful vision which spread itself so gloriously before him. But the thought of Marion and her scorn, of Frank and his hopeless love, decided him. With a look of hatred he opened the knife, and raised the blade to slash the picture.

“Stop!”

With a cry, Parsons dropped the knife and wheeled round at that imperious command. At the further end of the room, candle in hand, stood the tall form of a woman. She wore a dressing-gown hastily thrown over her shoulders; her hair was loose, her feet were bare; and she approached the steward noiselessly and swiftly. It was Marion Danetree, and her eyes were full of anger.

“What are you doing here at this time of night?” she demanded haughtily of the sullen old man. “I heard a cry and the noise of a fall, and I came down.”

“I want to spoil that picture,” said Parsons between his teeth.

“Destroy Castagno’s ‘Nativity’? Take away my only chance of restoring the family fortunes? You are mad.”

“No; I am Frank’s father. You despise him; you hate him. Through him you have found the picture; but now – –” He picked up the knife again.

“Wait a moment!” said Marion, comprehending Parsons’s motive; “if you destroy that picture, you prevent my marriage with Frank.”

“What?” – the knife crashed on the floor – “are you going to marry my boy?”

“Yes. Did not Frank tell you? When we discovered the picture together this afternoon, he asked me to be his wife. I consented only too gladly.”

“But – but I thought you despised him!”

“Despise him? I love him better than all the world! Go away, Mr. Parsons, and thank God that He sent me to prevent you committing a crime. I shall bring that picture to Frank as my dowry. He shall take my name, and there will once more be a Squire Danetree at the Hall.”

“O Miss Danetree – Marion – forgive me!” cried Parsons, quite broken down.


“I forgive you; it was love for Frank made you think of this folly. But go – go! it is not seemly that you should be here at this hour of the night.” Parsons closed up the panel in silence, locked it, and turned to go. But as he passed her he held out his hand.

“What is this?” asked Marion, smiling.

“My gift to you – my marriage gift – the copper key which has brought you a husband and a fortune.”

7

The Sixth Customer and the Silver Teapot

f all the people with whom Hagar had to do while managing the Lambeth pawn-shop, she liked always to remember Margaret Snow. The memory of that pale, blind old maid, with her sorrowful story and her patient endurance, never died out of the girl's heart. The pitiful little episode of the silver teapot, which she pawned so unwillingly, and only out of sheer necessity; the sad tale recounted by the crushed creature, and the unexpected part which she took herself in the conclusion of such tale: all these things served to keep green the memory of the sad woman whom Hagar called her sixth customer. There was even something ludicrous in parts of the affair; something naive and childlike in the absolute simplicity of the romance; but Hagar never saw its humour. All she knew was that Margaret was a martyr and a saint, and that the world was the loser for not knowing her story. Such as it is, the tale runs thus:

It was dusk one November evening when Margaret entered the shop, with a parcel tied up in an old towel. Hagar knew her well by sight as a blind woman who lived in an attic at the top of the end house in Carby's Crescent, and as one who earned a hard and penurious living by weaving hand-baskets of straw for a great emporium at the corner of the outside street. These baskets – a speciality of the great shop – were given to customers in which to carry away small parcels; and as the demand was constant, the supply was the same. Margaret could always sell as many of these baskets as she could weave; but, although skilful and nimble with her long fingers, she could rarely earn more than ten shillings a week. On this she had to live, and dress, and buy food,

so her existence was really a kind of miracle. Still, she had never asked charity of a single soul, being proud and reserved: and in all the years she had dwelt in Carby's Crescent she had never entered the pawnshop. Knowing this, Hagar was astonished to see her standing in one of the sentry-boxes, with the bundle placed on the counter before her. "Miss Snow!" cried Hagar, in sheer surprise. "What is the matter? Is there anything that I can do for you?"

The thin pale face of the woman flushed as she heard herself called by her name; and her voice was hesitating and low as she laid one slender finger on the bundle, before making reply.

"I have been ill, Miss Stanley," she explained, softly, "so I have not done much work lately. Very little money has come in. I – I am obliged to – to pay my rent and – and –" She broke down altogether, and added desperately: "Please lend me something on this."

Hagar became a business woman at once "What is it?" she said, undoing the bundle deftly.

"It is – it is – a silver teapot," faltered Miss Snow; "the only valuable I possess. I wish to pawn it for three months, until I can redeem it. I – I – hope to repay the money by then. Three – three pounds will be –" Her voice died away in her throat: and Hagar saw her poor thin hand steal up to her averted face to brush away a tear.

The teapot was a square one of Georgian design, with fluted sides, an elegantly-curved spout, and a smooth handle of ivory. Hagar was quite willing to lend on it the required three pounds, as the silver was worth more, until she made a curious discovery. The lid of the pot was closed tightly, and soldered all round, in a manner which made it quite impossible to be opened. This odd circumstance rendered the teapot for all practical purposes entirely useless; no one could use an hermetically sealed vessel.

"Why is this teapot closed?" asked Hagar in surprise.

"It was done thirty years ago by my order," replied the blind woman, in a calm voice; then, after a pause, she added in faint and hesitating tones: "There are letters in it."

"Letters? Whose letters?"

"Mine and – a person's with whom you have no concern. Please do not ask any more questions, Miss Stanley. Give me the money and let me go. I hope to redeem the teapot in three months."

Hagar hesitated and looked doubtful. "As it is sealed up, the teapot is hardly of much use," she said, after a pause. "Take it back, my dear Miss Snow, and I'll lend you the three pounds."

"Thank you, no," replied the old maid, coldly. "I take charity from no one. If you can't lend the money on the teapot, give me back my property."

"Oh, well, I'll take it in pawn if you like," rejoined Hagar, with a shrug. "Here are three sovereigns, and I'll make out the ticket at once."

The hand of the blind woman closed on the money with a sigh of mingled regret and relief. When Hagar returned with the ticket she saw that Margaret was fondling the piece of silver as though unwilling to part with it. She drew back, flushing, on hearing the approaching foot-steps of Hagar, and taking the ticket in silence, moved away with tears running down her withered cheeks. Hagar was touched by this mute misery.

"Can you find your way back home in the darkness?" she called out.

"My dear," said the elder woman with dignity, "day and night are the same to me. You forget that I am blind. Also," she added, with an attempt at lightness, "I know every inch of this neighbourhood."

When she departed Hagar put away the teapot, and wondered a little over the odd circumstance of it being closed, and containing love-letters. She was certain that the letters were full of love from the faltering way in which Margaret had mentioned them; also because they were her own and "a person's with whom you have no concern."

That last sentence, as spoken by the blind woman, showed Hagar only too truly her indomitable reserve and pride. She must have been reduced to her last crust before she could have brought herself to pawn the queer casket – and a teapot as a receptacle for love-letters was very queer indeed – which contained the evidence of her youth's dead romance. Thirty years ago the teapot had been sealed; Hagar knew also that thirty years ago the heart of this blind and unattractive old maid had been broken. Here indeed was material for a true romance – and that of the strangest, the most pitiful.

"What a strange place is a pawn-shop!" said Hagar, philosophizing to herself. "All the flotsam and jetsam of human lives drift into it. Broken hearts, wrecked careers, worn-out and dead romances – this is the place for them all. I should like to know the story of that sealed-up teapot."

Indeed, so curious she was to know it that she felt half-inclined to call on the old maid, and ask for information. But Hagar, although a poor girl, and a wandering gipsy, and the manageress of a low London pawn-shop, had a natural instinct of delicacy which withheld her from forcing the confidence of one disinclined to give it.

Miss Snow was a lady born, as all Carby's Crescent knew, and her unbending pride was proverbial. The few words with which she had checked Hagar's inquiries about the letters enshrined in the teapot showed plainly enough that the subject of the hinted romance was not one to be touched upon. Hagar therefore kept the teapot in the shop, and forbore to call upon its owner.

For some weeks Margaret continued to weave her baskets and take them to the shop which employed her. She went to church every Sunday morning, according to her usual custom; and other than these outings she remained secluded in her freezing garret. In that year the winter was particularly severe in London, and snow fell thickly before Christmas. In her desire to save money for the redemption of the teapot, Margaret denied herself a fire, and reduced the amount of food she took, to as little as would sustain life. In her thin clothing and well-worn shoes she went to shop and church amid falling snow, and in the teeth of cutting winds. Naturally, with lack of clothing, food and fire, with her weight of years, and emaciated frame, she fell ill. One morning she did not appear, and the woman of the house went up to find her in bed.

Still, her bold spirit, her inborn pride, kept her resolute to refuse charity; and she wove her baskets sitting up in her buckle-bed, between bouts of pain and anguish. In these straits she must have died, but that God in His pity for this helpless and tortured woman sent an angel to aid her. The angel was Hagar; and a very practical angel she proved to be.

Learning from the gossip of the neighbourhood that Miss Snow was ill, and remembering the episode of the silver teapot, Hagar marched up to the freezing garret and took charge of the old maid. Margaret objected with all her feeble force; but the kind-hearted gipsy girl was not to be deterred from what she conceived to be her duty.

"You are ill and alone, so I must look after you," she said, throwing a rug, which she had brought, over the poor woman.

"But I cannot pay you. All I have of value is the silver teapot."

"Well," said Hagar, proceeding to kindle a good fire, "that is safe in my shop, so don't trouble about it. As to payment, we'll talk about that when you get better."

"I shall never get better," groaned Margaret, and turned her face to the wall. And indeed, Hagar thought, that was true enough. Worn by years of cold and privation, Margaret's body was too feeble to resist much longer the inroads of disease. When she left her garret again it would be feet foremost; and another London pauper would be added to the

great army of the unknown dead. With Margaret the sands of time were running out very rapidly.

Hagar was like a sister to her. She kept her supplied with fire and food and blankets; she gave her wine to drink; and, when she could get away from the shop, she came oftentimes to sit by that poor bedside. It was on such an occasion that she heard the one romance of Margaret's life, and learnt why the love-letters – they truly were love-letters – had been placed in the silver teapot.

It was late in December, and the ground was white with snow. The shops, even in Carby's Crescent, were being decked with holly and mistletoe for the season of Yule; and, after closing the premises, Hagar had come to pass an hour with Margaret. There was a good fire – one which would have made wrathful the miserly heart of the late Jacob Dix – and a fair amount of light from two candles placed on the mantelpiece. Margaret was cheerful, even gay, on this evening; and with her hand in Hagar's she thanked the girl for her kindness.

"But indeed thanks are weak," said the blind woman; "you have fed the hungry and clothed the naked. After thirty years of doubt, my dear, you have restored my faith in human nature."

"How did you lose it?"

"Through a man, my dear; one who said that he loved me, yet who broke off our engagement without any reason."

"That was strange. Why did you not ask him for his reason?"

"I could not," said Margaret, with a sigh; "he was in India. But it is a long story, my dear. If you care to listen –"

"I shall be delighted," said Hagar, quickly – "especially if it explains why you sealed up the letters in the teapot."

"Yes; it explains that. In that teapot – which was the only present I ever received from John Mask – I placed his cruel letters thirty years ago; also mine to him, which he sent back."

"Why did he send back your letters?" asked Hagar.

"I don't know; I cannot say; but he returned them. Oh!" she cried with a burst of anguish, "how cruel, how cruel! and I loved him so – I loved him! But he forgot me and married Jane Lorrimer. Now they are rich and prosperous and happy, while I – I am dying a pauper in a garret. And the silver teapot is pawned," she finished pathetically.

Hagar patted the thin hand which gripped the bedclothes. "Tell me the story," said she, soothingly – "that is, if it will not cause you too much pain."

"Pain," echoed Margaret, bitterly. "When the heart is broken it feels no pain, and mine was broken thirty years ago by John Mask." She remained silent for a moment, and then continued: "I lived at Christchurch, in Hants, my dear, in a little cottage just outside the town. This I inherited from my parents, together with a trifle of money – not much, indeed, but sufficient to live upon. Both my father and mother had died, leaving me alone in the world at the age of twenty; so I lived in my cottage with Lucy Dyke and a little maid as my servants. Lucy was near my own age, and looked after the house well. I was blind, you see, my dear," said Margaret, softly "and could do nothing for myself. Dear Lord but I have had to earn my own living since then."

Overcome by bitter memories, she paused for a moment. Hagar did not dare to break the silence; and in a short time Margaret resumed her tale. "Also, I had a dear friend called Jane Lorrimer, who lived near with her parents, and who visited me constantly. We were like sisters, and I loved her better than any one in the world till John Mask came to Christchurch. He was visiting the rector of the parish, and I met him. Although I never saw his face, I was told that he was very handsome; and he had a sweet low voice, which charmed me greatly. You know, my dear, how we poor blind folk love a sympathetic voice. Well, I loved John, but I had no idea that there would be any return of that love; for how could a blind girl hope that a handsome young man would look on her – especially," added Margaret in a melancholy tone, "when Jane was so handsome?"

"But he did not love Jane," observed Hagar, significantly.

"No," said the blind woman, proudly; "he loved me, and this he told me after we had known each other a year. We became engaged, and life was then at its brightest for me. However, he was going out to India to be a tea-planter; and he said when he was settled there and had made a fair amount of money that he would send for me. Alas! alas! that promise was never kept."

"Why wasn't it?" asked Hagar, bluntly.

"Who can tell?" said Margaret, sadly. "Not I; not Jane. She was as surprised as I was when the end came. Although blind, my dear, I can write fairly well, and John made me promise to correspond with him. I did so for more than a year, and he answered faithfully."

"Who read his letters to you?"

"Sometimes Jane, sometimes Lucy Dyke. Ah! they were both good friends to me in my trouble. At first John's letters were very affectionate, but as the months went by they grew colder and colder. Oftentimes

Jane said that she would not read them to me. I wrote to John asking the meaning of this change; but his replies were not satisfactory. At last, eighteen months after his departure, I received back my letters."

"Really! Did Jane or Lucy bring them to you?"

"No; Jane was absent in London seeing friends; and Lucy at the moment was out of the house. The little maid brought me the packet. I opened it, thinking it might be a present from John, as he had given me nothing but the silver teapot, which he presented to me before he departed. I made the little maid wait till I opened the packet; and I asked her to read the letter from John enclosed."

"Did she?"

"Yes; oh, the pain of it!" cried Margaret. "He said that it was best that our engagement should end, and that he returned to me my letters, thirteen in all. Not an excuse, or a sigh, or a regret. Only two curt, cruel lines, breaking off our engagement, and the packet of my letters. I was distracted with grief; and I placed the letters in my bosom while I wept."

"What did Lucy say when she returned?"

"She was very angry with the little maid for having read the letter to me and causing me such pain. She wanted me to destroy my own letters, but I refused. I kept them by me day and night; John had touched them, and they were all that remained to me of him. Then I saw that my romance was dead and done with. I took my own letters and those he had written me, and tying them up in a bundle, I placed them with my own hands in the silver teapot. Then I went to a jeweler, and had the lid closed. It has not been opened since."

"Did you tell Lucy or Jane that you had done this?"

"I told no one. I kept my own secret, and none guessed what the teapot contained of my one hour of happiness. Then shortly afterwards misfortunes fell on me. I lost my money through the wickedness of my trustee, and had to give up my house and dismiss Lucy and my little maid. Jane went out to India to an uncle, and she took with her Lucy as maid. In six months from her departure I heard that she had married John Mask."

"Did she write and tell you so?"

"No; she never wrote to me, nor did he. As for myself, after receiving back my letters with those cruel two lines, after enshrining them in the teapot, I strove to forget him. I never wrote a line to him; I never mentioned him. He had treated me cruelly, and he was dead to me. That was the end of my romance, my dear."

"And how did you come to London?"

"I lost my all, as I told you," said Margaret, simply; "and, as I could not bear to live poor where I had been well off, I left Christchurch and came to London. Oh, my dear, why should I tell you of the miseries I endured! Blind and poor and friendless, I suffered greatly; but it was all nothing compared to the suffering of that hour when John broke my heart. Finally, I drifted here, to earn my bread by weaving baskets; and here I die. Alas! poor Margaret Snow!"

"And John Mask and his wife?"

"They live in the West End, in Berkeley Square, rich and prosperous, with sons and daughters by their side. Lucy is the housekeeper. Oh, I learnt it all from a friend of mine in Christchurch. Ah! how happy – how happy they are!"

"Did you reveal yourself to them?"

"No. Why should I? They would not care for me to haunt them like a ghost of the past. They are rich and honored and happy."

"And you lie here, poor and dying!" said Hagar, bitterly.

"Yes; it is hard – hard. But I must not complain. God has sent you to me to make my last moments happy. You are good – good, my dear. You have done much for me; but one thing more you must do. Open the teapot."

"What!" cried Hagar, in surprise – "open what has been closed for thirty years!"

"Yes; I wish you to read me John's letters before I die. Let me go to my rest knowing that he loved me once. To-morrow, my dear, you must do this for me. Promise."

"I promise," said Hagar, folding the blankets over her. "To-morrow I shall have the teapot opened, and bring you the letters – your own and John Mask's."

With this promise she took her leave for the night, after first seeing that Margaret was warm and comfortable. In her own bed, Hagar meditated on the sadness of the story which had been told to her, on the passionate love of the man for the blind woman, which had died away so strangely. That he should have ceased to love Margaret was not uncommon, as men, particularly when absent, are only too often prone to forget those they leave at home; but it was curious that he should have married Jane Lorrimer. A doubt stole into Hagar's mind as to whether Margaret had been treated fairly; whether there might not have been other reasons for the sudden ending of her romance than she knew of. For such suspicion Hagar had no grounds to go upon; but all the same she could not rid her mind of the doubt. Perhaps the letters might set it at rest; perhaps all

had happened as Margaret had told. Nevertheless, Hagar was anxious that the morrow should come – that the teapot should be opened and the letters read. Then she would learn if treachery and woman's wiles had parted the lovers, or if the story was merely one – as Margaret believed – of a faithless man and a broken-hearted woman.

The next day Hagar left the shop in charge of Bolker, and took the silver teapot to a jeweler in the adjacent thoroughfare. He soon melted the solder, and opened the lid. Within, beneath a pile of dried rose-leaves, she found the packet of letters, tied up with a blue ribbon. There was something sacrilegious to her imaginative mind, in thus disturbing the relics of this dead-and-done-with romance; and it was with reverent care that Hagar carried the teapot and its contents to the house in Carby's Crescent. After thirty years of moldering under the rose-leaves, these letters, yellow and faded, were restored to the light of day; and the woman who had written them when young and fair was now lying withered and dying in the winter of her age. Hagar was profoundly moved as she sat by that humble bedside with the ancient love-letters on her lap.

"Read them all," said Margaret, with the tears running down her face; "read the letters of John in which he told me of his love thirty years ago. Thirty years! Ah, dear God! when I was young and fresh! Oh, oh, oh! Youth and love!" she wept, beating the bedclothes with trembling hands – "love and youth! Gone! gone! – and I lie dying!"

Steadying her voice with an effort in the presence of this sacred grief, Hagar read the letters written from India by the absent lover. There were ten or twelve of them – charming letters, full of pure and undying love. From first to last there was no sentiment but what breathed devotion and trust. The writer spoke tenderly of his poor blind love; he promised to make her her path with roses, and in every way to show himself worthy of honor and affection. Up to the twelfth letter there was not a hint of parting or of a desire to break off the engagement; only in the thirteenth letter – two curt lines, as Margaret had said – came the announcement, with the swiftness and unexpectedness of a thunderbolt. "It is better that our engagement should end," wrote John, coldly; "therefore I return you the thirteen letters you wrote me." And that was all. This unexpected communication, coming so suddenly after the fervor of the dozen letters, took away Hagar's breath.

"Excepting in the last I do not see anything cruel or cold in these letters, Miss Snow," said Hagar, when she had ended her reading.

Margaret put up one thin hand to her head. "No, no," she stammered,

confusedly; "and yet I am sure John wrote cruelly. It is so long ago that perhaps I forget; but his last letters were cold, and hinted at a desire that we should part. I remember Jane and Lucy reading them to me."

"I don't see any hint of that," replied Hagar, doubtfully; "in fact, in the last two or three he asks, as you have heard, why you wish the marriage postponed."

"I never wished that!" murmured Margaret, perplexed. "I wanted to marry John and be with him always. Certainly I never said such a thing when I wrote to him. Of that I am sure."

"We can soon prove it," said Hagar, taking up the other packet. "Here are your letters to John – all of them. Shall I read them?"

Receiving an eager assent, the girl arranged the epistles in order of dates, and read them slowly. They were scrawled rather than written, in the large, childish handwriting of the blind; and most of them were short, but the first six were full of love and a desire to be near John. The seventh letter, which was better written than the previous ones, breathed colder sentiments; it hinted that the absent lover could do better than marry a blind girl, who might be a drag on him, it said.

"Stop! Stop!" cried Margaret, breathlessly. "I never wrote that letter!"

She was sitting up in the bed, with her gray hair pushed off her thin, eager face; and turning her sightless eyes towards Hagar, she seemed almost to see the astonished face of the girl in the intensity of her desire.

"I never wrote that letter!" repeated Margaret, in a shrill voice of excitement; "you are making some mistake."

"Indeed I read only what is written," said Hagar; "let me continue. When I finish the other five letters we shall discuss them. But I fear – I fear –"

"You fear what?"

"That you have been deceived. Wait – wait! say nothing until I finish reading."

Margaret sank back on her pillow with a gray face and quick in-drawn breathing. She dreaded what was coming, as Hagar well knew; so the girl continued hurriedly to read the letters, lest she should be interrupted. They were all – that is, the last five or six – written in better style of handwriting than the former ones; and each letter was colder than the last. The writer did not want to leave her quiet English home for distant India. She was afraid that the engagement was a mistake; when she consented to the marriage she did not know her own mind. Moreover, Jane Lorrimer loved him; she was –

"Jane!" interrupted Margaret, with a cry – "what had Jane to do with my love for John? I never wrote those last letters; they are forgeries!"

"Indeed they look like it," said Hagar, examining the letters; "the handwriting is that of a person who can see – much better than the writing of the early letters."

"I always wrote badly," declared Margaret, feverishly. "I was blind; it was hard for me to pen a letter. John did not expect – expect – oh, dear Lord, what does it all mean?"

"It means that Jane deceived you."

"Deceived me!" wailed Margaret, feebly – "deceived her poor blind friend! No, no!"

"I am certain of it!" said Hagar, firmly. "When you told me your story, I was doubtful of Jane; now that I have read those forged letters – for forged they are – I am certain of it. Jane deceived you, with the aid of Lucy!"

"But why, dear Lord, why?"

"Because she loved John and wished to marry him. You stood in the way, and she removed you. Well, she gained her wish; she parted you from John, and became Mrs. Mask."

"I can't believe it; Jane was my friend."

"Naturally; and for that reason deceived you," said Hagar, bitterly. "Oh, I know well what friendship is! But we must find out the truth. Tell me the exact address of Mrs. Mask."

"For what reason?"

"Because I shall call and see her. I shall learn the truth, and right you in the eyes of John."

"What use?" wept Margaret, bitterly. "My life is over, and I am dying. What use?"

Feeble and hopeless, she would have made no effort herself; but Hagar was determined that the secret, buried in the silver teapot for thirty years, should be known, if not to the world, at least to John Mask. These many days he had deemed Margaret faithless, and had married a woman who, he believed, gave him that love which the blind girl had refused. Now he should learn that the wife was the traitress, that the rejected woman had been true and faithful even unto death. Hagar made up her mind to this course, and forcing the address from the unwilling lips of Margaret, she went the very next day to the stately mansion in Berkeley Square. So came Nemesis to the faithless friend after the lapse of thirty years. The justice of the gods is slow, but it is certain.

Margaret lay weeping in her bed. As yet her feeble brain could not grasp the truth. John, whom she had believed faithless, had been true; and in his eyes all these years it was she who had been cruel. To her all was confusion and doubt. Not until the afternoon of the next day did she learn the truth for certain. It was Hagar who told it to her.

"I went to the house in Berkeley Square," said Hagar, "and I asked for Mrs. Mask. She was out, and I saw the housekeeper – none other than your former servant, Lucy Dyke; Mrs. Jael now," added the girl, contemptuously – "well off, trusted, and comfortable. That is the reward of her treachery."

"No, no! Lucy – surely she did not deceive me?"

"I made her confess it," said Hagar, sternly. "I told her of the letters in the teapot; of your hard life, and of your dying bed. At first she denied everything; but when I threatened to tell Mr. Mask the wretch confessed the truth. Yes, my poor Miss Snow, you were deceived – bitterly deceived – by your friend and your servant. They made a sport of your blindness and love."

"Cruel! cruel!" moaned Margaret, trembling violently.

"Yes, it was cruel; but it is the way of the world," said Hagar, with bitterness. "It seems that Jane was in love with your John; but as he was true to you, she could not hope to marry him. Determined, however, to do so, she bribed Lucy with money, and the pair resolved to part you from John by means of lying letters. Those you wrote to India never reached him. Instead of your epistles, Jane wrote those which I read to you, urging a breaking-off of the engagement, and hinting at her own love. John thought they came from you, and wrote back – as you have heard now – asking why you wished the marriage broken off. When Lucy or Jane read the letters to you thirty years ago, they altered the sense so that you should think John cruel. But why explain further?" cried Hagar, with a burst of deep anger. "You saw – you know how they succeeded. John broke off the engagement and sent you back your letters. For that your treacherous enemies were not prepared. If Lucy had been in the house, you would never have received the packet. No wonder she wanted you to burn the letters, seeing that the forged ones were amongst them. Had you not hidden them away in the silver teapot, Lucy would have found means to destroy them. However, you know how they have been preserved these thirty years, to prove the truth at last. Revenge yourself, Miss Snow! Jane is the honored wife of John; Lucy is the confidential housekeeper, comfortable and happy. Tell John the truth, and punish these vixens!"

"Oh, what shall I do? What can I do?" cried Margaret. "I do not want to be cruel, but they ruined my life. Jane – –"

"She is coming to see you; and John also," said Hagar, rapidly. "The two will be here in an hour. Then you can denounce the treachery of Jane, and show John those letters to prove it. Ruin her! She ruined you."

Margaret said nothing. She was a religious woman, and nightly recited the Lord's Prayer; "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us." Now – and in no idle fashion – she was called upon to prove the depth of her belief – the extent of her charity. She was asked to forgive her bitterest enemies those two women who had ruined her life, and who had built up prosperous existences on such ruins. It was hard to say "Go in peace" to these. Hagar was implacable, and urged revenge; but Margaret – weak, sweet soul – leant to the side of charity. Waiting the arrival of her false friend, her lost lover, she prayed for guidance and for strength to sustain her in the coming ordeal. It was the last and most painful phase of her long, long martyrdom.

Mrs. Mask arrived an hour later, as Hagar had announced, but alone. Her husband had been detained by business, she explained to the girl, and would come on later. Like herself, he was anxious to see their dying friend.

"Does he know the truth?" asked Hagar before admitting the visitor.

Jane was now a large and prosperous woman, with an imperious temper, and in an ordinary case would have replied sharply. But the discovery of her treachery, the knowledge that her victim was dying, had broken her down entirely. With a pale face and quivering lips, she shook her head, and signed that she could not bring herself to speak. Hagar stood aside and permitted her to pass in silence. She would have lashed the perfidious woman with her tongue, but deemed it more just that the traitress should be punished by the friend she had wronged so bitterly. Mrs. Mask entered the room, and slowly walked over to the bedside. The blind woman recognized her footstep: yes! recognized it, even after these many years.

"Jane," said Margaret, reproachfully, "have you come to look at your work?"

The prosperous lady recoiled as she saw the wreck of the merry, happy girl she had known thirty years before. Tongue-tied by the knowledge that Margaret spoke truly, she could only stand like a culprit beside the bed, and like a culprit await her sentence. Hagar remained at the door to listen.

"Have you nothing to say?" gasped Margaret, faintly – "you who lied about me with your accomplice – who made my John believe me faithless? My John! alas, he has been yours – won by dishonor – these thirty years!"

"I – I loved him!" stammered the other woman at last, goaded into defending herself.

"Yes, you loved him and betrayed me. For years I have suffered hunger and cold; for years I have lived with a broken heart, alone and miserably!"

"I – I – oh, I am sorry!"

"Sorry! Can your sorrow give me back thirty years of wasted life – of long-enduring agony? Can sorrow make me what I should have been – what you are – a happy wife and mother?"

"Margaret," implored Jane, sinking on her knees, "forgive me! In spite of all my prosperity, I have suffered in secret. My sin has come home to me many a time, and made me weep. I searched for you when I returned to England; I could not find you. Now I am willing to make what expiation you wish."

"Then tell your husband how you tricked him and ruined me."

"No – no! Anything but that, Margaret! For God's sake! I should die of shame if he knew. He loves me now; we are old; we have children. Two of my boys are in the army; my daughter is a wife and mother. What you will, but not that; it would destroy all; it would kill me!"

She bowed her head on the bed-clothes and wept. Margaret reflected. Her revenge was within her grasp. John was coming, and a word from her would make him loathe the woman he had loved and honored these many years – would make him despise the mother of his children. No, she could not be so cruel as to ruin the innocent to punish the guilty. Besides, Jane had loved him, and it was that love which had made her sin. Margaret raised herself feebly, and laid her thin hand on the head of the woman who had martyred her.

"I forgive you, Jane. Go in peace. John shall never know."

Jane lifted up her face in amazement at this God-like forgiveness. "You will not tell him?" she muttered.

"No. No one shall tell him. Hagar, swear to me that you will keep silent."

"I swear," said Hagar, a little sullenly. "But you are wrong."

"No; I am right. To gain forgiveness we must forgive others. My poor Jane, you were tempted, and you fell. Of Lucy I shall say nothing; God will bring home her sin to her in – Ah! dear Lord! Hagar! I – I – I die!"

Hagar ran to the bedside, and placed her arms round the lean frame of poor Margaret. Her face was gray, her eyes glazed, and her body fell back in the arms of Hagar like a dead thing. She was dying; the end of her martyrdom was at hand.

"Give! give – –" she whispered, striving to raise one feeble hand.

"The teapot!" said Hagar. "Quick – give it to her!"

Jane seized the teapot – ignorant that it contained the letters which proved her guilt – and placed it in the hands of the poor soul. She clasped it feebly to her breast, and a smile of delight crept slowly over her gray face.

"John's gift!" she faltered, and – died.

A moment later the door was pushed open, and a portly man with gray hair entered the room. He saw Jane sobbing by the bedside, Hagar kneeling with tears in her eyes, and on the bed the dead body of the woman he had loved.

"I am too late," said he, approaching. "Poor Margaret!"

"She has just died," whispered Hagar. "Take your wife away."

"Come, my dear," said John, raising the repentant woman; "we can do no good. Poor Margaret! to think that she would not marry me! Well, it is best so; God has given me a good and true wife in her place."

"A good and true wife!" muttered Hagar, with irony.

With Jane on his arm, the former lover of Margaret moved towards the door. "I shall of course see to the funeral," he said in a pompous tone. "She shall be buried like a princess."

"Indeed, Mr. Mask! – and she lived like a beggar!"

A faint flush of colour crept into the man's cheeks, withered with age. "That was not my fault," he said, haughtily; "had I known of her wants, I would have helped her; though, indeed," he added, bitterly, "she deserves little at the hands of one whom she wronged so deeply. I loved her, and she was faithless."

"Ah!" cried Hagar, and for the moment she felt inclined to tell the truth, but the memory of her promise restrained her; also a glance at the white face of Jane, who thought that her secret was about to be revealed.

"What do you say?" asked John, looking back.

"Nothing. But – the silver teapot?"

"My gift. Let it be buried with her."

He passed through the door without another word, leaving Hagar alone with the dead. Had he known of the contents of the teapot which the

dead woman held clasped in her arms, he might not have departed with his wife by his side. But he went out ignorant and happy.

Hagar looked at the retiring forms of the married pair; at the white face of the dead woman at the bare, bleak room and the silver teapot. Then she laughed!

8

The Seventh Customer and the Mandarin

There was something very queer about that lacquer mandarin; and something still queerer about the man who pawned it. The toy itself was simply two balls placed together; the top ball, a small one, was the head, masked with a quaintly-painted face of porcelain, and surmounted by a pagoda-shaped hat jingling with tiny golden bells. The large ball below was the body, gaily tinted to imitate the official dress of a great Chinese lord; and therefrom two little arms terminating in porcelain hands, exquisitely finished even to the long nails, protruded in a most comical fashion. Weighted dexterously within, the mandarin would keel over this side and that, to a perilous angle, but he never went over altogether. When set in motion the big ball would roll, the arms would wag, and the head nod gravely, a little red tongue thrusting itself out at every bow. Then the golden bells would chime melodiously, and rolling, wagging, nodding, the mandarin made all who beheld him laugh, with his innocent antics. He was worthy, in all his painted beauty, to be immortalized by Hans Andersen.

"A very pretty toy?" said Hagar, as the quaint thing tipped itself right and left, front and back. "It comes from China, I suppose?"

She asked this question of the customer, who demanded two pounds on the figure; but in place of answering her, he burst out into a hoarse laugh, and leered unpleasantly at the girl.

"Comes from other side of Nowhere, I reckon, missus!" he said, in a coarse voice; "and a bloomin' rum piece of goods 'tis, anyhow!"

Hagar did not like the man's looks at all, although she was by no means exacting on the score of personal beauty – especially with regard to the

male sex. Still, there was something brutal about this fellow which revolted her every sense. He had a bullet-head, with a crop of closely-cut hair; a clean-shaven face of a blue-black dirty hue, where the beard had been removed; a low forehead, a snub nose, a large ugly mouth, and two cunning gray eyes which never looked any one straight in the face. This attractive gentleman wore a corduroy suit, a red linen handkerchief round his throat, and a fur cap with earflaps on his head. Also he carried a small black pipe between his teeth, and breathed therefrom an atmosphere of the vilest tobacco. Certainly the toy was queer; but the man queerer. Not at all the sort of person likely to be in possession of so delicate a work of Chinese art and fancy.

"Where did you get this?" demanded Hagar, drawing her black brows together and touching with one finger the swaying mandarin.

"It's all on the square, missus!" growled the man in an injured tone. "I didn't prig the blessed thing, if that's yer lay. A pal o' mine as is a sailor brought it from Lord-knows-where an' guv' it me. I wants rhino, I do; so if you kin spring two quid --"

"I'll give you twenty shillings," said Hagar, cutting him short.

"Oh, my bloomin' eyes! if this ain't robbery an' blue murder!" whined the man; "twenty bob! why, the fun you gits out of it's worth more!"

"That's my offer -- take it or leave it. I don't believe you came honestly by it, and I'm running a risk in taking it."

"Sling us the blunt, then!" said the customer, sullenly; "it's the likes of you as grinds down the likes of me! Yah! you an' yer preachin'."

"In whose name am I to make out the ticket?" asked Hagar, coldly.

"In the name of Mister William Smith -- Larky Bill they calls me; but 'tain't hetiikit to put h'endearin' family names on pawn-tickets. I lives in Sawder Alley, Whitechapel."

"Why didn't you go to a nearer pawn-shop, then?" said Hagar, taking down Mr. Smith's address, without smiling at his would-be wit.

"That's my biz!" retorted Bill, scowling. "Ere, gimme the tin; an' don't you arsk no questions an' you won't be tol' no lies! D'ye see?"

Hagar stamped her foot. "Here's the money and the ticket. Take yourself and your insolence out of my shop. Quick!"

"I'm gitting!" growled the man, shuffling towards the door. "See 'ere, missus; I comes fur that doll in three months, or it may be four. If it ain't all right an' 'anded up to me proper, I'll break your neck!"

"What's that you say?"

Hagar was over the counter, and close at hand by this time. Larky Bill stared open-mouthed at her spirit. "You say another word, my jail-bird," said Hagar, seizing his ear, "and I'll put you into the gutter!"

"Lordy! what a donah!" muttered Bill, rubbing his ear when he found himself outside. "She'll look arter the toy proper. Three months. Tck!" he rapped his thumbnail against his teeth. "I can't get less from the beak; but I've bested Monkey anyhow!"

And with these enigmatic words, Mr. Smith turned on his heel and went to Whitechapel. There his forebodings were realized, for at the very door of his own house in Sawder Alley, he was taken in charge by a grim policeman, and sent to prison for four months. He had stolen some fruit off a coster's barrow on the day previous to his arrest, and quite expected to be – as he phrased it – nabbed for the theft. Therefore he employed the small remnant of freedom still remaining to him in pawning the mandarin in the most distant pawn-shop he could think of, which happened to be Hagar's. As Mr. Smith left the court to do his four months, a wizen-faced man slouched close to him.

"Bill," he growled, edging against the policeman, "where's that doll?"

"That's all right, Monkey! I've put it where you won't git it!" grunted Smith.

When Black Maria rolled away with Bill inside, the man he had called Monkey stood on the edge of the pavement and cursed freely till a policeman moved him on. He had a particular desire to gain possession of that doll, as he called it; and it was on this account that Larky Bill had taken the trouble to hide it. Monkey never thought of a pawn-shop. It was a case of diamond cut diamond; and one rogue had outwitted the other.

In the meantime, Hagar, quite unaware of the value attached to the Chinese toy, placed it away among other pawned articles upon a high shelf. But it did not always remain there, for Bolker, a child in many ways, notwithstanding his precocious intelligence, found it out, and frequently took it down to play with. Hagar would not have permitted this had she known, as the toy was given into her charge to keep safe, and she would have been afraid of Bolker spoiling the painting or rubbing off the gilding. Bolker knew this, and was clever enough to play with the mandarin only when Hagar was absent. He placed it on the counter, and made it sway in its quaint fashion. The waving arms, the nodding head, and the roseleaf of a tongue slipping in and out, enchanted the lad, and he would amuse himself for hours with it. It was strange that a gilded toy, no doubt made for the amusement of grave Chinese Em-

perors, should descend to afford pleasure to an arab of London City. But the mandarin was an exile from the Flowery Land, and rocked as merrily in the dingy pawn-shop as ever he had done in the porcelain palaces of Peking.

A month or two after the mandarin had been pawned, Bolker announced in the most unexpected manner that he intended to better himself. He had been given, he said, the post of shop-boy in a West-end bookseller's establishment; and as he was fond of literature, he intended to accept it. Hagar rather wondered that any one should have placed sufficient confidence in this arab to give him a situation; but she kept her wonderment to herself, and permitted him to go. She was sorry to lose the benefit of his acute intelligence, but personally she had no great love for this scampish hunchback; so she saw him depart without displaying much sorrow. Thus Bolker vanished from the pawn-shop and from Carby's Crescent, and ascended into higher spheres.

Nothing new happened after his departure. The mandarin remained untouched on the shelf, and the dust collected over his motionless figure. Hagar quite forgot about the toy and its pawner; and it was only when Larky Bill was released from prison and came to claim his property that she recalled the incident. She took down the figure, dusted it carefully, and set it swaying on the counter before Mr. Smith. Neither Bill nor Hagar noticed that it did not roll as easily and gracefully as usual.

"Here's the quid and interest and ticket," said Bill, tendering all three. "I'm glad to get this 'ere back again. No one's touched it, 'ave they?"

"No. It has been on that shelf ever since you pawned it. Where have you been?"

Larky Bill grinned. "I've been stayin' at a country 'ouse of mine fur my' ealth's sake," he said, tucking the mandarin under his arm. "Say, missus, a cove called Monkey didn't come smellin' round 'ere fur this h' image?"

"Not that I know of. Nobody asked for the toy."

"Guess it's all right," chuckled Bill, gleefully. "Lord, to think as how I've done that bloke! Won't he cuss when he knows as I've got em!"

What "them" were Mr. Smith did not condescend to explain at that particular moment. He nodded familiarly to Hagar, and went off, still chuckling with the mandarin in charge. Hagar put away the money, and thought that she had seen the last of Bill; but she reckoned wrongly. Two hours afterwards he was back in the shop, mandarin and all, with a pale face, a wild eye, and a mouth full of abuse. At first he swore at large without giving any explanation; so Hagar waited till the bad language

was ended, and then asked him quietly what was the matter. For answer Bill plumped down the Chinese toy on the counter, and clutched his fur cap with both hands.

"Matter, cuss you!" he shrieked, furiously – "as if ye didn't know! I've been robbed!"

"Robbed! What nonsense are you talking And what have I to do with your being robbed?"

Bill gasped, and pointed to the mandarin, who was rolling complacently, with a fat smile on his porcelain visage. "That – that doll!" he spluttered. "I've been robbed!"

"Of the doll?" asked Hagar, impatiently.

"Y' young Jezebel! Of the dimins – dimins!"

"Diamonds!" echoed the girl, starting back in astonishment.

"Yes! Y' know, hang you, y' know! Twenty thousan' pount of dimins! They was in that doll – inside 'im. They ain't there now! Why not? 'Cause you've robbed me! Thief! Yah!"

"I did not know that there were any jewels concealed in the mandarin," said Hagar, calmly. "Had I known I should have informed the police."

"Blown the gaff, would ye? An' why?"

"Because a man in your position does not possess diamonds, unless he steals them. And now I think of it," added Hagar, quickly, "about the time you pawned this toy Lady Deacey's jewels were stolen. You stole them!"

"P'raps I did, p'raps I didn't!" growled Bill, mentally cursing Hagar for the acuteness of her understanding. "'Tany rate, 'twarn't your biz to prig 'em!"

"I tell you I never touched them! I did not know they were in there!"

"Then who did, cuss you? When I guv you the doll, the dimins were inside; now they ain't. Who took 'em?"

Hagar pondered. It was certainly odd that the diamonds should have been stolen. She had placed the mandarin on the shelf on the day of its pawning, and had not removed it again until she had returned it to its owner. Seeing her silent, Bill turned the toy upside down, and removed a square morsel of the lacquer, which fitted in so perfectly as to seem like one whole piece. Within was the dark hollow of the ball – empty.

"I put them dimins into 'ere with my own 'and," persisted Bill, pointing one grimy finger at the gap; "they were 'ere when I popped it; they ain't 'ere now. Where are they? Who's bin playing with my property?"

"Bolker!" cried Hagar, without thinking. It had just flashed across her mind that one day she had found Bolker amusing himself with the mandarin. At the time she had thought nothing of it, but had replaced the toy on its shelf, and forbidden the lad to meddle with it. But now, recalling the episode, and connecting it with Bolker's sudden departure, she felt convinced that the imp had stolen the concealed jewels. But – as she wondered – how had he become cognizant that twenty thousands pounds' worth of diamonds was hidden in the hollow body of the doll? The thing puzzled her.

"Bolker?" echoed Larky Bill, wrathfully. "And who may that cuss be?"

"He was my shop-boy; but he left three months ago to better himself."

"I dessay! With my dimins, I'll bet. Where is he, that I may cut his bloomin' throat!"

"I shan't tell you," said Hagar, alarmed by the brutal threat of the man, and already regretting that she had been so candid.

"I'll make you! I'll twist your neck!" raged Bill, mad with anger.

He placed his great hands on the counter to vault over; but the next moment he dropped back before the shining tube of a neat little revolver, which leveled itself in Hagar's hands. She had lately purchased it for defense.

"I keep this always by me," said she, calmly, "to protect myself against such rogues as you!"

Bill stared at her blankly, then turned on his heel and left the shop. At the door he paused and shook his fist.

"I'll find that Bolker, and smash the life out of him!" he said, hoarsely; "then, my fine madam, I'll come back to lay you out!" after which he vanished, leaving the mandarin, with its eternal smile, still rocking on the counter.

Hagar put away the pistol, and took up the figure. Now that she knew about the diamonds, and had forced Bill to admit, as he had done indirectly, that they had been stolen from Lady Deacey, she thought it possible that the Chinese toy might belong to the same owner. In spite of her fearlessness, Hagar was not altogether happy in her mind as regards the burglar. If he did not find the diamonds, he was quite capable of returning to murder her. On the whole, Hagar concluded that it would be just as well for society at large, and herself in particular, if Mr. Smith were restored to the prison whence he had lately emerged. After some consideration she resolved to see Vark, the lawyer, and tell him the episode of the mandarin, taking the image with her as evidence. Vark, if anyone, would be able to deal with the intricacies of the affair.

In the meantime, Bill Smith had repaired to the public-house which guarded the narrow entrance to Carby's Crescent, and there was drowning his regrets in strong drink. As he drained his tankard of ale, he fell into conversation with the fat landlord – a brutal-looking prize-fighter, who looked as though he had been in jail – quite a bird of Mr. Smith's feather. These two congenial spirits recognized each other, and became friendly – so friendly, indeed, that Bill thought it a good opportunity to extract information regarding the whereabouts of Bolker. He was too wise to explain his reason for making these inquiries.

"That's a fine gal in the pawn-shop, hay!" said he, with a leer.

"Wot – 'Agar? She's a plum, ain't she? – but not for every man's pickin'; oh, no; not she! 'Agar kin look arter herself proper!" said the landlord.

"Does she mind that shorp all alone?"

"Jus' now she does," replied mine host. "She 'ad a boy, a wicked little 'unchback devil; Bolker's 'is name. But he's hoff; gitting a wage in West-end, as I do 'ear."

"Wes'-end?" said Bill, reflectively. "An' where might 'e 'any out there?"

"Ho, in a swell, slap-up book-shop. Juppins, Son an' Juppins, Les'er Square way. 'Is parients live down 'ere, but Bolker's that set up with 'is good luck as 'e looks down on 'em."

"Do he now!" said Bill, amiably. "I'd twist 'is neck if he wos my kid. No more booze, thankee. I'm orf t' see a pal o' mine."

The result of this conversation was that Mr. Smith repaired to Leicester Square and loafed up and down the pavement before the book-shop. He saw Bolker several times during the day; for, having been told by the landlord that the lad was a hunchback, he had no difficulty recognizing him. Up till the evening he kept a close watch, and when Bolker had put up the shutters and was walking home towards Lambeth, Bill followed him stealthily. All unknowing that he was followed by a black shadow of crime and danger, Bolker paused on Westminster Bridge to admire the red glories of the sunset; then plunged into the network of alleys which make up Lambeth. In a quiet lane by the river he was gripped from behind; a large hand was clapped over his mouth to prevent his crying out, and he was dragged down on to a ruined wharf which ran out through green slime into the turbid waters of the stream.

"Now, then, I've got ye!" said his captor in a savage tone – "an' I've got a knife too, y' bloomin' thief! Jes' y' answer me strife, or I'll cut yer 'ead orf!"

Bolker gasped with alarm; but, not recognizing the threatening face of the man before him, he recovered a little of his native impudence, and

began to bluster.

"Here, now, what do you mean by this? What have I done?"

"Done, y' whelp! Opened that doll an' priggied them dimins!"

"Larky Bill!" cried Bolker, at once recognizing his peril. "Here, let me go!"

"Not till y' give up my property – my dimins."

"What property? What diamonds?"

"Oh, y' know what 'm drivin' at, cuss you! Y're the 'unchback as wos in the shorp kep' by that foine gal 'Agar. I popped that doll, with dimins in 'is innards, an' you stole 'm."

"I did nothing of the sort. I – –"

"Ere! drop yer lies, y' imp! Y' know moy naime, y' did, so y' knows more! Jes' look et this knoif! S'elp me but I'll slip it int' ye, ef y' don't tell!"

He threw the terrified boy across his knee, and placed the cold steel at his throat. The rose-red sky spun overhead in the eyes of Bolker, and he thought that his last hour had come. To save himself there was nothing for it but confession.

"What! wait! I'll tell you!" he gasped. "I did take the diamonds."

"Y' young cuss!" growled Bill, setting the lad on his feet again with a jerk. "An' 'ow did y' know they was inside that himage?"

"Monkey told me."

Bill started to his feet with an oath, but still kept his grip on Bolker's shoulder to prevent him getting away. "Monkey," he said, fiercely. "Wot did 'e tell y'?"

"Why, that Lady Deacey's diamonds were inside the mandarin."

"How did Monkey come to find that doll?"

"He got the office from a girl called Eliza, who saw you pawning the toy."

"Liz sold me," muttered Bill. "I thought as I sawr'er on that doy. She' mus' ha' twigged that doll under m' arm, and guessed as I popped it. Gord! I'll deal with 'er laiter, I will! Garn, y' doryg and tell me th' rest!" he added, shaking the boy.

"There is no more to tell," whimpered Bolker, his teeth chattering. "Monkey couldn't get the mandarin, 'cause he had not the ticket. He made friends with me, and asked me to steal it. I wouldn't, until he told me why he wanted it. Then he said that you had stolen twenty thousand pounds' worth of diamonds from Lady Deacey's house in Curzon Street, and had hidden them in the mandarin. He said we'd go whacks if I'd

steal them for him. I couldn't get the mandarin, as Hagar's so sharp she would have missed it, and put me in jail for stealing it; so I opened the doll, and took out the diamonds which were in a leather bag."

"Moy bag, moy dimins!" said Bill, savagely. "What did y' do with 'em?" "I gave them to Monkey, and he cleared out with them. He never gave me a single one; and I don't know where to find him."

"I does," growled Mr. Smith, releasing Bolker, "an' I'll fin' 'im and slit his bloomin' throat. 'Ere! I say, y' come back!" for, taking advantage of his release, Bolker was racing up the wharf.

Bill gave chase, as he wanted to obtain further information from the lad; but Bolker knew the neighbourhood better than the burglar, and soon eluded him in the winding alleys.

"It don't matter!" said Bill, giving up the chase and wiping his brow. "Monkey's got the swag. Might ha' guessed as he'd round on me. I'll jest see 'im and Liz, and if I don't make 'm paiy fur this, maiy I – !" Then he clinched his resolve with an oath, which it is unnecessary to repeat here. After relieving his feelings thus, he went in search of his perfidious friend, with murderous thoughts in his heart.

At first he thought that it would be difficult to find Monkey. No doubt the man on obtaining the diamonds had gone off to America, North or South, so as to escape the vengeance of his pal – Bill had always been Monkey's pal – and to live comfortably on the fruits of his villainy. Later on the burglar learnt, rather to his surprise, that Monkey was still in London, and still was haunting the thieves' quarter in Whitechapel. Bill wondered at this choice of a residence when the man had so much money in his possession; but he ascribed this longing to Monkey's love for his old haunts and associates. Nevertheless, knowing that Bill was out of prison, it was strange that the man did not look after his skin.

"'E knows wot I am when I'm riz!" said Bill to himself, as he continued his search, "so he ought to get orf while 'is throat ain't cut! Blimme; but I'll 'ave a drop of 'is 'eart's blood fur every one of them bloomin' dimins!"

One evening he found Monkey in the parlour of a low public-house called the Three Kings, and kept by a Jew of ill-fame, who was rather a fence than a landlord.

His traitorous friend, more wizened and shriveled up than ever, was seated in a dark corner, with an unlighted pipe in his mouth, a half-drained tankard of bitter before him, and his hands thrust moodily into his pockets. If Monkey had the diamonds, his appearance belied their

possession, for he looked anything but prosperous. There was no appearance of wealth in his looks or manner or choice of abode.

"Wot, Bill, ole pal!" he said, looking up when Mr. Smith hurled himself into the room. "Y've got h'out of quod!"

"Yus! I've got h'out to slit yer throat!"

"Lor!" whined Monkey, uncomfortably. "Wot's you accusin' me fur? I ain't done nuffin', s'elp me!"

Bill drew a chair before that of Monkey, and taking out his knife played with it in a significant manner. Monkey shrank back before the glitter of the blade and the ugly look in his pal's eyes, but he did not dare to cry out for assistance, lest the burglar should pounce on him.

"Now, look 'ee 'ere, Monkey," said Bill, with grim deliberation, "I don't want none of yer bloomin' lip, ner his eiather! D' y' see? I've seen that beast of a kid as you put up to steal my dimins, and –"

"Yah! that kid!" cried Monkey, with sudden ferocity. "Wish I'd 'im 'ere; I'd squeeze the 'eart out o' him!"

"Wot fur? Didn't 'e git y' the swag – moy swag – cuss y'?"

"No, 'e didn't; an' ef 'e ses 'e did, 'e's a liar – a bloomin' busted liar, s'elp me! I tell you, Bill, 'e kep' them shiners to 'imself, cuss 'im!"

"Thet's a d – d lie, y' sneakin' dorg!" said Bill, politely.

"M' I die if 'tain't gorspel truth!" yelled Monkey. "Look 'ee 'ere, ole pal –"

"Don't y' call me pal!" interrupted Bill, savagely. "I ain't no pal of yourn, y' terbaccar-faiced son of a bloomin' 'angman! Liz blew the gaff on me poppin' that himage, and y' tried to git m' swag when I was doin' time. An' y' did get it, y' –!"

"I didn't!" snapped Monkey, interrupting in his turn. "The kid stuck to the swag, I tell y'. 'Course I knowed of them dimins!"

"'Course y' did!" growled William, ironically. "Didn't I tell y' 'ow I cracked that crib in Curzon Street, an' prigged th' dimins an' th' himage? Yah! y' cuss!"

"I knows y' did, Bill. An' you tole me 'ow y' stowed the swag inside the doll. My heye! that was sharp of y'; but y' moight 'ev trusted a pal! I didn't know y' popped the doll till Liz told me. She sawr y' goin' in t' that popshorp with the Chiner thing under yer arm; an' –"

"And you'd set 'er arter me!" cried Bill! savagely. "She didn't git int' Lambeth on the chance!"

"Yus," said Monkey, doggedly, "I did put 'er on yer trail. Y' hid the dimins in that image, and cleared out with it. I couldn't foller meself, so I set

Liz ont' ye. She tole me as 'ow y'd popped th' thing; so when y' was doin' time I tried to git it again, tho' that young cuss 'es sold me."

"Blimme! but I've a moind to slit yer throat!" said Bill, furiously. "Wot d' y' mean tryin' to coller my swag?"

"Why, fur yer own sake, Bill, s'elp me. I thort the gal might fin' out. But y' needn't git up, Bill; I didn't git them dimins. The boy hes them."

"That's a lie. I tell y'!"

"'Tain't! When I tole the kid about the dimins he stole 'em sure, an' lef' th' doll so es the pawn-shop gal wouldn't fin' out. But I never saw 'im agin, though I watched the shorp like a bloomin' tyke. The boy cleared out with them dimins. I wish I'd 'im 'ere! I'd choke the little d - l!"

Bill reflected, and slipped the knife into his pocket. Without doubt Monkey was speaking the truth; he was too savagely in earnest to be telling a falsehood. Moreover, if he really possessed the diamonds, he would not remain hard up and miserable in the thieves' quarter of dingy White-chapel. No; Bolker had kept the jewels, and had deceived Monkey; more than that, in the interview on the ruined wharf he had deceived Bill himself. Priding himself on his astuteness, Mr. Smith felt savage at having been sold by a mere boy.

"If I kin on'y git 'im agin!" he thought, when leaving the Three Kings, "I'll take the 'ead orf 'm, and chuck 'is crooked karkuss int' the river mud!"

But he found it difficult to lay hands on Bolker, although for more than a week he haunted the shop in Leicester Square. Warned by his one experience that Bill was a dangerous person to meddle with, Bolker had given notice to his employers, and at present was in hiding. Also, he was arranging a little scheme whereby to rid himself of Larky Bill's inopportunities. Vark was the man who undertook to carry out the details of the scheme; and Hagar was consulted also with regard to its completion. These three people, Vark, Hagar, and Bolker, laid an ingenious trap for unsuspecting Bill, into which he walked without a thought of danger. He had been betrayed by Monkey, by Bolker, by Liz; now he was going to be sold by Vark, the lawyer. Truly, the fates were against Bill at this juncture.

Vark was a thieves' lawyer, and had something in him of a latter-day Fagin; for he not only made use of criminals when he could do so with safety, but also he sold them to justice when they became dangerous. As he saw a chance of making money out of Bill Smith, he resolved to do so, and sent for the man to visit him at once. As Vark had often done business with the burglar, Bill had no idea that it was in the lawyer's

mind to betray him, and duly presented himself at the spider's office in Lambeth, like a silly fly. The first thing he saw on entering the room was the mandarin swaying on the table.

"You are astonished to see that," said Vark, noticing his surprise. "I daresay; but you see, Bill, I know all about your theft of the Deacey diamonds."

"Who tole you?" growled Bill, throwing himself into a chair.

"Hagar of the Pawn-shop," replied Vark, slowly and with significance.

Bill's eyes lighted up fiercely, in precisely the way Vark wished. The lawyer had not forgiven Hagar for refusing to marry him, and for cur-tailing his pickings in the Dix estate. For these reasons he wished her evil; and if he could inoculate the burglar's heart with a spite towards her he was bent on doing so. It appeared from Bill's next speech that he had succeeded.

"Oh, 'twas that gal, wos it?" said Mr. Smith, quietly. "I might ha' guessed it, by seein' that himage. Well, I owe 'er one, I do, and I guess I'll owe 'er another. But that's my biz; 'tain't yourn. Wot d'ye want, y' measly dorg?" he added, looking at the lean form of Vark in a surly manner.

"I want to see you about the Deacey diamonds. Why did you not bring them to me when you stole them?"

"Whoy? 'Cause I didn't b'lieve in ye!" retorted Bill. "I know'd I wos in fur toime when I prigged them apples, an' I wasn't going to trust my swag to y' or Monkey. Y'd ha' sold me."

"Well, Monkey did sell you."

"Yah! 'e didn't get much on th' deal!"

"No; but Bolker did."

"Bolker!" echoed Bill, grinding his teeth: "d' y' know that crooked cuss? Y' do! Well, see 'ere!" – Bill drew his clasp-knife out of his pocket and opened it – "I'm goin' to slip that int' 'im fust toime as I claps eyes on 'is ugly mug!"

"You'd better not, unless you want to be hanged."

"Wot d' I care?" growled Bill, sulkily; "scragged, or time with skilly an' hoakum. It's all th' saime t' me."

"I suppose you wonder where the diamonds are?"

"Yus. I want 'em!"

"That's a pity," said Vark, with irony – "because I am afraid you won't get them."

"Where is them dimins?" asked Bill, laying his open knife on the table.

Vark passed over the question. "I suppose you know that the police are after you for the Deacey robbery?" he said, slipping his hand idly across the table till it was within reach of the knife. "Oh, yes; Lord Deacey offered a reward for the recovery of the jewels. That has been paid, but as you are still at large, the police want you, my friend!"

"Oh, I ain't afraid of y' givin' me up; I'm too useful t'y', I am, and I knows too much about y'. The pealers shawn't put me in quod this toime. Who got the reward?" he asked suddenly.

"Bolker got it."

"D - n him! Bolker!"

"Yes. Monkey made a mistake when he trusted the lad. Bolker thought that he would make more out of honesty than by going shares with Monkey. When he found the jewels, he went off with them to Scotland Yard. Lady Deacey has them now, and Bolkers," added Vark, smiling, "has money in the bank."

"Cuss 'im; whoy didn't I cut 'is bloomin' throat down by the river?"

"That is best known to yourself," replied Vark, who was now playing with the knife. "You are in a tight place, my friend, and may get some years for this robbery."

"Yah! No one knows I did it!"

"There is the evidence against you," said Vark, pointing to the mandarin. "You stole that out of Lord Deacey's drawing-room along with the diamonds. You pawned it, and Hagar can swear that you did so. Bolker can swear that the stolen diamonds were inside. With these two witnesses, my poor Bill, I'm afraid you'd get six years or more!"

"Not me!" said Bill, rising. "Y' won't give me up; and I ain't feared of any one else."

"Why not? There is a reward offered for your apprehension."

"What d' I care? Who'll git it?"

"I will!" replied Vark, coolly, rising.

"You?" Bill recoiled for a moment, and sprang forward. "Cuss you! Y'd sell me, y' shark! Gimme my knife!"

"Not such a fool, Mr. Smith!"

Vark threw the knife into a distant corner of the room, and leveled a revolver at the bullet head of the advancing burglar. Bill fell back for the moment - fell into the arms of two policemen.

He gave a roar like a wild beast.

"Trapped, by - !" he yelled, and struggled to get free.

The next moment Hagar and Bolker were in the room, and Bill glared at one and the other.

"Y' trapped me, d – n y'!" said he; "wait till I git out!"

"You'll kill me, I suppose?" said Hagar, scornfully.

"No; shawn't kill you, nor yet that little d – l with th' 'unch. There's on'y one cove as I'd swing for – that beastly thief of a lawyer!"

Vark recoiled before the glare in the man's eyes; and as Bill, foaming and cursing, was hurried out of the room, he looked at Hagar with a nervous smile.

"That's bluff," he said, feebly.

"I don't think so," replied Hagar, quietly.

"Good-by, Mr. Vark. I'm afraid you won't live more than seven years; there will be a funeral about the time of Larkey Bill's release."

When she went out, Bolker grinned at the lawyer and, with frightful pantomime, he drew a stroke across his neck. Vark looked at the clasp knife in the corner and shivered. The mandarin on the table rolled and smiled always.

9

The Eighth Customer and the Pair of Boots

He was a very little lad, reaching scarcely to the top of the counter; but he had a sharp, keen face, intelligent beyond his years with the precocity taught by poverty. Hagar, looking at his shock of red hair, and the shrewd blue eyes which peered up at her face, guessed that he was Irish; and when he spoke, his brogue proved her guess to be a correct one. She stared at the ragged, bare-footed urchin with some amusement, for this was the smallest customer she had yet had. But Micky – so he gave his name – was quite as sharp as customers of more mature years – in fact, sharper. He bargained astutely with Hagar, and evidently had made up his small mind not to leave the shop until he obtained his own price for the article he was pawning. This was a pair of strong laborer's boots, hob-nailed and stout in the soles. The red-haired boy heaved them on to the counter with a mighty clatter, and demanded seven shillings thereon.

"I'll give you five," said Hagar, after examination.

"Ah, now, would ye?" piped the brat, with shrill impudence. "Is it taking the bread out av me mouth ye w'uld be afther? Sure, me mother sid sivin bob, an' 'tis sivin I want."

"Where is your mother, boy? Why did she not come herself?"

"Mother's comforting herself wid the drink round the carner; an' sure I'm aqual to gittin' th' dirty money meself! Sivin bob, alannah, ant may the hivins be yer bed!"

"Where did you get these boots?" said Hagar, asking another question, and ignoring the persuasive tone of the lad. "I see there are letters marked in nails on the two soles."

"Ah! there moight be," assented Micky, complacently; "there's a 'G' on one foot, an' a 'K' on the other; but me fawther's name is Patrick Dooley, an' he's in Amerikey, worse luck. Mother got thim boots foive days gone in the counthry. They wos a prisint, me darlin'; an' as they wos too big fur me an' me mother, we pop them, dear, fur sivin bob."

"Take six," said Hagar, persuasively; "they aren't worth more."

"Howly saints! listen to the lies av her!" shrieked Micky. "Six, is it? An' how can I go to me mother wid a shillin' wrong? Sure, it's breakin' me hid she'd be afther, wid a quart pot! An' what's money to the loikes av you, me dear?"

"Here – here! take the seven shillings!" said Hagar, anxious to rid herself of this shrieking imp. "I'll make out the ticket in the name of Mrs. Dooley."

"Mrs. Bridget Dooley, av Park Lane," said Micky, grandly. "Sure that will do as well as any other place. It's on the tramp we are – bad luck to it! If 'twasn't for thim boots we got in Marlow, it's without a copper we'd be."

"Here! take the ticket and money. I daresay you stole the boots."

"Is it takin' away me characther y'd be afther? Stalin'? Wasn't thim boots a prisint to me, for pure charity an' love av the saints? Ah, well, I'm goin' – I'm goin'! Sivin bob; it's little enough onyhow; but phwat's the use of lookin' for justice to Oireland in the counthry av the Saxon toyrant?" and Micky went out, singing "The Wearing of the Green" in a very shrill and unpleasant voice.

Hagar put the boots away, never expecting that a story could be attached to so ordinary a pawned article. But two days afterwards she was reading an account of a murder, and, to her surprise, the very boots, now reposing on a high shelf in her shop, were mentioned as a link in the chain of evidence likely to hang the assassin. Coincidences occur in real life oftener than the world cares to admit; and this was a case in point. A pair of boots with initials on the soles had been pawned in her shop; and now – scarcely forty-eight hours afterwards – she was reading about them in a newspaper. It was strange – almost incredible; but, to quote a trite and well-worn saying, "Truth is stranger than fiction." Briefly, the history of the crime was as follows:

Sir Leslie Crane, of Welby Park, Marlow, had been shot by his game-keeper, George Kerris. It seemed that the man was engaged to marry a farmer's daughter, Laura Brenton by name; and Sir Leslie had been paying the girl more attention than was consistent with their respective positions. Kerris had remonstrated with the baronet, who had forthwith

discharged him. A week later, Crane, having gone out after dinner for a stroll in the park, had been found dead by a pond known as the Queen's Pool, which was some little distance from the gates. Footmarks had been discovered in the soft mud near the water, which showed that the assassin had worn boots marked on the soles with the letters "G" and "K." These had been traced, through a Marlow bootmaker, to George Kerris. The man had been arrested, but neither denied his guilt nor affirmed his innocence. Still, as the report said, there could be no doubt that he had killed Sir Leslie in a fit of jealous rage, and also because he had been discharged. The boots could not be found, so undoubtedly the man had got rid of them after wearing them on the night of the murder. The report in the paper concluded by stating that the dead baronet was succeeded by his cousin, now Sir Lewis Crane.

"Strange that the boots should have been pawned in London," thought Hagar, when she finished reading this article, "and stranger still that they should have been pawned by that Irish lad! On the day he came here, he said the boots had been given to him five days previously. It is two days since then, so that in all makes seven days. H'm! To-day is the twenty-first of August, so I suppose Kerris must have given the boots to Micky on the fourteenth. Let me see the date of the crime."

On examination she found that the murder had been committed on the night of the twelfth of August, and that Kerris had been arrested on the thirteenth. Here Hagar came to a full stop and reflected. If Kerris had been in jail on the fourteenth – as from the report in the paper he undoubtedly was – he could not have given the boots to Micky on that day. Yet the Irish lad had confessed to receiving the boots at Marlow, and had given a time which, as reckoned out by Hagar, corresponded with the fourteenth of the month. But on that day the man who owned the boots was under lock and key.

"There's something wrong here," said Hagar to herself, on making this discovery. "Perhaps Kerris is innocent in spite of the evidence of the boots. What am I to do?"

It was difficult to say. Certainly the accused man did not assert his innocence – a fact which was rather astonishing on the face of it. No one would let themselves be hanged for a murder which they did not commit. Yet, if Kerris were guilty, he must have had an accomplice, else how could the boots have been given to the Irish tramp when their owner was in prison? The man, thought Hagar, might be innocent after all, in spite of his strange silence. Still, not knowing all the circumstances of the case – save the garbled and bare report in the newspaper – the girl

did not, and could not, make up her mind in the matter. At the present moment, her sole course was to write and state that the boots had been pawned. This Hagar did at once, and the next day received a visit from the detective who had charge of the case.

He was called Julf, a lean, tall, dark and solemn creature, who went very cautiously to work – especially in cases of murder. He had a conscience, he said, and would never forgive himself did he hang the wrong criminal. Julf knew how often circumstantial evidence helped to condemn the innocent; how likely even the most acute detective was to be deceived by outward appearances; and how intricate and dark were the paths which led to the discoveries of mysterious crimes. Hence he was slow and circumspect in his dealings.

On arriving at the Lambeth pawn-shop he examined the boots, asked Hagar a few questions, and then sat down with her to thresh out the matter. Julf saw that the girl was shrewd and clever from the remarks she had made anent the pawning of the boots; so he was quite willing to discuss the affair freely with her. In contrast to many self-sufficient detectives, Julf always believed that two heads were better than one, especially when the second head was that of a woman. He had a great respect for the instinct of the weaker sex.

"I'm afraid the man's guilty, right enough," he said, in his solemn way. "He had quarreled with Sir Leslie over this girl, and had been dismissed for insolence. Besides, he was seen coming out of the park at ten o'clock – just after the murder!"

"Had he his gun with him?"

"No; but that's no matter. Sir Leslie was shot through the heart with a pistol. Now, Kerris had a pistol, but that can't be found either. You didn't have a pistol pawned here, did you?"

"Nothing was pawned but the boots," said Hagar, "and Kerris could not have given them to Micky; it seems that he was in prison on the day the lad got them."

"That is true enough. We must find this boy, and learn who gave him the boots on that day. But if Kerris is innocent, why doesn't he say so?"

"It is a mystery," sighed Hagar. "You say that Kerris's pistol cannot be found?"

"No, not in his house; so I daresay he flung it away after killing Sir Leslie."

"Oh, ho!" said Hagar, shrewdly, "then the weapon with which the murder was committed can't be found either."

"But the pistol is the same; Kerris used it, and then got rid of it."

"Why don't you search for it?"

"We have searched everywhere, but it cannot be found."

"Have you drained the pond near which the crime was committed?"

"Why, no," said Julf, meditatively; "we haven't done that. It's a good idea!"

Hagar sighed impatiently. "I wish I had this case in my own hands!" she said, sharply; "I believe I'd find the assassin."

"We have found him," replied the detective, stolidly. "Kerris killed Sir Leslie."

"I don't believe it!"

"Then why doesn't he deny it?"

"I can't say. Is Kerris much in love with this Laura Brenton?" asked Hagar, turning her large bright eyes on Julf.

"I should think so! He's madly in love with her."

"And she with him?"

"Oh, I don't say that," replied Julf; "that is quite another thing. I fancy from what I have heard that she gave far too much encouragement to that young baronet. Kerris evidently had cause for jealousy; so I do not wonder he killed Sir Leslie."

"You have yet to prove that he did."

"Bah!" said Julf, rising to take his leave. "He quarreled with the baronet: he was discharged. His own pistol is missing, and the dead man was shot with a pistol. Then there is the evidence of the boots with his initials on the soles. You can't get over that. Don't you talk nonsense, my girl; there is a strong case against Kerris."

"I can see that; but there is one point in his favor. He did not give those boots to Micky."

"Evidently not. But to prove that point we must find the lad."

This was easier said than done, for Micky and his mother had disappeared as completely as though the earth had swallowed them up. All the police and detective forces in London tried to find the boy, but could not. Yet on his evidence turned the whole case. And all this time George Kerris, in the Marlow prison, refused to open his mouth. Most people believed him to be guilty on the evidence of the boots; but Hagar, on the evidence of the pawning, insisted that he was innocent. Still, she could not understand why he held his tongue at such a crisis.

It has been stated several times that Hagar found her life in the pawnshop extremely dull, and seized every opportunity to gain for herself a little diversion. A chance of amusement in unraveling the mystery of

the boots offered itself now; and this she resolved to take. Also, the conduct of the case would necessitate a visit into the country; and, weary of the narrow streets of Lambeth, Hagar eagerly desired a breath of fresh air. She left the shop in charge of an elderly man, who had been her assistant since Bolker's departure, and took the train to Marlow. When she arrived there, Julf, more solemn than ever, met her at the railway station.

"Good-day," said he, quietly. "You see I have agreed to let you assist me in finding out the truth of this case; though to my mind the truth is already plain enough."

"I don't believe it, Mr. Julf. Take my word for it, George Kerris is innocent of the crime."

"Is he?" said Julf, in sceptical tones; "then who is guilty?"

"That is what I have come to find out," retorted Hagar. "I am obliged to you for letting me help you, though, to be sure, I do so only to gratify my own curiosity. But you won't repent of your concession. I am to have a free hand?"

"You can do exactly as you like."

"Can I? Then I shall first call and see the new baronet."

Refusing the offer of Julf to accompany her, on the plea that she could execute her business better alone, Hagar walked to Welby Park, which was on the other side of Marlow, and asked to see Sir Lewis Crane. At first, owing to her gipsy-like appearance, she was refused admittance; but on mentioning that her business had to do with the murder of the late baronet, Sir Lewis consented to see her. When face to face with him, Hagar, for reasons of her own, examined him closely.

He was an ugly, elderly little creature, many years older than his dead cousin, and had a mean yellow face, stamped with an expression of avarice. Hagar had seen just such another pinched, cunning look on the face of Jacob Dix, and she knew without much trouble that the man before her was a miser. However, she wasted no time in analyzing his character – knowing that it would reveal itself in the forthcoming conversation – but at once mentioned her business.

"I am come on the part of Mr. Julf to see about this murder," she said, curtly.

Sir Lewis raised his eyes. "I did not know that the Government employed lady detectives!" was his remark.

"I am not a detective, but the owner of the shop in which the boots of George Kerris were pawned."

"The boots which prove his guilt," said Crane, with an air of relief, which did not escape Hagar.

"I rather think that they prove his innocence!" was her cold reply.

"Oh! you are talking about them having been given to that tramp when Kerris was in prison. I know all about that, as the detective told it to me. But, all the same, Kerris is guilty, else he would deny his guilt."

"Have you any idea why he does not do so?"

Crane shrugged his shoulders. "No; unless it is that he knows himself to be guilty."

"I believe him to be innocent."

"Pshaw! My cousin admired Laura Brenton, who was engaged to Kerris, and was foolishly attentive to her. On that score the man was insolent; so Leslie discharged him. In committing the murder, he took a double revenge."

"Where were you, Sir Lewis, when your cousin was killed?"

"In the park," replied the baronet, frankly, "After dinner my cousin and I went out for a stroll. In a short time he made some excuse to leave me, as I believe he wished to meet Laura by the Queen's Pool. I walked in the opposite direction, and shortly afterwards I came back to the house. Leslie had not returned, so I went to look for him, and found his dead body by the Pool."

"Did you hear the pistol shot?"

"Yes; but I paid no attention to it. My cousin was in the habit of firing at a target, and I thought he might be doing so then."

"What! firing at a target in the twilight! Could your cousin see in the dark like a cat?" said Hagar, with irony.

"I don't know anything about that!" retorted Crane, snappishly. "I have told you the story, as you represent the detective Julf. I say no more!"

"I don't want you to say more. May I go and look at the pond?"

"Certainly. One of the servants shall show it to you."

"Can't you come yourself?" said Hagar, with a keen glance.

Crane drew back, and his yellow face grew pale. "No," said he, in an almost inaudible voice. "I have seen enough of that horrible place!"

"Very good; I'll go with the servant," replied Hagar, and marched towards the door.

"What do you want to see the pool for?" he asked, following.

"I wish to find the lost pistol."

When Hagar had taken her departure, Sir Lewis, pale and nervous, stood near the open window. "Confound this woman!" he thought,

clenching his hand. "She is far too clever; but I don't think she'll be quite clever enough to find that pistol," he added, in a satisfied tone. The Queen's Pool was a circular sheet of water filled with lilies, at the lower end of the park. On the way thereto Hagar asked the servant who was guiding her a few questions.

"Was Sir Lewis poor before he got the estate?" she demanded.

"Very poor, miss; hadn't a sixpence but what he got from Sir Leslie."

"Was he on good terms with his cousin?"

"No, miss; they was quarreling fearful. On the night of the murder they had a row royal!"

"What about?" asked Hagar, turning a keen look on the man.

"About money and that gal Laura. Sir Lewis loved her just as much as Sir Leslie; but she didn't care a straw for either of them, being taken up with Kerris."

"How does she take her lover's arrest?"

"Why, miss, she cries, and cries, and swears that he is innocent, and talks nonsense."

"What kind of nonsense? There may be some sense in it?"

"I dursn't tell you, miss," said the servant casting a hurried look round, "it 'ud be as much as my place is worth."

"Oh, I understand," said Hagar, serenely; "this Laura says that Sir Lewis killed his cousin."

"Yes, she do," replied the man, aghast at her penetration; "but how could you guess, miss, is more –"

"Never mind," said Hagar, cutting him short as they arrived at the pool.

"Is this the place where the murder was committed?"

"Yes, miss; we found the body there in the mud; and just beside it the marks of the boots."

Hagar reflected, and asked another question. "Did Sir Lewis ever visit Kerris?"

"He did, miss, just two days afore the murder – went to see him about some game."

"Oh, did he?" murmured Hagar to herself. "I think there was something more than game in that visit."

Of this she said nothing to the man, who stood on the bank, watching her searching about the place. The pool was filled with clear water, and on it the lilies floated placidly. Hagar peered in to see if there was any trace of the pistol used to kill Sir Leslie; but although the water was crystal-clear, and she searched carefully, not a sign of the weapon

could she see. The grass round the pool was closely shorn, and some little distance up the slope stretched a terrace with a flight of shallow stone steps. On either side of these, at the lower end, were two pillars, bearing urns of marble sculptured in classic fashion with nymphs and dancing fauns. In these bloomed scarlet geraniums, now in full flower; and as Hagar, idly gazing around, caught sight of the vivid blossoms an idea entered her head. Dismissing the man, for whom she had no further use, she moved swiftly towards the terrace, and lifted one of the pots out of its marble urn.

"No sign of a pistol there," she said, replacing the pot with a sense of disappointment. "I may be wrong. Let me examine the other."

This time she was rewarded for her shrewd guess. At the bottom of the right-hand urn, quite concealed by the pot, she found a small pistol. On its stock there was a silver plate, and on that plate a name was engraved. At the sight of this latter the eyes of Hagar glistened with much satisfaction.

"I thought so!" said she to herself, "and now to tell Julf!"

The detective was waiting for her at the park gates, and looked up expectantly as she moved towards him with a smile on her face. With grim satisfaction she placed the pistol in his hand.

"There is the weapon with which Sir Leslie was killed!" she said, in a tone of triumph. "I found it under the geranium pot in one of those urns. What do you think of that?"

"The pistol of Kerris!" said Julf quite amazed.

"No; not the pistol of Kerris, but of the man who murdered Sir Leslie."

"Kerris," repeated Julf, with dogged obstinacy.

"Look at the name on the silver plate, you idiot!"

"Lewis Crane!" read the detective, stupefied then he looked up with an expression of blank astonishment on his solemn face. "What!" he muttered, "do you think Sir Lewis killed his cousin?"

"I am sure of it!" replied Hagar, firmly. "I have just learnt from a servant that he was in love with the girl Laura also, and that he was poor and dependent upon the dead man for money. The two had a quarrel on the night of the murder, as they were walking in the park. Because of this quarrel they parted, each going different ways. Sir Lewis said that he returned home, that he heard the pistol shot, and thought that his cousin was shooting at a target – as if a man would do so in the twilight!" added the girl, contemptuously. "What he really did – Lewis, I mean – was to follow his cousin, and shoot him by the Queen's Pool; then he hid the pistol in the marble urn, and crept back to the house

to play his comedy. I tell you, Mr. Julf, that Kerris is innocent. I said so always. Sir Lewis is the guilty person, and he slew his cousin out of jealousy of Laura Brenton, and because he wanted the dead man's money."

"But the boots – the footmarks in the mud?" stammered Julf, quite confounded by this reasoning. "The marks were made by the boots of Kerris."

"I quite believe that," admitted Hagar; "another portion of Sir Lewis's very clever scheme to ward off suspicion from himself. The servant who led me to the Queen's Pool will tell you, as he told me, that Sir Lewis just a day or two before the murder paid a visit to the cottage of Kerris. Now, it is my opinion that while there he stole the boots, and wore them on the night on which he committed the murder, with the intention of throwing the blame on Kerris, whom Laura Brenton loved. Don't you see what his game was, Mr. Julf? He wanted to gain a title and money, so as to marry Laura: so he slew his cousin to get the first, and laid the blame – by circumstantial evidence – on George Kerris, to get the second. Now what do you say?"

"It looks black against Sir-Lewis, certainly," admitted Julf; "still, I cannot think that he would dare – –"

"Bah! men dare anything to gratify their passions!" retorted Hagar, shrewdly; "besides, he thought that he made all safe for himself by wearing the boots of Kerris. It was Sir Lewis who gave the boots to Micky. Oh, if that boy could only be found!"

"He is found!" said Julf, quickly. "I got a telegram while you were in the park. The police picked him up in Whitechapel, and will send him down here to-morrow. If he can swear that Sir Lewis gave him the boots, I shall get a warrant out for that man's arrest."

"I believe he is guilty," said Hagar, in a meditative fashion, "and yet I am not altogether sure."

"Why not? There is certainly a strong case against him."

"Yes, yes; but why, if Sir Lewis is guilty, should Kerris keep silent, and not declare his innocence? I must see the man and find out. Can I get into the jail?"

"I'll take you there myself to-morrow morning," replied Julf. "I should like to know the reason of his silence also. It can't be love of Sir Lewis as makes him hold his tongue."

"No; that is what puzzles me. After all, like Kerris, the baronet may be innocent."

Julf shook his head. "I can't think where you will find a third party on which to lay the guilt – unless," he added, with an afterthought, "you blame the Irish boy who pawned the boots."

"It may be even him!" said Hagar, seriously. "But we'll know to-morrow, I fancy. Kerris, Sir Lewis, Micky – h'm! I wonder which of the three killed that poor young man."

Hagar thought over this problem for an hour or so, then, not being able to solve it, she put it out of her head for the night. As for Julf, he was so much impressed by Hagar's cleverness in finding the pistol and constructing a case against Sir Lewis – who he now began to believe was guilty – that the next morning, before taking her to see George Kerris in prison, he conducted her to an outlying farm.

"Laura Brenton lives here," he said; "ask her about Sir Lewis, and see if we can strengthen the case against him."

Laura was a fine, tall, handsome girl, somewhat masculine in her looks; but at the present moment she seemed ill, and appeared haggard – which was no wonder, seeing that one of her lovers was dead, and the other in prison. However, she was quite willing to answer Hagar's questions, and declared most emphatically that Kerris was innocent.

"He wouldn't kill a fly!" said she, weeping, "although he was angry with me for meeting Sir Leslie; but I never saw any harm in doing so."

"Opinions differ," said Hagar, coldly, not approving of this morality. "You met Sir Leslie on the night of the murder?"

"I – I didn't!" stammered the girl, fiercely. "Who says so?"

"Sir Lewis. He told me that his cousin left him in the park – after their quarrel – to see you by the Queen's Pool."

This Laura denied flatly. "I went into Marlow on that evening to buy some ribbon," she explained, "but I never went near Welby Park. Sir Lewis is a liar and a murderer!"

"A murderer? Why should he murder his cousin?" asked Hagar, sharply.

"Because he loved me, and I would have nothing to say to him."

"You loved Sir Leslie?"

"I did not!" blazed out the girl, wrathfully. "I loved neither of them, but only George Kerris. He is innocent, and Sir Lewis is guilty. I believe he killed his cousin with the pistol Sir Leslie gave him."

"What do you know about that pistol?"

"Why," explained Laura, quietly, "I went to Welby Park with father to pay the rent, and in the library, on the table, there was a pistol with a

silver plate on it. Sir Lewis – he was not the baronet then – told me that Sir Leslie had given it to him, and showed me his own name on the plate. As Sir Leslie was shot with a pistol, I believe Sir Lewis did it.”

“But had not George Kerris a pistol also?”

“Yes; an old thing that wouldn’t fire straight. I tried it myself at a target which George set up on the farm.”

“The pistol isn’t in George’s house.”

“I don’t know where it is, then,” said the girl, indifferently; “but I am sure of one thing, that George is innocent. Oh, try and get him out of jail!”

“And Sir Lewis hanged?” said Hagar, drily.

“Yes!” cried Laura, fiercely: “he’s a murdering beast; I should like to see him dead!”

Rather wondering at the fierceness of the girl, Hagar left her, and went on to the jail in which Kerris was incarcerated. The gamekeeper was a huge blond man, with a fresh, handsome face. Usually his expression was frank and kindly, but now, owing to recent events, he looked sullen. In spite of all Hagar’s questioning, he persisted in declining an explanation.

“I’ll say neither one thing nor another,” he declared; “if I did kill Sir Leslie, or I didn’t, is my business. Anyhow, he deserved to be killed.”

“Who are you screening?” asked Hagar, changing her tactics.

“No one,” replied Kerris, a colour rising in his face.

“Yes, you are, else you would not jeopardize your neck. But you shall be saved in spite of yourself. I know who killed Sir Leslie.”

“You do?” asked the man, looking up anxiously.

“Yes, his cousin, Sir Lewis. We have found his pistol concealed where the murder took place; he stole your boots to wear them, and throw the blame on you. You came out of Welby Park at ten o’clock, after the murder was committed. Did you not see Sir Lewis?”

“No, I didn’t,” replied Kerris, hastily. “I saw no one. I heard a shot, and thought poachers might be about, but as Sir Leslie had discharged me I didn’t think it was my business to see after them.”

“Sir Lewis paid you a visit shortly before the murder?”

“Yes, he did; to see me about some game.”

“Did you miss the boots after he left?”

“I never missed them till the night of the murder, when I wanted to put ’em on,” said Kerris. “I hadn’t worn them for some days, as they were new boots, and rather hurt my feet.”

"Then no doubt Sir Lewis stole them for his own purposes," said Hagar triumphantly. "He is guilty, and you – –"

"I am innocent!" cried Kerris, proudly. "I don't mind saying it now. I never killed Sir Leslie; I never laid a finger on him."

"And you did not say so before because you are screening some one. Who is it?"

Kerris made no reply, but looked uneasy.

Before Hagar could repeat her question, the answer thereto came from a most unexpected quarter. The door of the cell was opened, and Julf entered, with an expression of profound astonishment on his face.

"Here's a go!" he cried to Hagar. "Micky has arrived, and has told me from whom he received the boots!"

"Sir Lewis?"

"No! I have seen Sir Lewis, and he denies his guilt; also, he tells me a story which corroborates Micky's evidence, and explains why Kerris here holds his tongue."

Kerris rose from his seat on the bed with a bound, and strode towards Julf, looking worried and fierce.

"Not a word! not a word!" he said, between his clenched teeth. "Spare her!"

"Her!" cried Hagar, a light breaking in on her. "Laura Brenton?"

"Yes, Laura Brenton," replied Julf, shaking off the gamekeeper. "Micky has seen her; it was she who gave him the boots."

"I told her to; I told her to!" interrupted Kerris, in despair.

"Nonsense! you wish to screen her, as you have tried to do all along. But you are wrong. Laura Benton is not worth your sacrificing your life, my man. She is the guilty person who killed Sir Leslie. And why? Because he had cast her off, and was about to marry another woman."

Kerris gave a great cry. "It is false – false! She loved me!"

"She loved herself!" retorted Julf, sharply. "Sir Leslie promised to marry her, and because she could not force him to keep that promise she killed him. It was to throw the blame on you that she stole the boots and wore them on the night she met Sir Leslie by the Queen's Pool. It was to get Sir Lewis into trouble that she stole his pistol to kill his cousin."

"And did she hide it in the urn?" asked Hagar, astonished by these revelations.

"No; Sir Lewis did so. He knew that Laura committed the crime."

"How so?"

"He heard the shot, and went to see who had fired it. By the Queen's Pool he found his cousin's dead body, and picked up his own pistol on the bank. As Laura, to his knowledge, had taken it away from the library on the day she came with her father to pay rent, he knew that she had killed Sir Leslie. To screen her, and not thinking of his own danger should the pistol with his name on it be found, he hid it in the urn where you found it. So, you see, two men have tried to screen this woman, who loved neither of them."

"She loved me – me!" cried Kerris, in agony. "Oh, why did Sir Lewis speak!"

"To save himself from arrest," replied Julf. "He was not so loyal as you, my poor fellow. However, you will soon be released. To-day, I arrest Laura."

And this was done on that very morning. Laura was arrested, and, terrified by the statements of Micky and Sir Lewis, although George Kerris loyally kept silent, she confessed all. Julf's explanation was correct. She had met Sir Leslie on the night of the murder by the Queen's Pool, with the intention of killing him should he persist in his intention of casting her off. He did so, and she killed him. She had stolen the pistol and the boots to throw the blame, should occasion arise, on Sir Lewis and Kerris. Also, she had taken away the pistol of Kerris from his cottage to inculpate him. But for Hagar and the episode of the pawned boots, which Laura had given to Micky to get rid of, she might have succeeded in her vile plans, and have escaped free, to ruin other men. As it was, she confessed her crime, and was condemned to penal servitude for life. She deserved the scaffold, but she escaped that through the leniency of the jury, on the score of her youth and beauty.

Released from the prison into which he had cast himself so madly to save an ungrateful woman, George Kerris came up to Lambeth and redeemed those fatal boots which had been pawned by Micky.

"I am going to Australia," he said to Hagar. "I failed to save her, so I cannot bear to remain at Marlow. I knew she was guilty all along; for she had been in my cottage the day previous to the murder, and had carried off these boots, on the plea that her father wished for a similar pair, and wanted to see them. When the footmarks with my initials were traced in the mud of the pond, I guessed that she had worn the boots, and had killed Sir Leslie. I loved her so dearly that I would have suffered in her place: but you with your clear head found her out, and now she is paying for her wickedness. Life is over for me here; I go to Australia, and I shall take these boots which ruined her with me."

“Why did you do all this for Laura – that worthless woman?”

“Worthless she is, I know,” rejoined Kerris; “but – I loved her!” and with a nod he departed, carrying the boots and himself into exile.

10

The Ninth Customer and the Casket

Hagar had almost a genius for reading people's characters in their faces. The curve of the mouth, the glance of the eyes – she could interpret these truly; for to her feminine instinct she added a logical judgement masculine in its discretion. She was rarely wrong when she exercised this faculty; and in the many customers who entered the Lambeth pawn-shop she had ample opportunities to use her talent. To the sleek, white-faced creature who brought for pawning the Renaissance casket of silver she took an instant and violent dislike. Subsequent events proved that she was right in doing so. The ninth customer – as she called him – was an oily scoundrel. In appearance he was a respectable servant – a valet or a butler – and wore an immaculate suit of black broad-cloth. His face was as white as that of a corpse, and almost as expressionless. Two tufts of whisker adorned his lean cheeks, but his thin mouth and receding chin were uncovered with hair. On his badly-shaped head and off his low narrow forehead the scanty hair of iron-gray was brushed smoothly. He dropped his shifty gray eyes when he addressed Hagar, and talked softly in a most deferential manner. Hagar guessed him to be a West-end servant; and by his physiognomy she knew him to be a scoundrel.

This “gentleman's gentleman” – as Hagar guessed him rightly to be – gave the name of Julian Peters, and the address 42, Mount Street, Mayfair. As certainly as though she had been in the creature's confidence, Hagar knew that name and address were false. Also, she was not quite sure whether he had come honestly by the casket which he wished to pawn, although the story he told was a very fair and, apparently, candid

one.

"My late master, miss, left me this box as a legacy," he said deferentially, "and I have kept it by me for some time. Unfortunately, I am now out of a situation, and to keep myself going until I obtain a new one I need money. You will understand, miss, that it is only necessity which makes me pawn this box. I want fifteen pounds on it."

"You can have thirteen," said Hagar, pricing the box at a glance.

"Oh, indeed, miss, I am sure it is worth fifteen," said Mr. Peters (so-called): "if you look at the workmanship – –"

"I have looked at everything," replied Hagar, promptly – "at the silver, the workmanship, the date, and all the rest of it."

"The date, miss?" asked the man, in a puzzled tone.

"Yes; the casket is Cinque Cento, Florentine work. I dare say if you took it to a West-end jeweler you could get more on it than I am prepared to lend. Thirteen pounds is my limit."

"I'll take it," said Peters, promptly. "I don't care about pawning it in the West-end, where I am known."

"As a scoundrel, no doubt," thought Hagar, cynically. However, it was not her place to spoil a good bargain – and getting the Renaissance casket for thirteen pounds was a very good one – so she made out the ticket in the false name of Julian Peters, and handed it to him, together with a ten-pound note and three sovereigns. The man counted the money, with a greedy look in his eyes, and turned to depart with a cringing bow. At the door of the shop he paused, however, to address a last word to Hagar.

"I can redeem that casket whenever I like, miss?" he asked, anxiously.

"To-morrow, if it pleases you?" replied Hagar, coldly, "so long as you pay me a month's interest for the loan of the money."

"Thank you, miss; I shall take back the box in a month's time. In the meantime I leave it in your charge, miss, and wish you a very good day."

Hagar gave a shudder of disgust as he left the shop; for the man to her was a noxious thing, like a snake or a toad. If instinct were worth anything, she felt that this valet was a thief and a scoundrel, who was abusing the trust his employer placed in him. The casket was far more likely to have been thieved than to have come to Mr. Peters by will. It is not usual for gentlemen to leave their servants legacies of Cinque Cento caskets.

The box, as Peters called it, was very beautiful; an exquisite example of goldsmith's art, worthy of Benvenuto Cellini himself. Probably it was

by one of his pupils. Renaissance work certainly, for in its ornamentation there was visible that mingling of Christianity and paganism which is so striking a characteristic of the re-birth of the Arts in the Italy of Dante and the Medici. On the sides of the casket in relief there were figures of dancing nymph and piping satyr; flower-wreathed altar and vine-crowned priest. On the lid a full-length figure of the Virgin with upraised hands; below clouds and the turrets of a castle; overhead the glory of the Holy Ghost in the form of a wide-winged Dove, and fluttering cherubs and grave saints. Within the casket was lined with dead gold, smooth and lusterless; but this receptacle contained nothing.

Without doubt this tiny gem of goldsmith's art had been the jewel-case of some Florentine lady in that dead and gone century. Perhaps for her some lover had ordered it to be made, with its odd mingling of cross and thyrsus; its hints of asceticism and joyous life. But the Florentine beauty was now dust; all her days of love and vanity and sin were over; and the casket in which she had stored her jewels lay in a dingy London pawn-shop. There was something ironic in the fate meted out by Time and Chance to this dainty trifle of luxury.

While examining the box, Hagar noticed that the gold plate of the case within was raised some little distance above the outside portion. There appeared to her shrewd eyes to be a space between the base of the casket and the inner box of gold. Ever on the alert to discover mysteries, Hagar believed that in this toy there was a secret drawer, which no doubt opened by a concealed spring. At once she set to work searching for this spring.

"It is very cleverly hidden," she murmured, having been baffled for a long time; "but a secret recess there is, and I intend to find it. Who knows but what I may stumble on the evidence of some old Florentine tragedy, like that of the Crucifix of Fiesole?"

Her fingers were slender and nimble, and had a wonderfully delicate sense of feeling in their narrow tips. She ran them lightly over the raised work of beaten silver, pressing the laughing heads of the fauns and nymphs. For some time she was unsuccessful, until by chance she touched a delicately-modeled rose, which was carved on the central altar of one side. At once there was a slight click, and the silver slab with its sculptured figures fell downward on a hinge. As she had surmised, the box was divided within into two unequal portions; the upper one, visible when the ordinary lid was lifted, was empty, as has been said; but in the narrowness of the lower receptacle, between the false and the real bottoms of the box, there was a slim packet. Pleased with her

discovery – which certainly did credit to her acute intelligence – Hagar drew out the papers. “Here is my Florentine tragedy!” said she, with glee, and proceeded to examine her treasure-trove.

It did not take her long to discover that the letters – for they were letters, five or six, tied up with rose-hued ribbon – were not fifteenth century, but very late nineteenth; that they were not written in Italian, but in English. Penned in graceful female handwriting upon scented paper – a perfume of violets clung to them still – these letters were full of passionate and undisciplined love. Hagar only read one, but it was sufficient to see that she had stumbled upon an intrigue between a married woman and a man. No address was given, as each letter began unexpectedly with words of fire and adoration, continuing in such style from beginning to end, where the signature appended was “Beatrice.” In the first one, which Hagar read – and which was a sample of the rest – the writer lamented her marriage, raged that she was bound to a dull husband, and called upon her dearest Paul – evidently the innamorato’s name – to deliver her. The passion, the fierce sensual love which burnt in every line of this married woman’s epistles, disgusted Hagar not a little. Her pure and virginal soul shrank back from the abyss revealed by this lustful adoration; trembled at the glimpse it obtained of a hidden life. There was, indeed, no tragedy in these letters as yet, but it might be – with such a woman as she who had penned them – that they would become the prelude to one. In every line there was divorce.

“What a liar that valet is!” thought Hagar, as she tied the letters up again. “This casket was left to him as a legacy, was it? As if a man would entrust such compromising letters to the discretion of a scoundrel like Peters! No, no; I am sure he doesn’t know of this secret place, or of the existence of these letters. He stole this casket from his master, and did not know that it was used to hide these epistles from a married woman. I’ll keep the casket safely, and see what comes of it when Mr. Peters returns.”

But she did not put the letters back in their secret recess. It might be that the valet would return before the conclusion of the month; and if she were out of the shop at the time, her assistant would give back the casket. Hagar felt that it would be wrong to let the letters get into the hands of so unscrupulous a scoundrel as she believed Peters to be. Did he find out the secret of the hiding-place, and the letters were within, he was quite capable of making capital out of them at the expense of the unhappy woman or his own master. He had the face of a blackmailer; so Hagar reclosed the casket, and put away the letters in the big safe in the parlour.

"She is a light woman – a bad woman," she thought, thinking of that Beatrice who had written those glowing letters – "and deserves punishment for having deceived her husband. But I won't give her into the power of that reptile; he would only fatten on her agony. If he comes back for the casket, he shall have it, but without those letters."

Hagar did not think for a moment that Peters knew of the existence of these epistles, else in place of pawning the box he would have levied blackmail on the wretched Beatrice or her lover. But when in two weeks – long before the conclusion of the month – the valet again appeared, he showed Hagar very plainly that he had learnt the secret in the meantime. How and from whom he had learnt it Hagar forced him to explain. She was able to do this, as he wanted back the casket, yet had not the money to redeem it. This circumstance gave her a power over the man which she exercised mercilessly: and for some time – playing with him in cat-and-mouse fashion – she pretended to misunderstand his errand. But at first sight she saw from his greedy eyes and the triumphant look on his face that he was bent on some knavery.

"I wish to look at my box, if you please, miss," said he, on first entering the shop. "I cannot redeem it as yet, but if you would permit me to examine it I – –"

"Certainly!" said Hagar, cutting him short; she had no patience with his flowery periods. "Here is the box. Look at it as long as you please."

Peters seized the casket eagerly, opened it, and looked into the empty space within; then he shook it, and turned it upside down, as though he expected the inner box to fall out. In a moment Hagar guessed that he had become aware, since pawning the casket, that it contained a secret receptacle, and was looking for the same. With an ironic smile she watched him fingering the delicate carvings with his clumsy hands, and saw that with such coarse handling the casket would never yield up its secret. She therefore revealed it to him, not for his satisfaction, but because she wanted to know the history of the love-letters. For these, without doubt, the creature was looking, and Hagar congratulated herself that she had obeyed her instinct, and had placed the letters beyond his reach.

"You can't find it, I see," she observed, as Peters put down the casket in disgust.

"Find what?" he asked, with a certain challenge in his regard.

"The secret drawer for which you are looking."

"How do you know that I look for a secret drawer, miss?"

"I can guess as much from the persistent way in which you press the sides of that box. Your late master, who left you the casket as a legacy, evidently did not explain its secrets. But if you wish to know, look here?" Hagar picked up the box deftly, touched the altar rose with a light finger, and revealed to Mr. Peters the secret recess. His face fell, as she knew it would, at the sight of the vacant space.

"Why, it's empty!" he said aloud in a chagrined tone. "I thought – I thought –"

"That you would find some letters within," interrupted Hagar, smartly. "No doubt; but you see, Mr. Peters – if that is your name – I happen to have anticipated you."

"What? You have found the letters?"

"Yes; a neat little bundle of them, which lies in my safe."

"Please give them to me," said the man, with tremulous eagerness.

"Give them to you!" repeated Hagar, contemptuously. "Not I; it is not my business to encourage blackmailing."

"But they are my letters!" cried Peters getting red, but not denying the imputation of blackmailing. "You cannot keep my letters!"

"Yes, I can," retorted Hagar, putting the box on the shelf behind her; "in the same way that I can keep this casket if I so choose."

"How dare you!" said the man, losing all his suavity. "The box is mine!"

"It is your master's, you mean; and the letters also. You stole the casket to get money, and now you would steal the letters, if you could, to extort money from a woman. Do you know what you are, Mr. Peters? You are a scoundrel."

Peters could hardly speak for rage; but when he did find his voice, it was to threaten Hagar with the police. At this she laughed contemptuously.

"The police!" she echoed. "Are you out of your mind? Call a policeman if you dare, and I give you in charge for thieving that box."

"You cannot; you do not know my master's name."

"Do I not?" retorted Hagar, playing a game of bluff. "You forget that the name and address of your master are in those letters."

Seeing that he was baffled in this direction, the man changed his high tone for one of diplomacy. He became cringing and wheedling, and infinitely more obnoxious than before. Hagar could hardly listen to his vile propositions with calmness; but she did so advisedly, as she wished to know the story of the letters, the name of the woman who had written them, and that of the man – Peter's master – to whom they

had been sent. But the task was disagreeable, and required a great deal of self-restraint.

"Why not share the money with me?" said Peters, in silky tones; "those letters are worth a great deal. If you let me have them, I can sell them at a high price either to my master or to the lady who wrote them."

"No doubt," replied Hagar, with apparent acquiescence; "but before I agree to your proposal I must know the story."

"Certainly, miss. I shall tell it to you. I – –"

"One moment," interrupted Hagar. "Is Peters your real name?"

"Yes, miss; but the address I gave was false; also the Christian name I gave you. I am John Peters, of Duke Street, St. James's, in the employment of Lord Averley."

"You are his valet?"

"Yes; I have been with him for a long time; but I lost some money at cards a week or two ago, so I – I – –"

"So you stole this casket," finished Hagar, sharply.

"No miss, I didn't," replied Peters, with great dignity. "I borrowed it from my lord's room for a few weeks to get money on it. I intended to redeem and replace it within the month. I shall certainly do so, if our scheme with these letters turns out successful."

Hagar could scarcely restrain herself from an outbreak when she heard this wretch so coolly discuss the use he intended to make of the profits to be derived from his villainy. However, she kept herself calm, and proceeded to ask further questions with a view to gaining his entire confidence.

"Well, Mr. Peters, we will say you borrowed it," she remarked, ironically; "but don't you think that was rather a dangerous proceeding?"

"I didn't at the time," said Peters, ruefully, "as I didn't know my lord kept letters in it. I did not fancy he would ask after it. However, he did ask two days ago, and found that it was lost."

"Did he think you had taken it?"

"Lor' bless you, no!" grinned the valet. "I ain't quite such a fool as to be caught like that. My lord's rooms have been done up lately, so he thought as perhaps the paper-hangers or some of that low lot stole the box."

"In that case you are safe enough," said Hagar, enraged at the ingenious villainy of the creature. "But how did you come to learn that there were letters hidden in this box? You didn't know of them when you pawned it."

"No, miss, I didn't," confessed Peters, regretfully; "but yesterday I heard my lord say to a friend of his that there were letters to him from a married lady in the secret place of the box, so I thought --"

"That you would find the secret place, and use the letters to get money out of the married lady."

"Yes, I did. That's what we are going to do, ain't it?"

"Is the married lady rich?" asked Hagar, answering the question by asking another.

"Lor', miss, her husband, Mr. Delamere, has no end of money! She'd give anything to get those letters back. Why, if her husband saw them he would divorce her for sure! He's a proud man, is Delamere."

"Has he any suspicion of an intrigue between his wife and Lord Averley?"

"Not he, miss; he'd stop it if he had. Oh, you may be sure she'll give a long price for those letters."

"No doubt," assented Hagar. "Well, Mr. Peters, as I am your partner in this very admirable scheme, you had better let me see Mrs. Delamere. I'll get more out of her than you would."

"I daresay, miss. You're a sharp one, you are! But you'll go shares fair?"

"Oh, yes; if I get a good sum, you shall have half," replied Hagar, ambiguously. "But where does Mrs. Delamere live?"

"In Curzon Street, miss; the house painted a light red You'll always find her in now about seven. Squeeze her for all she is worth, miss. We've got a good thing on in this business."

"It would seem so," replied Hagar, coolly. "But if I were you, Mr. Peters, I would redeem this casket as soon as I could. You may get into trouble else."

"I'll take the money out of my share of the cash," said the scoundrel.

"Don't you take less than five hundred, miss; those letters are worth it."

"Be content; I'll see to all that. To-morrow I shall interview Mrs. Delamere; so if you come and see me the day after, I will tell you the result of my visit."

"Oh, there can only be one result with a sharp one like you," grinned Peters. "You squeeze Mrs. Delamere like an orange, miss. Say you'll tell her husband, and she'll pay anything. Good day, miss. My stars, you're a sharp girl! Good day."

Mr. Peters departed with this compliment, just in time to stop Hagar from an unholy desire to throw the casket at his head. The man was a greater scoundrel even than she had thought; and she trembled to

think of how he would have extorted money from Mrs. Delamere had he obtained the letters. Luckily for that lady, her foolish epistles were in the hands of a woman far more honorable than herself.

Although untitled, Mrs. Delamere was a very great lady. Certainly she was a beautiful one, and many years younger than her lord and master. Mr. Delamere was a wealthy commoner, with a long pedigree, and an over-weening pride. Immersed in politics and Blue-books, he permitted his frivolous and youthful wife to do as she pleased, provided she did not drag his name in the mud. He would have forgiven her anything but that. She could be as extravagant as she pleased; gratify all her costly whims; and flirt – if she so chose, and she did choose – with fifty men; but if once the name of Delamere was whispered about in connection with a scandal, she knew well that her husband would seek either a separation or a divorce. Yet, with all this knowledge, pretty, silly Mrs. Delamere was foolish enough to intrigue with Lord Averley, and to write him compromising letters.

She never thought of danger. Averley was a gentleman, a man of honor, and he had told her a dozen times that he always burnt the letters she wrote him. It was therefore a matter of amazement to Mrs. Delamere when a gipsy-like girl called to see her with a sealed envelope, and mentioned that such envelope contained her letters to Averley.

“Letters! letters!” said Mrs. Delamere, brushing her fluffy yellow curls off her forehead. “What do you mean?”

“I mean that your letters to Lord Averley are in this envelope,” replied Hagar, looking coldly at the dainty doll before her. “I mean also that did your husband see them he would divorce you!”

Mrs. Delamere turned pale under her rouge. “Who are you?” she gasped, her blue eyes dilating with terror.

“My name is Hagar Stanley. I am a gipsy girl, and I keep a pawn-shop in Lambeth.”

“A pawn-shop! How – how did you get my – my letters?”

“The valet of Lord Averley pawned a silver box in which they were concealed,” explained Hagar. “He intended to use them as a means to extort money from you. However, I obtained the letters before he did, and I came instead of him.”

“To extort money also, I suppose?”

For the life of her, Mrs. Delamere could not help making the remark. She knew that she was speaking falsely; that this girl with the grave, dark, poetic face was not the kind of woman to blackmail an erring sister. Still, the guilty little creature saw that Hagar – this girl from a pawnshop

of the slums – was sitting in judgement upon her, and already, in her own mind, condemned her frivolous conduct. Proud and haughty Mrs. Delamere writhed at the look on the face of her visitor, and terrified as she was at the abyss which she saw opening at her feet, she could not help making a slighting remark to gall the woman who came to save her. She said it on the impulse of the moment; and impulse had cost her dearly many a time. But that Hagar was a noble woman it would have cost the frivolous beauty dearly now.

“No, Mrs. Delamere,” replied Hagar, keeping her temper – for really this weak little creature was not worth anger – “I do not wish for money. I came to return you these letters, and I should advise you to destroy them.”

“I shall certainly do that!” said the fashionable lady, seizing the envelope held out to her; “but you must let me reward you.”

“As you would reward any one who returned you a lost jewel!” retorted the gipsy, with curling lip. “No, thank you; what I have done for you, Mrs. Delamere, is above any reward.”

“Above any reward!” stammered the other wondering if she heard aright.

“I think so,” responded Hagar, gravely. “I have saved your honor.”

“Saved my honor!” cried Mrs. Delamere, furiously. “How dare you! How dare you!”

“I dare, because I happen to have read one of those letters; I read only one, but I have no doubt that it is a sample of the others. If Mr. Delamere read what I did, I am afraid you would have to go through the Divorce Court with Lord Averley as co-respondent.”

“You – you are mistaken,” stammered Mrs. Delamere, drawn into defending herself. “There is nothing wrong between us, I – I swear.”

“It is no use to lie to me,” said Hagar, curtly. “I have seen what you said to the man; that is enough. However, I have no call to judge you. I came to give you the letters; you hold them in your hand; so I go.”

“Wait! wait! You have been very good. Surely a little money – –”

“I am no blackmailer!” cried Hagar, wrathfully; “but I have saved you from one. Had Lord Averley’s valet become possessed of those letters, you would have had to pay thousands of pounds for them.”

“I know, I know,” whimpered the foolish little woman. “You have been good and kind; you have saved me. Take this ring as – –”

“No, I want no gifts from you,” said Hagar, going to the door.

“Why not – why not?”

Hagar looked back with a glance of immeasurable contempt. "I take nothing from a woman who betrays her husband," she said, tranquilly. "Good-night, Mrs. Delamere – and be careful how you write letters to your next lover. He may have a valet also," and Hagar left the magnificent room, with Mrs. Delamere standing in it, white with rage and terror and humiliation. In those few contemptuous words of the poor gipsy girl, her sin had come home to her.

Hagar had come to the West-end to see the woman who had written the letters; now she walked back to her Lambeth pawn-shop to interview the man to whom they had been sent. She was not a girl who did things by halves; and, bent upon thwarting in every way the scoundrelism of John Peters, she had sent a message to his master. In reply Lord Averley had informed her that he would call on her at the time and place mentioned in her letter. The time was nine o'clock; the place, the dingy parlour of the pawn-shop; and here Hagar intended to inform Lord Averley of the way in which she had saved Mrs. Delamere from the greed of the valet. Also, she intended to make him take back the casket and repay the money lent on it. In all her dabbings in romance, Hagar never forgot that she was a woman of business, and was bound to get as much money as possible for the heir of the old miser who had fed and sheltered her when she had come a fugitive to London. Hagar's ethics would have been quite incomprehensible to the majority of mankind.

True to the hour, Lord Averley made his appearance in Carby's Crescent, and was admitted by Hagar to the back parlour. He was a tall slender, fair man, no longer in his first youth, with a colourless face, which was marked by a somewhat tired expression. He looked a trifle surprised at the sight of Hagar's rich beauty, having expected to find an old hag in charge of a pawn-shop. However, he made no comment but bowed gravely to the girl, and took the seat she offered to him. In the light of the lamp Hagar looked long and earnestly at his handsome face. There was a look of intellect on it which made her wonder how he could have found satisfaction in the love of a frivolous doll like Mrs. Delamere. But Hagar quite forgot for the moment that the fullest delight of life lies in contrast.

"I have no doubt you wondered at receiving a letter from a pawn-shop," she said, abruptly.

"I confess I did," he replied, quietly: "but because you mentioned that you had my casket I came. It is here, you say?"

Hagar took the silver box off a near shelf, and placed it on the table before him. "It was pawned here two weeks ago," she said, quietly. "I lent

thirteen pounds; so, if you give me that sum and the month's interest, you can have it."

Without a word Lord Averley counted out the thirteen pounds, but he had to ask her what the interest was. Hagar told him, and in a few moments the transaction was concluded. Then Averley spoke.

"How did you know it was my casket?"

"The man who pawned it told me so."

"That was strange."

"Not at all, my lord. I made him tell me."

"H'm! you look clever," said Averley, looking at her with interest. "May I ask the name of the man who pawned this?"

"Certainly. He was your valet, John Peters."

"Peters!" echoed her visitor. "Oh, you must be mistaken! Peters is an honest man!"

"He is a scoundrel and a thief, Lord Averley; and but for me he would have been a blackmailer."

"A blackmailer?"

"Yes. There were letters in that casket."

"Were letters!" said Averley, hurriedly, and drew the box towards him.

"Do you know the secret?"

"Yes; I found the secret recess and the letters. It was lucky for you that I did so. Your indiscreet speech to a friend informed Peters that compromising letters were hidden in the casket. He came here to find them; but I had already removed them."

"And where are they now?"

"I gave them back to the married woman who wrote them."

"How did you know who wrote them?" asked Lord Averley, raising his eyebrows.

"I read one of the letters, and then Peters told me the name of the lady. He proposed to me to blackmail her. I ostensibly agreed, and went to see the lady, to whom I gave back the letters. I asked you here to-night to return the casket; also to put you on your guard against John Peters. He is coming to see me to-morrow, to get – as he thinks – the money obtained by means of the letters. That is the whole story."

"It's a queer one," replied Averley, smiling. "I shall certainly discharge Peters, but I won't prosecute him for thieving. He knows about the letters, and they are far too dangerous to be brought into court."

"They are not dangerous now, my lord. I have given them back to the woman who wrote them."

"That was very good of you," said Averley, satirically. "May I ask the name of the lady?"

"Surely you know! Mrs. Delamere."

Averley looked aghast for a moment, and then began to laugh quietly. "My dear young lady," he said, as soon as he could bring his mirth within bounds, "would it not have been better to have consulted me before giving back those letters?"

"No," said Hagar, boldly, "for you might not have handed them over."

"Certainly I should not have handed them to Mrs. Delamere!" said Averley, with a fresh burst of laughter.

"Why not?"

"Because she never wrote them. My dear lady, I burnt all the letters I got from Mrs. Delamere, and I told her I had done so. The letters in this casket signed 'Beatrice' were from a different lady altogether. I shall have to see Mrs. Delamere. She'll never forgive me. Oh, what a comedy!" and he began laughing again.

Hagar was annoyed. She had acted for the best, no doubt; but she had given the letters to the wrong woman. Shortly the humour of the mistake struck her also, and she laughed in concert with Lord Averley.

"I'm sorry I made a mistake," she said, at length.

"You couldn't help it," replied Averley rising. "It was that scoundrel Peters who put you wrong. But I'll discharge him to-morrow, and get those letters of Beatrice back from Mrs. Delamere."


"And you'll leave that poor little woman alone," said Hagar, as she escorted him to the door.

"My dear lady, now that Mrs. Delamere has read those letters she'll leave me alone – severely. She'll never forgive me. Good-night. Oh, me, what a comedy!"

Lord Averley went off, casket and all. Peters never came back to get his share of the blackmail, so Hagar supposed he had learnt from his master what she had done. As to Mrs. Delamere, Hagar often wondered what she said when she read those letters signed "Beatrice." But only Lord Averley could have told her that and Hagar never saw him again; nor did she ever see Peters the blackmailer. Finally, she never set eyes again on the Cinque Cento Florentine casket which had contained the love-letters of – the wrong woman.

11

The Tenth Customer and the Persian Ring

ne of the last customers of any note who came to the Lambeth pawn-shop was a slender, wiry man with an Oriental face, not unlike that of Hagar herself. His countenance was oval, his nose aquiline in shape, and he possessed two dark sparkling eyes; also a long black beard, well trimmed and well kept. In fact, this beard was the neatest thing about him, as his dress – a European garb – was miserably poor, and the purple-hued cloth which he had twisted round his head for a turban was worn and soiled. He was nevertheless a striking figure when he presented himself before Hagar, and she examined him with particular interest. There was a gipsy look about the tenth customer, which seemed to stamp him as one of the gentle Romany. Even keen eyed Hagar was deceived.

“Are you of our people?” she asked, abruptly, after looking at him for a moment or so.

“I do not understand,” replied the man, in very good English, but with a foreign accent. “What people you speak of?”

“The Romany – the gipsy tribes.”

“No, lady; I no of dem. I know what they are – oh, yes, they in my own country as in dis.”

“Where is your country?” demanded Hagar, vexed at her mistake.

“Iran; wheat you call Persia,” replied the customer. “My name, lady, is Alee; I come from Ispahan dese two year. Oh, yes; a long time I do stop in dis town.”

"A Persian!" said Hagar, looking at his swarthy face and delicate features. "I don't think I ever saw a Persian before. You are very like one of the Romany; not at all like a Gentile."

"Lady, I no Gentile, I no Christian; I am follower ob de Prophet. May his name be blessed! But dis not what I do come to speak," he added, with some impatience. "You give money on ring, eh!"

"Let me see the ring first," said Hagar, diplomatically.

Alee, as he called himself, slipped the ring in question off one of his slender brown fingers, and handed it to her in silence. It was a band of dead gold, rather broad, and set in it was an oval turquoise of azure hue, marked with Arabic letters in gold. The ring had the look of a talisman or amulet, as the queer hieroglyphics on the stone seemed the words of some charm, stamped thereon to avert evil. Hagar examined the ring carefully, as she had never seen one like it before.

"It is a queer stone," she said, after looking through a magnifying glass at the turquoise. "What do you want on it?"

"One pound?" replied Alee, promptly; "just for two – tree days. Eh, what! you give me dat?"

"Oh, yes; I think the ring is worth five times as much. Here is the money; I'll make out the ticket in your name of Alee. How do you spell it?"

The Persian took the ticket from Hagar, and in very fair English letters wrote down his name and address. Then with a bow he turned to leave the shop; but before he reached the door she called him back.

"I say. Alee, what do these gold marks on this stone mean?"

"Dey Arabic letters, lady. Dey a spell against de Jinns. 'In de name ob Allah de All-Merciful.' Dat what dem letters say."

"They say a good deal with a word or two," muttered Hagar. "Arabic must be something like shorthand. When do you want back the ring?" she asked, aloud.

"In two – tree days," replied the Persian. "Say dis week. Yes. Good night, lady; you keep dat ring all right. Yes. So."

Alee took himself out of the shop with another bow, and Hagar, after a further examination of the queer ring with its talismanic inscription, put it away on a tray with other jewels. She wondered very much if it had a story attached to it; and, having read the "Arabian Nights" of late, she compared it in her own mind to the ring of Aladdin. It looked like a jewel with a history, did that inscribed turquoise.

In the afternoon of the next day another Persian arrived. Hagar recognized him as such from his resemblance to Alee; indeed, but for the difference in expression the two men might have passed for twins. Alee

had a soft look in his eyes, a melancholy twist to his mouth; while this countryman of his had a hawk-like and dangerous fierceness stamped on his lean face. He was dressed similarly to Alee, but wore a yellow turban instead of a purple one, and gave his name to Hagar as Mohommed; also, he took out of his pocket the pawn-ticket, which he handed to the girl.

"Alee, my countryman, he send dis," said he, in broken but very fair English; "he want de ring which he leave here."

"Why doesn't he come for it himself?" asked Hagar, suspiciously.

"Alee ill; him bery bad; he ask me to get de ring. But if you no gib me – why, I tell Alee; he come himself den."

"Oh, there is no necessity for him to do so," replied Hagar, getting the ring. "You would not have the ticket with you if everything was not square. Here is Alee's property. One pound and interest. Thank you, Mr. Mohommed. By the way, you are a friend of Alee?"

"Yis; I come to dis place when he come," replied Mohommed, passively, "him very great frien' of me. Two year we in dis land."

"Both of you speak English very well."

"Tank you, yes; we learn our Ingles in Persia for long time; and when we here we spike always – always. Goot-tay; I do take dis to Alee."

"I say," called out Hagar, "has that ring a story?"

"What, dis? I no know. Him charm against de Jinn; but dat's all. Goot-day; I go queek to Alee. Goot-day."

He went away with the ring on his finger, leaving Hagar disappointed that the strange jewel with its golden letters had not some wild tale attached to it. However, the ring was gone, and she never expected to hear anything more of it, or of the two Persians. A week passed, and no Alee made his appearance; so Hagar concluded that everything was right, and that he had really sent Mohommed to redeem the ring. On the eighth day of its redemption she was undeceived, for Alee himself made his appearance in the shop. Hagar was surprised to see him.

The poor man looked ill, and his brown face was terribly lean and worn in its looks. An expression of anxiety lurked in his soft black eyes, and he could hardly command his voice as he asked her to give him the ring. The request was so unexpected that Hagar could only stare at him in silence. It was a moment or so before she could find words.

"The ring!" she said, in tones of astonishment. "Why, you have it! Did not your friend Mohommed give it – –"

"Mohommed!" cried Alee, clenching his hands; and the next moment he had fallen insensible on the outer floor of the shop. The single mention

of the name Mohommed in connection with the ring had stricken the poor Persian to the heart. His entrance, his behavior, his fainting – all three were unexpected and inexplicable.

Recovering from her first surprise, Hagar ran to the assistance of the fallen man. He was soon revived by the application of cold water, and when he could rise Hagar, like the Good Samaritan she was, conducted him into the back parlour and made him lie down on the sofa. But more than ordinary weakness was the matter with the man; he was suffering from want of food, and told Hagar faintly that he had eaten nothing for two days. At once the girl set victuals before him, and warmed some soup to nourish him. Alee ate sparingly but well; and although he refused to touch wine, as a follower of the Prophet, he soon became stronger and more cheerful. His gratitude to Hagar knew no bounds.

“You are as charitable as Fatima, the daughter ob our Lord Mohommed,” said he, gratefully, “and your good deed, it will be talked ob by de angel Gabriel on de Las’ Day.”

“How is it you are so poor?” asked Hagar, restive under this praise.

“Ah, lady, dat is one big long story.”

“Connected with the ring?”

“Yes, yes; dat ring would haf mate me reech,” replied the Persian, with a sigh; “but now dat weeked one vill git my moneys. Aha!” said Alee, furiously, “dat Mohommed is de son ob a burnt fazzer!”

“He is a scoundrel certainly! How did he get the pawn-ticket?”

“He took it away when I ill.”

“Why did he want the ring?”

Alee reflected for a moment, and then he evidently made up his mind what course to pursue. “I weel tell you, lady,” he said, looking with thankful eyes at Hagar. “You haf been good to me. I weel tell you de story ob my life – ob de ring.”

“I knew that ring had some story connected with it,” said Hagar, complacently. “Go on, Alee; I am all attention.”

The Persian obeyed forthwith; but, as his English was imperfect at times, it will be as well to set forth the story in the vernacular. Being still weak, it took Alee some time to tell the whole tale; but Hagar heard him patiently to the end. His narrative was not without interest.

“I was born in Ispahan,” said the Persian, in his grave voice, “and I am a Mirza – what you call here a prince – in my own country. My father was an officer of the Shah’s household, and very wealthy. When he died I, as his only son, inherited his wealth. I was young, rich, and not at all bad-looking, so I expected to lead a pleasant life. The Shah,

who had protected my father, continued the sun of his favor to me; and I accompanied him to the Court at Teheran, where I speedily became high in his favor. But alas!" added Alee, in the flowery language of his country, "soon did I cover the face of pleasure with the veil of mourning, and ride the horse of folly into the country of sorrow." He paused, and then added, with a sigh: "Her name was Ayesha."

"Ah!" said Hagar, the cynic. "I was waiting to hear the name of the woman. She ruined you, I suppose?"

"She and another," sighed Alee, stroking his beard. "I melted like wax in the flame of her beauty, and my heart turned to water at the glance of her eyes. She was Georgian, and fairer than the chief wife of Sulieman bin Daoud. But alas! alas! what saith Sa'adi; 'Wed a charmer and wed sorrow!'"

"Well," said Hagar, rather patiently, "I know all about her looks. Go on with the story."

"On my head be it!" said Alee. "I purchased this Georgian in Ispahan, and made her my third wife; but so lovely and clever she was, that I speedily raised her to the rank of the first. I adored her beauty, and marveled at her wit. She sang like a bulbul, and danced like a Peri."

"She seems to have been a wonder, Alee! Go on."

"There was a man called Achmet, who hated me very much," continued Alee, his eyes lighting up fiercely at the mention of the name. "He saw that I was rich, and favored by the King of Kings, so he set his wits to work to ruin me. Having heard of my beautiful wife Ayesha, he told the Shah of her loveliness, which was that of a houri in Paradise. Fired by the description, my Sovereign visited at my house, and I received him with due splendor. He saw all my treasures – among others, my wife."

"I thought you Turks never presented your wives to strangers?"

"We are Persians, not Turks," corrected Alee, quietly, "and the Shah is no stranger in the houses of his subjects. Also, he has the right to pass the forbidden door to the Abode of Felicity."

"What is the Abode of Felicity?"

"The harem, lady. But to tell you the story of my ruin.

"The Shah saw my beautiful Ayesha, and her burning glances were as arrows of delight in his heart. He returned to his palace with a desire to possess my treasure. Achmet, who had right of access to the person of the Shah, strengthened this desire, and declared that I was unhappy with Ayesha."

"And were you?"

Alee sighed. "After the coming of the King of Kings I was," he confessed. "My wife wished to enter the royal harem, and warm herself in the glory of the royal sun. She was silent and melancholy, or cross and fierce. I did what I could to console her, but she refused to listen to me, treated me as dirt beneath her feet, and sometimes she even smote me on the mouth with her pearl-embroidered slipper. Tales of our constant quarrels were carried to the Shah by the perfidious Achmet who declared that I ill-treated my beautiful Georgian. At last Achmet told the King that I had wished I were rid of the woman, if only for the meanest jewel worn by his august self."

"Did you say that?"

"In a fit of rage one day I said something like it," said Alee, darkly; "but I never intended my foolish speech to be taken seriously. However these idle words were reported to the Shah, and he sent for me. 'Alee,' said he, 'it has been said that thou deemest the meanest thing worn by us of more value than your wife Ayesha. If that be so, take this ring, which we give thee freely, and surrender thy lightly-valued wife to dwell in the shadow of our throne. Thou hast my leave to go.' Lady, I bowed myself to the ground, I took the ring you know of, and I went."

"Did you not say that you wished to keep Ayesha?"

"No; the word of the Shah is law. Had I expressed such a wish I should have lost my head; as it was, I lost my wife. Returning home, I made known the Shah's desire, and urged her to fly with me beyond his power. Desirous of entering the royal serail, however, she refused, and so I carried her off by force. I drugged her one night, placed her on a camel, and set out for the nearest seaport disguised as a merchant."

"Was your flight successful?"

"Alas, no," replied Alee, in melancholy tones. "Achmet was on the watch, and had me followed. My wife was taken from me by force, but only too willingly on her own part. For daring to disobey the royal command I suffered the bastinado on the soles of my feet until I fainted away."

"Poor Alee!"

"Mad with anger, I let the wrath of the heart overpower the judgement of the mind, and rashly joined in a conspiracy to overthrow the King of Kings. Again my evil genius Achmet thwarted and discovered me. I was forced to fly from Persia to save my life; and all my wealth was forfeited to the royal treasury. A goodly portion of it, however, was given to Achmet for his having found out the conspiracy. After many adventures, which I need not relate here, I came to this land, where I

have lived in poverty and misery for two years. My wife is a queen in the serail of the Shah; my enemy is the ruler of a province; and I, lady, am the exile you see. All that I carried out of the Shah's kingdom was the ring which he gave me in exchange for my beautiful Ayesha."

He paused, and Hagar waited for him to continue the story. Finding that he still kept silent, she addressed him impatiently: "Is that all?"

"Yes – except that since I have been here it has been told to me that both Achmet and Ayesha wish to get me back to Persia, that they may kill me. The Georgian never forgave me for carrying her away, and only my death will glut her vengeance. As for Achmet, he is never free from dread while I live, and wishes me to die also. If they can manage it, those two will have me carried back to Persia, and there have me slain."

"They can't take you out of London against your will."

Alee shook his head. "Who knows!" said he. "There is the case of the Chinaman who was lured into the Embassy to be sent back to China. If the Government of England had not interfered he would have been a dead man by this time. I keep always away from the Persian Embassy."

"You are wise to do so," replied Hagar, who remembered the case. "But about the ring. Why did you pawn it, and why did Mohommed steal it by means of the pawn-ticket?"

"There was a friend of mine in Persia," explained Alee, "who saved for me out of my property seized by the Shah a box of jewels. Knowing that I was starving in this land, he sent the Jewels to me in charge of a servant. I received a letter from him, in which he stated that the servant had been instructed to give up the Jewels to me when I produced the ring. I foolishly told Mohommed about this, and one night he tried to thieve the ring from me, thinking that he would show it to my friend's servant and get my jewels. In fear lest he should obtain it, I pawned it with you for safety, until the servant should arrive."

"Is the servant here now?"

"He arrived last week," replied Alee, mournfully, "and he is now waiting for me at Southampton. But, alas! I speak foolishly. When I fell ill after pawning the ring, Mohommed stole the ticket, and, as you know, he obtained the ring. I have no doubt that by this time he has shown it to the servant of my friend, and is possessed of the jewels. Mohommed the accursed is rich, and I remain poor. Now, lady, you know why a darkness came over my spirit, and why I fell as one bereft of life. Surely, I am the sport of Fortune, and the most unlucky of men! I am he of whom the poet spoke when he said:

'Strive not, contend not; thy future is woe; Accept of thy sorrows, for Fortune's thy foe.' "

The poor man recited this couplet in faltering tones, and burst into tears, rocking himself to and fro in an agony of grief. Hagar was sorry for this unfortunate person, who had been so unlucky as to lose wife, and wealth, and country. She gave him the only comfort that was in her power.

"Here are twenty shillings," said she, placing some silver in his hand. "Perhaps Mohommed has not yet gone to Southampton; or it may be that the servant with your jewels has not yet arrived. Go down to Hampshire, and see if you can recover your ring."

Alee thanked her with great emotion, and shortly afterwards left the shop, promising to tell her of the issue of this adventure. Hagar saw him go away with the fullest belief in his honesty of purpose, and perfect trust in the truth of his story; but later on, when alone, she began to wonder if she had not been gulped by two sharpers. The whole story told by Alee was so like an adventure of the "Arabian Nights" that Hagar became more than a trifle doubtful of its truth. As the days went by, and Alee did not return as he had promised, she fancied that her belief was a true one.

"Those two Persians have played a comedy of which I have been the dupe," she said to herself; "it has all been done to get money. And yet I am not sure; the pair would not take all that trouble for a miserable twenty shillings. After all, Alee's story may be true; and he may be at Southampton trying to recover his ring and jewels."

In this conjecture she was perfectly right, for all the days of his absence Alee had been at Southampton vainly looking for Mohommed the thief. His twenty shillings had soon been expended; but luckily he had met with an Englishman whom he had known in Persia. This gentleman, an Oriental scholar and a liberal-minded man, had recognized Alee, dirty and miserable, as he haunted the Southampton quays looking for the servant of his friend and the recreant Mohommed. Carthew – for that was the Englishman's name – was profoundly shocked to find one whom he had known wealthy in such misery. He took Alee to his hotel, supplied him with food and clothes, and requested to know how the Persian had fallen so low. Alee told this Samaritan the same story as he had told Hagar; but, versed in the craft and topsy-turvydom of the East, Carthew was not so surprised or sceptical as the gipsy girl had been. He was sorry for poor Alee, who had been for so long the butt of Fortune, and determined to befriend him.

"I suppose there is no chance of your regaining the Shah's favor?" he asked the unfortunate man in his own tongue.

"Alas! no. What is, is. I conspired against the King of Kings; I was betrayed by Achmet; so there is no way in which I can approach again the Asylum of the Universe."

"Humph! looks like it," growled Carthew, stroking his white beard. "And Achmet, that son of a burnt father, is high in favor?"

"Yes; he is the governor of a province, and as he is friendly with Ayesha, who is now the favorite of the Shah, he is above all fortune. It is strange," added Alee, reflectively, "that those so rich and high-placed should wish to get me back to my death."

"They know they have wronged you, my friend, and so they hate you. But you are safe in England. Even the Shah cannot seize you here."

Alee reminded Carthew, as he had done Hagar, of the Chinese kidnapping case which had created so great a stir in England. Carthew laughed. "Why, don't you see that the case is your very safeguard?" said he. "If the Persian Embassy seized you, they would have to release you. Remember, now that I have met you, you are not friendless. You stay by me, Alee, and you will be safe from the vengeance of your wife and Achmet."

"But I do not wish to live on your charity."

"You needn't," said the Oriental scholar, bluntly. "As you know, I am translating the Epic of Kings which Ferdusi wrote. You must assist me, and I'll engage you as my secretary. In a few months you'll be on your feet again, and no doubt I shall be able to find you some regular employment. As for that scoundrel Mohommed who stole the ring, I'll set the police after him. By the way, I suppose he dare not go back to Persia again!"

"No; he was a conspirator also," replied Alee. "We fled together from the wrath of the Shah. He was nearly captured and beheaded in mistake for me, as we are so like one another; but he managed to escape, and joined me in England. Still, he is safer here than I, as he has no powerful enemies who desire his return to Persia."

"It's a case of Dilly duck, come and be killed," said Carthew, with a grim laugh. "Well, we must hunt up the scoundrel, and find your jewels if possible. Who was the friend who sent them to you?"

"Feshnavat, of Shiraz. He was a friend of my father's, and is, as you know, a great merchant."

"Yes, I know him," said Carthew, nodding; "a fine old man. I have no doubt he recovered your jewels, and sent them here all right. The pity

is that he made their delivery depend upon the showing of the Shah's ring. Though, to be sure, he never anticipated that a villain would rob you of it. Truly, Alee, you are the most unlucky of men!"

"Not since I met with you, O comforter of the poor!" replied Alee, gratefully "You have been charitable and good, even as the woman who helped me in the great city. But to both reward shall come. What says the poet:

'Give freely to the poor your gold; What's spent will come back forty-fold.' "

"Ah, Alee," said Carthew, with a half-sigh, "your couplet and gratitude are but bringing the posey of the East into the prose of the West. You are in London, my friend – in ordinary, commonplace London; and not with Sa'adi in the gardens of Shiraz."

Carthew was as good as his word, and employed Alee to aid him in translating the Epic of Kings. With the first money which he earned the Persian visited Hagar – to repay her, and to tell her all that had befallen him since he had left her shop. Hagar was pleased to see him, and gratified at the refunding of the money; for such action quite restored her faith in Alee, which she had been beginning to lose. She asked after Mohommed; but concerning that rascal the Persian was unable to give any news.

"He haf took my ring and jewels," sighed Alee, mournfully, "and in some lan' far away he live on my moneys. But the justice of Allah, who sees the black beetle in the black rock, will smite him. He will fall in his splendor and evil-doing, as the people of Od went down to the dust. It is written."

In the meantime Carthew, who had a genuine liking for Alee, made all inquiries about the absent Mohommed and the missing ring. For many weeks he learnt nothing; but finally chance set him on the track of the thief, and in the end he learnt all. He discovered what had become of Mohommed and of the ring; and the discovery astonished him not a little. It was an Attache of the Persian Embassy who revealed the truth; and Carthew judged it best that the lips of this same man should relate the story to Alee.

"My friend," said he one day to the Persian "do you know a countryman of yours called Mirza Baba?"

"I have heard of him," replied Alee, slowly, "but he has not seen my face, nor have I beheld him. Why do you ask?"

"Because he knows what has become of your ring."

"And of Mohommed? Oh, my friend, tell me of these things!" cried the Persian.

"Nay, Alee; it is better that the truth should come from the lips of Mirza Baba himself. I will ask him here to tell you."

"But he may learn who I am!" muttered Alee, in dismay.

"I think not, as he has never seen your face," replied Carthew, smiling, "besides – –" He broke off with a nod. "Well, you'll hear the story as he tells it; but call all your self-command and Oriental impassiveness to your aid. You'll need courage."

"Let it be as you say," rejoined Alee, folding his hands. "To-day and to-morrow are in the hands of the All-Wise."

True to his promise, Carthew next day received Mirza Baba in his house, and introduced him to Alee, who gave his countryman a feigned name. The Persian of the Embassy, who was a very great man indeed, paid little attention to Alee, whom he regarded simply as the secretary of Carthew, and as one quite beneath his notice. This neglect suited Alee, who sat meekly on one side, and listened to his own story, and to the story of Mohommed and the missing ring. Mirza Baba, in response to the request of Carthew, told it over pipes and coffee, and greatly astonished Alee in the telling.

"You know," said the Mirza, addressing himself particularly to Carthew, and quite ignoring his own countryman, "that this dog of an Alee, on whose head be curses! had the folly to conspire against the peace of the Shah – on whom be blessings! He escaped from the Land of the Sun, and came to this island of thine. Hither he was traced, and to assert the majesty of the Asylum of the Universe it was resolved that this son of a burnt father should be brought back to Persia for punishment. The Banou Ayesha, who is the Pearl of the East, was bent upon seeing the head of this traitor, to whom aforesaid she had been wife, ere the King of Kings had deigned to cast his eyes upon her. Also Achmet, the most zealous of governors, who had discovered the conspiracy of the evil-minded Alee, wished to punish him. Orders were sent to our Embassy that Alee should be taken, even in the streets of London, and sent back in chains to the Court of Teheran; but this, it was difficult to do.

"H'm! I think so!" replied Carthew, drily. "The Chinese Embassy tried on that game with Sun Yat, and had to give him up. The English Government do not recognize the Embassies as so many neutral territories in London."

"It is true; I know it," answered Baba, coolly. "Well, as there was no chance of capturing Alee in that way, it was resolved to employ strata-

gem. A letter, purporting to be written by Feshnavat, of Shiraz, was sent to this traitor, in which it was set forth that a box of jewels, saved from the wreck of his property, was being sent to England, and that it would be given up at Southampton to the bearer of the Shah's ring. You know of the ring, my friend?" added the Mirza.

"Yes; the ring given by the Shah to Alee in exchange for his wife. Go on."

"That is so. The dog surrendered his spouse, who is now the Pearl of Persia, for the meanest ring worn by the Shah. It was known that he bore it to this land, so it was arranged by the Pearl and Achmet that such ring should be the means to lure this traitor to his death. Well, my friend," continued Baba, with a chuckle, "the plot contrived by the wit of Banou Ayesha was successful. Alee went to Southampton, and finding the supposed servant of Feshnavat, produced the ring, and demanded the jewels. This was at night, so at once the traitor was seized, and placed on board the waiting vessel to be taken to Persia."

"That was very clever," said Carthew, stealing a glance at Alee, who was painfully white. "And what happened then?"

"Lies and misfortune," replied Baba Mirza. "This Alee, when he learnt the truth, swore that he was not the man we sought, but one Mohammed, and that he had stolen the ring to get the jewels. Of course, no one believed this story, which, without doubt, was a mere trick to save his life. He was carefully watched, and was told that on arriving in Persia he would be beheaded at once. In fear of this death, the wretch escaped one night from the cabin in which he was confined, and threw himself into the sea. He left behind him the ring; and this, seeing that the man was dead, was taken to Persia, in proof that Alee had been seized. The ring is now worn by the Pearl of Persia; but never has she ceased regretting that Alee escaped her vengeance."

After telling this story, which was listened to, with outward composure but inward fear by Alee, the Mirza took his leave. When alone with the Persian, Carthew turned to address him.

"Well, Alee," said he, kindly, "you see Fortune has not forsaken you yet! She has saved you, and punished Mohammed for his theft."

"What is, is," said Alee, with Oriental impassiveness; "but in truth it is wondrous that I escaped the snare. Now I can live in peace; for, thinking me dead, neither Ayesha nor Achmet will seek me again. I have lost the ring, it is true; but I have gained my life. Now I shall take another name, and dwell for the span of my days in England."

"It is a queer ending to the story," said Carthew, reflectively.

“The tale is as strange as any of the ‘Thousand and One Nights,’ “ replied Alee. “It should be written in letters of gold. It is of such that the poet writes:

“Go forward on thy path, tho’ darkness hides it;
Thy destiny is sure, for Allah guides it.”

12

The Passing Of Hagar

It was now two years since Hagar had presented herself to the astonished eyes of Jacob Dix, and one year since the death of the old miser had left her in sole charge of the pawnshop. During all these months she had striven hard to do her duty, for the sake of the man who had taken pity on her poverty. She had toiled early and late; she had neglected no opportunity to make bargains; and she had lived penuriously the meanwhile. All moneys accruing from the business she had paid into the bank; and all accounts of receipts and payments she had placed in the hands of Vark, the lawyer. At any time that Goliath chose to arrive, she was ready to hand over the pawn-shop and property to him, after which it was her intention to leave.

As yet she had no idea in her head what was to become of her when the arrival of the lost heir reduced her to the position of a pauper. It had, indeed, occurred to her that it would be best to return to her tribe again, and take up the old gipsy life. On account of Goliath she had exiled herself from the Romany tents: so when he came into his inheritance she would be free to return thereto. As a wealthy man, Jimmy Dix, alias Goliath, would not care to spend his life in roaming the country with vagrants; and thus she would be relieved of his presence. Hagar was getting very tired of the shop and the weary life of Carby's Crescent; and often the nostalgia of the roads came upon her. Several times of late she had wished that Goliath would claim his heritage, and relieve her of the irksome task which she had taken on her own shoulders, out of gratitude to Jacob Dix. But as yet the absent heir had not made his appearance.

Hagar knew very well that Eustace Lorn was looking for him. Pursuant to the promise he had given her, and expecting the reward of her

hand on his return, Lorn had been these many months on the trail of the missing man. All over England and Scotland had he tramped, inquiring of every gipsy, every vagrant, every town scamp, the whereabouts of Goliath; but all in vain, for Goliath seemed to have vanished completely. Indeed, Eustace began to fear that he was not in the United Kingdom, else he would certainly have heard of him, or the man would have seen in the newspapers the advertisement inquiring for his whereabouts. From time to time Eustace wrote to Hagar of his ill success, and received replies wherein she expressed her detestation of the shop, and bidding him continue his search; whereupon, encouraged to fresh exertions, Eustace would resume his wanderings. His adventures while thus engaged were many and various; and in the end his efforts were crowned with success.

One day, while Hagar was seated rather disconsolately in the back parlour, the side-door, which had been used by Dix for such of his friends as wished to dispose of stolen goods – a form of business which Hagar had abandoned – was opened boldly, and a tall man strode into the room. Hagar rose indignantly to repel the intruder, who had no right to enter by that way, when suddenly she saw his countenance, and fell back a step.

“Goliath!” she said with a pale face.

The tall man – he was almost a giant in point of height and size – nodded and smiled. He had closely-cropped red hair, and a rather brutal cast of countenance, by no means prepossessing. Again familiarly nodding to Hagar, who recoiled from him in aversion, he seated himself in a large armchair by the fire, which had formerly been used by dead Jacob Dix. “My father’s chair,” said he, with a grin. “I have come to take possession of it, my dear.”

“I am very glad to hear it,” replied Hagar, recovering the use of her tongue. “Certainly it was about time, Mr. Dix.”

“Don’t call me Mister, or Dix, my dear! To you I shall always be Goliath – your Goliath.”

“Indeed you shan’t!” retorted Hagar, in a spirited manner. “I hate you now just as much as I did when you forced me to leave my people.”

“That is uncommon cruel of you, seeing as you have been wearing my shoes all this time!”

“I have been wearing your father’s shoes, you mean, and for your benefit solely. I did so simply because your father was good enough to take me in, after you had exiled me from the Romany.”

“Oh, I know all about that, Cousin Hagar. We’re cousins, ain’t we?”

"Yes; and we are likely to continue cousins. But I'm tired of this sparing, Goliath. Where have you been all this time? and how did you learn that your father was dead?"

"Where I've been I'll tell you later," replied Goliath, rendered surly by the attitude of Hagar, "and as to how I knowed the old 'un was gone – why, a cove called Lorn told me just after I got out."

"Got out!" cried Hagar, noting the queer wording of the phrase; "so you have been in prison, Goliath!"

"You're a sharp one, you are!" grinned the red-haired man. "Yes, I've been in quod though I didn't intend to tell you so yet. I was Number Forty-three till a week ago, and they ticketed me for horse-coping. I got two years, and was took just arter you gave me the slip in New Forest; so now you know how I didn't see your noospaper notice about the old 'un kicking the bucket."

"You might speak of your father with more respect!" said Hagar, in a disdainful tone; "but what can one expect from a convict?"

"Come, none of that, cousin, or I'll twist your neck."

"You dare to lay a finger on me, and I'll kill you!" retorted Hagar, fiercely.

"Yah! You're as much a spitfire as ever!"

"More so – to you!" replied the girl. "I hate you now as I did when I left my tribe. Now you have come back, I'll go."

"And who is to look after the shop?"

"That is your business. My task here is ended. To-morrow I'll show you all the accounts – –"

"Won't you share the property with me?" asked Goliath, in a wheedling tone.

"No, I shan't! To-morrow you must come with me and see Vark, to – –"

"Vark!" echoed Goliath, starting to his feet; "is it that old villain who is to hand me over my tin?"

"Yes; your father employed him, so I thought – –"

"Don't think! there ain't no time for thinking! Job! I'd better get my money afore the head of old Vark is stove in!"

"What do you mean?" asked Hagar, bewildered by his tone.

"Mean!" echoed Goliath, pausing at the door. "Well, I was in quod, as I told ye; there I came across Bill Smith – –"

"The mandarin customer?"

"Yes; we managed to talk – how it don't matter to you; but I guess, when Bill Smith's out of quod, that Vark is bound for Kingdom-come! And Bill Smith is out!"

"What!" shrieked Hagar, alive at once to the danger which threatened the lawyer. "Out! Escaped?"

"That's the case. He got away last week, and they ain't got him yet. I'd best go and tell Vark to load his pistols. I don't want the old villain choked until I get my property square. You come too, cousin."

"Not just now. To-morrow."

"To-morrow won't do for me!" growled Goliath. "You come to-day, quick!"

"Oh," said Hagar, very disdainfully, "it is no use your taking that tone with me, Goliath. I must get ready my accounts to-night; and tomorrow, if you come here, I'll take them with you to Vark. When everything is set out to your satisfaction, you can enter into your property at once."

"Then you won't come now?"

"No; I have given you my answer."

"You'd best give me a pound or two," said Goliath, crossly. "I'm cleaned out, and I need money to get a bed for the night. You are as obstinate as ever, I see; but if you won't come, you won't. But I'll go and see Vark myself, and tell him about Bill Smith."

After which speech Goliath, with money in his pocket, went off to see the lawyer, cursing Hagar freely for her obstinacy. The man entirely forgot how she had devoted herself these many months to looking after his property; all he thought of was, that he loved her now, as much as he had done in the old days, and that she was still set on having nothing to do with him. Had she been an ordinary girl, he might have broken her spirit; but it was useless to attempt bullying with Hagar. She could give as good as she got; and this great, hulking Goliath could only admire and desire this spirited gipsy girl who disdained him and his money.

"Well," said Hagar to herself as she saw the last of him, "I have had one unexpected visitor; so by all the laws of coincidence I should have another to-day. I never knew one strange event happen without another following on its heels."

Hagar did not think precisely in so bookish a fashion, but the gist of her ideas was as above; and this proved correct before nightfall, at which time the unexpected second event duly occurred. This was none other than the arrival of Eustace Lorn, who entered the shop with a smile on his lips and a love light in his eyes. The girl knew his step – by some intuition of love, no doubt – and rushed to meet him with outstretched

hands. These Eustace clasped ardently in his own; but as yet – so dignified was the attitude of Hagar – he did not venture to kiss her. His speech was warmer than his actions.

“Hagar! my dear Hagar!” he cried, in rapture, “at last I have come back. Are you not glad to see me?”

“I am delighted!” replied Hagar, beaming with pleasure – “more delighted than I was to see Goliath.”

“Ah! he has returned, then? I found him at last, you see; and I recognized him from your description.”

“He did not tell me of your meeting, Eustace.”

“Oh, it was in this way,” replied Lorn, as they entered the parlour together. “I had searched for him everywhere, as you know, but could not find him. Where he has been all these months I cannot say, as at our interview he refused to tell me.”

“Perhaps he had a good reason for his silence,” said Hagar, noting the fact that Goliath had kept quiet concerning his prison experiences.

“I dare say,” laughed Lorn. “He looks a scamp. Well, I was down near Weybridge, resting by the roadside, when I saw a tall red-haired man passing. Remembering your description of Jimmy Dix, I felt sure that it was him; and I called out the name ‘Goliath.’ To my surprise, instead of stopping, he took to his heels.”

“Ah, he had a good reason for that also.”

“Not an honest one, I am afraid. Well; I ran after him, and in spite of his long legs I managed to catch him up. Then he showed fight; but when I explained who I was, and who you were, and how his father had died and left a fortune, Goliath grew quiet and friendly. He fraternized with me, accepted the loan of a few shillings – which was all I could spare – and took himself off to London. You have seen him?”

“Yes; and to-morrow I make up my accounts and give him over his property. Then I shall be free – free! Oh!” cried Hagar, stretching her arms, “how delicious it will be to be free once more – to leave this weary London, and see the sky and stars, sunrise and sunset – to hear the birds, and breathe the fresh air of the moors! I am going back to my tribe, you know.”

“I don’t know,” said Eustace, taking her hand; “but I do know that I love you, and I have an idea that you love me. In this case, I think that instead of going back to your tribe you should come to your husband.”

“My husband – you!” cried Hagar, with a charming blush.

“If you love me,” said Eustace, and then was quiet.

"You leave the burden of proposing on me," cried Hagar, again. "Well, my dear, I will not hide from you that I do love you. Hush! let me go on. I have seen but little of you, yet what I have seen I have loved, every inch of it. I can read faces and estimate character better than most, and I know that you are a true, good, honorable man, who will make me, a poor gipsy, a better husband than I dared to expect. Yes, Eustace, I love you. If you care I will marry you – –"

"Care! Marry me!" said Lorn, in rapture. "Why, my angel – –"

"One moment," interrupted Hagar more seriously. "You know that I have no money, Eustace. Jacob Dix did not leave me a penny. I refuse to take anything from Goliath, who wants to marry me; and to-morrow I leave this shop as poor as when I came into it two years ago. Now, you are poor also; so two paupers are foolish to marry."

"But I am not poor!" cried Eustace, smiling – "that is, I am not rich, but I have sufficient for you and me to lead the life we love."

"But the life I love is the gipsy life," objected Hagar.

"I also am Romany by instinct," said Eustace joyously. "Have I not led the life of a vagabond these many months while looking for Goliath? See here, my dearest girl; when I left you I sold the Florentine Dante to a collector of books for a goodly sum. With the money I sought a caravan, and stocked it with books suitable for the country folk. All this time, my dear, I have been traveling with my caravan from town to town, earning my living by selling books; and I find it, really and truly, a very profitable concern. I ask you to be my wife – to share my caravan and gipsy life; so if you – –"

"Eustace!" cried Hagar, joyfully, and threw her arms round his neck. That was all; the situation adjusted itself between them without further words. When the pair stepped out into Carby's Crescent to see the caravan – it was round the corner – they were already betrothed. For once in this world the course of true love was running smoothly. To marry Eustace; to live in a caravan; to wander about the country in true Bohemian fashion – Hagar could conceive of no sweeter existence. At last she was rewarded for her toils in the pawn-shop.

"This is our future home, Hagar," said Eustace, and pointed to the caravan.

It was a very spick and span vehicle, painted a light canary colour, picked out with pale blue; and on either side was inscribed – also in azure – the legend, "E. Lorn, Bookseller." A sleek gray horse in brown harness was between the shafts; and the windows of the caravan were

barred with brass rods and curtained with the whitest of curtains. Hagar fell in love with this delightful Noah's ark – as Eustace playfully called it – and clapped her hands. As it was about six o'clock and twilight, the street was almost emptied of people, so Hagar could indulge in her raptures to her heart's content.

"O Eustace, Eustace! 'Tis beautiful! 'tis perfect!" she cried. "If it is as neat within as without, I shall love it dearly!"

"You'll make me jealous of the caravan," said Eustace, rather uneasily. "But don't look inside, Hagar."

"Why not?" said she, with a wondering look.

"Oh, because, because – –" he began, in confusion, and then stopped. Hagar looked at the door of the caravan, and Eustace turned his eyes in the same direction. It opened slowly, and a face – a brutal white face – looked out. The man to whom this visage – it was covered with a hairy growth of some days – belonged peered out at Eustace; then his gaze wandered to Hagar. As the light fell on his sullen looks, she gave a cry; the man on his side uttered an oath, and the next moment, dashing open the door, he had leaped out, and brushing past the pair, was racing down the street which led from Carby's Crescent into the larger thoroughfare.

Eustace looked surprised at this sudden flight, and turned an inquiring look on Hagar, who was pale as sculptured stone.

"Why are you so pale?" he said, taking her hand; "and why did my friend run away at the sight of you?"

"Your friend?" said Hagar, faintly.

"Yes; for the time being at all events. He is only a poor tramp I found near Esher the other day. He was lying in a ditch half-dead for want of food, so I took him into my caravan, and looked after him till he got better. He asked me to take him up to London; and I was about to tell you about him when he ran away."

"Why did you not wish me to look into the caravan?"

"Well," said Eustace, "this tramp seemed rather nervous; I'm afraid a hard life has told on the poor soul. A strange face always made him afraid, and I thought that if you looked in suddenly, he might be alarmed. As it is – –"

"As it is, he was alarmed when he did see me," burst out Hagar. "He well might be, as I know him!"

"You know him – that tramp?"

"Tramp! He is a convict – Bill Smith – the one I wrote to you about."

"What! that blackguard who was engaged in the mandarin swindle!" cried Eustace, taken aback – "who stole those diamonds! I thought he was in prison!"

"So he was; but he escaped last week. The police are looking for him."

"Who told you this, Hagar?"

"Goliath. He was in prison also, for horse-stealing; but he has just been let out – a few days ago. Bill Smith – Larky Bill as they call him – broke out, and he wants to kill Vark, the lawyer."

"Then I have unconsciously helped him to escape justice," said Lorn, in vexed tones. "I really thought he was a tramp; had I known who he was I would not have helped him. He is a brute!"

"He'll be a murderer soon!" cried Hagar, feverishly. "For heaven's sake, Eustace, repair your error by going to Scotland Yard and telling them that the man is in London! You may be able to prevent a crime."

"I'll go," said Eustace, getting on to the driving seat of the caravan. "I'll see about this tonight, and return to talk to you to-morrow. One moment" – he leaped down again – "a kiss, my dear."

"Eustace! there are people about!"

"Well, they didn't stop Bill Smith running away, so they won't object to a kiss between an engaged couple. Good-by, dearest, for the last time. To-morrow we meet to part no more."

It was in considerable agitation that Hagar returned to her pawn-shop. The coming of Goliath, the arrival of Eustace, the unexpected escape of Bill Smith – all these events crowded so rapidly into her life – in the space of an hour, as one might say – that she felt unnerved and alarmed. She did not know what the next day might bring forth, and was particularly careful in locking up the house on this night, lest the escaped convict should take it into his head to enter therein as a burglar. The next twelve hours were anything but pleasant to Hagar.

With the daylight came more assurance; also Vark and Goliath. The lean lawyer was much agitated at the news of the escape, and feared – as he well might – that his miserable life was not safe from so bitter an enemy as Larky Bill. However, his fear did not prevent him from attending to business; and the whole of that morning Hagar was busy explaining accounts and payments and receipts to Vark and Goliath. The lawyer tried hard to find fault with the administration of Hagar; to pick holes in her statements; but, thanks to the rigid honesty of the girl, and the careful manner in which she had conducted her business, Vark, to his great disgust, was unable to harm her in any way. Everything

was arranged fairly, and Goliath expressed himself quite satisfied with the statement of his property. Then he made a speech.

"It seems that I have thirty thousand quid," said he, exultingly; "also a pop-shop, which I'll give the kick to. With the rhino I can set up as a gent – –"

"That you can never be!" retorted Hagar, scornfully.

"Not unless you look arter me. See here, you jade, when I was poor you said naught to me; now I am rich you – –"

"I say the same, Goliath. When you were an honest man I refused you; now you are a felon I – –"

"Was a felon," corrected Goliath. "I'm out of quod now."

"Well, I won't marry you. I hate you!" cried Hagar, stamping her foot; "and indeed, if you must know, I'm going to marry Eustace Lorn."

"What! that puppy!" cried Goliath, in a rage.

"That man – which you aren't! I'll live in a caravan and sell books."

Here Goliath broke out into imprecations, and was hardly restrained from violence, so enraged was he. He swore that for her years of service he would not give Hagar a penny; she would leave the pawn-shop as poor as when she entered it.

"I intend to," said Hagar, coolly. "I shan't even take the mourning I wore for your father. My red dress is good enough for the caravan of Eustace; and to-morrow I'll put it on, and leave the pawn-shop forever."

This was all that Goliath could get out of her. He offered to settle the money on her, to go in a caravan round the country if she wished it; but all to no purpose. Hagar had surrendered her stewardship in such wise that not even Vark, who hated her, could find a flaw in the accounts. These things being settled, she declared that she was going away with Eustace, after one more night in the pawn-shop. First the altar and the marriage service; then the caravan and the country; and from this program Hagar never swerved.

That same evening Eustace came to see Hagar, and told her that he had given notice at Scotland Yard of Smith's escape, and that the police were now looking for him. While they were talking over this, Vark, pale and scared-looking, made his appearance. He told the engaged pair a piece of news which astonished them not a little.

"I went to the police about Smith," said he, rubbing his lean hands together, "and I found out that not only one convict escaped, but two."

"Two!" cried Hagar; "and the second?"

"Is Goliath – your friend Jimmy Dix. He got three years, not two; and he broke prison with Larky Bill."

"What a fool to come here!" cried Eustace, recovering from his surprise.

"On the contrary, I think he was very wise," said Hagar; "only I knew him as Goliath, and under that name he was arrested and sentenced. As James Dix, the heir of Jacob, the owner of thirty thousand pounds, no one would suspect him of being an escaped convict. But how did he get rid of his prison clothes?"

"The police told me," grinned Vark. "The two broke into a house and stole suits to fit 'em. Bill Smith was wounded by a steel trap, so hid in the ditch where Mr. Lorn found him. Goliath came up here boldly to get his money. If I hadn't heard his description at Scotland Yard I should never have suspected him."

"Did you tell them he was here?" asked Lorn, sharply.

"No; but I'll do so unless he gives me half his money – fifteen thousand pounds. If he does, I'll smuggle him over to America. If he doesn't –"

"Well," said Hagar, "if he doesn't, you Judas?"

"I'll give him up to the police."

"You beast!" cried the girl, furiously, "you low reptile! You make capital out of everything. Goliath has conferred nothing on you but benefits; why, he warned you about Smith, and so gave himself into your hands; yet you would betray him!"

"I thought you hated the man!" quavered Vark, astonished at this outburst.

"So I do; but I think you might let him enjoy his money in peace. If he has been in jail, he hasn't deserved it half so much as you."

"I want half his money," said the lawyer, sullenly.

"What good will it do?" asked Lorn. "Bill Smith may kill you."

"I'm not afraid of him!" snapped Vark, turning pale nevertheless. "I have Bolker to stay with me at night, and I've got my pistols. Besides, the police are after Bill, so he won't come here."

"Yes, he will," said Hagar, throwing open the door; "he'll gladly give his own neck to twist yours. Get out of this place, Judas! You poison the air!"

Vark whimpered and protested, but Hagar drove him out and locked the door on him. When in the street, he turned round and shook his fist at the house wherein dwelt the woman he now hated as much as he had loved. She had escaped his toils, she had run clear of the traps he had laid for her; and now, having discharged her trust towards the dead, she

was going out into the wide world with the man she loved; poor indeed as regards worldly wealth, but rich in the possession of Lorn's honest heart. No wonder Vark was wrathful.

The house in which Vark lived, was down by the river, and near that ruinous wharf whither Bill Smith on a certain memorable occasion had dragged Bolker. It was a gloomy old ramshackle mansion, which had seen better days in the early part of the century, but now it was given over to the lawyer, his deaf old house-keeper, and the rats. On the present occasion Bolker was also staying there, by desire of Vark. The wretched solicitor, who had sold so many thieves, and who was now terribly afraid of one, insisted that the lad should stay by him, in case of need. But Nemesis was not to be tricked in that way.

Passing through the gloomy streets on his way to this den, Vark, who had grown a trifle hard of hearing, did not hear the stealthy footfalls of one who stole after him; nor did he see a shadow gliding close at his heels. It was a windy night, and the moon was veiled on occasions by a rack of flying clouds. The lawyer walked slowly on, until he ascended the flight of worn steps which led to his hall door. As he did so, a black cloud swept before the moon, and lingered there so long that Vark could not find the keyhole. When he did so, the door blew open with a crash, and Vark measured his length on the stone pavement of the hall. Bill Smith saw his opportunity of entering the house unnoticed, and flew swiftly up the steps, and past the prostrate man, who was so confused by his fall that he did not know of the man flitting by. At this moment Bill could have killed Vark easily; but he judged that the hall, with the open door, was too public; moreover, he wished to get into the room where the lawyer kept his safe. Vark once dead, and Bill intended to open the safe with his keys, and then escape well laden with plunder. But of all these dark plans against his life and moneys Vark was ignorant.

As he gathered himself up and closed the door, his housekeeper came down the stairs with a candle. Grumbling at her for being late, Vark made her precede him into a little room at the back, looking on to the river. Larky Bill took off his boots, grasped the knife he was carrying, and went after the old man and woman. When he looked through a crack of the door into the room, he started back and swore under his breath, for therein were Bolker and Goliath. Bill began to think he would not be able to kill Vark after all.

He hid in a dark corner as the housekeeper repassed him on the way up the stairs, and then returned to his vantage point near the door of the room, where he could both hear and see. What ensued made him

more resolved than ever to kill Vark. Such an ungrateful bloodsucker, thought Bill, did not deserve to live.

"I am glad to see you here," said Vark to Goliath, who rose at his entry. "You got my note asking you?"

"Yes, or I shouldn't be cooling my heels in this hole of yours?" growled Goliath, savagely. "What do you want?"

"Fifteen thousand pounds," said Vark, tersely.

"Half the money left by the old 'un! And why?"

"Because I know you bolted from jail," replied Vark, coolly, "and that the police are looking for you."

"Do you intend to give me up?" asked Goliath, grinding his teeth.

Vark rubbed his hands. "Why not?" he snarled. "I gave up Bill Smith and got the reward; but I'd rather have half your money than put you in jail again."

"I've a mind to kill you."

"Oh, I'm not frightened," said Vark, with an ugly look. "Bolker sits here, and Bolker has pistols. You can't kill me."

"No; I'll leave Bill Smith to do that," said Goliath, coolly.

"Bah! I'm not afraid of that ruffian!"

Before Goliath could reply there was a roar like an angry beast's, the door was burst violently open, and Bill Smith, knife in hand, hurled himself into the room. Vark yelled shrilly like a rabbit caught in a trap, and the next moment was dashed to the ground by the infuriated convict. Bolker ran out of the room crying for the police, and flew through the passage, out of the hall door, and into the windy night. His shrieks roused the neighbourhood.

In a flash Goliath saw a chance of gaining a pardon by saving Vark from being murdered. He threw himself on Bill, who was striking blindly with his knife at the struggling lawyer, and strove to wrench him off.

"Let be, curse you!" shrieked the convict. "He sold me; he said he'd sell you! If I swing for it, I'll kill him!"

"No, d - n you, no!"

Goliath plucked the wretch off the prostrate man like a limpet off a rock; and then commenced a furious struggle between the pair. Vark, wounded and covered with blood, had fainted away. The next moment, while Smith and Goliath were swaying together in a fierce embrace, the room was filled with policemen, brought hither by the shrieking Bolker. Seeing them enter, Bill, wrenching himself free of Goliath, snatched up

a revolver, that Bolker had left on the table when he fled, and fired two shots at the prostrate body of his enemy.

"Yah! Brute! Curse you! Die!"

Then he returned to the window which overlooked the river, and keeping the police at bay with the pistol, he wrenched it open. Goliath sprang forward to seize him, but Bill, with a howl of rage, dashed the revolver in his face.

"Curse you for rounding on a pal!"

The next moment he had swung himself out of the window, and those in the room heard the splash of his heavy body as it struck the waters of the Thames.

F.W.H.

Two months after the foregoing event, a caravan, painted yellow and drawn by a gray horse, was rolling along one of the green lanes leading to Walton-on-Thames. It was the beginning of spring, and the buds were already running along the leafless branches of the trees, while the sharpness of the air was tempered by a balmy breath foretelling the advent of the warm months of the year. Beside the caravan strode a tall dark man arrayed in a rough suit of homespun, and near him walked a woman with an imperial carriage and lordly gait. She wore a dress of dark red, much stained and worn; but her eye was full of fire, and her cheek healthy. The pair were of humble condition, but looked contented and happy. As the horse plodded onward in the bursts of sunlight, the two talked.

"So Vark died, after all, Hagar," said the man, gravely.

"As you know," she replied, "the two pistol shots killed him; and Bill Smith was drowned in the river as he attempted to escape. He gave up his life to compass his revenge."

"I am glad Goliath was pardoned."

"Oh, as to that," said Hagar, indifferently, "I am neither glad nor sorry. I think myself that he only strove to save Vark in order to gain pardon."

"Well, he got what he wanted," said Eustace, reflectively.

"He wouldn't if the public hadn't taken the matter up," retorted Hagar: "but they made him out a hero. Nonsense! As if Goliath was the man to forgive Vark, who intended to sell him. Well, he is free now, and rich. I dare say he'll lose all his money in dissipation. He had much better have held on to the pawn-shop, instead of giving it up to Bolker."

"Bolker is very young to have a business."

“Don’t you believe it,” replied Hagar, drily. “Bolker is young in years, but old in wickedness. He bought the pawn-shop business with the reward he got from Lord Deacey for recovering the diamonds. Bolker will grind down the poor of Carby’s Crescent, and develop into a second Jacob Dix.”

“You are glad to be away from the pawn-shop?”

“I should think so!” she replied, with a loving glance at Eustace. “I am glad to leave dirty Lambeth for the green fields of the country. I am a gipsy, and not used to the yoke of commerce. Also, my dear, I am glad to be with you always.”

“Are you indeed, Mrs. Lorn?” said her husband, laughing.

“Yes, Mrs. Lorn,” repeated Hagar, very sedately, “I am Mrs. Lorn now, and Hagar of the Pawn-shop, with all her adventures, is a phantom of the past.”

Eustace kissed her, and then chirruped the horse onward. They passed down the lane, across the dancing shadows, and went away hopefully into the green country towards the gipsy life. Hagar of the Pawn-shop had come to her own at last.

THE END