

THE LAST STROKE
A DETECTIVE STORY
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LONDON:
WARD, LOCK & Co., LIMITED,
WARWICK HOUSE, SALISBURY SQUARE, E.C.
NEW YORK AND MELBOURNE.

[Pg v]

CONTENTS.

PAGE

CHAPTER I.

SOMETHING WRONG [1](#)

CHAPTER II.

FOUND [12](#)

CHAPTER III.

NEMESIS [28](#)

CHAPTER IV.

FERRARS [39](#)

CHAPTER V.

IN CONSULTATION [52](#)

CHAPTER VI.

"WHICH?" [64](#)

CHAPTER VII.

RENUNCIATION [75](#)

[Pg vi]CHAPTER VIII.

TRICKERY [90](#)

CHAPTER IX.

A LETTER [101](#)

CHAPTER X.

THIS HELPS ME [117](#)

CHAPTER XI.

DETAILS [127](#)

CHAPTER XII.

"FERRISS-GRANT" [135](#)

CHAPTER XIII.

THE "LAKE COUNTY HERALD" [148](#)

CHAPTER XIV.

A GHOST [157](#)

CHAPTER XV.

REBELLION [175](#)

CHAPTER XVI.

"OUT OF REACH" [185](#)

CHAPTER XVII.

RUTH GLIDDEN [196](#)

[Pg vii]CHAPTER XVIII.

SUDDEN FLITTINGS [208](#)

CHAPTER XIX.

THROUGH THE MAIL [221](#)

CHAPTER XX.

A WOMAN'S HEART [237](#)

CHAPTER XXI.

"QUARRELSOME HARRY" [250](#)

CHAPTER XXII.

IN NUMBER NINE [269](#)

CHAPTER XXIII.

TWO INTERVIEWS [279](#)

CHAPTER XXIV.

MRS. GASTON LATHAM [292](#)

CHAPTER XXV.

THE LAST STROKE [301](#)

[Pg 1]

THE LAST STROKE.

CHAPTER I.SOMETHING WRONG.

It was a May morning in Glenville. Pretty, picturesque Glenville, low lying by the lake shore, with the waters of the lake surging to meet it, or coyly receding from it, on the one side, and the green-clad hills rising gradually and gently on the other, ending in a belt of trees at the very horizon's edge.

There is little movement in the quiet streets of the town at half-past eight o'clock in the morning, save for the youngsters who, walking, running, leaping, sauntering or waiting idly, one for another, are, or should be, on their way to the school-house which stands upon the very southernmost outskirts of the town, and a little way[Pg 2] up the hilly slope, at a reasonably safe remove from the willow-fringed lake shore.

The Glenville school-house was one of the earliest public buildings erected in the village, and it had been "located" in what was confidently expected to be the centre of the place. But the new and late-coming impetus, which had changed the hamlet of half a hundred dwellings to one of twenty times that number, and made of it a quiet and not too fashionable little summer resort, had carried the business of the place northward, and its residences still farther north, thus leaving this seat of learning aloof from, and quite above the newer town, in isolated and lofty dignity, surrounded by trees; in the outskirts, in fact, of a second belt of wood, which girdled the lake shore, even as the further and loftier fringe of timber outlined the hilltops at the edge of the eastern horizon and far away.

"Les call 'er the 'cademy?" suggested Elias Robbins, one of the builders of the school-house, and an early settler of Glenville. "What's to hinder?"

"Nothin'," declared John Rote, the village oracle. "'Twill sound first-rate."

They were standing outside the building, just completed and resplendent in two coats of yellow paint, and they were just from the labour of putting in, "hangin'" the new bell.

[Pg 3]

All of masculine Glenville was present, and the other sex was not without representation.

"Suits me down ter the ground!" commented a third citizen; and no doubt it would have suited the majority, but when Parson Ryder was consulted, he smiled genially and shook his head.

"It won't do, I'm afraid, Elias," he said. "We're only a village as yet, you see, and we can't even dub it the High School, except from a geographical point of view. However, we are bound to grow, and our titles will come with the growth."

The growth, after a time, began; but it was only a summer growth; and the school-house was still a village school-house with its master and one under, or primary, teacher; and to-day there was a frisking group of the smaller youngsters rushing about the school-

yard, while the first bell rang out, and half a dozen of the older pupils clustered about the girlish under-teacher full of questions and wonder; for Johnny Robbins, whose turn it was to ring the bell this week, after watching the clock, and the path up the hill, alternately, until the time for the first bell had come, and was actually twenty seconds past, had reluctantly but firmly seized the rope and began to pull.

"Taint no use, Miss Grant; I'll have to do it. He told me not to wait for nothin', never, when 'twas [Pg 4]half-past eight, and so"—cling, clang, cling—"I'm bound"—cling—"ter do it!" Clang. "You see"—cling—"even if he aint here——" Clang, clang, clang.

The boy pulled lustily at the rope for about half as long as usual, and then he stopped.

"You don't s'pose that clock c'ud be wrong, do yo', Miss Grant? Mr. Brierly's never been later'n quarter past before."

Miss Grant turned her wistful and somewhat anxious eyes toward the eastern horizon, and rested a hand upon the shoulder of a tall girl at her side.

"He may be ill, Johnny," she said, reluctantly, "or his watch may be wrong. He's sure to come in time for morning song service. Come, Meta, let us go in and look at those fractions."

Five—ten—fifteen minutes passed and the two heads bent still over book and slate. Twenty minutes, and Johnny's head appeared at the door, half a dozen others behind it.

"Has he come, Johnny?"

"No'm; sha'n't I go an' see——"

But Miss Grant arose, stopping him with a gesture. "He would laugh at us, Johnny." Then, with another look at the anxious faces, "wait until nine o'clock, at least."

Johnny and his followers went sullenly back to the porch, and Meta's lip began to quiver.

[Pg 5]

"Somethin's happened to him, Miss Grant," she whimpered; "I know somethin' has happened!"

"Nonsense," said Miss Grant. But she went to the window and called to a little girl at play upon the green.

"Nellie Fry! Come here, dear."

Nellie Fry, an a, b, c student, came running in, her yellow locks flying straight out behind her.

"What is it, Miss Grant?"

"Nellie, did you see Mr. Brierly at breakfast?"

"Yes'm!"

"And—quite well?"

"Why—I guess so. He talked just like he does always, and asked the blessin'. He—he ate a lot, too—for him. I 'member ma speakin' of it."

"You remember, Nellie."

Miss Grant kissed the child and walked to her desk, bending over her roll call, and seeming busy over it until the clock upon the opposite wall struck the hour of nine, and Johnny's face appeared at the door, simultaneously with the last stroke.

"Sh'll I ring, Miss Grant?"

"Yes." The girl spoke with sudden decision. "Ring the bell, and then go at once to Mrs. Fry's house, and ask if anything has happened to detain Mr. Brierly. Don't loiter, Johnny."

[Pg 6]

There was an unwonted flush now upon the girl's usually pale cheeks, and sudden energy in her step and voice.

The school building contained but two rooms, beside the large hall, and the cloak rooms upon either side; and as the scholars trooped in, taking their respective places with more than their usual readiness, but with unusual bustle and exchange of whispers and inquiring looks, the slender girl went once more to the entrance and looked up and down the path from the village.

There was no one in sight, and she turned and put her hand upon the swaying bell-rope.

"Stop it, Johnny! There's surely something wrong! Go, now, and ask after Mr. Brierly. He must be ill!"

"He'd 'a sent word, sure," said the boy, with conviction, as he snatched his hat from its nail. But Miss Grant only waved him away and entered the south room, where the elder pupils were now, for the most part, assembled.

"Girls and boys," she said, the colour still burning in her cheeks, "something has delayed Mr. Brierly. I hope it will be for a short time only. In the meantime, until we know—know what to expect, you will, of course, keep your places and take up your studies. I am sure I can trust you to be as quiet and studious as if your teacher was here; and while

we wait, and I [Pg 7] begin my lessons, I shall set no monitor over you. I am sure you will not need one."

The pupils of Charles Brierly were ruled by gentleness and love, and they were loyal to so mild a ruler. With low whispers and words of acquiescence, they took up their books, and Miss Grant went back to her more restless small people, leaving the connecting door between the north and south rooms open.

Mrs. Fry's cottage was in the heart of the village, and upon the hillside, but Johnny stayed for nothing, running hither, hat in hand, and returning panting, and with a troubled face.

"Miss Grant," he panted, bursting into her presence with scant ceremony, "he aint there! Mrs. Fry says he came to school before eight o'clock. He went out while she was combin' Nellie's hair, an' she aint seen him since!"

Hilda Grant walked slowly down from her little platform, and advanced, with a waving movement, until she stood in the doorway between the two rooms. The colour had all faded from her face, and she put a hand against the door-pane as if to steady herself, and seemed to control or compose herself with an effort.

"Boys—children—have any of you seen Mr. Brierly this morning?"

For a moment there was an utter silence in the [Pg 8]school-room. Then, slowly, and with a sheepish shuffling movement, a stolid-faced boy made his way out from one of the side seats in Miss Grant's room, and came toward her without speaking. He was meanly dressed in garments ill-matched and worse fitting; his arms were abnormally long, his shoulders rounded and stooping, and his eyes were at once dull and furtive. He was the largest pupil, and the dullest, in Miss Grant's charge, and as he came toward her, still silent, but with his mouth half open, some of the little ones tittered audibly.

"Silence!" said the teacher, sternly. "Peter, come here." Her tone grew suddenly gentle. "Have you seen Mr. Brierly this morning?"

"Uh hum!" The boy stopped short and hung his head.

"That's good news, Peter. Tell me where you saw him."

"Down there," nodding toward the lake.

"At the—lake?"

"Yep!"

"How long ago, Peter?"

"Fore school—hour, maybe."

"How far away, Peter?"

"Big ways. Most by Injun Hill."

"Ah! and what was he doing?"

"Set on ground—lookin'."

"Miss Grant!" broke in the boy Johnny. "He was[Pg 9] goin' to shoot at a mark; I guess he's got a new target down there, an' him an' some of the boys shoots there, you know. Gracious!" his eyes suddenly widening, "Dy'u s'pose he's got hurt, anyway?"

Miss Grant turned quickly toward the simpleton.

"Peter, you are sure it was this morning that you saw Mr. Brierly?"

"Uh hum."

"And, was he alone?"

"Uh hum."

"Who else did you see down there, Peter?"

The boy lifted his arm, shielding his eyes with it as if expecting a blow.

"I bet some one's tried ter hit him!" commented Johnny.

"Hush, Johnny! Peter, what is it? Did some one frighten you?"

The boy wagged his head.

"Who was it?"

"N—Nothin'—" Peter began to whimper.

"You must answer me, Peter; was any one else by the lake? Whom else did you see?"

"A—a—ghost!" blubbered the boy, and this was all she could gain from him.

And now the children began to whisper, and some of the elder to suggest possibilities.

[Pg 10]

"Maybe he's met a tramp."

"P'r'aps he's sprained his ankle!"

"P'r'aps he's falled into the lake, teacher," piped a six-year-old.

"Poh!" retorted a small boy. "He kin swim like—anything."

"Children, be silent!" A look of annoyance had suddenly relaxed the strained, set look of the under teacher's white face as she recalled, at the moment, how she had heard Mr. Samuel Doran—president of the board of school directors—ask Mr. Brierly to drop in at his office that morning to look at some specimen school books. That was the evening before, and, doubtless, he was there now.

Miss Grant bit her lip, vexed at her folly and fright. But after a moment's reflection she turned again to Johnny Robbins, saying:

"Johnny, will you go back as far as Mr. Doran's house? Go to the office door, and if Mr. Brierly is there, as I think he will be, ask him if he would like me to hear his classes until he is at liberty."

Again the ready messenger caught up his flapping straw hat, while a little flutter of relief ran through the school, and Miss Grant went back to her desk, the look of vexation still upon her face.

Five minutes' brisk trotting brought the boy to Mr.[Pg 11] Doran's door, which was much nearer than the Fry homestead, and less than five minutes found him again at the school-house door.

"Miss Grant," he cried, excitedly, "he wa'n't there, nor haint been; an' Mr. Doran's startin' right out, with two or three other men, to hunt him. He says there's somethin' wrong about it."

[Pg 12]

CHAPTER II.FOUND.

"I suppose it's all right," said Samuel Doran, as he walked toward the school-house, followed by three or four of the villagers, "called" because of their nearness, rather than "chosen"; "but Brierly's certainly the last man to let any ordinary matter keep him from his post. We'll hear what Miss Grant has to say."

Miss Grant met the group at the gate, and when she had told them all she had to tell, ending with the testimony of the boy Peter, and the suggestion concerning the target-shooting.

"Sho!" broke in one of the men, as she was about to express her personal opinion and her fears, "that's the top an' bottom of the hull business! Brierly's regularly took with ashootin' at a mark. I've been out with him two or three evenin's of late. He's just got

int'rusted, and forgot ter look at his watch. We'll find him safe[Pg 13] enough som'e'res along the bank; let's cut across the woods."

"He must have heard the bell," objected Mr. Doran, "but, of course, if Peter Kramer saw him down there, that's our way. Don't be anxious, Miss Grant; probably Hopkins is right."

The road which they followed for some distance ran a somewhat devious course through the wood, which one entered very soon after leaving the school-house. It ran along the hillside, near its base, but still somewhat above the stretch of ground, fully a hundred yards in width, between it and the lake shore.

Above the road, to eastward, the wooded growth climbed the gentle upward slope, growing, as it seemed, more and more dense and shadowy as it mounted. But between the road and the river the trees grew less densely, with numerous sunny openings, but with much undergrowth, here and there, of hazel and sumach, wild vines, and along the border of the lake the low overhanging scrub willow.

For more than a fourth of a mile the four men followed the road, walking in couples, and not far apart, and contenting themselves with an occasional "hallo, Brierly," and with peering into the openings through which they could see the lake shore as they passed along.

[Pg 14]

A little further on, however, a bit of rising ground cut off all sight of the lake for a short distance. It was an oblong mound, so shapely, so evenly proportioned that it had become known as the Indian Mound, and was believed to have been the work of the aborigines, a prehistoric fortification, or burial place.

As they came opposite this mound, the man Hopkins stopped, saying:

"Hadn't a couple of us fellers better go round the mound on t'other side? Course, if he's on the bank, an' all right, he'd ort to hear us—but——"

"Yes," broke in the leader, who had been silent and very grave for some moments. "Go that way, Hopkins, and we'll keep to the road and meet you at the further end of the mound."

They separated silently, and for some moments Mr. Doran and his companions walked on, still silent, then—

"We ought to have brought that simpleton along," Doran said, as if meditating. "The Kramers live only a quarter of a mile beyond the mound, and it must have been near here—Stop!"

He drew his companions back from the track, as a pony's head appeared around a curve of the road; and then, as a black shetland and low phaeton came in sight, he stepped forward again, and took off his hat.

He was squarely in the middle of the road, and the[Pg 15] lady in the little phaeton pulled up her pony and met his gaze with a look of mute inquiry. She was a small, fair woman, with pale, regular features and large blue eyes. She was dressed in mourning, and, beyond a doubt, was not a native of Glenville.

"Excuse my haste, ma'am," said Doran, coming to the side of the phaeton. "I'm James Doran, owner of the stable where this horse belongs, and we are out in search of our schoolmaster. Have you seen a tall young man along this road anywhere?"

The lady was silent a moment, then—"Was he a fair young man?" she asked, slowly.

"Yes, tall and fair."

The lady gathered up her reins.

"I passed such a person," she said, "when I drove out of town shortly after breakfast. He was going south, as I was. It must have been somewhere not far from this place."

"And—did you see his face?"

"No; the pony was fresh then, and I was intent upon him."

She lifted the reins, and then turned as if to speak again when the man who had been a silent witness of the little dialogue came a step nearer.

"I s'pose you hav'n't heard any noise—a pistol shot—nor anythin' like that, have ye, ma'am?"

[Pg 16]

"Mercy! No, indeed! Why, what has happened?"

Before either could answer, there came a shout from the direction of the lake shore.

"Doran, come—quick!"

They were directly opposite the mound, at its central or highest point, and, turning swiftly, James Doran saw the man Hopkins at the top of it, waving his arms frantically.

"Is he found?" called Doran, moving toward him.

"Yes. He's hurt!"

With the words Hopkins disappeared behind the knoll, but Doran was near enough to see that the man's face was scared and pale. He turned and called sharply to the lady, who had taken up her whip and was driving on.

"Madam, stop! There's a man hurt. Wait there a moment; we may need your horse." The last words were uttered as he ran up the mound, his companions close at his heels. And the lady checked the willing pony once more with a look half reluctant, wholly troubled.

"What a position," she said to herself, impatiently. "These villagers are not diffident, upon my word."

A few moments only had passed when approaching footsteps and the sound of quick panting breaths caused her to turn her head, and she saw James Doran running[Pg 17] swiftly toward her, pale faced, and too full of anxiety to be observant of the courtesies.

"You must let me drive back to town with you, madam," he panted, springing into the little vehicle with a force that tried its springs and wrought havoc with the voluminous folds of the lady's gown. "We must have the doctor, and—the coroner, too, I fear—at once!"

He put out his hand for the reins, but she anticipated the movement and struck the pony a sharp and sudden blow that sent him galloping townward at the top of his speed, the reins still in her two small, perfectly-gloved hands.

For a few moments no word was spoken; then, without turning her eyes from the road, she asked:

"What is it?"

"Death, I'm afraid!"

"What! Not suicide?"

"Never. An accident, of course."

"How horrible!" The small hands tightened their grasp upon the reins, and no other word was spoken until they were passing the school-house, when she asked—

"Who was it?"

"Charles Brierly, our head teacher, and a good man."

Miss Grant was standing at one of the front windows[Pg 18] and she leaned anxiously out as the little trap darted past.

"We can't stop," said Doran, as much to himself as to his companion. "I must have the pony, ma'am. Where can I leave you?"

"Anywhere here. Is there anything—any message I can deliver? I am a stranger, but I understand the need of haste. Ought not those pupils to be sent home?"

He put his hand upon the reins. "Stop him," he said. "You are quick to think, madam. Will you take a message to the school-house—to Miss Grant?"

"Surely."

They had passed the school-house and as the pony stopped, Doran sprang out and offered his hand, which she scarcely touched in alighting.

"What shall I say?" she asked as she sprang down.

"See Miss Grant. Tell her privately that Mr. Brierly has met with an accident, and that the children must be sent home quietly and at once. At once, mind."

"I understand." She turned away with a quick, nervous movement, but he stopped her.

"One moment. Your name, please? Your evidence may be wanted."

"By whom?"

"By the coroner; to corroborate our story."

[Pg 19]

"I see. I am Mrs. Jamieson; at the Glenville House."

She turned from him with the last word, and walked swiftly back toward the school-house.

Hilda Grant was still at the window. She had made no attempt to listen to recitations, or even to call the roll; and she hastened out, at sight of the slight black robed figure entering the school yard, her big grey eyes full of the question her lips refused to frame.

They met at the foot of the steps, and Mrs. Jamieson spoke at once, as if in reply, to the wordless inquiry in the other's face.

"I am Mrs. Jamieson," she said, speaking low, mindful of the curious faces peering out from two windows, on either side of the open door. "I was stopped by Mr.—"

"Mr. Doran?"

"Yes. He wished me to tell you that the teacher, Mr. ——"

"Brierly?"

"Yes; that he has met with an accident; and that you had better close the school, and send the children home quietly, and at once."

"Oh!" Suddenly the woman's small figure swayed; she threw out a hand as if for support and, before the half-dazed girl before her could reach her, she sank weakly upon the lowest step. "Oh!" she sighed again.[Pg 20] "I did not realise—I—I believe I am frightened!" And then, as Miss Grant bent over her, she added weakly: "Don't mind me. I—I'll rest here a moment. Send away your pupils; I only need rest."

When the wondering children had passed out from the school-rooms, and were scattering, in slow-moving, eagerly-talking groups, Hilda Grant stood for a moment beside her desk, rigid and with all the anguish of her soul revealed, in this instant of solitude, upon her face.

"He is dead!" she murmured. "I know it, I feel it! He is dead." Her voice, even to herself, sounded hard and strange. She lifted a cold hand to her eyes, but there were no tears there; and then suddenly she remembered her guest.

A moment later, Mrs. Jamieson, walking weakly up the steps, met her coming from the school-room with a glass of water in her hand, which she proffered silently.

The stranger drank it eagerly. "Thank you," she said. "It is what I need. May I come inside for a little?"

Hilda led the way in silence, and, when her visitor was seated, came and sat down opposite her. "Will you tell me what you can?" she asked hesitatingly.

"Willingly. Only it is so little. I have been for some time a guest at the Glenville House, seeking to recover here in your pure air and country quiet, from[Pg 21] the effects of sorrow and a long illness. I have driven about these hills and along the lake shore almost daily."

"I have seen you," said Hilda, "as you drove past more than once."

"And did you see me this morning?"

"No."

"Still, I passed this spot at eight o'clock; I think, perhaps, earlier. My physician has cautioned me against long drives, and this morning I did not go quite so far as usual, because yesterday I went too far. I had turned my pony toward home just beyond that pretty mill where the little streams join the lake, and was driving slowly homeward when this Mr. Doran—is not that right?—this Mr. Doran stopped me to ask if I had seen a man, a tall, fair man——"

"And had you?"

"I told him yes; and in a moment some one appeared at the top of the Indian Mound, and called out that the man was found."

"How—tell me how?"

Mrs. Jamieson drew back a little and looked into the girl's face with strange intentness.

"I—I fear he was a friend of yours," she said in a strangely hesitating manner, her eyes swiftly scanning the pale face.

[Pg 22]

"You fear! Why do you fear? Tell me. You say he is injured. Tell me all—the worst!"

Still the small, erect, black-clad figure drew back, a look of sudden understanding and apprehension dawning in her face. She moved her lips, but no sound came from them.

"Tell me!" cried the girl again. "In mercy—oh, don't you understand?"

"Yes, I understand now." The lady drew weakly back in the seat and seemed to be compelling her own eyes and lips to steadiness.

"Listen! We must be calm—both of us. I—I am not strong; I dare not give way. Yes, yes; this is all I can tell you. The man, Mr. Doran, asked me to wait in the road with the pony. He came back soon, and said that we must find the doctor and the coroner at once; there had been an accident, and the man—the one for whom they searched—was dead, he feared."

She sprang suddenly to her feet.

"You must not faint. If you do, I—I cannot help you; I am not strong enough."

"I shall not faint," replied Hilda Grant, in a hard strange voice, and she, too, arose quickly, and went with straight swift steps through the open door between the two rooms and out of sight.

Mrs. Jamieson stood looking after her for a moment,[Pg 23] as if in doubt and wonder; then she put up an unsteady hand and drew down the gauze veil folded back from her close-fitting mourning bonnet.

"How strange!" she whispered. "She turns from me as if—and yet I had to tell her! Ugh! I cannot stay here alone. I shall break down, too, and I must not. I must not. Here, and alone!"

A moment she stood irresolute, then walking slowly she went out of the school-room, down the stone steps, and through the gate, townward, slowly at first, and then her pace increasing, and a look of apprehension growing in her eyes.

"Oh," she murmured as she hurried on, "what a horrible morning!" And then she started hysterically as the shriek of the incoming fast mail train struck her ears. "Oh, how nervous this has made me," she murmured, and drew a sigh of relief as she paused unsteadily at the door of her hotel.

For fully fifteen minutes after Hilda Grant had reached the empty solitude of her own school-room she stood crouched against the near wall, her hands clenched and hanging straight at her side, her eyes fixed on space. Then, with eyes still tearless, but with dry sobs breaking from her throat, she tottered to her seat before the desk, and let her face fall forward upon her arms, moaning from time to time like some[Pg 24] hurt animal, and so heedless of all about her that she did not hear a light step in the hall without, nor the approach of the man who paused in the doorway to gaze at her in troubled surprise.

He was a tall and slender young fellow, with a handsome face, an eye clear, frank, and keen, and a mouth which, but for the moustache which shadowed it, might have been pronounced too strong for beauty.

A moment he stood looking with growing pity upon the grieving woman, and then he turned and silently tip-toed across the room and to the outer door. Standing there he seemed to ponder, and then, softly stepping back to the vacant platform, he seated himself in the teacher's chair and idly opened the first of the volumes scattered over the desk, smiling as he read the name, Charles Brierly, written across the fly-leaf.

"Poor old Charley," he said to himself, as he closed the book. "I wonder how he enjoys his pedagogic venture, the absurd fellow," and then by some strange instinct he lifted his eyes to the clock on the opposite wall, and the strangeness of the situation seemed to strike him with sudden force and brought him to his feet.

What did it mean! This silent school-room! These empty desks and scattered books! Where were the pupils? the teacher? And why was that brown-tressed[Pg 25] head with its hidden face bowed down in that other room, in an agony of sorrow?

Half a dozen quick strides brought him again to the door of communication, and this time his strong, firm footsteps were heard, and the bowed head lifted itself wearily, and the eyes of the two met, each questioning the other.

"I beg your pardon," spoke a rich, strong voice. "May I ask where I shall find Mr. Brierly?"

Slowly, as if fascinated, the girl came toward him, a look almost of terror in her face.

"Who are you?" she faltered.

"I am Robert Brierly. I had hoped to find my brother here at his post. Will you tell me—
—"

But the sudden cry from her lips checked him, and the pent-up tears burst forth as Hilda Grant, her heart wrung with pity, flung herself down upon the low platform, and sitting there with her face bent upon her sleeves, sobbed out her own sorrow in her heartbreak of sympathy for the grief that must soon overwhelm him and strike the happy light from his face.

Sobs choked her utterance, and the young man stood near her, uncertain, anxious, and troubled, until from the direction of the town the sound of flying wheels smote their ears, and Hilda sprang to her feet with a sharp cry.

[Pg 26]

"I must tell you; you must bear it as well as I. Hark! they are going to him; you must go too!" She turned toward the window, swayed heavily, and was caught in his arms.

It was a brief swoon, but when she opened her eyes and looked about her, the sound of the flying wheels was dying away in the distance, southward.

He had found the pail of pure spring water, and applied some of it to her hands and temples with the quickness and ease of a woman, and he now held a glass to her lips.

She drank feverishly, put a hand before her eyes, raised herself with an effort, and seemed to struggle mutely for self-control. Then she turned toward him.

"I am Hilda Grant," she said, brokenly.

"My brother's friend! My sister that is to be!"

"No, no; not now. Something has happened. You should have gone with those men—with the doctor. They are going to bring him back."

"Miss Grant, sister!" His hands had closed firmly upon her wrists, and his voice was firm. "You must tell me the worst, quick. Don't seek to spare me; think of him! What is it?"

"He—he went from home early, with his pistol, they say, to shoot at a target. He is dead!"

"Dead! Charley dead! Quick! Where is he? I must see, I must. Oh! there must be some horrible mistake."

He sprang toward the door, but she was before him.

"Go this way. Here is his wheel. Take it. Go south—the lake shore—the Indian Mound."

A moment later a young man with pallid face, set mouth and tragic eyes was flying toward the Indian Mound upon a swift wheel, and in the school-room, prone upon the floor, a girl lay in a death-like swoon.

CHAPTER III. NEMESIS.

"Mr. Brierly, are you strong enough to bear a second shock? I must confer with you before—before we remove the body."

It was Doctor Barnes who thus addressed Robert Brierly, who, after the first sight of the outstretched figure upon the lake shore, and the first shock of horror and anguish, had turned away from the group hovering about the doctor, as he knelt beside the dead, to face his grief alone.

Doctor Barnes, besides being a skilled physician, possessed three other qualities necessary to a successful career in medicine—he was prompt to act, practical and humane.

Robert Brierly was leaning against a tall tree, his back toward that group by the water's edge, and his face pressed against the tree's rugged trunk. He lifted his head as the doctor spoke, and turned a white, set face[Pg 29] toward him. The look in his dark eyes was assurance sufficient that he was ready to listen and still able to manfully endure another blow.

The two men moved a few steps away, and then the doctor said:

"I must be brief. You know, do you not, the theory, that of these men, as to the cause of this calamity?"

"It was an accident, of course."

"They make it that, or suicide."

"Never! Impossible! My brother was a God-fearing man, a happy man."

"Still, there is a bullet-hole just where self-inflicted wounds are oftenest made."

Brierly groaned aloud. "Still," he persisted, "I will never believe it."

"You need not." Doctor Barnes sank his voice to a yet lower pitch. "Mr. Brierly, there is a second bullet-wound in the back!"

"The back! And that means——"

"It means murder, without a doubt. No huntsman could so mistake his mark in this open woodland, along the lake. Besides, hunting is not allowed so near the village. Wait," as

the young man was about to speak, "we have no time to discuss motives now, or the possible assassin. What I wish to know is, do you want this fact known now—at once?"

[Pg 30]

"I—I fear I don't understand. Would you have my brother's name——"

"Stop, man! Knowing that these men have already jumped at a theory, the thought occurred to me that the work of the officers might be made easier if we let the theory of accident stand."

He broke off, looking keenly at the other. He was a good judge of faces, and in that of Robert Brierly he had not been deceived.

The young man's form grew suddenly erect and tense, his eye keen and resolute.

"You are right!" he said, with sudden energy, as he caught at the other's hand. "They must not be enlightened yet."

"Then, the sooner we are back where we can guard this secret, the safer it will be. Come. This is hard for you, Mr. Brierly, I know, and I could say much. But words, no matter how sincerely sympathetic, cannot lighten such a blow as this. I admire your strength, your fortitude, under such a shock. Will you let me add that any service I can render as physician, as man, or as friend, is yours for the asking?"

The doctor hesitated a moment, then held out his hand, and the four watchers beside the body exchanged quick glances of surprise upon seeing the two men grasp[Pg 31] hands, silently and with solemn faces, and then turn, still silently, back to the place where the body lay.

"Don't touch that pistol, Doran," the doctor spoke, in his capacity of coroner.

"Certainly not, Doc. I wanted to feel, if I could, whether those side chambers had been discharged or not. You see," he added, rising to his feet, "when we saw this, we knew what we had to do, and it has been 'hands off.' We've only used our eyes so far forth."

"And that I wish to do now with more calmness," said Robert Brierly, coming close to the body and kneeling beside it.

It lay less than six feet from the very water's edge, the body of a tall, slender young man, with a delicate, high-bred face that had been fair when living, and was now marble-white, save for the blood-stains upon the right temple, where the bullet had entered. The hair, of that soft blonde colour, seen oftenest upon the heads of children, and rarely upon adults, was thick and fine, and long enough to frame the handsome face in close half rings that no barber's skill could ever subdue or make straight. The hands were long, slender, and soft as a woman's; the feet small and arched, and the form

beneath the loose outlines of the blue flannel fatigue suit in which it was clad, while slender and full of grace, was well built and not lacking in muscle.

[Pg 32]

It lay as it had fallen, upon its side, and with one arm thrown out and one limb, the left, drawn up. Not far from the outstretched right arm and hand lay the pistol, a six-shooter, which the brother at once recognised, with two of the six chambers empty, a fact which Mr. Doran had just discovered, and was now holding in reserve.

The doctor, upon his discovery of the second bullet-wound, had at once flung his own handkerchief over the prostrate head, and called for the carriage robe from his own phaeton, which, fortunately for the wind and legs of the black pony, had stood ready at his office door, and was now in waiting, the horse tethered to a tree at the edge of the wood not far away.

This lap robe Robert Brierly reverently drew away as he knelt beside the still form, and thus, for some moments remained, turning his gaze from right to left, from the great tree which grew close at the motionless feet, and between the group and the water's edge, its branches spreading out above them and forming a canopy over the body to a dead stump some distance away, where a small target leaned, its rings of white and black and red showing how often a steady hand had sent the ball, close and closer, until the bull's eye was pierced at last.

No word was uttered as he knelt there, and before[Pg 33] he arose he placed a hand upon the dead man's shoulder with an impulsive caressing motion, and bending down, kissed the cold temple just above the crimson death-mark. Then, slowly, reverently, he drew the covering once more over the body and arose.

"That was a vow," he said to the doctor, who stood close beside him. "Where is—ah!" He turned toward the group of men who, when he knelt, had withdrawn to a respectful distance.

"Which of you suggested that he had fallen—tripped?"

Doran came forward and silently pointed to the foot of the tree, where, trailing across the grass, and past the dead man's feet, was a tendril of wild ivy entangled and broken.

"Oh!" exclaimed Brierly. "You saw that too?"

"It was the first thing I did see," said the other, coming to his side, "when I looked about me. It's a very clear case, Mr. Brierly. Target-shooting has been quite a pastime here lately. And see! There couldn't be a better place to stand and shoot at that target, than right against that tree, braced against it. It's the right distance and all. He must have stood there, and when he hit the bull's eye, he made a quick forward step, caught his foot in that vine and tripped. A man will naturally throw out his arm in falling so,[Pg

34] especially the right one, and in doing that, somehow as he lunged forward it happened."

"Yes," murmured Brierly, "it is a very simple theory. It—it might have happened so."

"There wasn't any other way it could happen," muttered one of Doran's companions. And at that moment the wheels of an approaching vehicle were heard, and all turned to look toward the long black hearse, divested of its plumes, and with two or three thick blankets upon its velvet floor.

It was the doctor who superintended the lifting of the body, keeping the head covered, and when the hearse drove slowly away with its pathetic burden, he turned to Doran.

"I'll drive Mr. Brierly back to town, Doran," he said, "if you don't mind taking his wheel in charge;" and scarcely waiting for Doran's willing assent, he took Richard Brierly's arm and led him toward his phaeton.

The young man had picked up his brother's hat, as they lifted the body from the ground, and he now carried it in his hand, laying it gently upon his knees as he took his seat.

When the doctor had taken his place and picked up the reins he leaned out and looked about him. Two or three horsemen were riding into the wood toward them, and a carriage had halted at the side of the road,[Pg 35] while a group of schoolboys, headed by Johnny, the bell ringer, were hurrying down the slope toward the water's edge.

"They're beginning to gather," the physician said, grimly. "Well, it's human nature, and your brother had a host of friends, Mr. Brierly."

Robert Brierly set his lips and averted his face for a moment.

"Doran," called the doctor. "Come here, will you."

Doran, who had begun to push the shining wheel up the slope, placed it carefully against a tree and came toward them, the doctor meanwhile turning to Brierly.

"Mr. Brierly, you are a stranger here. Will you let me arrange for you?"

The other nodded, and then said huskily: "But it hurts to take him to an undertaker's!"

"He shall not be taken there," and the doctor turned to Doran, now standing at the wheel.

"Mr. Doran, will you take my keys and ride ahead as fast as possible? Tell the undertaker, as you pass, to drive to my house. Then go on and open it. We will put the body in the private office. Do not remonstrate, Mr. Brierly. It is only what I would wish another to do for me and mine in a like affliction." And this was the rule by which this man lived his life, and because of which death had no terrors.

"I am a bachelor, you must know," the doctor said, as they drove slowly in the wake of the hearse. "And I have made my home and established my office in a cosy cottage near the village proper. It will save you the ordeal of strange eyes, and many questions, perhaps, if you will be my guest for a day or two, at least."

Robert Brierly turned and looked this friend in need full in the face for a moment; then he lifted his hand to brush a sudden moisture from his eye.

"I accept all your kindness," he said, huskily, "for I see that you are as sincere as you are kind."

When the body of Charles Brierly had been carried in and placed as it must remain until the inquest was at an end, and when the crowd of sorrowing, anxious and curious people had dispersed, the doctor, who was masterful at need, making Doran his lieutenant, arranged for the securing of a jury; and, after giving some quiet instructions, sent him away, saying:

"Tell the people it is not yet determined how or when we shall hold the inquiry. Miss Grant, who must be a witness, will hardly be able to appear at once, I fear," for, after looking to his guest's bodily comfort, the doctor had left him to be alone with his grief for a little while, and had paid a flying visit to Hilda Grant, who lived nearly three blocks away.

[Pg 37]

When at length the little house was quiet, and when the doctor and his heavy-hearted companion had made a pretence of partaking of luncheon, the former, having shut and locked the door upon the elderly African who served him, drew his chair close to that of his guest, and said:

"Are you willing to take counsel with me, Mr. Brierly? And are you quite fit and ready to talk about what is most important?"

"I am most anxious for your advice, and for information."

"Then, let us lose no time; there is much to be done."

"Doctor," Robert Brierly bent toward the other and placed a hand upon his knee. "There are emergencies which bring men together and reveal them, each to each, in a flash, as it were. I cannot feel that you know me really; but I know you, and would trust you with my dearest possession, or my most dangerous secret. You will be frank with me, I know, if you speak at all; and I want you to tell me something."

"What is it?"

"You have told me how, in your opinion, my poor brother really met his death. Will you put yourself in my place, and tell me how you would act in this horrible emergency? What is the first thing you would do?"

[Pg 38]

The doctor's answer came after a moment's grave thought.

"I am, I think, a Christian," he said, gravely, "but I think—bah! I know that I would make my life's work to find out the truth about that murder, for that it was a murder, I solemnly believe."

[Pg 39]

CHAPTER IV.FERRARS.

Robert Brierly caught his breath.

"And your reason?" he gasped, "for you have a reason other than the mere fact of the bullet-wound in the neck."

"I have seen just such deeds in the wild west and I know how they are done. But this is also professional knowledge. Besides, man, call reason to your aid! Oh, I expect too much. The hurt is too fresh, you can only feel now, but the man shot by accident, be it by his own hand or that of another, is not shot twice."

"Good heavens, no!"

"But when one who creeps upon his victim unawares, shoots him from behind, and, as he falls, fearing the work is not completed, shoots again, the victim, as you must see, receives the wound further to the front as[Pg 40] the body falls forward and partially turns in falling. Do you see? Do you comprehend?"

"Yes." Brierly shuddered.

"Brierly, this talk is hurting you cruelly. Let us drop details, or postpone them."

"Not the essential ones. I must bear what I must. Go on, doctor. I quite agree with you. It looks like a murder, and we must—I must know the truth—must find the one who did the deed. Doctor, advise me."

"About——"

"How to begin, no time should be lost."

"That means a good detective, as soon as possible. Do you chance to know any of these gentry?"

"I——No, indeed! I suppose a telegram to the chief of police——"

"Allow me," broke in Doctor Barnes. "May I make a suggestion?"

"Anything. I seem unable to think."

"And no wonder! I know the right man for you if he is in Chicago. You see, I was in hospital practice for several years, and have also had my share of prison experience. While thus employed I met a man named Ferrars, an Englishman, who for some years has spent the greater part of his time in this country, in Chicago, in fact. There's a mystery and a romance attached to the man, or his history. He's not connected with[Pg 41] any of the city offices, but he is one of three retired detectives—retired, that is, from regular work—who work together at need when they feel a case to be worth their efforts. I think a case like this will be certain to attract Ferrars."

"And he is your choice of the three?"

The doctor smiled. "The others are married," he said, "and not so ready to go far afield as is Ferrars."

"You think him skilful?"

"None better."

"Then, do you know his address?"

Brierly got up and began to walk about, his eyes beginning to glow with the excitement so long suppressed. "Because we can't get him here too soon."

"I agree with you. And now one thing more. To give him every advantage he should not be known, and the inquest should not begin until he is here."

"Can that be managed?"

"I think so."

Brierly was now nervously eager. He seemed to have shaken off the stupor which at first had seemed to seize upon and hold him, and his questions and suggestions came thick and fast. It ended, of course, in his putting himself into the doctor's hands, and accepting his plans and suggestions entirely. And very soon, Dr. Barnes, having given his factotum distinct [Pg 42]instructions as regarded visitors, and inquiries, had set off, his medicine case carried ostentatiously in his hand, not for the telegraph office, but for the cottage, close by, where Hilda Grant found a home.

It was a small, neatly-kept cottage, and Mrs. Marcy, a gentle, kindly widow, and the young teacher were its only occupants.

The widow met him at the door, her face anxious, her voice the merest whisper.

"Doctor, tell me; do you think she will really be ill?"

"Why no, Mrs. Marcy; at least not for long. It has been a shock, of course; a great shock. But she——"

"Ah, doctor, she is heart-broken. I—I think I surely may tell you. It will help you to understand. They were engaged, and for a little while, such a pitiful little while it seems now, they have been so happy."

The doctor was silent a moment, his eyes turned away.

"And now," went on the good woman, "she will be lonelier than ever. You know she was very lonely here at first. She has no relatives nearer than a cousin anywhere in the world, to her knowledge. And he has never been to see her. He lives in Chicago, too, not so far away."

[Pg 43]

"Yes, surely he ought to visit her now, really. Just ask her if I may come up, Mrs. Marcy. I—I'm glad you told me of this. Thank you. It will help me."

Ten minutes later Doctor Barnes was hastening toward the telegraph office, where he sent away this singular and wordy message:

"Frank Ferrars, No. ... Street, Chicago——

"Your cousin, Miss Hilda Grant, is ill, and in trouble. It is a case in which you are needed as much as I. Come, if possible, by first evening train.

"WALTER BARNES."

"That will fetch him," he mused, as he hastened homeward. "Ferrars never breaks a promise, though I little expected to have to remind him of it within the year."

"Well," began Brierly, when he entered his own door. "Have you seen her? Was she willing?"

"Willing and anxious. She is a brave and sensible little woman. She will do her part, and she has never for one moment believed in the theory of an accident."

"And she will receive me?"

"This evening. She insists that we hold our council there, in her presence. At first I objected, on account[Pg 44] of her weakness, but she is right in her belief that we should be most secure there, and Ferrars should not be seen abroad to-night. We will have to take Mrs. Marcy into our confidence, in part at least, but she can be trusted. We will all be observed, more or less, for a few days. But, of course, I shall put Ferrars up for the night. That will be the thing to do after he has spent a short evening with his cousin."

Brierly once more began his restless pacing to and fro, turning presently to compare his watch with the doctor's Dutch clock.

"It will be the longest three hours I ever passed," he said, and a great sigh broke from his lips.

But, before the first hour had passed, a boy from the telegraph office handed in a blue envelope, and the doctor hastily broke the seal and read—

"Be with you at 6.20.

"FERRARS."

When the first suburban train for the evening halted, puffing, at the village station, Doctor Barnes waiting upon the platform, saw a man of medium height and square English build step down from the smoking car and look indifferently about him.

There was the usual throng of gaping and curious villagers, and some of them heard the stranger say, as[Pg 45] he advanced toward the doctor, who waited with his small medicine case in his hand—

"Pardon me; is this doctor—doctor Barnes?" And when the doctor nodded he asked quickly, "How is she?"

"Still unnerved and weak. We have had a terrible shock, for all of us."

When the two men had left the crowd of curious loungers behind them the doctor said—

"It is awfully good of you, Ferrars, to come so promptly at my call. Of course, I could not explain over the wires. But, you understand."

"I understand that you needed me, and as I'm good for very little, save in one capacity, I, of course, supposed there was a case for me. The evening paper, however, gave me—or so I fancy—a hint of the business. Is it the young schoolmaster?"

The doctor started. It seemed impossible that the news had already found its way into print.

"Some one has made haste," he said, scornfully.

"Some one always does in these cases, and the *Journal* has a 'special correspondent' in every town and village in the country almost. It was only a few lines." He glanced askance at his companion as he spoke. "And it was reported an accident or suicide."

[Pg 46]

"It was a murder!"

"I thought so."

"You—why?"

"'The victim was found,' so says the paper, 'face downward, or nearly so.' 'Fallen forward,' those were the words. Was that the case?"

"Yes."

"Well, did you ever see or hear of a suicide who had fallen directly forward and face downward, supposing him to have shot himself?"

"No, no."

"On the other hand, have you ever noted that a man taken unawares, shot from the side, or rear, falls forward? If shot standing, that is. It is only when he receives a face charge that he falls backward."

"I had not thought of that, and yet it looks simple and rational enough," and then, while they walked down the quiet street running parallel with Main, and upon which Mrs. Marcy's cottage stood, the doctor told the story of the morning, briefly but clearly, adding, at the end, "In telling this much, I am telling you actually all that I know."

"All—concerning Miss Grant, too?"

"Everything."

The doctor did not lift his eyes from the path before them, and again the detective shot a side glance from [Pg 47] the corner of his eye, and the shadow of a smile crossed his face.

"How does it happen that this brother is here so—I was about to say—opportunistically?"

"He told me that he came by appointment, but on an earlier train than he had at first intended to take, to pass Sunday with his brother."

"Now see," mused Ferrars, "what little things, done or left undone, shape or shorten our lives! If he had telegraphed to his brother announcing his earlier arrival, there would have been no target practice, but a walk to the station instead."

The doctor sighed, and for a few moments walked on in silence. Then, as they neared the cottage he almost stopped short and turned toward the detective.

"I'm afraid you will think me a sad bungler, Ferrars. I should have told you at once that Robert Brierly awaits us at Mrs. Marcy's cottage."

"Robert Brierly? Is that his name? I wonder if he can be the Robert Brierly who has helped to make one of our morning papers so bright and breezy. A rising young journalist, in fact. But it's probably another of the name."

"I don't know. He has not spoken of himself. Will it suit you to meet him at once?"

"We don't often get the chance to begin as would[Pg 48] best suit us, we hunters of our kind. I would have preferred to go first to the scene of the death, but I suppose the ground has been trampled over and over, and, besides, I don't want to advertise myself until I am better informed at least. Go on, we will let our meeting come as it will."

But things seldom went on as they would for long, when Frank Ferrars was seeking his way toward a truth or fact. They found Mrs. Marcy at the door, and she at once led them to the upper room which looked out upon the side and rear of the little lawn, and was screened from inlookers, as well as from the sun's rays, by tall cherry trees at the side, and thick and clinging morning glory vines at the back.

"You'll be quite safe from intrusion here," she murmured, and left them as she had received them at the door.

If Doctor Barnes had feared for his patient's strength, and dreaded the effect upon her of the coming interview, he was soon convinced that he had misjudged the courage and will power of this slight, soft-eyed, low-voiced and unassertive young woman. She was very pale, and her eyes looked out from their dark circles like wells of grief. But no tears fell from them, and the low pathetic voice did not falter when she said, after the formal presentation, and before either of the others had spoken:

[Pg 49]

"I have asked to be present at this interview, Mr. Ferrars, and am told that it rests with you whether I am admitted to your confidences. Charles Brierly is my betrothed, and I would to God I had yielded to his wish and married him a week ago. Then no one could have shut me out from ought that concerns him, living or dead. In the sight of heaven he is my husband, for we promised each other eternal faithfulness with our hands clasped above his mother's Bible."

Francis Ferrars was a singular mixture of sternness and gentleness, of quick decision at need and of patient considerateness, and he now took one of the cold little hands between his own, and gently but firmly led her to the cosy chair from which she had arisen.

"You have proved your right to be here, and no one will dispute it. We may need your active help soon, as much as we need and desire your counsel and your closer knowledge of the dead man now."

In moments of intense feeling conventionalities fall away from us and strong soul speaks to strong soul. While they awaited the coming of the doctor and Francis Ferrars, Hilda Grant and Robert Brierly had been unable to break through the constraint which seemed to each to be the mental attitude of the other, and then, too, both were engrossed with the same thought, the coming of the detective, and the possibilities this suggested, for [Pg 50]underlying the grievous sorrow of both brother and sweetheart lay the thought, the silent appeal for justice as inherent in our poor human nature as is humanity itself.

But Hilda's sudden claim, her prayer for recognition struck down the barrier of strangeness and the selfishness of sorrow, than which sometimes nothing can be more exclusive, in the mind and heart of Robert Brierly, and he came swiftly to her side, as she sank back, pallid and panting, upon her cushions.

"Miss Grant, my sister; no other claim is so strong as yours. It was to meet you, to know you, that I set out for this place to-day. In my poor brother's last letter—you shall read it soon—he said, 'I am going to give you something precious, Rob; a sister. It is to meet her that I have asked you to come just now.' I claim that sister, and need her now if never before. Don't look upon me as a stranger, but as Charlie's brother, and yours." He placed his hand over hers as it rested weakly upon the arm of her chair, and as it turned and the chill little fingers closed upon his own, he held it for a moment and then, releasing it gently, drew a seat beside her and turned toward the detective.

"Mr. Ferrars, your friend has assured me that I may hope for your aid. Is that so?"

"When I have heard all that you can tell me, I will answer," replied Ferrars. "If I see a hope or chance of[Pg 51] unravelling what now looks like a mystery—should it be proved a mystery—I will give you my promise, and my services."

He had seated himself almost opposite Hilda Grant, and while he quietly studied her face, he addressed the doctor.

"Tell me," he said, "all you know and have been told by others, and be sure you omit not the least detail."

Beginning with the appearance of Mr. Doran at his office door, with the panting and perspiring black pony, the doctor detailed their drive and his first sight of the victim, reviewing his examination of the body in detail, while the detective listened attentively and somewhat to the surprise of the others, without interruption, until the narrator had reached the point when, accompanied by Brierly, he had followed the hearse, with its pitiful burden, back to the village. Then Ferrars interposed.

"A moment, please," taking from an inner pocket a broad, flat letter-case and selecting from it a printed card, which, with a pencil, he held out to the doctor. "Be so good," he said, "as to sketch upon the blank back of this the spot where you found the dead man, the mound in full, with the road indicated, above and beyond it. I remember you used to be skilful at sketching things."

[Pg 52]

CHAPTER V. IN CONSULTATION.

When the doctor had completed his hasty sketch, he returned the card upon which it was made, to the detective and silently awaited his comment.

"It is very helpful," said Ferrars. "It would seem, then, that just opposite the mound the lake makes an inward curve?"

"Yes."

"And that the centre of the mound corresponds to the central or nearest point of the curve?"

The doctor nodded assent.

"Now am I right in thinking that anything occurring at this central point would be unseen from the road?"

"Quite right. The mound rises higher than the road, and its length shuts off the view at either end, that and[Pg 53] the line of the road, which curves away from the lake at the north end, and runs in an almost straight direction for some distance at the other."

"I see." And again for a moment Ferrars consulted the sketch. Then—

"Did you measure the distance between the target and the spot where the body was found?"

"No. It was the usual distance for practice, I should think."

"It was rather a long range," interposed Brierly. "I am something of a shot myself and I noticed that."

Again the detective pondered over the sketch.

"By this time I dare say," he said presently, "there will be any number of curious people in the wood and about that spot."

"I doubt it," replied Doctor Barnes. "I thought of that, and spoke to Doran. Mr. Brierly was so well liked by all that it only needed a word to keep the men and boys from doing anything that might hinder a thorough investigation. Two men are upon the road just below the school-house to turn back the thoughtless curious ones. It was Doran's foresight," added the honest physician. "I suppose you will wish to explore the wood near the mound?"

Ferrars laid aside the sketch. "As the coroner," he said, "you can help me. Of course, you can have no[Pg 54] doubt as to the nature of the shooting. There could be no mistake."

"None. The shot at the back could not have been self-inflicted."

"Then if you can rely upon your constables and this man Doran, let them make a quiet inquiry up and down the wood road in search of any one who may have driven over it between the hours of——"

"Eight and ten o'clock," said Hilda Grant. "He," meaning her late friend, "left his boarding place at eight o'clock, or near it, and he was found shortly before ten."

Her speech was low and hesitating, but it did not falter.

"Thank you," said the detective, and turned again to the doctor.

"Next," said he, "if you can find a trusty man, who will find out for us if any boat or boats have been seen about the lake shore during those hours, it will be another step in the right direction. And now, you have told me that you suspect no one; that there is no clue whatever." He glanced from one to the other. "Still we are told that very often by those who should know best, but who were not trained to such searching. To begin, I must know something, Mr. Brierly, about your brother and his past. Is he your only brother?"

[Pg 55]

"Yes. We lost a sister ten years ago, a mere child. There were no other children."

"And—your parents?"

"Are both dead."

"Ah! Mr. Brierly, give me, if you please, a sketch of your life and of your brother's, dating, let us say, from the time of your father's death."

If the request was unexpected or unwelcome to Robert Brierly he made no sign, but began at once.

"If I do not go into details sufficiently, Mr. Ferrars," he said, by way of preamble, "you will, of course, interrogate me."

The detective nodded, and Brierly went on.

"My father was an Episcopalian clergyman, and, at the time of his death, we were living in one of the wealthy suburbs of Chicago, where he had held a charge for ten years, and where we remained for six years after he gave up the pulpit. Being in comfortable circumstances, we found it a most pleasant place of residence. My sister's death brought us our first sorrow, and it was soon followed by the loss of our mother. We continued to live, however, in the old home until my brother and I were ready to go to college, and then my father shut up the house and went abroad with a party of congenial friends. My father was not a business man, and the man to whom he had confided the management of his affairs [Pg 56]misarranged them during his absence, to what extent we never fully knew until after my father's death, when we found ourselves, after all was settled, with something like fifteen thousand dollars each, and our educations. My brother had already begun to prepare for the ministry, and I had decided early to follow the career of a journalist."

"Are you the elder?" asked the detective.

"Yes." Brierly paused for further comment, but none came, and he resumed. "It had been the intention of my father that my brother and I should make the tour of the two continents when our studies were at an end; that is, our school days. He had made this same journey in his youth, and he had even mapped out routes for us, and told us of certain strange and little explored places which we must not miss, such as the rock temples of Kylas in Central India, and various wonders of Egypt. It was a favourite project of his. 'It will leave you less money, boys,' he used to say, 'but it will give what can never be taken from you. When a man knows his own world, he is better fitted for the next.' And so, after much discussion we determined to make the journey. Indeed, to Charley it began to seem a pilgrimage, in which love, duty, and pleasure intermingled."

He paused, and Hilda turned away her face as a long sighing breath escaped his lips.

[Pg 57]

"Shortly after our return I took up journalistic work in serious earnest, and my brother, having been ordained, was about to accept a charge when he met with an accident which was followed by a long illness. When he arose from this, his physicians would not hear of his assuming the labours of a pastor over a large and active suburban church, and, as my brother could not bear to be altogether idle, and the country was thought to be the place for him, it ended in his coming here, to take charge of the little school. He was

inordinately fond of children, and a born instructor, so it seemed to me. He was pleased with the beauty of the place and the quiet of it, from the first, and he was not long in finding his greatest happiness here."

His voice sank, and he turned a face in which gratitude and sorrow blended, upon the girl who suddenly covered her own with her trembling hands.

But the detective, with a new look of intentness upon his face, and without a moment's pause, asked quickly.

"Then you have been in this place before, of course?"

"No, I have not. For the first three months Charley was very willing to come to me, in the city. Then came a very busy time for me and he came twice, somewhat reluctantly, I thought. Six months ago I [Pg 58] was sent to New Mexico to do some special work, and returned to the city on Tuesday last." His voice broke, and he got up and walked to the window farthest from the group.

While he had been speaking, Ferrars had scribbled aimlessly and a stroke at a time, as it seemed, upon the margin of the printed side of the card which bore the sketch made by Doctor Barnes; and now, while Hilda's face was again turned away, the young man at the window still stood with his back towards all in the room, he pushed the card from the edge of the table, and shot a significant glance toward the doctor.

Picking up the card, Doctor Barnes glanced at it carelessly, and then replaced it upon the table, having read these words—

"I wish to speak with her alone. Make it a professional necessity."

As Brierly turned toward them once more the detective turned to the young girl. "I would like to hear something from you, Miss Grant, if you find yourself equal to it."

Hilda set her lips in firm lines, and after a moment said steadily—

"I am quite at your service."

"One minute." The doctor arose and addressed himself to the detective.

[Pg 59]

"I feel sure that it will be best for Miss Grant that she talk with you alone. As her physician, I will caution her against putting too great a restraint upon herself, upon her feelings. While you talk with her, Ferrars, Mr. Brierly and I will go back to my quarters, unless you bid us come back."

"I do not," interposed the detective. "I will join you soon, and if need be, you can then return, doctor."

At first it seemed as if Hilda were about to remonstrate. But she caught the look of intelligence that flashed from his eyes to hers, and she sat in silence while Doctor Barnes explained the route to his cottage and murmured a low good-bye, while Brierly took her hand and bent over her with a kind adieu.

"I may see you to-morrow," he whispered. "You will let me come, sister?" The last word breathed close to her ear.

Her lips moved soundlessly, but he read her eager consent in her timid return of his hand clasp and the look in her sad, grey eyes, and followed the doctor from the room.

When Frank Ferrars had closed the door behind the two men, he wasted no time in useless words, but, seating himself opposite the girl, and so close that he could catch, if need be, her faintest whisper, he began, his own tones low and touched with sympathy—

[Pg 60]

"Miss Grant," he said, "I already feel assured that you know how many things must be considered before we can ever begin such a search as I foresee before me. Of course it may happen that before the end of the coroner's inquest some clue or key to the situation may have developed. But, if I have heard all, or, rather, if there has not been some important fact or feature overlooked, we must go behind the scenes for our data, our hints and possible clues. Do you comprehend me?"

Hilda Grant had drawn herself erect, and was listening intently with her clear eyes fixed upon his face, and she seemed with her whole soul to be studying this man, while, with her ears she took in and comprehended his every word.

"You mean," she answered slowly, "that there may be something in himself or some event or fact in his past, or that of his family, which has brought about this?" She turned away her face. She could not put the awful fact into words.

"I knew you would understand me, and it is not to his past alone that I must look for help, but to others."

"Do you mean mine?"

"Yes. You do understand!"

There was a look of relief in his eyes. His lips took[Pg 61] on a gentler curve. "I see that you are going to help me."

"If it is in my power, I surely am. Where shall we begin?"

"Tell me all that you can about Charles Brierly, all that he has told you about himself. Will it be too hard?"

"No matter." She drew herself more erect. "I think if you will let me tell my own story briefly, and then fill it out at need, by interrogation, it will be easiest for me."

"And best for me. Thank you." He leaned back and rested his hands upon the arms of his chair.

"I am ready to hear you," he said, and withdrew his full gaze from her face, letting his eyelids fall and sitting thus with half-closed eyes.

"Of course," she began, "it was only natural, or so it appeared to me, that we should become friends soon, meeting, as we must, daily, and being so constantly brought together, as upper and under teachers in this little village school. He never seemed really strange to me, and we seemed thrown upon each other for society, for the young people of the village held aloof, because of our newness, and our position, I suppose, and the people of the hotels and boarding-houses found, naturally, a set, or sets, by themselves.[Pg 62] I grew up in what you might call a religious atmosphere, and when I knew that he was a minister of the gospel, I felt at once full confidence in him and met his friendly advances quite frankly. I think we understood each other very soon. You perhaps have not been told that he filled a vacancy, taking the place of a young man who was called away because of his mother's illness, and who did not return, giving up the school at her request. It was in April, a year ago, that he—Charlie—took up the work, coming back, as I did, after the summer vacation. It was after that that he began telling me about himself a little; to speak often of his brother, who was, to his eyes, a model of young manhood and greatly his intellectual superior."

She paused a moment, and then with a little proud lifting of her rounded chin, resumed—

"I was not quite willing to agree as to the superiority; for Charles Brierly was as bright, as talented and promising a young man, as good and as modest as any I ever knew or hope to know, and I have met some who rank high as pastors and orators."

"I can well believe you," he said, with his eyes upon her face, and his voice was sincere and full of sympathy.

"We were not engaged until quite recently. Although we both, I think, understood ourselves and each other[Pg 63] long before. And now, what more can I say? He has told me much of his school days, of his student life, and, of course, of his brother's also. In fact, without meaning it, he has taught me to stand somewhat in awe of this highly fastidious, faultless and much-beloved brother, but I have heard of no family quarrel, no enemy, no unpleasant episode of any sort. For himself, he told me, and I believe his lightest word, that he never cared for any other woman; had never been much in women's society, in fact, owing to his almost constant study and travel. Here in the village all was his friends; his pupils were all his adorers, young and old alike were his

admirers, and he had room in his heart for all. No hand in Glenville was ever raised against him, I am sure."

"You think then that it was perhaps an accident, a mistake?" He was eyeing her keenly from beneath his drooping lashes.

"No!" She sprang suddenly to her feet and stood erect before him. "No, Mr. Ferrars, I do not! I cannot. I was never in my life superstitious. I do not believe it is superstition that compels me to feel that Charles Brierly was murdered of intent, and by an enemy, an enemy who has stalked him unawares, for money perhaps, and who has planned cunningly, and hid his traces well."

[Pg 64]

CHAPTER VI."WHICH?"

"Give me a few moments of your time, doctor, after your guest has retired for the night."

For more than two hours after his parting with Hilda Grant, Ferrars had talked, first with Robert Brierly alone, and then with the doctor as a third party. At the end, the three had gone together to look upon the face of the dead, and now, as the doctor nodded over his shoulders and silently followed, or, rather, guided Brierly from the room and toward his sleeping apartment, the detective turned back, and when they were out of hearing, removed the covering from the still face, and taking a lamp from the table near, stood looking down upon the dead.

"No," he murmured at last, as he replaced the lamp and turned back to the side of the bier. "You never earned such a fate. You must have lived and died a[Pg 65] good man; an honest man, and yet——" He turned quickly at the sound of the opening door. "Doctor, come here and tell me how your keen eyes and worldly intelligence weighed, measured and gauged this man who lies here with that look, that inscrutable look they all wear once they have seen the mystery unveiled. What manner of man did you find him?"

Doctor Barnes came closer and gazed reverently down upon the dead face.

"There lies a man who could better afford to face the mystery suddenly, without warning, than you or I or any other living man I know. A good man, a true Christian gentleman I honestly believe, too modest perhaps to ever claim and hold his true place in this grasping world. That he should be struck down by the hand of an assassin is past

belief, and yet——" He paused abruptly and bent down to replace the covering over the still, handsome face.

"And yet," repeated the detective, "do you really think that this man was murdered?"

"Ferrars!" Both men were moving away from the side of the bier, one on either hand, and, as they came together at its foot, the speaker put a hand upon the shoulder of the detective. "To-morrow I hope you will thoroughly overlook the wood road beyond the school house, the lake shore, from the village to the knoll or[Pg 66] mound; and the thin strip of wood between, and then tell me if you think it possible for any one, however stupid or erratic of aim, to shoot by accident a man standing in that place. There is no spot from which a bullet could have been fired whence a man could not have been seen perfectly by that figure by the lake side. The trees are so scattered, the bushes so low, the view up and down so open. It's impossible!"

"That is your fixed opinion?"

"It is. Nothing but actual proof to the contrary would change it."

When they had passed from the room and the doctor had softly closed the door, leaving the dead alone in the silence and the shaded lamp-light, they paused again, face to face, in the outer office.

"Have you any suggestions as regards the inquest, Ferrars?" asked the one.

"I have been thinking about that foolish lad, the one who saw poor Brierly in the wood. Could you get him here before the inquiry? We might be able to learn more in this way. You know the lad, of course?"

"Of course. There will be very little to be got from him. But I'll have him here for you."

"Do so. And the lady, the one who drove the pony; you will call her, I suppose?"

"Certainly."

[Pg 67]

"That is all, I think. If you can drive me to the spot very early, before we breakfast even, I would like it. You need not stop for me. I can find my way back, prefer to, in fact. You say it is not far?"

"Little more than half a mile from the school-house."

"Then—good night, doctor."

Doctor Barnes occupied a six-room cottage with a mansard, and he had fitted up the room originally meant to be a sitting-room, for his own sleeping apartment. It was at the front of the main cottage, and back of it was the inner office where the body lay, the

outer office being in a wing built out from this rear room and opening conveniently outward, in view of the front entrance, and very close to a little side gate. A porch fitted snugly into the angle made by the former sitting-room and this outer office, and both of these rooms could be entered from this convenient porch. Robert Brierly occupied the room opposite that assigned the detective with the width of the hall between them, and the doctor, although Ferrars did not know this, had camped down in his outer office.

Half an hour after he had parted from the doctor, Frank Ferrars, as he was called by his nearest and most familiar friends, opened the door upon the corner porch and stepped noiselessly out. When he believed that[Pg 68] he had found an unusual case—and he cared for no others—he seldom slept until he had thought out some plan of work, adopted some theory, or evolved a possibility, or, as he whimsically termed it, a "stepping stone" toward clearer knowledge.

He had answered the doctor's summons with little thought of what it might mean, or lead to, and simply because it was from "Walt." Barnes. Then he had heard the doctor's brief story with some surprise, and an inclination to think it might end, after all, in a case of accidental shooting, or self-inflicted death. But when he looked into the woeful eyes of lovely Hilda Grant, and clasped the hand of the dead man's brother, the case took on a new interest. Here was no commonplace village maiden hysterical and forlorn, no youth breathing out dramatic vows of vengeance upon an unknown foe. At once his heart went out to them, his sympathy was theirs, and the sympathy of Francis Ferrars was of a very select nature indeed.

And thus he had looked at the beautiful refined face of the dead man, a face that told of gentleness, sweetness, loyalty, all manifest in the calm dignity of death. Not a strong face, as his brother's face was strong, but manly with the true Christian manliness, and strong with the strength of truth. Looking upon this face, all thought of self-destruction forsook the detective, and he[Pg 69] stood, after that first long gaze, vowed to right this deadly wrong in the only way left to a mortal.

But how strange that such a man, in such a place, should be snatched out of life by the hand of an assassin! He must think over it, and he could think best when passing slowly along some quiet by-way or street. So he closed his door softly, and all unconscious that he was observed from the window of the outer office, he vaulted across the low fence, striking noiselessly upon the soft turf on the further side; and, after a moment of hesitation, turned the corner and went down Main Street.

Past the shops, the fine new church, the two hotels, one new and one old. Past the little park and around it to the street, terraced and tree planted, where the more pretentious dwellings and several modish new houses, built for the summer boarder, stood. It was a balmy night. Every star seemed out, and there was a moon, bright, but on the wane.

Ferrars walked slowly upon the soft turf, avoiding the boards and stones of the walks and street crossings. Now and then he paused to look at some fair garden, lovely in the moonlight, or up at the stars, and once, at least, at a window, open to the breezes of night and revealing that which sent Ferrars homeward presently with a question on his lips. He paced the length of the[Pg 70] terraced street, and passed by the cottage where Hilda Grant waked and wept perchance, and as he re-entered his room silently and shadow-like, he said to himself—

"Is it fate or Providence that prompts us to these reasonless acts? I may be wrong, I may be mistaken, but I could almost believe that I have found my first clue."

And yet he had heard nothing, and yet all he had seen was a woman's shadow, reflected fitfully by the waning moon, as she paced her room to and fro, to and fro, like some restless or tormented animal, and now and then lifted her arms aloft in despair? in malediction? in triumph? in entreaty?—which?

In spite of his brief rest, if rest it was, Ferrars was astir before sunrise: but, even so, he found the doctor awake before him, and his horse in waiting at the side gate.

They drove swiftly and were soon within sight of the Indian Mound.

"Show me first the place where the body was found," Ferrars had said to his guide as they set out, and when the two stood at this spot, which some one had marked with two small stakes, and the doctor had answered some brief questions regarding the road through the fringe of wood, the mound, and the formation of the lake shore further south or away from the town, the detective announced his wish to be left alone to pursue his work in his own way.

[Pg 71]

"Your guest will be astir early if I am not much mistaken," he said. "And you have Miss Grant to look after, and may be wanted for a dozen reasons before I return. I can easily walk back, and think you will see me at the breakfast hour, which you must on no account delay."

Two hours later, and just as the doctor's man had announced breakfast, the detective returned, and at once joined the two in the dining-room.

He said nothing of his morning excursion, but the doctor's quick eye noted his look of gravity, and a certain preoccupation of manner which Ferrars did not attempt to hide. Before the meal was ended Doctor Barnes was convinced that something was puzzling the detective, and troubling him not a little.

After breakfast, and while Brierly was for the moment absent from the porch where they had seated themselves with their cigars, Ferrars asked—

"Where does the lady live who drove Mr. Doran's black pony yesterday. Is it at an hotel?"

"It is at the Glenville, an aristocratic family hotel on the terrace. She is a Mrs. Jamieson."

"Do you know her?"

"She sent for me once to prescribe for some small ailment not long ago."

"Has she been summoned?"

[Pg 72]

"She will be."

"If there was any one in the woods, or approaching the mound by the road from the south, she should have seen them, or him; even a boat might have been seen through the trees for some distance southward, could it not?"

"Yes. For two miles from the town the lake is visible from the wood road. Ah! here comes Doran and our constable."

For half an hour the doctor was busy with Doran, the constable, and a number of other men who had or wished to have some small part to play in this second act of the tragedy, the end of which no one could foresee. Then, having dispatched them on their various missions, the doctor set out to inquire after the welfare of Hilda Grant; and Robert Brierly, who could not endure his suspense and sorrow in complete inaction, asked permission to accompany him, thus leaving the detective, who was quite in the mood for a little solitude just then, in possession of the porch, three wicker chairs and his cigar.

But not for long. Before he had smoked and wrinkled his brows, as was his habit when things were not developing to his liking, and pondered ten minutes alone, he heard the click of the front gate, and turned in his chair to see a lady, petite, graceful, and dressed in [Pg 73] mourning, coming toward him with quick, light steps. She was looking straight at him as she came, but as he rose at her approach, she stopped short, and standing a few steps from the porch, said crisply—

"Your pardon. I have made a mistake. I am looking for Doctor Barnes."

"He has gone out for a short time only. Will you be seated, madam, and wait?"

She advanced a step and stopped irresolute.

"I suppose I must, unless," coming close to the lower step, "unless you can tell me, sir, what I wish to know."

"If it is a question of medicine, madam, I fear——"

"It is not," she broke in, her voice dropping to a lower note. "It is about the—the inquiry or examination into the death of the poor young man who—but you know, of course."

"I have heard. The inquest is held at one o'clock."

"Ah! And do you know if the—the witnesses have been notified as yet?"

"They are being summoned now. As the doctor's guest I have but lately heard him sending out the papers."

"Oh, indeed!" The lady put a tiny foot upon the step as if to mount, and then withdrew it. "I think, if I may leave a message with you, sir," she said, "I will not wait."

[Pg 74]

"Most certainly," he replied.

"I chanced to be driving through the wood yesterday when the body was discovered near the Indian Mound, and am told that I shall be wanted as a witness. I do not understand why."

"Possibly a mere form, which is nevertheless essential."

"I had engaged to go out with a yachting party," she went on, "and before I withdraw from the excursion I wish to be sure that I shall really be required. My name is Mrs. Jamieson, and——"

"Then I can assure you, Mrs. Jamieson, that you are, or will be wanted, at least. My friend has sent a summons to a Mrs. Jamieson of the Glenville House."

"That is myself," the lady said, and turned to go. "Of course then I must be at hand."

She nodded slightly and went away, going with a less appearance of haste down the street and so from his sight.

When she was no longer visible the detective resumed his seat, and relighted his cigar, making, as he did so, this very unprofessional comment—

"I hate to lose sight of a pretty woman, until I am sure of the colour of her eyes."

And yet Francis Ferrars had never been called, in any sense, a "ladies' man."

[Pg 75]

CHAPTER VII.RENUNCIATION.

Ferrars had predicted that nothing would be gained by the inquest, and the result proved him a prophet.

Peter Kramer, the poor half-wit who had given the first clue to the whereabouts of the murdered man, was found, and his confidence won by much coaxing, and more sweets and shining pennies, the only coin which Peter would ever recognise as such. But the result was small. Asked had he seen the teacher, the reply was, "Yep." Asked where, "Most by Injun hill." Asked what doing, "Settin' down."

"Had he heard the pistol fired?" asked the doctor.

"Un! Uh! Heard nawthin."

"And whom did you see, Peter, besides the teacher?"

Again the look of affright in the dull eyes, the arm lifted as in self-protection, and the only word they could coax from his lips was, "Ghost!" uttered in evident fear and trembling.

[Pg 76]

And this was repeated at the inquest. This, and no more, from Peter.

Mrs. Fry, Charles Brierly's landlady, told how the dead man had appeared at breakfast, and her testimony did not accord with the statement of her little daughter.

"Miss Grant has told me of my little girl's mistake," she said. "Mr. Brierly was downstairs unusually early that morning, and he did not look quite as well as usual. He looked worried, in fact, and ate little. He was always a small eater, and I said something about his eating even less than usual, I can't recall the exact words. Nellie of course, did not observe his worried look, as I did, and quoted me wrong. Mr. Brierly left the house at once after leaving the table. I did not think of it at first, but it came to me this morning that as he did not carry any books with him, he must of course have meant to come back for them, and——" She paused.

"And, of course," suggested the coroner, "he must have had his pistol upon his person when he came down to breakfast? Is that your meaning?"

"Yes, sir."

The weapon, found near the dead man's hand as it had doubtless fallen from it, was there in evidence, as it had been picked up with two of the chambers empty.

That it was not a case of murder for plunder was proven, or so they thought, by the fact that the dead[Pg 77] man's watch was found upon his person; his pockets containing a small sum of money, pencils, knives, note book, a small picture case, closed with a spring, and containing Hilda Grant's picture, and a letter from his brother.

Hilda Grant's brief testimony did not agree with that of Mrs. Fry.

"She saw her lover, alive, for the last time on the evening before his death. He was in good spirits, and if there was anything troubling him he gave no sign of it. He was by nature quiet and rather reserved," she said.

"Yes, she knew his habit of sometimes going to the lake shore beyond the town to practice at target-shooting, but when he did not appear at his post at nine o'clock, she never thought to send to the lake shore at first, because he usually returned from his morning exercise before nine o'clock; and so her first thought had been to send to Mrs. Fry's."

When the doctor and Robert were about to leave the scene of the murder, among other instructions given to Doran had been this:

"Don't say anything in town about Mr. Brierly's arrival; you know how curious our people are, and we would have a lot of our curiosity lovers hovering around my place to see and hear and ask questions. Just caution the others, will you?"

[Pg 78]

Doran held an acknowledged leadership over the men with whom he consorted, and the group willingly preserved silence. Later, when Doctor Barnes explained to Ferrars how he had kept the curious away from his door, and from Brierly, he thought the detective's gratification because of this rather strange, just at first, and in excess of the cause.

"You couldn't have done a better thing," Ferrars had declared. "It's more than I had ventured to hope. Keep Brierly's identity as close as possible until the inquest is called, and then hold it back, and do not put him on the stand until the last."

After Mrs. Fry, the boy Peter and Hilda Grant had been questioned, Samuel Doran took the witness chair, telling of his summons from Miss Grant, of the separation of the group at the Indian Mound, of his meeting with Mrs. Jamieson, of the discovery made by his two companions and of all that followed. And then Mrs. Jamieson was called.

She had entered the place accompanied by an acquaintance from the Glenville, and they had taken, from choice, as it seemed to them, seats in the rear of the jury, and somewhat aloof from the place where Hilda Grant, Mrs. Marcy, and Mrs. Fry sat. Robert Brierly would have taken his place beside Hilda, but the detective interposed.

[Pg 79]

"Owing to the precautions of the doctor and Mr. Doran, the fact of your relationship has not leaked out. It appears that Mrs. Fry was not informed of your coming until the evening before, or Thursday evening, and she seems to be a very discreet woman. After

the inquest you will be free to devote yourself to Miss Grant. Until then, it is my whim, if you like, to keep you incog."

Of course Brierly acquiesced, but more than once he found himself wondering why this should seem to Ferrars needful.

Mrs. Jamieson came quietly to the witnesses' chair, and took her place. There was a little stir as she came forward, for, while she had been for some weeks in Glenville, and had driven much about its pretty country roads and lanes, she had gone, for the most part, more or less closely veiled in fleecy gauzes of black or white. Afoot she was seldom seen beyond the grounds about the family hotel.

To-day, however, the lady had chosen to wear a Parisian looking gown of dull black silk and a tiny capote of the same material rested upon her blonde and abundant hair, while only the filmiest of white illusion veiled, but did not hide, the pretty face from which the blue eyes looked out and about her, gravely but with perfect self-possession.

She told of her morning drive, and while so doing,[Pg 80] Ferrars, sitting a little in the rear of the coroner, slipped into his palm a small card closely written upon both sides. Upon one side was written, "Use these as random shots."

And when she spoke of the man whom she had seen going into the wood near the mound, the doctor interposed his first question.

"Can you describe the person at all? His dress, his bearing?"

"Not distinctly," she replied. "He was going from me and his face, of course, I could not see. In fact, as I have before stated, my pony was fresh, and required my attention. Besides, there was really no reason why I should look a second time at the back of a strange person whom I passed at some little distance. As I seem to recall the figure now, it was that of a rather tall, fair-haired man. I can say no more."

"And at what hour was this?"

"It must have been nearing eight o'clock, I fancy, although being out for pleasure I took little notice of the hour."

No further interruptions were made until she had finished the story of the morning's experience, of her meeting with Doran and the others, of the drive to the village, and of her message to Miss Grant.

"Did you know Miss Grant?"

"Only as I had seen her at church, and upon the street[Pg 81] or in the school-yard. We had never met, prior to that morning."

"And Charles Brierly? Did you know him?"

"Only by sight. I know few people in Glenville outside of my ho—of the Glenville House."

Both the doctor and Ferrars noted the unfinished word broken off at the first syllable. To the one it was a riddle; to the other it told something which he might find useful later on.

"Mrs. Jamieson," resumed the coroner, after consulting the detective's card, "how far did you drive yesterday before you turned about upon the wood road?"

For a moment the lady seemed to be questioning her memory. Then she replied.

"The distance in miles, or fractions of miles, I could not give. I turned the pony about, I remember, at the place where the road curves toward the lake, at the old mill, near the opening of the wood."

"Ah, then you could see, of course, for some distance up and down the lake shore?"

"I could!"

There was a hint of surprise in her coldly courteous reply.

"And at that point did you see anything, any one in the wood, or along the lake?"

"I certainly saw no person. But—yes, I do remember[Pg 82] that there was a boat at the water's edge, not far from the place where I turned homeward. It was a little beyond, or north of me."

"Did you observe whether there were oars in the boat?"

"I saw none, I am quite sure," the lady replied, and this ended her part in the inquiry.

But now there were some youthful, eager and valuable new witnesses, and their combined testimony amounted to this:

When the body of their beloved teacher had been brought home and the first hour of excitement had passed, three boys, who had been among Charles Brierly's brightest and most mischief loving and adventurous pupils, had set out, a full hour in advance of the elder exploring party, and had followed the lake shore and the wood road, one closely skirting the lake shore, another running through the sparse timber and undergrowth about half way up the shallow slope, and the third trotting down the road beyond; the three keeping pretty nearly parallel, until the discovery, by the lad upon the shore, of the boat drawn out of the water, and in the shade of a tree. This had brought the others down to the lake and then caused them to go hastily back. Meeting the party of men, who were not far behind them, the boys had turned back with them,[Pg 83] and now there was a crowd of witnesses to corroborate the story of the boat.

It stood, they all affirmed, in the shade of a spreading tree, so as that no sun rays had beaten upon it, and its sides were still damp from recent contact with the water, while it stood entirely upon the land. Two oars, also showing signs of contact with the lake, were in the little boat, blade ends down, and it was evident that its late occupant had disembarked in haste, for, while the stake by which the boat had been secured, stood scarcely three feet away, and the chain and padlock lay over the edge of the little craft, there had been no effort to secure it, and the oars had the look of having been hastily shipped and left thus without further care.

When the matter of the boat had been fully investigated, the coroner and Ferrars conferred together for some moments, and during these moments Mrs. Jamieson and her companion exchanged some whispered words.

Through some mistake, it would seem, these two had been given places which, while aloof from the strange men, and almost in the rear of the jurors, brought them facing the open door of the inner room, where, in full view, the shrouded body of the murdered man lay, and from the first the eyes of the two seemed held and fascinated by the sight of the long, still figure outlined under the white covering.

[Pg 84]

"Is it possible," whispered the lady witness, "that we must sit here until the end, face to face with that!" She was trembling slightly, as she spoke. "It is making me nervous."

"And no wonder," murmured her friend. "But it must be almost over. I—I confess to some curiosity. This is such a new and unusual sensation, to be here, you know."

"Ugh!"

Mrs. Jamieson turned away, for the coroner was speaking.

"There is one point," he said, "upon which our witnesses differ, and that is the mental condition of the deceased during the twenty-four hours preceding his death. Another witness will now speak upon this matter. Mr. Robert Brierly, the brother of Charles Brierly, will now testify."

As Robert Brierly came out from the rather secluded place he had heretofore occupied, at the suggestion of the detective, all eyes were fixed upon him. There could be no doubt of his relationship to the deceased. It was the same face, but darker and stronger; the same tall form, but broader and more athletic. The eyes of this man were darker and more resolute than those of his dead brother; his hair was browner, too, and where the face of the one had been full of kindness and gentle[Pg 85] dignity, that of this other was strong, spirited and resolute. But, beyond a doubt, these two were brothers.

There was a stir as Brierly made his way forward, paused before the coroner and faced the jury; and then, as his eyes fell upon the two figures in the rear of that body he made a sudden step forward.

"Doctor!" he called quickly, "you are needed here! A lady has fainted!"

For a moment all was forgotten, save the white face that had fallen back upon her friend's shoulder, and that seemed even whiter because of the black garments, and beneath the halo of fair blonde hair.

"It was that," explained the friend, who proved to be a Mrs. Arthur, pointing toward the shrouded figure in the inner room. "She has been growing more and more nervous for some time."

Robert Brierly was the first at her side, but, as the doctor took his place and he drew back a pace, a hand touched his arm.

"Step aside," whispered Ferrars, "where she cannot see you." And without comprehending but answering a look in the detective's eye, he obeyed.

Mrs. Jamieson did not at once recover, and the doctor and Ferrars carried her across the hall and into the room lately occupied by Brierly. As Mrs. Arthur followed them, it seemed to her that the detective, whom of course[Pg 86] she did not know as such, was assuming the leadership, and that half a dozen quick words were spoken by him to the doctor, across her friend's drooping head.

"She must be removed immediately," said the doctor a moment after. "Let some one find a carriage or phaeton at once." Then, as Ferrars did not move from his place beside the bed where they had placed the unconscious woman, he strode to the chamber door, said a word or two to Doran, who had followed them as far as the door, and came back to his place beside the bed.

Before Mrs. Jamieson had opened her eyes a low wagonette was at the door, and when the lady became conscious and had been raised and given a stimulating draught, she was lifted again by Ferrars and Doctor Barnes and carried to the waiting vehicle, followed by Mrs. Arthur.

"Kindly take the place beside the driver, madam," directed the doctor. "My friend will go with the lady and assist her; it will be best. It is possible that she may faint again." And so they drove away, Mrs. Arthur beside Doran, the driver; and Mrs. Jamieson, still pallid and tremulous, leaning upon the supporting shoulder of Ferrars, silent and with closed eyes.

As he lifted her from the wagonette, and assisted her up the steps and within the door, however, the lady[Pg 87] seemed to recover herself with an effort. She had crossed the

threshold supported by Ferrars on the one side, and leaning upon her friend's arm upon the other, and at the door of the reception room she turned, saying faintly:

"Let me rest here first. Before we go upstairs, I mean." Then, withdrawing her hand from her friend's arm, she seemed to steady herself, and standing more erect, turned to Ferrars.

"I must not trouble you longer, now, sir. You have been most kind." Her voice faltered, she paused a moment, and then held out her hand. "I should like very much to hear the outcome," she hesitated.

"With your permission," the detective replied quickly, "I will call to ask after your welfare, and to inform you if I can." He turned to go, but she made a movement toward him.

"That poor girl," she said, "I pity her so. Do you know her well, sir?" She was quite herself now, but her voice was still weak and tremulous.

"You have not heard, I see, that she is my cousin."

"No. I would like to call upon her. Will you ask her if I may?" He nodded and she added quickly, "And call, if you please, to-morrow."

Robert Brierly told his story almost without interruption; all that he knew of his brother's life in the village;[Pg 88] of his own; of his coming earlier than he was expected, and of his firm belief that his brother had been made the victim of foul play. Possibly killed by mistake, because of some fancied resemblance; for his life, which had been like an open book to all his friends, held no secrets, no "episodes," and enemies he never had one. In short, he could throw no light upon the mystery of his brother's death. Rather, his story made that death seem more mysterious than at first because of the possibilities that it rendered at least probable.

But this evidence had its effect upon a somewhat bucolic jury. That Charles Brierly had been shot by another hand than his own had been very clearly demonstrated, for his brother would have no doubt whatever left upon this point; while he little knew how much the judicious whispers and hints uttered in the right places, and with apparent intent of confidence and secrecy, had to do with the shaping of the verdict, which was as follows:

"We, the jury, find that the deceased, Charles Brierly, died from a bullet wound, fired, according to our belief, by mistake or accident, and at the hands of some person unknown."

And now came the question of proof.

"It must be cleared up," said Robert Brierly to the detective. "I am not a rich man, Mr. Ferrars, but all that I have shall be spent at need to bring the truth to light. For I can never rest until I have learned it. It is my duty to my dead brother, father, mother—all."

And late that night, alone in his room he looked out upon the stars hung low upon the eastern horizon and murmured—

"Ah, Ruth, Ruth, we were far enough asunder before, and now—Ah, it was well to have left you your freedom, for now the gulf is widening; it may soon, it will soon be impassable." And he sighed heavily, as a strong man sighs when the tears are very near his eyes and the pain close to his heart.

[Pg 90]

CHAPTER VIII. TRICKERY.

As was quite natural, the three men, thrown so strangely and unexpectedly together at the doctor's cottage, sat up late after the inquest, and discussed the strange death of Charles Brierly in all its bearings. As a result of this they slept somewhat late, except the detective, who let himself out of the house at sunrise, and lighting a cigar, set off for a short walk, up one certain street, and down another. He walked slowly, and looked indolently absorbed in his cigar. But it was a very observant eye that noted, from under the peak of his English cap, the streets, the houses, and the very few stray people whom he passed. It was not the people, though, in whom he was chiefly interested. Ferrars was intently studying the topography of the town, at least of that portion of it which he was then traversing with such seeming aimlessness.

[Pg 91]

From the doctor's cottage he had sauntered north for several blocks, crossed over, until he reached the upper or terraced street, and followed it until he had reached the southern edge of the village and was in sight of the school-house not far beyond. Turning here he crossed a street or two, and was nearing the house where the dead school teacher had lived, when he saw the front door of the house open, and a woman come out and hasten away in the direction in which he was moving. She hurried on like one intent upon some absorbing errand, and, knowing the house as the late home of Charles Brierly, and the woman as its mistress, Ferrars quickened his steps that he might keep her in sight, and when she turned the corner leading directly to the doctor's cottage he further increased his speed, feeling instinctively that her errand, whatever its nature, would take her there.

He was not far behind her now, and he saw the doctor standing alone upon the side porch, saw the woman enter at the side gate, and the meeting of the two.

Mrs. Fry, with her back towards him, was making excited gestures, and the face of the doctor, visible above her head, changed from a look of mild wonder to such sudden anxiety and amazement that the detective halted at the gate, hesitating, and was seen at that instant by the doctor, who beckoned him on with a look of relief.

"Look here, Ferrars," he began, and then turned to[Pg 92] assure himself that Brierly had not arisen, and was not observing them from the office window. "Come this way a few steps," moving away from the porch and halting where the shadow of the wing hid them from view from within the main dwelling. "And now, Mrs. Fry, please tell Mr. Grant what you had begun to tell me. I want his opinion on it. He's not a bad lawyer."

"A good detective'd be the right thing, I think," declared the woman. "It's about Mr. Brierly's room, sir. He had a small bedroom, and another opening out from it, where he used to read and study. You know how they were, doctor!"

The doctor nodded silently.

"Well, last night, you remember, when you brought this gentleman and his brother to my place to look at the rooms. You or he decided not to go up then, but told me to close the rooms, and he would come to-morrow—to-day—that would be."

"Yes, yes!" said the doctor, impatiently, "we remember all that, Mrs. Fry."

"Well, I'd had the rooms locked ever since I heard that he was dead." Mrs. Fry was growing somewhat hazy as to her pronouns. "And I had the key in my pocket. Then, well, after a while I lit the lamp in the sittin' room so's it wouldn't seem so gloomy in the[Pg 93] house, and went out and sat on my side stoop, and after a little my neighbour on that side, Mrs. Robson, came acrost the lawn—there aint no fence between, ye know—and we talked for some time, and my little girl fell asleep with her head in my lap."

"Don't be too long with the story," broke in the doctor. "I don't want it to spoil Mr. Brierly's breakfast, for he needs it badly."

"Yes, sir. Well, just about that time—it must have been half-past eight, I guess—and there was plenty of folks all along the street, a boy came running across the lawn and right up to me.

"If you please," he says, touching his hat rim, 'Mr. Brierly, down to the doctor's, forgot to get the key to his brother's room, and he sent me to get it for him.' I s'pose I was foolish. I felt hurt, thinkin' he couldn't trust me with his brother's things, an' so I jest hands out the key and no questions asked."

A look of sudden alertness shot from the eyes of the detective, and he arrested the doctor's evident impatience by a quick shake of the head unperceived by the woman, who was addressing her narrative to the doctor, as was natural.

"I s'pose," she went on, "that I shouldn't a' done it, but I didn't scent anything wrong then. Mrs. Robson went home in a few minutes, and then I roused my little[Pg 94] girl up and took her in and put her to bed. She was asleep again a'most as soon as her head touched the pillow, and the night was so pleasant-like that I threw my shawl on my shoulders and went out onto the front stoop. I felt sort o' lonesome in the house all alone."

"Of course," commented Ferrars, seeing the dread of their criticism or displeasure that was manifest in her face as she paused and looked from one to the other. "One naturally would in your place."

"Yes, I suppose so," she went on, reassured. "Well, I hadn't been out there two minutes when that same boy came running up the walk, all out of breath, and says, sort of panting between words, 'Ma'am, the lady that lives next the engine-house by the corner stopped me just now an' asked me to come back here an' beg you to come down there quick! Her little boy's got himself burned awful!'"

"Ah! I see!" Ferrars spoke low, as if to himself, and his face wore the look of one who is beginning to understand a riddle. "You went, of course?"

"Yes, I went."

"Go on with the story, please. Tell it all as you have begun. Let us have the details," and he again nodded toward the doctor, who was regarding him with profound surprise, and put a finger to his lip.

"My sister-in-law lives in the house by the [Pg 95]engine-house," Mrs. Fry hurried on, "and knowing how careless she is about keepin' things in the house against such times, I ran back into my bedroom and got a bottle of camphor and a roll of cotton batt. 'Run ahead, boy,' I says to the boy, 'an' tell her I am coming; I must lock up my doors and winders.' 'She's in an awful hurry,' he says, 'cryin' fit to kill. I'll set right down here and watch your house, ma'am; I can do no good there.' The boy spoke so honest, and Mary's boy is such a dear little fellow, that I jest lost my head complete, and ran off down the sidewalk. At the corner I looked back. The boy was sittin' on the doorstep, an' I heard him whistlin'; someway it made me feel quite easy. But when I got to the house and found them all in the sitting-room, and Neddy not hurt at all, but sound asleep on the floor, I was so took back that I just dropped down on a chair and acted like a wild woman. Instead of rushin' back that very minute, I sat there and told how I had been tricked, and scolded about that boy, an' vowed I'd have him well punished, and so on,

until Mary reminded me that I'd better get back home and see if the house was all right, or if 'twas only a boy's trick."

"It looked like one, surely," was the detective's easy comment.

"That's what Mr. Jones said. He's my neighbour.[Pg 96] He was just going home, and we overtook him. Mary told him about the boy and he laughed and said that some boys had played that sort of trick last summer two or three times, sending people running across the town on some such fool's errand. He thought maybe 'twas some boy that I had offended some way; and then I thought about how crisp I was about givin' the boy Mr. Brierly's key, and it made me feel sort of easier. But Mr. Jones went in with us when we got to my house. We looked all around downstairs and everything was all right. Nellie was fast asleep still, and not a thing had been disturbed. Then we went upstairs, 'just for form's sake,' Mr. Jones said, and looked in all the bedrooms, and even tried Mr. Brierly's door. Everything seemed right, and so Mr. Jones and Mary went away, and I went to bed. But somehow I couldn't sleep sound. I felt provoked and angry about that boy, and the more I thought of him, of his being a stranger and all, the uneasier I got. Then I began to imagine I heard queer sounds, and creaking doors, and, right on the heels of all that, came a loud slam that waked Nellie, and made me skip right out of bed."

"A shutter, of course," said the doctor, as she paused for breath.

"Yes, a shutter, and I knew well that every shutter on my house was either shut tight or locked open. I look[Pg 97] to that every night, as soon as it's lamp-lighting time; them downstairs I shut, them upstairs I open, sometimes. I knew where that slammin' shutter was by the sound, and it set me to dressing quick. I had opened the shutters on Mr. Brierly's windows that very afternoon, thinking the rooms would not seem quite so dreary and lonesome when his brother came to look through 'em and they was locked open, I knew well! All the same, it was them shutters, or one of 'em, that was clattering then, and I knew it."

"Were you alone in the house, you and your little girl?" asked Ferrars.

"All alone, yes, sir; and I took Nellie with me and went out into the hall——"

"You mean downstairs?"

"Yes, sir. We sleep downstairs. Now, I thought I had seen that everything was right when Mr. Jones and Mary was with me, but when we went into that hall—Doctor—" turning again toward that gentlemen, for she had addressed her later remarks to Ferrars,— "I guess you may remember a shelf just at the foot of the stairs. It's right behind the door, when it stands open, and that's why we hadn't seen it, or I hadn't before. Well, I always set the lamp for Mr. Brierly's room—his bedroom lamp, that is—on that shelf for him every morning, as soon as it had been filled for the night's burning; and

the[Pg 98] morning he was killed I had put it there as usual, and it had been there ever since. It was there when Mr. Brierly and you two gentlemen called, after the inquest."

A queer little sound escaped the detective's throat, and again he checked the doctor's impatience with that slight movement of the head.

"I don't call myself brave," the woman went on, "but I caught Nellie by the hand—I was carrying my bedroom lamp—and ran up the stairs and straight to Mr. Brierly's door. I don't know what made me do it, but I stooped down to look through the keyhole, and there in the door was the very key I had given to that boy to take to Mr. Brierly's brother."

"What did you do?" asked the doctor, breathlessly.

"I set down my lamp very softly, told Nellie in a whisper not to make a noise, and then very carefully tried the key. It turned in the lock. I didn't dare go in, but I locked the door, left the key in it, and went downstairs and out at the front door. I went around the house and stood under the window of that room. The side window shutter that I had fastened back was swinging loose. I went back to the sitting-room, locking the front door and the doors from the hall into the front room and sitting-room, taking out the key of the front door, and leaving the other keys in the locks, on[Pg 99] my side. Then I lit the big lamp, pulled down the curtains, fixed the side door so I could open it quick, and set the big dinner bell close by it. I made Nellie lie down on the lounge with her clothes on, and there I sat till morning. Before daylight I went into the kitchen and moved about very softly to get myself a cup of coffee, and a bite of breakfast for Nellie. I had been careful not to let her see how I was scared, and she went sound asleep right away. As soon as I thought you would be up I awoke my little girl, and left her sitting upon the side stoop, while I came here to you. Mr. Brierly's brother ought to be first to enter that room, and—if there was anyone there last night—they're there yet."

"What room is that which I ought to enter, Mrs. Fry?" said a voice behind them, and turning, all together, they saw Robert Brierly standing at the edge of the porch where it joined the wall of the doctor's room.

"I was afraid of this," muttered Doctor Barnes. But the detective seemed in nowise disconcerted. Neither did he seem inclined to listen, or allow Brierly to listen to a repetition of Mrs. Fry's story.

"You are here just in time, Mr. Brierly," he said, briskly. "Mrs. Fry believes that someone has paid a visit to your brother's room during the night, and as she says, you are the one who should investigate, and[Pg 100] I think it ought to be done at once, if you feel up to it."

"I'll be with you in a moment," replied Brierly, promptly, and he went indoors by way of the French windows which had given him egress.

CHAPTER IX.A LETTER.

As Robert Brierly entered the house, the detective, now taking the lead as a matter of course, turned toward Mrs. Fry.

"I see that you are anxious to get back home," he said to her. "And it is as well that you go back in advance of us, for people are beginning to move about. Wait for us at the side door." And then, as the woman hastened away, he turned toward the doctor. "You need not feel uneasy because of your guest, Doc.," he said, with his rare and fine smile. "There are times when the physical man is in subjection to the spiritual man, or the will power within him, if you like that better. Brierly has already endured a severe mental strain, I grant, but he's not at the end of his endurance yet. In fact, if he's the journalist, and I begin to think so, he knows how to sustain mental strain long and steadily. You don't fancy[Pg 102] he could be persuaded to wait for meat and drink now, do you?"

"My soul, man!" exclaimed Doctor Barnes, "how you do read a man's thoughts! No! Brierly wouldn't stop for anything now. Nor you, either, for that matter, What do you make of this?"

"I can tell you better in an hour from now, I hope. Here's Brierly. Now then, gentlemen, try and look as if this was merely a morning walk. We don't want to excite the curiosity of the neighbours."

There seemed little need of this caution, for they saw no one as they crossed to the quiet street in which Mrs. Fry lived. But Ferrars, who had fallen behind the others, had an observant eye upon all within range, as if, as the doctor afterward declared, he held the very town itself under suspicion.

Mrs. Fry awaited them at the side door, and unlocked the one leading to the front hall and stairway at once.

"I hope one of you has got a pistol," she said, nervously, as they approached the stairs.

"There's no one up there, Mrs. Fry," replied Ferrars. "Never fear." But Mrs. Fry was not so positive. She closed the sitting-room door, all but the merest crack, and stood ready to clap it entirely shut at the first sound of attack and defence from the room above.

Meantime Robert Brierly, who had led the way upstairs, placed a firm hand upon the key, turned it and softly opened the door. Then, for a moment, all three stood still at the threshold, gazing within.

It was Francis Ferrars who spoke the first word, with his hand upon Robert Brierly's shoulder, and his voice little more than a whisper.

"Go inside, Brierly, quickly and quietly." He gave the shoulder under his hand a quick, light, forward pressure, and instinctively, as it seemed, Brierly stepped across the threshold with the other two close at his heels, and, the moment they were inside the room, Ferrars turned and silently withdrew the key from the outer side, closed the door cautiously, and relocked it from within.

"We will do well to dispense with Mrs. Fry, at least for the present," he said, coolly. "It's plain enough there has been mischief here. Mr. Brierly, you saw this room last night, for a moment."

Robert Brierly, who had dropped weakly upon a chair, stopped him with a movement of the hand.

"Mr. Ferrars," he said, "I realise the importance of a right beginning here, and if you will undertake this case—I am not a rich man, you understand—all I have is at your disposal. I could hardly bear to have my brother's rooms searched by strange hands in my [Pg 104]absence, but will it not be wise that you should take the lead, and begin as you deem best?"

"Yes," replied the detective, "but your assistance will be helpful."

"Mrs. Fry is coming upstairs," broke in the doctor, who had been standing near the door.

Ferrars sprang across the room, turned the key, and put his head out through the smallest possible opening in the door.

"There's no one here, Mrs. Fry; and nothing missing, that we have observed. It was, no doubt, a boyish trick."

He smiled amiably at the somewhat surprised woman.

"When Mr. Brierly has had time to look about a bit he will of course report to you." And he closed the door in the good woman's astonished face. "Better make no confidants until we know what we have to confide," he said, turning back to survey the room afresh. "Now let us have more light here."

The room in which they were was dimly lighted, for the outer blinds of its three windows had been closed, and all the light afforded them came from the one nearest the front corner, where half the shutter was swinging loosely at the will of the morning

breeze. This light, however, enabled them to see that the room[Pg 105] was in some confusion, or rather, that it was not in the same neat order in which they had seen it on the previous day.

The writing desk, which later Mrs. Fry declared to have been closed, was now open, and a portion of the contents of its usually neatly arranged pigeon-holes was scattered upon the leaf.

"This," said Brierly, as they approached it, "was closed when I saw it last night."

"I remember," Ferrars nodded, and sat down in the revolving chair before the desk, and, without touching anything, ran his eye carefully over the scattered papers, examined the pigeon-holes, the locks, and even the fine coating of dust.

Upon a round table near the front window were some scattered books, mostly of reference, a pile of unruled manuscript tablets, and a little heap of written sheets. There was a set of bookshelves above the writing-desk, and a wire rack near it was filled with newspapers and magazines.

When Ferrars had carefully noted the appearance of the desk and its contents, he swung slowly around in the swivel chair and gazed all about him without rising. He had noted the books above him with a thoughtful gaze, and he now fixed that same speculative glance upon those upon the table. Then he got up.

[Pg 106]

"Oblige me by not so much as touching this desk yet," he said, and crossed to the table. "Your brother was a magazinist, Mr. Brierly?" he queried.

"Yes," replied Brierly.

Ferrars turned toward the inner room which the others had not yet approached.

"Ah!" he exclaimed suddenly, and then, in an altered tone, "Here is Mrs. Fry's missing lamp."

His two companions came to the door of the room, where Ferrars was now looking down at the pillows of the bed.

"Brierly," asked Ferrars, as they paused in the doorway, "what had your brother with him in the way of valuables, to your knowledge?"

The young man, who had been looking sharply about the room like one who seeks something which should be there, started slightly.

"Why, he had a somewhat odd and valuable watch, which was given him by our father upon our setting out for Europe. It was like this," and he produced a very beautiful

specimen of the watchmaker's art, and held it out for inspection. "He also had a ring set with a fine opal, that was once our mother's, and a locket with her monogram. There were also some odd trifles that he had picked up abroad, saying that they would become his future wife, no doubt."

[Pg 107]

"And you think these were still in his possession?"

"I do. In writing of Miss Grant not long ago he mentioned as a proof of her refinement and womanly delicacy that she would accept no gifts from him other than books or flowers."

"I think," said Ferrars, gravely, "that we had better have Mrs. Fry in here now, and I want you to do the talking, Brierly. Doctor, if you would ask her to come up, I'll post Mr. Brierly, meantime."

The doctor turned the key in the lock and then hesitated. "I dare say I will not be needed here longer?"

"You!" Ferrars turned upon him quickly. "Is there anything urgent outside?"

"Not especially so—only——"

"Only you fancy yourself *de trop*? If you can spare us the time, we want you right here, doctor. Eh, Mr. Brierly?"

"By all means."

"Then of course I am at your disposal," and the doctor went out in search of Mrs. Fry.

"I wish there were more men with his combined delicacy and good sense," grumbled Ferrars, and then he began to explain to Brierly what was wanted from Mrs. Fry.

When that good woman entered, Ferrars was seated[Pg 108] by the furthest window, and Robert Brierly met her at the door.

"Mrs. Fry," he began, "will you kindly look about you, without, of course, disturbing or changing things, and tell us if you see anything that has changed? If you miss anything, or if anything in your opinion, has been tampered with? Look through both rooms carefully, and then give us your opinion."

Mrs. Fry, who had been expecting just such a summons and who fully realised the gravity of the occasion, stood still in her place near the door and looked slowly about her; then she began to walk about the room. Once or twice Brierly, prompted by a glance from the detective, had to warn her against putting a finger upon some object, but she went about with firmly closed lips until she had reached the little sleeping room. Then—

"Well, I declare!" she broke out. "If they haven't even been at the bed!"

Brierly started forward, but Ferrars held up a warning finger.

"And there's that lamp!" she went on, "with the chimney all smoked! Somebody's been carrying it around burning full tilt."

By this time Ferrars was so close beside Brierly that he could breathe a low word in his ear, from time to time, unnoted by the woman as she went peering about.

[Pg 109]

"You are sure the bed has been disturbed?" Brierly asked.

"Certain of it!"

"And can you guess why?"

"Well, he always kept his pistol under the bolster."

The men started and looked at each other. "What an oversight," murmured the doctor.

"Do you mean," went on the enquiry, "that it was there yesterday morning when you made the bed?"

"I can't say, sir. The fact is, I was awfully afraid of the thing, and when I told him I was, he put it clear under the bolster with his own hand, and said it should stay there, instead of on top, as it used to be at first."

"You don't mean that he left it there during the day?"

"Yes, sir! This one. You see he had two. The one he used to practise with—the one they found—was different. This one was bigger and different somehow, and not like any pistol I ever saw. He told me 'twas a foreign weapon."

"She is right," said Brierly. "My brother brought a pair of duelling pistols from Paris. They were elaborately finished. He gave me one of them." He looked anxiously toward the crushed and displaced pillows. "Shall we not look," he asked, "and find[Pg 110] out if anything is there? Will you look, Mr. Ferrars? Or did you?"

Ferrars moved forward. "No, I did not look," he said. "But the weapon is not there; I could almost swear to it. Come—see, all of you."

With a quick light hand he removed the pillows, turned back the sheets and lifted the bolster. There was nothing beneath it, save the impression where the weapon had laid upon the mattress.

The detective turned toward Mrs. Fry. "You are sure it was here usually?" he questioned.

"I have lifted that bolster carefully every day, and have always seen it," she declared. "When I wanted to turn the mattress he always took away the pistol himself."

Ferrars turned away from the bed, and Brierly resumed his rôle of questioner.

"What else do you miss or find disturbed, Mrs. Fry?"

She went back to the outer room after a last slow glance about the chamber.

"There is the lamp, of course," she began. "That was taken from the shelf to give them light. Then the writing-desk has been opened, as you see, and the things on that table have been disturbed, the books shoved about, and the papers moved. I think," going[Pg 111] slowly toward the article, "that even the waste basket and the paper holder have been rummaged."

"And do you miss anything here?"

Mrs. Fry shook her head. "I don't s'pose you've searched the writing-desk yet?" she ventured.

"Not yet. And is that all you observe, Mrs. Fry? The bed, the lamp, the desk, table, rack, and basket?"

She went back to the table and pointed out with extended forefinger a couple of burned matches, one upon a corner of the table, one upon the floor almost beneath it.

"They lit that lamp there!" she said. "And they brought their own matches. I never use those 'parlour matches,' as they call 'em!" She bent her head to look closer at the polished surface of the table, and then walked to the open window, where the shutter still swung in the breeze. "It has been awful dusty since yesterday, seems to me, for this time of year. That boy's left his finger prints on this window, as well's on the table there."

"Don't touch them!" It was Ferrars who spoke and so sharply that the woman turned suddenly, but not soon enough to note the swift gesture which directed his exclamation.

"Of course we may rely upon you to keep the fact that my brother's rooms have been entered in this[Pg 112] manner from every one, for the present. It may be very important that we do not let it be known beyond the four of us. You have not seen or spoken with any one as yet, I think you said?"

"I haven't, and I won't. I'd do more than that for the sake of your brother, Mr. Brierly, and you've only to tell me what I can do."

"I intend to examine my brother's papers now, Mrs. Fry, before I leave the house, and if we should need you again we will let you know." And Mrs. Fry withdrew, puzzled and wondering much, but with her lips tightly set over the secret she must and would help to preserve.

"She'll keep silent, never fear," said the doctor as the door closed behind her. "And now, Brierly, I must remind you that you will need all your strength, and that I don't like your colour this morning. If you must investigate at once, get it over, for you, even more than Ferrars or I, need your morning coffee and steak."

"That is true," agreed Ferrars. "Brierly, let me ask two questions, and then oblige me by leaving certain marks, which I will point out to you, just as you find them."

"Your questions." Brierly had already seated himself before his brother's desk.

[Pg 113]

"I have an idea that this old oak writing-desk was not selected by our friend, Mrs. Fry. Am I right?"

"It is my brother's desk; bought for its compact and portable qualities."

"Good! Now, where did your brother usually keep these keepsakes and bits of foreign jewellery?"

"In one of these drawers. He kept them in a lacquered Japanese box."

"Look for them. And, before you begin, oblige me by not touching that letter file above the desk, nor the desk top just below it."

The letter file held only a few bits of paper, apparently notes and memoranda; and upon the flat top of the desk was a bronze ink well, a pen tray, a thin layer of dust and nothing more, except a tiny scrap of paper hardly as big as a thumb nail, which lay directly beneath the letter file. Brierly cast a wandering glance over the desk top and file and set about his task.

There was quite a litter of papers, letters mostly, together with some loose sheets that contained figures, dates, or something begun and cast aside. Below some of the pigeon holes, letters lay as if hastily pulled out, and from one of these little receptacles three or four envelopes protruded, half out, half in—one, a square white envelope, projecting beyond the others. These [Pg 114] Brierly pulled forth, and turning them over in his hand, scrutinised their superscriptions. Then slowly he took the square white wrapper from among the others, and drew out the letter it contained. As he began to scan the page of closely lined writing he started, frowned, flushed hotly, and then with a look of fierce anger he thrust the sheet back into its envelope, and turned toward the detective.

"Take that!" he said with a curl of the lip. "Unless I am greatly at fault, it's a document in the case."

Ferrars took the letter from him, and asked, as he thrust it into the pocket of his loose coat without so much as glancing at it, "Do you mind my running over the papers in this rack, Brierly? and looking into the waste basket?"

"Do it, by all means," was the reply as Brierly pulled open the topmost drawer; and then for some time there was silence, save for the rustle of paper or the rasping of a hinge or turning knob.

When Brierly had finished his silent search of the two drawers, he approached the detective with a small lacquered box in his hand.

"The watch and the foreign jewels are gone," he said, holding out the open box. "And what do you think of this? Here are my mother's keepsakes, wrapped in tissue paper, and labelled in my brother's[Pg 115] hand, 'Mementos. From my mother.' The thief has spared these."

The detective, who was now seated beside the table, holding a folded newspaper in his hand, took the box, looked at the tiny packet within, nodded and passed it silently to the doctor.

"And now," went on Robert Brierly, and there was a new ring of resolution and menace in his voice. "I turn the rooms and all they contain over to you, Mr. Ferrars, and I await your opinion, when you have read that letter in your pocket."

Ferrars drew forth the envelope and looked at it for the first time. It was only a fragment, for a large corner of its face was missing, the corner, in fact, which should have borne the postage stamp and the postmaster's seal.

Without a word he held this side towards the two men, extending it first to one, and then to the other.

"You see!" he said, and then to Brierly. "Was it your brother's habit to tear his letters open in such a reckless manner?"

"No. He was almost dainty in all his ways."

"Is there another letter in that desk torn as this is?"

Without a word Brierly took the letter and went back to the desk, catching the letters from their pigeon holes by the handful.

"I understand," he said, when he came back to them. "No, there is not a torn envelope there."

"Then," said the detective, "I think I may venture to give an opinion even before I look at this letter."

[Pg 117]

CHAPTER X. THIS HELPS ME.

The three men were now standing grouped about the table with its scattered books and manuscripts, and Ferrars bent toward Robert Brierly, putting a hand upon his shoulder.

"Brierly," he said, "sit down; this thing is using up your strength. I will tell you what I think of all this, and then we must lock up this place for a little while just as it is." And as Brierly obediently dropped into the chair which the doctor quickly placed beside him, the detective resumed.

"Since yesterday half a dozen theories have suggested themselves to my mind as possible explanations of this very daring murder, for I am now fully convinced that it is nothing less; but I make it a rule never to accept, much less announce, a belief, until I have established at least a reasonable series of corroborative circumstances.[Pg 118] This I have not done entirely to my satisfaction, and so we will not go into the theory of the case, but will see what facts we have established; and fact number one, to my mind, is this: Your brother, Mr. Brierly, was most certainly shot down with malice aforethought. He could not have shot himself, and no one, in that open place, could have killed him by accident. He may have been entirely unaware of it, but he had an enemy; and the deed of yesterday was planned, I believe, long ago, and studied carefully in every detail."

Robert Brierly flushed and paled. He opened his lips as if to speak, but the detective's eyes were steadfastly turned away, and he resumed almost at once.

"I blame myself that I did not establish myself here last night, as I at first thought of doing. But it is too late for useless regret. And now, about this boy. Have you, either of you, a thought, a suspicion, as to his identity?"

The doctor shook his head.

"You can't suspect one of the pupils, surely?" hazarded Brierly.

"Be sure that Mrs. Fry knows every pupil in Glenville, by sight, at least; and this lad was a stranger, remember. It was a clever lad who first secured the key to these rooms and then decoyed Mrs. Fry half[Pg 119] way across the town perhaps. How long must it have taken her, Doc, to go and come, in haste?"

"Quite half an hour, I should think."

"Well, we will assure ourselves of that later. Now we will suppose that this strange boy was acquainted with these rooms to some extent, and that he was, I fully believe. When Mrs. Fry is out of sight—and we know, from her story, that he was careful that she should be before he left his station upon the front porch—he slips indoors and evidently knows where to look for a lamp, which he does not light until he is inside this room." And Ferrars put a finger upon the match remarked upon by Mrs. Fry. "Now, as Mrs. Fry observed, there has been quite a film of dust in the air for the past twenty-four hours, so that, in spite of the good woman's tidy ways, it has accumulated upon this dark and shining wood." And he put down his finger and called their attention to its prints upon the table at his side.

"When we entered this room," he went on, "and I took it upon myself to look at that window with the swinging blind, under pretence of opening the shutters, I first noted that the visitor had left us a clue to his identity—several clues, indeed. Before seeing these I had thought that the boy was only an advance guard for some one else, but I see I was wrong. It was the[Pg 120] boy, and a very keen and clever boy, who entered here alone. See upon this table, upon the window sills, and upon the desk, the prints of one, two, and sometimes all four, small slender fingers."

Ferrars paused a moment, while they examined the dust prints, faint but yet clear, upon the dark wood, and making lines of clearer colour upon the painted brown of the window sills.

"And what," asked Brierly, speaking for the first time since the detective began his explanation—"what was his real object?"

"His real object! Ah, I see you have been observant, and if I am not much mistaken he has left something; but the things he took were taken solely to cover up the real reason of his coming. Mr. Charles Brierly's pistol, his watch, and the foreign bijouterie were so little wanted by this remarkable boy that he will no doubt get rid of them in some way at the first opportunity. All but one thing."

"And that?" asked Brierly, breathlessly.

Ferrars walked over to the writing-desk and signed them to follow. "Observe that letter file!" he said. "There is not much upon it, bills for school books, two or three circulars, and so on, but observe that this file hangs over the top of the desk, so that anything falling from it would touch just here. He moistened the tip of[Pg 121] a forefinger, and,

touching with it a small bit of paper lying upon the top of the desk and just below the letter file, he lifted it deftly, and they all saw beneath it the dust of the previous day upon the polished surface.

"This," said Ferrars, holding out the bit of paper upon the palm of his hand, "was torn from something pulled from this file since Mrs. Fry dusted the furniture here yesterday morning, after Charles Brierly left the house. See, as the paper was pulled from the file this bit came off, because it was attached at the corner, as you see. It is a fragment from a newspaper. If it had been a letter the paper would not have parted so readily; it would merely have torn through."

It was, indeed, a tiny scrap of newspaper, not of the best quality, and not half an inch from the smoothly-cut corner to the ragged edge, where the file had perforated it.

"The slip of printed paper from which this was torn," said Ferrars, "was the one thing which was taken from this room because it was wanted! The rest were merely carried away as a blind."

"But," asked the doctor, "why did he make this search among the books and papers?"

"To find perhaps this very thing," replied Ferrars. "But his first and most important errand was this." He drew forth the letter given into his hands by [Pg 122] Robert Brierly, and held it toward them. "Witness the thing itself. It bears no post-mark, it never did bear one, and it is thrust into the most conspicuous place, doubtless, after some looking about, in search of a better. I do not know its contents but I guess."

A gesture from Brierly cut short his speech. "Read it, both of you," he said, with something like a groan. "And tell me what it means."

Ferrars drew forth the sheet of note paper and slowly unfolded it. For a moment he scrutinised the page with a frown, and then began to read—

"Mr. Charles Brierly: I don't know why I should be drawn into your love affair any further, and I have said my last word about your friend, Miss G——. One would think that the proofs you have already had would be more than enough. She is not the first woman, with a pretty face and an innocent way, who has fooled and tricked a man. Why don't you ask her and have it out? You'll find she can scratch as well as the rest of her sex. One word more, when you have had it out with her, beware! Especially if she weeps and forgives you. Remember the 'woman scorned.'

"Don't write me again. I shall not answer any more questions. And, remember your promise, don't let her [Pg 123] dream that you ever heard of me. I shall feel safer. So good-bye and good luck. Yours, J. B."

Ferrars folded up this strange letter slowly, saying:

"This document has no date and no post office address." He held it in his hand for a moment in silence, looking at it thoughtfully, then. "I should like to retain this," he said, looking at Brierly, "as one of the documents in the case." And as Brierly silently bowed his assent, he added: "Have you formed an opinion concerning this letter?"

"I believe it is a shameful trick," declared Robert Brierly, hotly. "An attempt on the part of some person or persons to injure Miss Grant, who stands to me as a sister henceforth. If I am any judge of womankind, she is as good as she is lovely, and I believe that she mourns my brother's awful death as only a good, true and loving woman can. I wish you could and would say the same, Mr. Ferrars."

"I can say that you have said the only right and manly thing, in my opinion. You don't want to know what I think, however, but what can be done? And, first, this affair must be kept between ourselves. This letter makes it all the more important. If it has been put here to mislead justice and to make trouble, perfect silence regarding it will be the most baffling and [Pg 124]perplexing course we can pursue. And it may lead to some further manifestation. The word must go out at once that Mr. Brierly has desired these rooms closed for the present, with everything to remain untouched. Meantime I consider that we have got our hands upon some strong clues, if we can find the way to develop them aright. Don't ask me anything more now, gentlemen. I want time to study over this morning's discoveries, and Mr. Brierly, it is time you breakfasted."

At this moment there came a quick tap at the door, and Mrs. Fry's voice was heard without. At a signal from Ferrars, Doctor Barnes opened the door.

"Gentlemen," began the little woman in eager explanation, "I don't want to interrupt."

"We are just going," said the doctor politely.

"Oh, well, I got to thinking, after I went downstairs, and it came into my mind that I didn't see Miss Grant's picture on the top of the writing-desk up here. Mr. Brierly had had it three weeks or so, and he showed it to me himself and says, 'Mrs. Fry, this picture is in its proper place here in my room. You and Nellie both know and love Miss Grant, and so I may tell you that she is to be my wife some day, God willing.'" The woman's voice broke at the last word, and Robert Brierly made a quick stride back toward the desk. But Ferrars said, unconcernedly, "Thank you, Mrs.[Pg 125] Fry; we shall find it in the desk, I fancy," and then he explained to her Mr. Brierly's desire that the rooms remain closed to all curious visitors until further notice, adding that they would close the outside blinds and be downstairs directly; then, shutting the door upon the woman's retreating form, and softly turning the key in the lock again, Ferrars went to the desk, and, catching back Brierly's extended hand, said, "Wait!"

He came closer to the desk and bent to scan at the top shelf.

"Look," he said after a moment, "do you see that line, close to the back, where the dust is not quite so apparent? The picture has been taken from there." He took hold of the back and pulled the desk from the wall a few inches.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "I thought so!" and dropping upon one knee he drew out two pieces of cardboard. "I thought so," he repeated as he arose, and there was a steely gleam in his eyes as he held out to view the two halves of a fine picture of Hilda Grant, torn across the middle as if by a firm and vindictive hand. "This helps me," he said, with a touch of triumph in his voice. "It helps me more than all the rest."

He made a movement as if to put the picture together with the letter which he had put down upon the desk-top, into a capacious inner pocket, and then[Pg 126] suddenly withdrew his hand and bestowed them elsewhere, for, thrust into that safe side pocket, so convenient and capacious, was a folded newspaper, from which a "clipping" had been carefully cut, a paper which he had found in the rack near the desk, and had secreted, as he thought, unseen, at his earliest opportunity.

[Pg 127]

CHAPTER XI.DETAILS.

During the day that followed the discoveries in Mrs. Fry's upper chamber, Mr. Ferrars did a variety of things that surprised the brother of Charles Brierly; yes, and the doctor as well, and he said some things that seemed quite incomprehensible. For the detective was somewhat given to half-uttered soliloquy when he knew himself among "safe" people, and could therefore afford to relax his guard. Likewise he failed to say the things which Brierly, at least, expected, and much desired to hear.

His first movement after the three had breakfasted, was to ask for the keys of the cottage chambers, for they had been handed over to Brierly somewhat ostentatiously in the presence of Mrs. Fry and at the foot of the cottage stairs, by the doctor.

"I want to spend another half-hour in those rooms," he said, "and to so leave them that I shall know at[Pg 128] once if a human foot has so much as crossed the threshold."

This was all the explanation he chose to make then or upon his return.

Indeed, when he came back he spent all of the remaining time until high noon, smoking alone upon the doctor's neat lawn and along the shady side of the house, excusing himself and guarding against possible intrusion, by remarking that he felt the need of a little solitary self-communion.

At luncheon the question of the burial was discussed, and afterward Brierly announced his intentions to call upon Miss Grant, if the doctor thought her able to receive him.

"I have told Mrs. Marcy to keep the gossips out," Doctor Barnes said gravely, "she's too sensitive, Miss Grant I mean, to hear unfeeling or curious discussions of the case. But a friend who is in sympathy—that's another thing. She'll be better with such company than alone."

When Brierly had set out, the detective threw away his after-dinner cigar.

"Were you called to see the little lady who was taken ill here yesterday, after the close of the inquest?" he asked carelessly. "I forgot to inquire, in my desire to keep Brierly occupied."

[Pg 129]

The doctor shook his head. "I fancy she only needed time to recover from the effect of her gruesome position. It was a blunder, putting her in plain sight of that shrouded corpse. Those little blue-eyed women are masses of nerves and fine sensibilities—often. I don't see how it came about."

"If you mean the 'blunder' of putting those ladies where they were, it was I who blundered. I arranged to place them there."

"You!" the doctor's eyes opened wide in astonishment. "Then I retract. It was I who have blundered."

"Um—I am not so sure," Ferrars replied slowly, and then the subject as by mutual consent was ignored between them. Ferrars, who seemed for the time at least to have done his thinking, wrote several letters at the doctor's desk, and then prepared to go out.

"I asked permission to call and inquire after Mrs. Jamieson's health, yesterday," he said to the doctor, "and as she has not required your services she may be able to receive me now."

"There is another Esculapius in Glenville," reminded Doctor Barnes.

"So I have heard; but the lady is a person of good taste. She would have called you in if any one." He bowed and went out with a gleam of humour in his eyes.

[Pg 130]

"It's sometimes hard to guess what Ferrars means when he speaks with that queer look and tone," mused the doctor. "And who would have thought he would care or think of a formal call like this just now! And yet, that little woman is pretty enough to attract a man, I'm sure; and a detective may be as susceptible, I suppose, as another."

Ferrars waited for a few moments in the reception-room of the Glenville House, and was then conducted to the pretty suite occupied by Mrs. Jamieson. He found her half reclining in a long, low chair, with her friend, Mrs. Arthur, still in attendance. She wore a soft, loose robe of black, with billowy gauze-like ruffles, and floating ribbons of the same sable hue, relieved only by a knot of purple wood violets at her throat. Her face was very pale and her eyes, with their changing lights of greyish green and glinting blue, looking larger and deeper than usual because of the dark shadows beneath them, and the waves of her plentiful fair hair falling low and loose upon her forehead.

She welcomed her visitor with a faint half smile, and thanked him again for his kindness of the previous day. She blamed herself for her want of nerve and courage. She inquired after Miss Grant and expressed her sympathy for the bereaved girl,[Pg 131] and her desire to see her again, to know her, and serve her if possible; she had shown herself so brave, yet so womanly that day—and then the little lady told of her encounter with Miss Grant in the unfortunate character of messenger or bearer of bad news. She was glad there would be no lack of staunch friends to support the sweet girl in her time of need and trouble, and she finished by sending a pretty message to Hilda, and then without further question or comment concerning the murder or the progress of the case, she let the talk slip into the hands of her friend, and leaned back in her chair like one too weak for further effort, seeing which Ferrars soon withdrew.

"You will not consider this an example of my usual hospitality, I trust," Mrs. Jamieson said, as he bent over her chair to say farewell. "I fear I was not wise in refusing to let them call a physician, but I do dread being in the hands of a doctor. I shall be pleased to hear how this sad case progresses, Mr. Grant, and by the bye, has anything new occurred since the inquest? Any new witnesses or discoveries of any sort?"

But Ferrars shook his head, and murmuring something about time being short, and not taxing her good nature and strength further, he bowed low, and went away.

[Pg 132]

"It's very good of her," he mused, as he went, "to take such kindly interest in my supposed relative, Miss Grant. But she certainly showed scant interest in the chief actor in the drama, my friend Brierly."

The candles had just been lighted that evening, and Ferrars was once more waiting at the doctor's desk, while Brierly, pale and heavy-eyed, lounged by the long window near, when Dr. Barnes came in, hat in hand.

"As you felt some interest in Mrs. Jamieson's selection of a physician this morning," the latter said, "I will inform you that I have just been summoned to see that lady, professionally, of course," he added, as if by an afterthought, and smiling slightly.

"Thank you. Mrs. Jamieson has vindicated my belief in her good judgment," replied Ferrars, and then he wheeled about in his chair, and put out a detaining hand.

"Don't think I doubt your reserve, doctor," he went on, "when I ask you to avoid or evade, if needful, any discussion of this affair of ours. That is, avoid giving any information, be it ever so trivial." He shot a quick glance toward Brierly, and met the doctor's eye for one swift, momentary glance.

"My visit will be purely professional, and doubtless brief," was the reply, as the speaker passed from the[Pg 133] room, and Ferrars smiled, knowing that his friend understood the meaning behind the half jesting words.

A moment later Robert Brierly arose, yawned, and crossed the room to take up his hat.

"This inaction is horrible," he said, drearily. "I must get out. I wish I had walked down with Barnes. Won't you come out with me, Mr. Ferrars?"

The detective dipped his pen in the sand-box, and arose quickly. Then when he had found his hat, and had lowered the light over the writing table, he put a hand upon the other's shoulder.

"I'll go out with you, of course, Brierly," he said, and there was a world of sympathy, as well as complete understanding in his tone. "But first, I want to ask you to show yourself as little as possible upon the streets, for a few days to come at least, and then only in the company of the doctor or myself, and not to go out evenings at all unless similarly attended. It will be irksome, I know, but I believe it important, and I must ask this of you, too, without explanation, for the present at least."

The young man looked at him for a moment, earnestly and in silence.

"Do you ask this for reasons personal to myself, or because it seems to you to be for the interest of the investigation?" he asked slowly.

[Pg 134]

Ferrars smiled. "You're as able to take care of yourself as any man I know, Brierly," he said, with frank conviction. "It's for the interest of the case that we—and especially you—keep ourselves as much aloof as possible from questions and curiosity. There is another reason which I cannot give just yet."

"As you will. I have put myself and my brother's vindication in your hands, Mr. Ferrars, and I shall do nothing, be sure, to hinder your progress." As they passed out Brierly paused under the shadow of the porch. "May I ask if you have put the same embargo upon Miss Grant?" he questioned.

"I have, yes. Glenville must know what we wish it to know, and not a syllable more."

"Ah! I like that."

"Why?"

"Because it sounds as if you had really found the end of your thread here."

"Oh, yes. The beginning is here. Not of the case, mind; only of the clues. But heaven only knows where it may lead us before we find the end."

"What matters," said the brother of Charles Brierly, with a heavy sigh, "so long as it brings us to the truth!"

[Pg 135]

CHAPTER XII. "FERRISS-GRANT."

On the fourth day after Charles Brierly's untimely death, his body was taken to the city and laid beside his parents in the beautiful cemetery where love and grief had already prepared for him and his, a place of final rest.

News of the burial had been sent ahead, and a crowd of friends had assembled at the home of their father's oldest friend and family lawyer, where the body was received as that of a son, and the last rites of affection and respect were performed by the venerable rector who had seen the brothers grow from boys to men.

Doctor Barnes and Hilda Grant, with Mrs. Marcy as chaperone, accompanied the sad-hearted brother upon this journey, and they were somewhat surprised when Ferrars, whom they had thought must go with[Pg 136] them in his character of sole relative to the young lady, explained that his presence in Glenville just then was essential to the success of the work he had been called there to do.

"There are so many little things which I want to learn," he said. "In fact, I must know Glenville much better before I can go far in my search, and during your absence I can find the time for making many new acquaintances, and I mean to begin by cultivating your friend Doran, doctor."

They were gone three days, and when they returned they were but a party of three. "Poor Charlie Brierly," as his friends in the city had already begun to call the dead, lay in his last, quiet earthly home, and Robert had remained in the city.

"To settle up his brother's affairs, and put the matter of his death into the hands of the detectives." At least this is what Mr. Doran informed one of the loungers who, seeing the return of the doctor and the two ladies, had remarked upon Brierly's absence.

"Of course he'll have to come back here," Doran had further added. "He ain't touched the things in his brother's rooms yet, they say. But they'll wait better than the other business."

"Umph!" the villager sniffed. "He's let three days slip by without makin' much of a stir. Why on earth[Pg 137] ain't they had one o' them fellers down here long before this? They ain't seemed to hurry much."

"Well, you see, at first 'twas more than half believed that the shooting must have been by accident; and then, this is just between you and me, Jones; didn't you ever think that even after that jury's verdict, and the doctor's testimony, they, Doc. and the brother, might have wanted to make sure, by a sort of private and more thorough investigation of the wound, eh?"

"By crackey! Now that you speak of it, I heard Mason say't they was up an' movin' round at the doctor's that livelong night! Yes, sir, I reckon you've hit it!"

"My!" mused Samuel Doran as he moved away from the gossip. "They bite at my yarns like babies on a teethin' ring. Doc. knows his fellow critters, sure enough, and my work's laid out for me, I guess."

For Doran, after due consultation, and upon the doctor's voucher, had been taken a little way into the confidence of the three men, and Ferrars began to foresee in him a reliable helper.

The above brief conversation took place between Doran and Mr. Jones, professional depôt-lounger and occasional worker at odd jobs, while the doctor was putting Hilda and Mrs. Marcy into a waiting carriage, and when he had seen it drive away up town, Doran[Pg 138] came forward and addressed him in a tone quite audible to the bystanders.

"You see, I didn't forget the carriage, Doc. Hope Miss Grant ain't none the worse for her sad sort of journey." And then as the two walked away from the platform together, and he saw the doctor's eyes glancing from side to side, Doran went on. "Looking for Mr. Grant, Doc.? Well, I guess you won't see him; not before supper-time, anyhow. Fact is, I guess he's sort of fancy struck on that pretty-faced widow down at the Glenville House, and he's taken her out behind my greys this afternoon. I don't know as I blame him any; she is a dainty little wid."

The doctor stared at him in amazement at his first words, and then broke into a hearty laugh over the last.

"Upon my word, Doran, you will be able to write a new dictionary of abbreviations some day! Doran's Original! A dainty wid. is very good in its way; only, is she a 'wid.'?"

"That's what they say at the Glenville. Widow and rich."

At the next corner Doran halted. "Have to tear myself away," he said, amiably. "See you later," and the two men separated.

"Well, old man, how have you fared during the lull in your business?" asked Doctor Barnes, as his man came to meet him. "You don't look overworked."

[Pg 139]

"I ain't been, neither, sah. Your Mr. Grant or Ferrars, I ain't rightly got his name, I guess, sir, he 'pears ter like the cooks down to the Glenville better than me. I ain't had no bother with him since you left, sir, 'cept to make up his bed."

"I know. He has found some friends there, I fancy, Jude. Any news or messages?" and the doctor became at once absorbed in his neglected business.

Ferrars made his appearance at "supper time" as Doran had described the evening meal, and the two men had much to discuss. When Jude had placed the last dishes and retired, the detective, who thus far had been listening to the doctor's account of the journey and the sad funeral obsequies, looked up and said: "I suppose you have heard of my wanderings, doctor, and how I have forsaken poor Jude? The fact is, I have found plenty of leisure, and Mrs. Jamieson, when one comes to know her a little, is a very ab—interesting woman. The sort of woman, in fact, whose society I now and then enjoy. I have not neglected my duty, however, but there is absolutely nothing new. And, by the bye, I must see Miss Grant this evening; after that, if you are at liberty, we must have a talk. I have decided upon a change of plan, of which you must know."

He had left a note for Miss Grant, which advised her[Pg 140] of his intended call as soon as she should have become rested and refreshed. He was glad to find her so strong and so composed, and he came at once to the business in hand.

"Miss Grant," he began, "as I said in my note, I have something to propose to you which has presented itself to me as the best course during your absence; and, to begin, let me ask, have you still full confidence in me as a detective, and as a man whom you may trust?"

She lifted her fine clear eyes to his face and kept them there while she replied.

"I felt that I could trust you, Mr. Ferrars, when we first met. There has been no change in that feeling unless it may be the change to a larger measure of trust and confidence."

"Thank you." And now the cool detective flushed like a schoolboy. "I shall try hard to deserve your good opinion, and it encourages me to broach my singular proposal. I believe it will enable me to get on easier and with more rapidity if you will permit me to continue for an indefinite time in the rôle which I did not at first choose for myself, and I ask you if I may still remain, in the eyes of Glenville, as now, in the character of your cousin."

"To remain—in Glenville?"

[Pg 141]

"When Doctor Barnes sent for me, advising me that I might arrive in the character of your cousin, it was, of course, with the idea that this masquerade would be a brief one, and it was undertaken because the doctor knew how it would hamper if not really balk, my attempts to unravel this mystery if I were known as a detective. I cannot explain now, but I ask you to believe that, being here, I am now convinced that in laying aside this character I should put out of my hands my best weapon, the most direct means of following up and ferreting out a crime which I fully believe will prove to have been—that is, if we succeed in finding out the truth—a crime with a far-reaching plot behind it, and the cause of which most of us have not even remotely dreamed of."

"You have said enough. All is in your hands. Be what you will and must, the better to prove to the world that Charles Brierly, my husband in the sight of heaven, died as he lived, an upright gentleman and martyr, and not the suicide or the victim of a righteous vengeance that most people would for ever declare him if the truth is not made known."

"Understand," he urged, "that if you consent to this, you, as well as myself, will have a part to play, and an active part, perhaps, in the drama we are about to begin. Remember, you will have to keep up the [Pg 142]deception for weeks, possibly months; and to go and come at my desire."

"Do you mean," she asked, breathlessly, "that you may need my help?"

"I do need your help!"

"Oh!" she cried, letting go her splendid self-restraint for the moment. "You don't know what you are doing for me! To be active, to do something, instead of sitting still and eating my heart out in suspense. It will save me from madness perhaps. What could a true relative do for me more than you are doing and will do. You are my cousin!" And she put out her two hands to him with a new look of energy and resolve in her face. As he took the two slim hands in both his own and looked in her eyes, suddenly so aroused and purposeful, he saw for the first time, the full strength and force of will and nature behind that fair face and gentle bearing, the high spirit and courage animating the slender frame.

"Thank you," he said, simply, as he released her hands. "I feel that I can indeed rely upon you at need. You have the strength; can you have the patience as well? At present I can tell you very little. You will have to take much upon trust."

"I have anticipated that."

"For example, it is my inflexible rule never to reveal[Pg 143] the name of a suspected person until I have at least partial proof of guilt, enough to warrant an arrest. But you have a right to such confidence as I can give, and so, if you have a question to ask, and I think you have, let me answer it if I can."

"Oh, I thank you." She came a step nearer. "I ask myself one question, over and over; that there was no guilty secret in my poor boy's life and death, I know. Where, then, can be the motive?"

"The motive, ah! When we know that, we shall be at the beginning of the end of the matter. Sit down, Miss Grant, and I will put the case before you as I now see it."

She sank into the nearest seat without a word.

"As to the manner of the murder," he went on, "this is my conclusion. Some one, an enemy who hated or feared him, has informed himself of Mr. Charles Brierly's habits, and made himself familiar with the woods along the lake shore. Your friend, I learn, has practised target-shooting for some time. Have you ever thought that he might have had a reason for so doing?"

"Good heavens! No!"

"Well, that is only a suggestion. But this much is certain, the deed was premeditated, and carefully planned. I have satisfied myself that the assassin, approaching from the south, made almost the circuit[Pg 144] of that long mound, after making sure that no one was near, in order to reach the point, scarcely twelve feet from the place where the body was found, from which to fire the fatal shot."

"My God!"

"It was a bold venture, but not so dangerous as might at first appear. I find that from a point half way to the top of the mound one might be quite concealed from any one down by the lake shore while taking a long look up and down the road. And, in case of approach, there is at the south end of the mound a clump of bushes and young trees, where one could easily remain concealed while awaiting the victim or the passing of an interloper. From the town to a point not far south of the knoll or mound, as your people call it, the ground between the road and lake has been partially cleared of undergrowth for the comfort of picnickers and fishing parties, I am told."

"Yes." She sighed wonderingly. "But beyond that, a person wishing to be unseen from the lake or road could easily hide among the brush and trees. I believe all this was carefully studied and carried out, and that, five minutes after the shots were fired, the slayer was on his way southward to some point where a confederate waited, with some means of conveying themselves to a safe distance."

[Pg 145]

"Ah!" she whispered. "The boat?"

"Yes, the boat. It was a part of the plot, and rowed to that point by the confederate, I believe, for the purpose of misleading justice. Doran, who is an able helper, learned this morning that a farm hand, who was driving his stock across the road to drink at the lake, saw a man in a boat rowing up towards Glenville at half-past seven that morning."

"Oh! And can you follow them? Is the trail strong enough?"

"I think so. And there are other clues. There is much to be done here in Glenville first of all. At the inquest the testimony was purposely left vague and uncertain at some points."

"And why?"

"Because, somewhere, not far away, there is a person who is watching developments, and who may leave some track unsevered if he can be made to think we are off the scent. I mean to know my Glenville very well before I leave it, and some of its people too. And here you can help me as soon as you are strong enough."

"I am strong enough now. What more can I do?"

"You remember the foolish boy and his fright when questioned?"

"Of course."

"Well, as his teacher, can you not win his confidence[Pg 146] until his fear is overcome? That boy has not told all he knows."

"He is very dull, I fear. He said he saw a ghost."

"Well, we must know the nature of that ghost, and why it has closed his lips so effectually. Seriously I hope much from that lad."

"Then be sure I will do my best."

"You see, I am taking you at your word. And there's one more thing. I have been told that strangers go oftenest to the Glenville when in town. Now it behoves me to know the latest comers, and the newcomers there, and chance having given me opportunity to break the ice by being polite to Mrs. Jamieson, I have improved the moments. I don't

mean that I am studying the lady for any sinister purpose, but one can see that she is quite a social leader in the house, and through her I have already come to know several of the other inmates. Mrs. Jamieson very much desires to know you, and if you will allow her to call, as under the circumstances she desires to do, and if you will return that call—in short, put yourself upon the footing of an acquaintance—it will really help me greatly."

For a long moment Hilda did not speak, then "I will do as you wish, of course," she said, but the note of eager readiness had gone out of her voice. "But I cannot even think of that woman without living over again[Pg 147] our first meeting and the awful blow her news dealt me. Will I ever outlive the hurt of it?"

"It hurt her, too; I am sure of that. She is a keenly sensitive woman. She went from your schoolroom really ill, so her friend has told me."

"I can well believe that. She looked ill when she came to me. And who can wonder?" her tone softening. "Mrs. Jamieson is certainly kind, and why should we not be friends? She is a lady, refined and charming. Don't think me unreasonable, Mr. Ferrars. I shall be pleased to receive her, of course."

"Thank you. And remember, that for the present Francis Ferrars becomes Ferriss, Ferriss-Grant. You'll not forget your part!"

"I will not forget," she answered. And when he was gone she smiled a sad little womanly smile. "After all, a detective is but a man, and that petite, soft-spoken, dainty blonde woman is just the sort to fascinate a big-hearted, strong man like Francis Ferrars."

[Pg 148]

CHAPTER XIII. THE "LAKE COUNTY HERALD."

"Has Doran been here, doctor?"

These were the detective's first words when he entered the sanctum upon his return from the Marcy cottage, and before his host could do more than shake his head, Ferrars dropped into a seat beside him and went on in a lower tone.

"The fact is, doctor, I've got myself interested in a thing which, after all, may lead me astray. Do you take the *Lake County Herald*?"

"Upon my word!" ejaculated the doctor. "I do; yes. Want to peruse the sheet?"

"I don't suppose you file them?" went on Ferrars.

"File the *Herald*! No, I fire them, or Jude does."

"I wish you had not. The fact is I want very much to get hold of a copy dated November last, the 27th. Do you recall the bit of paper I took from Charles[Pg 149] Brierly's desk-top to demonstrate that something had been hastily pulled from the letter file by that clever boy of whom Mrs. Fry could tell so little?"

"Yes; surely." The doctor now began to look seriously interested.

"Well, the stolen paper was a newspaper clipping, cut from the *Herald* of November 27th last."

"Upon my word! But there, I won't ask questions."

"You need not. Did you not observe me looking over the papers in the rack?"

"Yes."

"Possibly you saw me with a paper in my hand soon after?"

The doctor stared and shook his head. "I've no eye for sleight-of-hand," he grumbled.

"Decidedly not, for I folded up that paper and thrust it in a breast pocket before your very eyes. I kept that tiny bit, too, which I picked up on my forefinger. It fitted into a column from which a piece had been cut, and that's how I know that the stolen article came from that paper. Very simple, after all, you see!"

"For you, yes."

"The fact that the clipping was thought worth stealing, makes me fancy it worth a perusal. I tried for it here in town, in a quiet way, but failed. Then[Pg 150] I appealed to Doran, and he has written to Lake, to the editor, whom he happens to know."

"It would be hard to find hereabouts a man of any importance whatever whom Sam Doran does not know. He grew up in Lake County, and has held half the offices in the county's gift."

"There may be a clue for us in that clipping. I discovered another thing in that room. The dead man wrote, or began, a letter to his brother. I learned this from a scrap, dated and addressed, which I found in the waste basket, and I am led to believe the letter was re-written, or rather begun anew, and sent, from the fact that a fresh blotter showed a fragment of Brierly's name, and the city address. That letter, if mailed, must have passed him as he came down. Did he mention getting it?"

Doctor Barnes shook his head.

"He said nothing about such a letter," he replied. "Does he know about this—this newspaper business?"

"Not a word. No one knows it but yourself. If it should prove to be a clue in my hands, it may be better, it will be better, I am sure, to keep it at present between us two. I think, however, that I may decide to show Miss—my cousin—that anonymous letter, and tell her something about that mysterious boy and his visit to her lover's rooms." And then Ferrars[Pg 151] turned from this subject to explain to the doctor his present plans. How he had determined to continue his masquerade, and to remain for a time in Glenville; and, though Mrs. Jamieson's name was not uttered, the doctor found himself wondering, as had Hilda Grant, if the detective had not found the place attractive for personal, as well as business reasons; and if a detective's heart must needs be of adamant after all.

Next morning Samuel Doran, who knew the detective only as "Hilda Grant's cousin and a right good fellow," drove ostentatiously to the door to take "Mr. Grant" for a drive.

"I've had a line from Joe Howlett," he began the moment they were upon the road. "He was just setting out for a run out of town, but he says he told the boys to look up that paper and send it along. So, I guess we'll see it soon, if it's in existence." And Doran chirruped to his team and promptly changed the subject. He did not know why this man beside him so much wished to obtain a six-months-old copy of a country newspaper, and he did not trouble himself to worry or wonder. "It was none of his business," he would have said if questioned, and Samuel Doran attended to his own business exclusively and was by so much the more a reliable helper when, his[Pg 152] aid being asked, the business of his neighbour became his own.

Ferrars was learning to know his man, and he knew that the time might soon come when Doran would be his closest confidant and strongest assistant in Glenville.

"We look for Brierly in a day or two," the detective said, casually, as they bowled along. "He will bring a professional gentleman with him," and he turned his head and the eyes of the two met. Ferrars had found that Doran could extract much meaning from a few words, at need.

"Something in the detective line, for instance? 'S that it?"

"That explanation will do for Glenville, Doran."

"Cert. Glenville ought to know it, too. We've been thinking 'twas about time one of 'em appeared," and Doran grinned.

Ferrars smiled, well satisfied. He knew that the dignified family lawyer and friend, who was coming to Glenville with Robert Brierly by his own desire, would be promptly accepted as the tardy and eagerly looked for "sleuth" who would "solve the mystery" at once and with the utmost ease.

And that is what happened.

The two men arrived a day earlier than they had[Pg 153] been expected, and the moment Robert Brierly found himself alone with Ferrars he drew from his pocket a letter, saying, as he unfolded it with gentle, careful touch:

"This letter, Mr. Ferrars, is the last written me by my brother. It was in the city, passing me on the way, before I had arrived here, and I found it, among others, at the office. I have not spoken of it even to the doctor. Read it, please."

Ferrars took the letter and read:

"MY DEAR ROB.,—Since writing you, I have found in an old newspaper, quite by accident, something which has almost set my head to spinning. I know what you will say to that, old boy. It brings up something out of the past; something of which I may have to tell you and which should have been told you before. It's the only thing, concerning myself that is, which you do not know as well as I, and if I have not confided this to you, it was because I almost feared to. But then, why try to explain and excuse on paper when we are to meet, please God, so soon. Brother mine, what if that flood tide which comes, they say, to each, once in life, was on its way to you and to me? Well, it shall not separate us, Rob.; not by my will. But stop. I shall grow[Pg 154] positively oracular if I keep on, (no one ever could understand an oracle, you know) and so, till we meet, adieu.

"BROTHER CHARLIE."

When Ferrars had read this strange missive once, he sat for a moment as if thinking, and then deliberately re-read it slowly, and with here and there a pause; when at last he handed it back to Brierly, he asked:

"Do you understand that letter?"

"No more than I do the riddle of the sphinx, Ferrars," he leaned forward eagerly as he put a question, and his eyes were apprehensive, though his voice was firm. "Do you connect that letter in any way with my brother's death?"

For a moment the detective was silent, thinking of the newspaper and the missing clipping. Then he replied slowly as if considering between the words.

"Of course it's possible, Mr. Brierly, but as yet I cannot give an opinion. If you will trust that letter to me for a few days, however, perhaps I may see more clearly. It's a surprise, I'll admit. I had fully decided in my own mind that howsoever much the murderer may have premeditated and planned, his victim was wholly unaware of an en— of his danger."

"You were about to say, of an enemy!"

[Pg 155]

"Yes. It is what I have been saying before seeing that letter." He put out his hand, and as Brierly placed the letter in it, he added, "Let us not discuss this further. Does your friend, Mr. Myers, know of it?"

"Not a word."

"Then for the present let it rest between us."

Two days after this interview Doran dropped in at the doctor's office, and before he left had managed to put a newspaper, folded small, into the hands of the detective, quite unperceived by the other occupants of the room. For while since Brierley's return, accompanied by his friend, these two had occupied together the rooms at Mrs. Fry's, the doctor's cottage was still headquarters for them all, while Ferrars now had solitary possession of the guest chamber, formerly assigned to Brierly.

Mr. Myers was a shrewd lawyer, as well as a faithful family friend. He had felt from the first that there was mystery as well as crime behind the death of Charles Brierly, who had been near and dear to him, as dear as an own son, for the two families had been almost as one ever since John Myers and the elder Brierly, who had been school friends and fellow students, finally entered together the career of matrimony.

[Pg 156]

There had been no children in the Myers homestead, and the two lads soon learned to look upon the Myers' house as their second home, and "Uncle" John Myers had ranked, in their regard, only second to their well beloved father. So that when the young men were left alone, in a broken and desolate home, that other door opened yet wider, and claimed them by right of affection.

Mr. Myers had been taken to the scene of the murder, had visited Hilda Grant, and by his own desire had examined the books, papers, and manuscripts in Charles Brierly's rooms, and on the day of Doran's call, a longer drive than he had yet taken had been arranged. He was going, accompanied by Brierly and driven by Doran, to look at the skiff, still unclaimed and waiting upon the lake shore below the town.

Ferrars, much to Doran's regret, had declined to accompany them from the first, and when he found himself in possession of the coveted newspaper, he joined the others in their desire that Doctor Barnes should take the fourth seat in the light surrey behind Doran's pet span; and the day being fine, and business by no means pressing, that gentleman consented.

CHAPTER XIV. A GHOST.

When Ferrars found himself alone he lost no time in locking his chamber door and beginning his study of ancient news.

Taking the newly arrived paper from beneath his pillow, where he had hastily thrust it, he spread out the mutilated copy beside it and speedily located the clipping which should explain, or interpret, Charles Brierly's last letter.

Putting the perforated paper over the other, as the quickest means to the end, he drew a pencil mark around the paragraph which appeared in the vacant space, and then, without pausing to read it, he reversed the two sheets and repeated the operation.

This done, he took up the marked paper and sat down to read and digest the secret.

"It won't take long to tell which side of this precious[Pg 158] square of paper contains the thing I want, I fancy," he meditated, as he smoothed out the sheet.

The printed paragraph outlined by his pencil was hardly three inches in length, and he read it through with a growing look of comprehension upon his face. "I wonder if that can be it?" he said to himself at the end. And then he slowly turned the paper and read the pencil-marked lines upon the other side.

When he had perused the brief lines over, his brow knit itself into a frown, and he re-read them, with his face still darkened by it. Then he uttered a short laugh, and laid the paper down across his knee.

"I wonder if the other fellow will know which side was which!" he muttered. "I'm blest if I do!" He sat for half an hour with the paper upon his knee, looking off into space, and wrinkling his brow in thought. Then he got up and put the two papers carefully away.

"I'm very thankful that I did not speak of this to Brierly," he thought as he went out and locked his door behind him. "It would be only another straw—yes, a whole weight of them, added to his load of doubt and trouble."

The two paragraphs read as follows, the first being an advertisement, with the usual heading, and in solid nonpareil type:—

"Charlie: A. has found you out. He will not give me your address. Be on guard at all times, for there is danger. All will be forgiven if you will come back, and F. will help you to avoid A. You are not safe where you are. The city is better, and we cannot feel

at ease knowing the risk you are running. At least stay where you are. Your brother or some friend ought to know. For your own sake do not treat this warning as you did A.'s other threat. He means it. Still at G. Street.

"M."

The second paragraph was in the form of a would-be facetious editorial paragraph, and ran thus:—

"Not to have a fortune is sad enough, but to go up and down in the land a millionaire and never know it is wretchedness indeed. Many are the foreign fortunes seeking American heirs, if we are to believe the advertising columns, and the heirs seeking fortunes are as the sands of the sea in number.

"There have been the Frayles, and the Jans, and a long retinue of lost heirs to waiting estates, and now it appears that the great Paisley fortune rusts in idleness and shamelessly accumulates, while the heirs of a certain Hugo Paisley, an Englishman who was last heard from in the Canadas many years ago, are much to be desired[Pg 160] now that the home supply of English bred Paisley stock is run out."

There was more to this screed below the line which marked the lower end of the clipping, but it contained no further reference to the Paisleys, merely dilating in a would-be humorous manner upon the degenerating influence of the foreign legacy upon the American citizen. But the advertisement upon the other side had been cut out in full, and exactly at the beginning and end.

It was puzzling and disappointing in the extreme. Ferrars had really looked upon this cut newspaper as his strongest card when he should have found the missing fragment, and now——! He thought and wondered, and re-read letter and clipping again and again, but to no good purpose, and at last he locked away the puzzling documents and went out to make a morning call upon Mrs. Jamieson.

That evening he talked first with Robert Brierly and then with the family lawyer, and to both he put the same direct questions, "What could they tell him of the early history of the Brierlys? of Mrs. Brierly's family and ancestors? Had they any relatives in England or Scotland, say? Were there any old family papers in the possession of either?"

Of Robert Brierly he also asked if, to his knowledge,[Pg 161] his brother had had at any time a love affair—not serious, but amusing, perhaps—a student's flirtation, even. Also, when and for how long, if at all, had the brothers been separated since their schooldays?

And Brierly had replied that he knew very little of his father's ancestors, beyond the fact that his grandfather Brierly was a Virginia gentleman, and his father an only son. The family, so far as he knew, had been Virginians for three generations, and what more, pray, could an American ask? As for his mother, she had been a Miss Louise

Cotterrell of Baltimore, her father a railway magnate of renown. In her desk, very much as she had left it, in a closed-up room in the old house, were bundles of old letters and ancient family papers, so his father had once told him; he had meant to examine them some time, but had not yet so done. If Ferrars desired it he would do this soon.

So far as his dead brother was concerned, Brierly was sure there had never been a love affair of even the most ephemeral sort. In fact, Charles had always been shy of women, and used to shirk his social duties as much as possible. Hilda Grant was, without doubt, his first and only love. As to their separations, there had been several. To begin, Charlie had been in college a year after he (Robert) had been graduated, and the following year, "because the boy had seemed run down and in[Pg 162] need of rest and change," he had spent a few months upon a ranch in Wyoming with a college friend. Then the two had made their European tour, and since, their only long separations had been when his work as journalist had taken him away from the city, sometimes for weeks, until Charlie had taken this school as a relief from his theological studies.

From Mr. Myers he could only learn that the father and mother of Robert and Charles Brierly were of good families, well known in their respective states, and both, he believed, "were as distinctly Americans as the war of the Revolution could make any American citizen of English descent." As to Charlie Brierly, Myers "didn't believe the boy had ever looked twice at a girl until he met with that lovely, sad-eyed sweetheart who, it was plain, was wearing out her heart in silent grief for him."

Then Ferrars went to see his supposed cousin, and asked her to review, mentally, her latest talks with her lover, and to see if she could not recall some mention of a discovery, a surprise, a perplexity possibly, which he wished to lay before his brother when he should come. But she shook her head sadly.

"Was he, to her knowledge, in the habit of collecting odd things from the newspapers?"

She shook her head. "He did not think very highly of our daily papers, and seldom if ever read beyond the[Pg 163] news of the day. The scandals and criminal reports he abhorred," she said.

"And he never alluded in any way to his family history, you say? Think, was there no mention of family facts or names?"

She looked up after some moments of thought. "I can only recall one thing which, after all, does not contain information, except as regards the two brothers. Charlie was speaking of the difference of their temperaments. Robert, he said, was intensely practical, living in and enjoying most, the present, and by anticipation, the future, while he (Charlie) was a dreamer, loving the past, and idealising its history. To illustrate, he told how, as boys, he loved to hear his mother, whom I fancy he resembled, tell the tales she had heard at her grandmother's knee, of the early days, the French convents, the

Indians, the colonists, the quaint living, the speech, which had for him such charms, while Robert would only hear of the fighting and would run away from the ancestral history."

Hilda, grown accustomed to his numerous queries and scant explanations, was not surprised at Ferrars' hurried departure at the end of the catechism, and he went back to the doctor's cottage with just one faint little possibility as a reward for all this interviewing. He had known Mr. Myers in the city, as a successful [Pg 164]detective is apt to know an able lawyer, well by reputation and personally a little, and he was glad to find in him a friend to the Brierlys, dead and living.

Going back that night he said to himself:

"It's of no use to try to go on like this; a confidant will save me a lot of time, and Myers is the man. I can't call upon the doctor; he's got his profession, and he belongs here. Myers can make my business and Brierly's his at need. Besides, he's a lawyer and won't be knocked entirely out by my wild theorising, and he's the one man who can get access to the ancestral documents at need."

He found the lawyer still upon the doctor's piazza, and without the least attempt at explanation invited him into his own room, where they were still closeted when, at midnight, Robert Brierly went slowly toward the Fry cottage, and the doctor, who never got his full quota of sleep, went yawning off to bed.

Mr. Myers spent five days in Glenville, and then went back to the city, taking Robert Brierly with him, "for a purpose," as he said to the doctor and Ferrars. "He can come back in a day or two if he chooses," the lawyer added, "but in truth, Robert, unless you're needed here, which I doubt, you'll be better at work. Mr. 'Ferriss-Grant,' here, will summon you at need."

When they were on board the train, and the lawyer[Pg 165] had exhausted the morning paper, he drew close to his companion in that confidential attitude travellers fall into when they do not converse for the entertainment of all on board, and said:

"Robert, I want to tell you why I so insisted upon your company back to the city. I want you to rouse yourself, to open your house, and when you first have looked over your father's and mother's private and business papers, I want you to turn over to me all such as are not too sacred for other eyes than yours; all letters, journals—if there are such—all, in fact, that deal in any way with your family, friends, and family history."

Brierly turned to look in his face.

"This is some of Ferrars' planning," he said.

"It is, and it has my hearty endorsement. Don't ask questions. Frank Ferrars knows what he is about."

"No doubt of it. I only wish I did."

"You'll know at the right time. And if it will be a comfort to you, I'll admit that, while I am to a certain degree in his confidence, I know no more what or whom he suspects than you do, for he won't accuse without proof of guilt, however much he suspects or believes. But I know this, Ferrars is convinced that the secret of your brother's death lies in the past."

[Pg 166]

"And in whose past?"

"In his own, in that of your family, or of Hilda Grant."

At the beginning of the following week Hilda Grant resumed her duties as school mistress, the place of Charles Brierly being filled by a young student from the city.

Mrs. Jamieson, meantime, had called upon Hilda, the call had been returned, and the two were now upon quite a friendly and sympathetic footing; it was not long before the fair, black-robed little figure was quite familiar to the children, to whom she gave generously sweets, pleasant words and smiles.

Sometimes she met Ferrars, who would look in now and then at the recess or noon hour to keep up his cousinly character, and Hilda Grant's clear eyes saw, day by day, the blue eyes of the pretty widow taking on a new look and noted that, while she was at all other times full of easy, charming chat, the approach of "Mr. Grant," would close the pretty lips and cause the white eyelids to quiver and fall.

The understanding between Hilda and the detective was now almost perfect, and one day, Ferrars, having asked her if she had ever heard Mrs. Jamieson speak of leaving Glenville, or name her place of residence, Hilda replied—

[Pg 167]

"I have heard her express herself as well pleased with Glenville, and I think she is in no haste to go. In truth, Mr. Ferrars, I am beginning to feel that, in seeing this lady as a means toward a selfish end, we, or I, have done wrong. That she is a woman of the world, and has seen much of good society, is evident, but she has lived, of late, a lonely and much secluded life, she tells me, her late husband having been a somewhat exacting invalid for two years before his death; and forgive me for my great frankness, I fear that because of your absorption in this trouble of mine, you have not thought or observed, how 'much' your acquaintance is becoming to Mrs. Jamieson. One woman can read

another as a man cannot, and I must not let you serve me at the cost of another's happiness perhaps."

"Miss Grant, is this a riddle?"

"Mr. Ferrars, no. Must I say plainly, then, that you are making yourself quite too interesting to this lady?"

Ferrars turned his face away for a moment. Then he replied slowly, as if choosing his words with difficulty.

"My friend, I believe time will prove you the mistaken one. I cannot take this flattering idea of yours to myself and venture to believe in it, but should it[Pg 168] have the smallest foundation in reality, rest your conscience upon this candid declaration. The lady cannot feel more interest in my unworthy self than I in her; from the first moment almost I have taken an interest in Mrs. Jamieson, such as I have seldom felt for any woman. Shall we let the subject rest here? Be sure I shall not let any personal interest conflict with, or supersede, the work I came here to do."

In later years Hilda remembered these words.

During the next two weeks the wheels of progress, so far as Ferrars' work was concerned, moved slowly, and even rested, or seemed so to do.

To be baffled in a small town, and by a small boy, was something new and surprising in the experience of detective Ferrars, but so it was. Work as he would, finesse as he might, he could find no trace of the boy, "about half grown, with dark eyes and hair, freckles, a polite way with him, and a cap pulled over his eyes," and this was the best description Mrs. Fry could give of the strange lad.

"If Mrs. Fry was not the honest woman she is," said the doctor, "I should call that boy a myth. How could he come and go so utterly unseen by all Glenville."

Samuel Doran, who still believed that "Mr. Grant" was Mr. Grant, and thought it most natural that he[Pg 169] should turn his attention to the mystery surrounding the murder of "his cousin's lover," thought otherwise.

"Pshaw!" he objected, "look at the raff of half-grown boys racing up and down these streets from sunset to pretty late bedtime, for kids, and how much different does one boy look from another in the dark? Mrs. Fry herself only saw him out in the twilight."

Ferrars reserved his criticism and opinions for the time.

Doran had taken upon himself the investigation of the "boat puzzle," as he called it, for the skiff remained, after many days, still drawn up, unmoored and unclaimed, by the

lake shore; and at last, by dint of much driving up and down the lake shore road and interviewing of boat owners, he brought to Ferrars this unsatisfactory solution.

Two weeks before the murder the skiff had been owned by a certain Jerry Small, hunter and fisherman by choice, blacksmith by profession. On a certain day a man dressed in outing costume had entered Small's shop, asked about the boat, and made him such a liberal offer for it, that Jerry had at once closed with him. The shop stood upon the outskirts of the town and close to the lake. The man had said that he was coming out from the city in a few days for a few weeks in the country, meaning to secure board, if possible,[Pg 170] near the lake shore. If Mr. Small did not mind, the boat might stay where it was until his return; the money was paid down, and Small engaged to care for the boat.

One day, after much agitation, Small decided that it must have been the day of the murder that he missed the boat; and one of his "kids" told him that "a gentleman with flannel clothes and whiskers" took away the boat "right early," and neither boat nor man had ever reappeared.

Then Ferrars tore his hair and fumed at the long delay only to learn that Jerry Small had left his house on the day after the murder to attend a sick brother, and had returned just two days ago.

"It's of no use," fumed the detective to Doctor Barnes; "I shall put a couple of fellows I know in the Jerry Small vicinity; it's right in their line of work, and probably they'll find the man and boy together—in Timbuctoo."

"And you will remain in Glenville, eh?" queried the doctor, grinning openly.

"Yes," with an answering grin, which somehow the doctor did not quite understand. "I'll stay—for a while longer."

As they sat at lunch next day a small boy brought Ferrars a note from the teacher.

[Pg 171]

"Come to me at once.—H. G."

That was all it said, and Ferrars lost no time in obeying the summons.

"You may not see much in my news," Hilda said, as she closed the door upon intruders. "But I have got Peter's story out of him at last."

"The foolish boy? Ah, that is something after all, at least, I hope it will prove so. Well?"

"It was slow work, for the boy has been terribly frightened. His story is most absurd."

"No matter, tell it in your own way."

"He says still that he saw a ghost—a live ghost. That it arose out of the bushes and waved its arms at him. It was dressed 'all in white like big sheets,' Peter said, and its face was black, with white eyes. It spoke to him 'very low and awful,' and told him to lie down and put his face to the ground until it went back into its grave. If he looked, or even told that he had seen a ghost, the grave would open and swallow him too. Then it held up a 'shiny big knife' and he tumbled over in sheer fright. After a long time he began to crawl toward the road; and when he at last looked around and saw no ghost anywhere, he ran as fast as he could. I am afraid," Hilda added, "that you'll think as I do, that some of the school boys have played the poor child a trick, or else that he has[Pg 172] imagined it all. It's too absurd to credit. Still, as you made a point of being told at once of whatever I might learn from Peter, I kept my promise. I'm afraid I've spoiled your luncheon." She finished with a wan little half smile.

The detective's face was very grave and he did not speak at once.

"Is it possible," she ejaculated, "that you find anything in the boy's story?"

Ferrars leaned forward and took her hand. "Miss Grant," he said gravely, "I believe that poor foolish Peter saw Charles Brierly's murderer."

He got up quickly. "Do you think the boy could be got to show you where he saw this apparition?"

"I asked him that. He thinks he might dare to go if he were protected by 'big mans.'"

"Then, arrange to leave your school for a short time, at, say two o'clock. I shall get Doran and his surrey. Have the boy ready——"

"Pardon me, I will say nothing to Peter. The surrey will be enough, he is wild to ride."

"That will be best then. I shall lose no time. I have a strong reason for wishing to see the precise place where this ghost appeared."

The sight of the surrey filled poor foolish Peter with delight, and he rode on in high glee, sitting[Pg 173] between Hilda and Ferrars, whom he had learned to know, and like, and trust. When they were abreast of the hill Hilda bent over him.

"Now, Peter, tell me just where you saw that ghost."

Instantly the boy's face blanched and he cowered in his seat, but Ferrars with gentle firmness interfered. Peter would show him the place, and then he would drive away the ghosts. Ghosts were afraid of grown men, he averred. And at last, hesitating much, and full of fears, Peter was finally persuaded, yielding at last to Doran's offer to let him sit in front "and drive one of the horses."

As they reached the lower end of the Indian Mound, the boy's lips began to quiver and one arm went up before his face, while he extended the other toward the thickest of brushwood before described by Ferrars. "That's where," he whimpered. "It comed up out there."

"From among the bushes?"

"Ye-us."

"Did it have any feet?"

"Oh-oh! Only head and arms—ugh!"

"Turn around, Doran," said Ferrars sharply, and then in a lower tone to Hilda, "I shall go to the city to-night."

When Hilda reached her room, at the close of the[Pg 174] school, she found this letter awaiting her, "left," Mrs. Marcy said, "by her cousin":

"DEAR COUSIN,—Even if you had been disengaged, I could have told you nothing except that what I have learned to-day impels me to look a little more closely to the other end of my line. For there is another end.

"Now that I shall have the two men on duty in the south end of the county, and with the doctor and Doran alert in G——, not to mention yourself, I can go where I have felt that I should be for the past week or more. Will you keep me informed of the slightest detail that in any way concerns our case? And will you do me one individual favour? I trust Mrs. J—— may not leave this place until I see you all again, but should she do so, will you inform me of her intention at once? You see that I am quite frank. I should deeply regret it, if she went away before I could see her again. Destroy this.

"Yours

hopefully,

"FERRARS."

[Pg 175]

CHAPTER XV. REBELLION.

May had passed, and June roses were in late bloom. The city was horrid with the warm sun-filtered air after a summer shower, and Robert Brierly looked pale and languid as he stepped from an elevator, in one of the great department houses wherein Ferrars had his bachelor quarters, and walked slowly to his door.

Possibly it was the warmth of a very warm June, or there may have been other causes. At any rate Frank Ferrars' face wore an almost haggard look in spite of the welcoming smile with which he held out his hand to greet his friend, for friends these two had grown to be during the past weeks. Friends warm and true and strong, in spite of the fact that the mystery surrounding the death of Charlie Brierly remained as much of a mystery as on the day when foolish Peter Kramer led the detective to the scene of his ghostly encounter.

[Pg 176]

There were dark lines beneath the keen gray eyes, which, Rob Brierly had declared, "compelled a man's trust," and the smooth, shaven cheek was almost hectic, symptoms which, in Ferrars, denoted, among other things, loss of sleep.

There was a moment of silence, after the men had exchanged greetings, and it seemed, almost, that each was covertly studying the other, and then Brierly tossed down his straw hat, and pulling a chair directly in front of that in which the detective lounged, said, abruptly:

"I shouldn't like to quarrel with you, Ferrars, but I've something on my mind, and I'm here to have it out with you."

"Oh! Then I am in it?" the detective spoke nonchalantly, carelessly almost, and as the other seemed hesitating for a word, he added: "Give us the first round, old man. I'm apprehensive."

"H—m! You look it. Ferrars, do you know that for weeks, ever since my return from Glenville, in fact, I have been under constant surveillance?"

"Constant sur——. Excuse me, it's not polite to repeat, Brierly, but what do you mean?"

"What I say. It's plain enough, somebody is watching me, following me day and night."

"Pshaw! You don't mean that, man!"

[Pg 177]

"But I do. And that is not all," he leaned forward and fixed his eyes upon those of his *vis-à-vis* as if watching for the effect of his words. "I have been slowly discovering that I am being controlled—constrained—in many ways."

"Upon my word!" Ferrars was leaning back in his chair with his face a mask, expressing nothing but grave attention. "Make it plainer, Brierly."

"I will. I'll make it so plain that there will be no room for misunderstanding. When I first came back from Glenville, I did not go out much, especially evenings, but when I

did, I began to fancy that I was spied upon, followed, and, after a time, I became sure of it."

"Stop! When did you observe this first?"

"I think it was on the third night after my return. I was going down to the Lyceum Club rooms, when something caused me to glance at a fellow on the other side of the street. You know my eyes are good!"

"Unusually so."

"Well, I came out in a very short time, alone, and the same fellow was lounging so close to the entrance that I recognised him at once."

"A bungler, evidently."

"Perhaps. Well, I met two men whom I know, just outside, and they dragged me back with them. When at last I left the place, I started to walk home, and when[Pg 178] I got upon the quieter streets I soon became conscious of some one keeping so evenly opposite me across the street, that I began to watch, and as the fellow glided, as quickly as possible under a street lamp, I recognised the same man."

"And you have seen him since?"

"Himself or another. A disguise is easy at night. I have been watched, at any rate, and followed again and again."

"Ah! And could you imagine his motive?"

"No." A look that was almost of anger crossed Brierly's face. "But I have wondered if it was the same as yours, and Myers, when you have contrived to keep me from going here and there, or doing this or that, unless accompanied by one or the other of you two."

He bent forward again after this utterance. His eyes seemed to challenge an answer.

But it did not come. Ferrars only sat with that look of grave inquiry still upon his face. He knew the man before him.

"Ferrars," exclaimed Brierly, when he saw that no answer, no defence, was to be made, "will you look me in the face and say that you, and Myers also, have not connived to keep me under your eyes? to accompany me when that was practicable, and to prevent my[Pg 179] going when it was not? I can recall several occasions when——"

He stopped short, checked in his utterance by a sudden, subtle change in the face of Ferrars, who had not stirred so much as an eyelid, but who spoke at once quietly, but with a certain tone of finality, of decision.

"Brierly, do you believe that James Myers is your friend, in the full meaning of the word?"

"I do! It is not that I doubt, or that——"

"And do you believe," went on Ferrars, putting aside his protest with a peremptory gesture: "do you believe that, while thus far I seem to have failed in unravelling the mystery in which your brother's death seems enshrouded, I have given it my most faithful study, my time, thought, effort and labour? That, in short, I have been true to your interest at all times?"

"I know it. You have been all that and more. You must hear me, Ferrars. And I beg that you will answer me. Why am I watched, thwarted, cajoled? Why do you and Myers fear to let me out of your sight? A few weeks ago you found, or seemed to find, your chief interest in Glenville; you looked for clues, for developments, there; and yet, you have not visited Glenville since you left it so suddenly. Even your own personal interest has not drawn you there for a single day."

[Pg 180]

"By my 'personal interest' you mean what, Brierly?"

"You know what I mean. Pardon me, and do not misunderstand me. I could not fail to see that you were interested in Mrs. Jamieson, and why not?" While Brierly spoke, the detective arose and began to pace the floor with lowered eyelids and slow tread. Brierly watching him, was silent a moment, then he seemed to pull himself together and to speak with enforced calmness. "Ferrars, do you know what thought has taken possession of my brain until I cannot shake it off?"

"Assuredly not," going on with his promenade. "But I shall be glad to hear."

"I have begun to fear—yes, to fear—that you have found some reason for suspecting me, and that your horribly acute logic has even caused Myers to doubt too."

"Man!" Ferrars swung about and suddenly faced him. "Much meditation has surely made you mad. Now, in heaven's name, so far as may be, let us understand each other. First, you are utterly wrong."

"Ah!"

"Next, you speak of Mrs. Jamieson, and of my 'personal interest.' I admit, willingly, that I am interested in that lady. But my personal feelings and interests must be subservient for a time to your business."

[Pg 181]

"Pardon me."

"And now, I did leave Glenville to follow you, and see that you did not spoil my plans by any rashness."

"You are talking a puzzle!"

"Let me talk it out then, for you have forced my hand. But for this I should have gone on as before. And I did not dream that Mr. Myers and I were playing our game so stupidly, so openly; nor that you, owing to your present preoccupation, would prove so astute."

"You have not bungled, be sure of that. You have been most wonderfully keen and clever, but it was this very preoccupation, as you call it, my abnormal sensitiveness, in fact, which made me study your every word and set me searching for its hidden meaning; and so I could not fail to see that you were handling me, hedging me about, for some purpose."

"Ah! You have said the word, Brierly." Ferrars resumed his seat opposite the other, and his tone became once more composed. "We were trying to 'hedge you about,' to put up a wall between you and the assassin who killed your brother. Wait! Let me say it all. It is little enough. Do you remember telling me of an 'assault' upon your brother, made by footpads, not long before he came to Glenville?"

[Pg 182]

"Yes."

"It was that which gave me my first real clue. It confirmed one of the few theories that seem to fit, or cover, the case so far as known; but it wanted confirmation. I found nothing in Glenville that was in any way opposed to this theory which I was growing to believe in, but, on the other hand, I found nothing there to strengthen it. When you left that place, I meant to follow soon. Meantime I had confided my theory to Mr. Myers, who promised not to lose sight of you before I should arrive."

"But why? Why?"

"Because I then believed, as I do now, that that attack upon your brother last summer was the first act in the tragedy which has robbed you of him. I believed the plot to be far-reaching. It may be a case of vengeance, a family feud. The motive is yet to be discovered, but I will admit to you that I have had, from the first, a reason to think that the affair has not yet ended; and so, as soon as I could, I followed you to town. It was well that I did so. Before I had been your shadow forty-eight hours, I had proof that you were being otherwise watched and followed."

"Great heavens! And that is why——" He stopped short and bowed his head.

"That is why Myers and I have been such officious[Pg 183] friends, why we have advised, remarked, and why I have tried to trace to his lair the man who has been your very frequent shadow."

"And you think he is——"

"The assassin himself or his tool."

"Good heavens! And you cannot guess his motive?"

"We might guess, of course, half a dozen motives. What I have hoped to find was something, some fact in your family history, your father's life, or your mother's, perhaps, that would fit into one of these guesses or theories, and make of it a probability."

And then the two went all over the array of possible reasons and motives, and Brierly again protested his lack of any knowledge which might serve as the feeblest of guides to the truth.

"There's one other thing," said Brierly, at last. "I want to know if the new man, whom Myers took on soon after you came to town, is one of your sleuths? He has annoyed me more than once by his persistent attentions."

Ferrars smiled. "I never supposed you a reader of the penny dreadful, Brierly," he said, "and 'sleuth' is a word which makes the actual detective smile, and which is not known to the professional vocabulary. Hicks is my man; yes. And he has followed you by day and[Pg 184] night when you have not had the company of either Myers or myself."

Robert Brierly threw back his head and folded his arms. After a moment of silence he got up and stood before the detective.

"Ferrars," he said, "I owe you and my absent friend an abject apology for my unworthy suspicions, my impatience under restraint. And now, I beg of you, let this end. I am warned, and I do not think myself a rash man. I believe I can protect myself, and how can I endure the thought that I must be hedged about by this constant guardianship, which may last indefinitely? Withdraw Hicks, and give your own valuable time to better things. Rather than go about knowing myself so fenced in and guarded, I will lock myself up in the attic, and remain a recluse and invisible. Heavens, man! am I so stupid or cowardly a man not to be able to cope with an enemy whom I know to be in ambush at my very heels?"

CHAPTER XVI. "OUT OF REACH."

Much as Ferrars regretted Brierly's discovery, he was not much surprised by it, nor could he avoid or refuse an explanation. Robert Brierly was not a child. He was a strong man, and a brave one; and Ferrars, putting himself in the other's place, felt at once the force of his words, the right of his position; and, after a day or two, he withdrew Hicks from his post. At the same time he observed with surprise and some misgiving that the shadow was no longer on duty. With two trusty and able men, by turns, always on watch within sight of the Myers place, no glimpse of him had been seen for more than a week.

And then, like a lightning flash from a clear sky, the blow fell.

It was Sunday evening, and in the aristocratic uptown street where the Myers lived there reigned a [Pg 186] Sabbath quiet, for the habitues of the little park beyond had left it with the fading twilight, and had already passed on their way townward.

Robert Brierly had been indoors since morning, and now, shortly after Mr. and Mrs. Myers had walked down the tree-shaded street, toward the church on the avenue three blocks away, he came out upon the broad front portico and stood for a moment looking idly up and down.

There had been concessions on both sides, since that interview between Brierly and Ferrars in which the former had demanded an explanation; and the withdrawal of Hicks had been but one of the results; another had been a promise, given by Brierly, whereby he pledged himself not to walk the city streets alone after dark, but if unaccompanied to take a cab, there being a stand only two blocks away, in the direction of the park.

These cabs, when wanted, were to be called by one of the servants, and to take him from the door; but on this Sunday night, as Brierly looked up and down with a growing wish to drive about town and have a talk with Ferrars, he remembered that on Sunday the servants were allowed to go out; all save one who must remain in charge, and decided that it would be absurd to stand there "like a prisoner bound [Pg 187] by invisible chains" and wait for a chance to bring either carriage or policeman. He had received on the previous evening letters from Glenville, from Hilda and Doctor Barnes, and his curiosity had been aroused by the contents of both. He had not seen the detective for four days, and he fancied that he, too, would have had news from the little lakeside town; more explicit and satisfactory news, doubtless, than that contained in his own letters.

"How absurd!" he muttered, apropos of his own thoughts. "No doubt I'll meet a hack before I reach the corner," and he lighted a cigar and went down the steps, glancing, from sheer force of habit, for the street at that moment seemed quite empty, up and down, as he went toward the cab stand.

"I was sure of it," he said again, as he neared the corner, at the end of the block farthest from his home. "There they are, both of them."

He was looking ahead, where a cab was coming at a slow trot toward him, while around the corner, still nearer, a policeman had just appeared.

As the two men approached each other the officer, who had been looking toward the approaching cab, turned his face toward Brierly, just as he was passing under the glare of a street lamp, and stopped short.

"Excuse me, sir; this is Mr. Brierly, I believe?"

[Pg 188]

Brierly nodded.

"Mr. Brierly, may I have a few words with you? I have been lately put upon this beat, sir; changed from the next lower one; and there is something you ought, for your own safety, to know. Will you walk a few steps with me? I hardly like to stop; I ought to be at the next corner right now, in fact."

Brierly looked toward the approaching cab. "The truth is," he said, "I want very much to get that cab down town; otherwise——"

"Oh, I'll fix that, sir." And the officer took a step out from the curbstone and, standing under the glare of the light just above, held up his hand, and whistled shrilly. "Follow us a few steps, Johnny," he said to the driver. "You are wanted down town." Then, turning toward Brierly, "If you'll just step across the street after me, I'll tell you what you ought to know. It's a short story." And he crossed the street briskly, and paused on the opposite side to await the other.

"You see, sir," he began, as Brierly joined him, "we can walk slow for a few steps here, where all's quiet."

Brierly paused to look back. The cab was turning at the corner, and it followed them, at a snail's pace, and close behind, down the still and shady side-street. "You see, I've been noticing, for a couple of weeks, or[Pg 189] maybe more, a fellow who just seemed to patrol the street next below this, almost as faithfully as I did, and for quite a time I wondered why; and thus I began to watch him, till I found that his promenades always took him round the corner, and seemed to bring him up right opposite the house you live in. I guess I ought to step a little brisker, sir; somebody's coming. The man was not very tall, and thick set like, and if I hadn't taken notice of him, at the first, almost, I might not have recognised him, for he changed his clothes almost every trip; sometimes dressing common, sometimes quite swell; but I knew him every time."

"Make it as short as you can, officer; we're almost at the corner."

"All right, sir." The man glanced back. "Your cab's here, all right, sir. I was just going to tell you how we came to arrest the fellow."

"Ah!" Brierly smiled in the dusk. It had puzzled Ferrars or seemed to, the sudden cessation of the spy's visits, and now he would be able to enlighten the detective. "You have him, then? This shall be worth something to you."

"I don't want a reward for doing a plain duty, sir. Just walk on ahead for a step; somebody's coming."

Preoccupied with the story, and without glancing[Pg 190] behind, Brierly did as he was told, and had advanced not ten paces from the corner, when there was a swift blow, a fall and a cry, three pistol shots in swift succession, and the rattle of wheels; all so close together that the time could have been counted in seconds.

"Brierly! Are you badly hurt?" The revolver fell from the fingers of the man who had prevented the second blow, and put to flight the sham policeman, who had so deftly contrived his appearance, with the aid of the cab, between the rounds of the policeman proper, the latter now came up panting, his footsteps hastened by the shrill call of the whistle in the hands of the new or latest comer. And then the inmates of the neighbouring houses rushed out, and, for the moment, there was confusion, consternation and clamour.

"Is he dead?"

"How did it happen?"

"Was it a sandbag?"

"To think of a holdup on this street!"

"There was a carriage, I'm sure."

And then the policeman was flashing his lantern about among them, as he bade them stand back, and the rescuer, who looked like a workman in his Sunday clothes, looked up, from the place where he knelt, supporting the head and shoulders of the unconscious man, and said:

[Pg 191]

"Gentlemen, this is Mr. Brierly, Robert Brierly of 1030 C—— Avenue; the Myers house, only two blocks away. He must be taken home at once. Has any one a cot? No, he must be carried." For at the name of the Myers house, a gentleman had proffered his carriage at once. "And, officer, call up help. If possible, that cab must be traced. Send to the stand just above and find out what cabs have left it within the past quarter hour.

Let some one go ahead and bring Doctor Glessner from just opposite 1030. He's at home."

"How did it happen?" asked Mr. Myers, two hours later, when the injured man—his wounded head carefully dressed—lay, still dazed and in a precarious condition, in his darkened room, with a trained nurse in attendance.

Ferrars having seen his friend in his own room, and in the hands of the doctors, had not waited for their verdict, but had set off to put in motion his plan for hunting down the would-be murderer, and he had but now returned, full of anxiety for the fate of the sufferer.

"How did it happen? After all our precautions, too!"

"It's easy to tell how it happened," replied Ferrars with some bitterness. "It happened, first, because[Pg 192] the enemy outwitted me, in spite of my cordon of guards; and, second, because Brierly lost patience and exposed himself."

"But how?"

"I can only give you my theory for that. He was alone in the house, eh?"

"Yes. We were both out when he went."

"He wanted, doubtless, to go to town. There was no servant at hand whom he wished to send, so he walked toward the hack stand, or so I suppose. At the corner he met a policeman, as he thought, of course, and so, for a moment did I. They stopped, spoke together, and the sham policeman hailed an empty cab that was close at hand; then they crossed the street, the cab following, and the policeman seemed to be doing the talking, as I saw when they passed under the light at the corner. I had suspected some new plot, from the fact that the spy had so suddenly disappeared, and I had watched your place, in person, for the past three nights."

"Oh! And that is why we have seen so little of you?"

"In part. Well, I made up my mind, when they walked away together down that tree-shaded cross-street, that there was something wrong. I was on the opposite side, and concluded to close up, seeing[Pg 193] that the cab was getting very near and edging close to their side, against all rules of the road. I had got half way across, and was just behind the cab, when I saw Brierly step ahead of the other, and then came the blow. As I sprang forward the cabby gave a loud hiss and the scoundrel saw me, and sprang for the cab with his arm still uplifted for another blow. I fired twice running, the third time turning long enough to send another shot at him as he entered the carriage door. Then he was off. I think he was hit, once at least."

"He will be caught, don't you think so? A cab driving like mad through those quiet streets?"

"No. He will not be caught, I fear."

"But why?"

"Because he will have had a second vehicle, a carriage, no doubt, not far away, and he will leave the cab, which will slacken up for a moment for that, and then dash on."

"How can you know that?"

"Because, when I find that I am dealing with a clever rascal I ask, what would I do in his place? And that is what I would have done."

"Well, well!" The lawyer sighed. "Poor Robert."

"If he only had been less impatient!" exclaimed Ferrars.

[Pg 194]

"If we had been wiser, and had not left him! The boy was in a peculiarly restless mood. Even my wife had observed that since morning."

"And why since morning?"

The lawyer looked at him gravely for a moment. "Did you ever hear of Ruth Glidden?" he asked.

"The orphan heiress? Of course; through the society columns of the newspapers."

"Ruth Glidden and the Brierly boys grew up as the best of friends and neighbours. The elders of the two families were friends equally warm. I believe in my soul that Glidden would gladly have seen his daughter marry one of the Brierly boys. And if things had run smooth—but there! Brierly was accounted a rich man, and he was until less than a year before his death, when the failure of the F. and S. Railway Company, and the North-Western Land concern, within three months of each other, left him a heavy loser. Even then, if Glidden had been alive all might have been well. But he died, two years before Brierly's death, and Ruth went to live with her purse-proud aunt, her father's sister. The two families had resided for years, side by side, on this avenue."

"And where is Miss Glidden now?" asked Ferrars.

"Here in this city since the day before yesterday.[Pg 195] She and her aunt have been abroad for a year, but I believe that they care for each other, though Robert is so proud, and that is not all. The brothers have each a few thousand dollars still, and it appears that shortly before his death, Charlie—he was always a methodical fellow—instructed his brother, in case of his sudden death, to make over all of his share to Miss Hilda

Grant. Robert told me of this upon his return with the body, and he also said that all he possessed should go, if needful, to the clearing up of this murder mystery."

"It may be needful," sighed Ferrars. "I fear it will be."

"Then, good-bye to Robert's hopes! With it he might make a lucky hit; might have a chance. Without it"—he shrugged his shoulders—"what can even so bright a journalist, as he undoubtedly is, do to win a fortune quickly. And he won't accept help, even from me, his father's oldest friend."

"No," said Ferrars, gloomily. "Of course not. How could he? Mr. Myers, I'll be honest and tell you that I'm afraid we've struck a blank wall. Things look dark on all hands, just now, for poor Brierly."

"What! Do you think the clue, the case, is lost then?"

"Not lost. Oh, no. Only, I fear, out of reach."

[Pg 196]

CHAPTER XVII. RUTH GLIDDEN.

Francis Ferrars sat in his sanctum, one could scarcely call it an office, although he received here, now and again, visitors of many sorts on business bent. For, since his coming to America, five years before, to find the heiress of Sir Hillary Massinger, he had read many another riddle, and now, as at first, he worked independently, but with the difference that he now undertook only such cases as especially attracted him by reason of their strangeness, or of the worth, or need, of the client.

Two letters lay before him, and as he pondered, frowning from time to time, he would take up one or the other and re-read a passage, and compress his lips and give vent to his thoughts in fragmentary sentences. For he had grown, because of much solitude, to think aloud when his thoughts [Pg 197] grew troublesome, voicing the pros and cons of a case, and seeming to find this an aid to clearness of thought.

"It's a most baffling thing," he declared, taking up for the third time a letter in the strong upright hand of Doctor Barnes. "I wonder just what the man meant by penning this," and once more he ran his eye over this paragraph which occurred at the end of a long letter:

"Mrs. Jamieson has not forgotten you. She asks after you now and then, when we meet, and desires to be remembered to you. She is not looking well, and, I fancy, finds Glenville duller than at first."

"I'll wager she does not think of me any oftener than I of her. And she can't know how ardently I long to stand before her and look into those changeable, blue-green eyes of hers. What strangely handsome eyes they are—And say—Ah! how will those eyes look then, I wonder?"

Presently he turns the sheet and reads again:

"I think you did well to instruct your two men here to make use of, and place confidence in Doran. He's a host in himself. And what do you think of the tramp they have traced to the vicinity of that[Pg 198] boat on the morning of the murder? He was seen, it appears, by at least three."

"Umph!" laying down the letter. "If you were here, my dear Barnes, I would tell you frankly—I feel just like being brutally frank with some one—that I have no doubt that the tramp is a link—there seems to be so many of them, and all detached—a link—and that he approached the boat in that tramp disguise, after separating from his confederate at some more distant point. Bah! It looks simple enough. Confederate leaves vehicle—or two horses, possibly—they could slip off the saddles and hobble them in a thicket, where they would look, to the passer-by, like a pair of grazing animals, or they might have used a wagon, travelling thus like two innocent bucolics. Then how plain to me, the assassin goes through the woods, watchfully, like an Indian. The tramp boatman patrols the shore, to signal to the other when the victim appears; or, should the assassin on shore be unable to creep upon his prey, the assassin in the boat may row boldly near, and, at the signal from the other, telling him there is a clear coast, fire upon the victim. If he is sure of his aim, how easy! And if seen by the victim, well—'Dead men tell no tales.'"

[Pg 199]

He muses silently awhile now, puts down the doctor's letter, and takes up the other.

"This," he murmurs, "is tantalising." And then he read from a letter, signed "Hilda G—".

"Mrs. Jamieson begins to complain of the dullness of this place, in spite of the fact that she has had a visit from her husband's brother, a Mr. Carl Jamieson. He did not make a long visit, and I saw but little of him. He is something of a cripple, a sufferer from rheumatism, and just back from the hot springs. I met him but once. He looks and talks like an Englishman, and has a dark eye that betokens, if I am a judge of eyes, a bad temper. I give you these details knowing that all concerning the little blonde lady is of interest to you."

"Of interest!" he muttered "I should think so! Doubly so, now that there's so little else of interest, or——" He stopped short, and wheeled about in his chair. His office-boy had swung open his door, and was saying:

"A lady to see you, sir." And Ferrars arose to confront a visitor, a brunette so tall and lissom, so glowing with the rich hues of health and beauty, so clear of eye, and direct of gaze, that Ferrars could not at[Pg 200] first find his usually obedient tongue, and then she spoke.

"Mr. Ferrars!" her voice was a low, rich contralto. "I am Miss Ruth Glidden, and I have come to you to seek information concerning the awful death of my friend, Charles Brierly. Pray let me explain myself at once."

Ferrars bowed, placed her a chair, and closed the half-open door.

"The Brierlys and my own people were old friends, and Robert and Charles Brierly were my childhood playmates. I arrived home, ten days ago, after a year spent in Europe, and learned, soon, of Charlie's sad fate. While this shock was still fresh upon me, I heard of Robert's narrow escape from a like attack. Mr. and Mrs. Myers are my dear friends. I have spent much of the past week under their roof, and——" There was a little catch of the breath, and then she went bravely on. "And I have had a long, frank talk, first with Mrs. Myers, and then with her husband. He has told me all that he could tell. He has assured me that you are wholly to be trusted and relied upon, and, knowing my wishes—my intentions, in fact—Mr. Myers has advised me to come to you."

"And in what way can I serve you, Miss Glidden?"

[Pg 201]

"Please understand me. I have heard the story; that there are clues, but broken and disconnected ones; that you know what should be done, but that there is a barrier in the way of the doing. Mr. Ferrars, as a true friend of Robert Brierly, I ask you to tell me what that barrier is? I have a right to know." The rich tints of olive and rose had faded from her rounded cheek, leaving it pale. But the dark eyes were still steadily intense in their regard.

As Ferrars was about to reply, after a moment of silent meditation, the door opened, and the boy came in again, softly and silently, and placed upon the desk a handful of letters, just arrived; laying a finger upon the topmost one, and glancing up at his employer, thus signifying that here was his excuse for entering at such a moment.

The letter was marked "immediate," and the handwriting was that of James Myers.

With a murmured apology, the detective opened it, and read—

"MY DEAR FERRARS,—During the day you will no doubt receive a call from Miss Glidden. I cannot dictate your course, but I write this to say that no friend of Brierly's has a better right to the truth—all of it—nor a stronger will and greater power to aid. Of her[Pg 202] ability to keep a secret you can judge when you meet her.

"Yours,
"JAMES MYERS."

When he had read this letter Ferrars silently proffered it to his visitor, and in silence she accepted and read it.

"I was strongly inclined to accede to your request, after, first, asking one question," he said, when she gave the letter back, still without speaking. "And now, having read this, I am quite ready to tell you what I can."

"And the question?"

"I will ask it, but have no right to insist upon the answer. Have you any motive, beyond the natural desire to understand the case, in coming to me?"

She leaned slightly toward him and kept her earnest eyes steadily upon his face as she replied, "I cannot believe that you credit me with coming here, on such an errand, simply because I wish to know. I do wish to know as much as possible, but let me first tell you, plainly, my motives and why I have assumed such a right or privilege. To begin, I am told that Robert Brierly will not be able to think or act for himself for some time to come."

"That, unhappily, is true."

[Pg 203]

"And how does this affect your position?"

"It is unfortunate for me, of course. The case has reached a point when I can hardly venture far unauthorised, and yet no moment should be lost. The time has come when skilled investigations, covering many weeks, perhaps, as well as long journeys, are necessary. We need also the constant watchfulness of a number of clever shadowers."

"And this requires—it will incur great expense?" she asked, quickly. "Is it not so?"

Ferrars bowed gravely.

"Mr. Ferrars," she began, and there was a sudden subtle change in her voice. "I am going to speak to you as a woman seldom speaks to a man, for I trust you, and we must understand each other. Two years ago, when I was leaving my old home for my aunt's house, having still a half year of study before me, with the year abroad, already planned, to follow, Robert Brierly came to bid me good-bye, and this is what he said; I remember

every word: 'Ruth, we have been playmates for ten years, and dear friends for almost ten years more. Now I am a man, and poor, and you a budding woman, soon to be launched into society, and an heiress. I would be a scoundrel to seek to bind you to any promise now, so I leave you free to see the world and to know your own heart. I have not a fortune, but[Pg 204] if labour and effort will bring it about I hope to be able to offer you a fit home some day, for I love you, and I shall not change. I want you to be happy, Ruth, more than all else, and so I say, go out into the world, dear, and if you find in it a good man whom you love, that is enough. But, remember this, as long as you remain Ruth Glidden, I shall hope to win you when I can do so and still feel myself a man, for I do not fear your wealth, Ruth, only I must first show myself to possess the ability to win my way, on your own level."

She paused a moment, and bent her face upon her hand. Then she resumed, almost in a whisper. "He would not let me speak. He knew too well that he had always been very dear to me, and he feared to take advantage of my inexperience. I loved and honoured him for that, and every day and every hour since that moment I have looked upon myself as his promised wife, and have been supremely happy in the thought. And now——" There was a little pause and a sobbing catch of the breath—"Have I not the right, Mr. Ferrars, to put out my hand and help in this work? To say what I came here to say? My fortune is ample. It is mine alone. I am of age, and my own mistress. Take me into your confidence, to the utmost, make me your banker, and push on the work. Robert Brierly may be helpless for weeks or months longer. Charlie Brierly[Pg 205] was a brother to me. No one has a stronger right to do this thing."

"Miss Glidden, have you thought or been told that——"

"That Robert may die? Yes. But I will never believe it. And, even so, there is yet more reason why this work should not be dropped, why no moment should be lost." She paused again, battling now for self-control; then—"There is one other thing," she resumed. "Mr. Myers has told me of the young lady, poor Charlie's *fiancée*. Will you tell me her name? He did not speak it, I am sure, and I want to write to her, to know her."

"That will be a kindly deed, for she, too, is an orphan. Her name is Hilda Grant."

"Hilda! Hilda Grant! Tell me, how does she look?"

"A brown-haired, grey-eyed, sweet-faced young woman, with a clear, healthy pallor and a rich colour in her lips alone. The hair is that golden brown verging upon auburn; she is tall, or seems so, because of her slight, almost fragile, gracefulness."

"Ah! Thank you, thank you. This is my own Hilda Grant, who was my schoolmate and dearest friend, and who cut me because she was poor, and buried herself in some rustic school-house. She shall not stay there. She shall come to me."

[Pg 206]

"I fancy she will hardly be induced to leave Glenville now."

"I must see her. She will come up to see Robert, surely!"

"She is only waiting to know when she may see him."

"Of course. And now, it is agreed, is it not? You will take me as a silent partner?"

"Since Mr. Myers sanctions it I cannot refuse. Besides, I see you are quite capable of instituting a new search, if I did."

"I will not deny it." And they smiled, each in the other's face.

"Perhaps," he said, now grave again, "when I have told you all my ideas, theories, and plans, you will not be so ready to risk a small fortune, for, unless I am greatly in error, you will think what I am about to propose, after I have reviewed the entire situation, the wildest bit of far-fetched imagining possible, especially as I cannot, even to you, describe, name, or in any manner characterise the person, or persons, whom I wish to follow up, for months it may be, and because the slender threads by which I connect them with the few facts and clues we have, would not hold in the eyes of the most visionary judge and jury in the land."

[Pg 207]

"It will hold in my eyes. Do you think I have not informed myself concerning you and your work? Is not Elias Lord my banker, and Mrs. Bathurst *persona grata* in my aunt's home? I am ready to listen, Mr. Ferrars."

[Pg 208]

CHAPTER XVIII. SUDDEN FLITTINGS.

For two weeks Ruth Glidden stood at the right hand of Mrs. Myers, and supplemented the trained nurse in the sick room.

At first she only entered while the patient slept, but after a few days the stupor began to lessen, and the flightiness, with which it had alternated, to decrease. And then one day he knew them, and, by the doctor's orders, the nurse withdrew and Ruth came to the bedside and sat down beside him.

"Robert, dear," she said, smiling down upon him, "you have very nearly let that wretched footpad spoil the good looks of the only lover I ever had, and to prevent further mischief I am come to take care of you." She said very little more then, but gradually the patient found himself being ruled by her nod, and liking the tyranny; so that when he was told that he was going[Pg 209] away to try what change of air and scene would do for his maltreated head, he listened to her while she told him a tale which seemed to interest her much, and through which the names Ferrars, Myers, Hilda, and the pronouns "they" and "them" often occurred. And then it came about that, supported to a carriage and transferred then to a swinging cot, he was taken on board a Pullman sleeper, and, with nurse and attendant, was whirled away southward.

Two days later, James Myers said good-bye to wife and friends and set sail, on board the good ship *Etruria en route* for Europe.

"Yes," he said to an acquaintance whom he met at the wharf. "I've wanted to make the trip, you know, for a long time, and now a matter of business, the looking up of certain titles and records, makes the journey needful, and I can combine pleasure and business." And then he turned away to say a few last words to Francis Ferrars before the signal sounded, and he must say good-bye to his anxious wife, to serious-faced Ruth Glidden.

"And now," said the detective to Ruth, "the next flitting will be toward Glenville."

Before the end of that week Mrs. Myers, who stood staunchly by Ruth, and would not hear of her going alone, Ruth herself, and a keen-eyed maid[Pg 210]—not the one who had accompanied the young heiress home from Europe, but another supplied by Mr. Ferrars—all arrived at Glenville, and took quarters at the Glenville House, where Hilda Grant soon sought her friend, and promised herself much comfort in her society.

At first, Miss Glidden did not seem to desire acquaintances, and Mrs. Jamieson complained that she found herself almost deserted, Hilda was so preoccupied with her newly-arrived friend. But this was soon changed.

Miss Glidden and her party had at first been placed in quarters which the young lady did not find to her taste. There must be a pleasanter chamber for her friend, Mrs. Myers, and a reception room for their joint use, and it ended in her securing the little parlour suite adjoining that of Mrs. Jamieson.

For a time even this close proximity did not seem to break the ice, and while having been introduced by Hilda, the two ladies were for some days strangers still.

For reasons which Ferrars might have explained if he would, Hilda Grant had not visited Robert Brierly while he lay under the care of doctor and nurse, and now that they were together, the two girls, having first exchanged fullest personal confidences, had much to say about Robert and his dead brother.

At the end of their first confidential talk Ruth had said: "Apropos of this, Hilda, my dear, let me remind you that I have not outgrown my dislike of being quizzed or questioned by the simply curious, for the sake of curiosity. I know what a small town is, and so, I warn you not to let the dear inhabitants know that I am more than a friend of your own. To proclaim me a friend of the Brierlys as well, will be just to expose us both to the inquisitive, and to set vivid imaginations at work."

Hilda's eyes studied her face a moment. "I think you will not be troubled. My acquaintances all know that I do not willingly talk on that terrible subject. Even Mrs. Jamieson, who saw its fearful beginning and who is with me often, seldom speaks of it to me."

"The pretty widow? Mr. Ferrars, pardon me, your cousin, spoke of her more than once," and Ruth cast a keen side glance at her friend's face.

"And she speaks of him, now and then."

"As which?"

"As my cousin; for so she believes him to be."

"And you think them mutually interested? I must really see more of my pretty neighbour."

Miss Glidden and her party had been a week in[Pg 212] Glenville when "Mr. Ferriss-Grant" arrived, and spent a few days in the village, making his home at the doctor's cottage, and passing most of his time with Hilda and her friends. Mrs. Jamieson had now made better progress with her fair and stately neighbour, and they might have been seen strolling toward the school-house together, or driving along the terrace road—for Mrs. Jamieson had declared that the tragedy of the lake shore had spoiled the lakeside road for her—in Doran's pony carriage, and, sometimes with "Miss Grant's cousin" for charioteer.

One evening the little party sauntered away from the pretty hotel together to walk to Hilda's home and sit for an hour upon Mrs. Marcy's broad and shaded piazza, which Mrs. Jamieson declared so charmingly secluded, after the chatter and movement, the coming and going upon that of the Glenville House.

They had been taking tea with Mrs. Myers and Ruth, Hilda, Mrs. Jamieson, and the sham cousin, who seemed to rather enjoy his *rôle*, if one might judge by his manner, and they seemed inclined to pass the remainder of the evening together.

They had not been long seated upon the vine-shaded piazza when Doctor Barnes came up the walk and dropped down upon the upper step, like one[Pg 213] quite at home. It

was now more than two weeks since Robert Brierly had been carried southward and the people of Glenville, for the most part, had heard most discouraging reports from the invalid, most of them given forth by the doctor, or "Sam" Doran, who, by the way, had been for the past month entertaining a warmly welcomed and much quoted "first cousin" from "out west."

The doctor held a letter in his hand, and seeing this, Miss Grant's cousin asked carelessly:

"Any news of general interest in that blue envelope, doctor?"

They could not see the doctor's face, but his voice was very grave when he replied, "I'm sorry to say yes. Our friend down south is in a very bad way."

"Mr. Brierly?" exclaimed Mrs. Jamieson. "Oh, doctor, tell us the worst." And then she murmured to Ruth, who sat near her, "Miss Grant's friend, you know, but of course you do. I have grown as much interested in his welfare, somehow, as if he were not really a stranger, whom I never saw but once."

The doctor had left his place, and crossed to the open window, through which the lamp-light shone upon the open letter.

[Pg 214]

"I think I can see to read it," he said, and bent over the sheet. "The writer says:

"I fear our friend will not see many more Florida suns; will not be here with us long. The change has been surprisingly rapid, and the heart is now seriously implicated. Do not be surprised if ill news comes at an early day."

He folded the letter. "Ill news should always be briefly told," he said.

When the ladies came in, that night, having parted from the two gentlemen who had escorted them as far as the piazza steps, they found Miss Glidden's maid hovering in the passage, near her mistress's door.

"Miss Glidden, ladies," she began in evident agitation, "I have been terribly frightened. Some one has been in your room, and, I fear, in that of this lady also. I sat, for an hour, on the back piazza with two of the housemaids, and when I came up, only a few steps from this room, some one slipped out from Mrs. Jamieson's door and round the corner toward the south hall. I did not think about it until I had gone into your room to make all ready for the night, and then I saw the closet door open, and the things upon your table pulled about as if some one had hurried much, and had left, when they[Pg 215] found it was not a sleeping room. Then I thought of the next room, of the person coming out so still and so sly——"

Miss Glidden pushed past the maid, and opened her own door. "Look in your room, Mrs. Jamieson," she said, "and see if you have really been robbed before we alarm the house. Susan, go with her."

Mrs. Jamieson found that her door was indeed unlocked, and her inner room showed plainly that a hasty hand had searched, here and there.

"It's lucky that I never leave money where it can be got at," she said to Ruth, when she had taken in the full extent of the mischief, "and that I haven't taken my jewel box from the hotel safe for three days. Even my purse was in my chatelaine with me. I find absolutely nothing gone. But my boxes, my frocks, my boots and wraps, even, have been pulled about. It's very strange. The thief must have been frightened away before anything was taken."

"Perhaps," suggested Miss Glidden, "the person wanted clothing, and heard Susan coming down the hall."

It was very strange, but, although they called the landlord, and told him privately of the invasion, and though there was a quiet but strict investigation, nothing came of it, and no one was even suspected.

[Pg 216]

"It was certainly some one from outside, who slipped in through some open door in the dark, while every one was out upon the piazzas, or in the grounds. These halls are not lighted until quite dark, sometimes, I find. I am thankful that you met with no loss, ladies," said mine host.

Next morning Mrs. Myers declared herself more than ready to leave Glenville. The thought of being in a house where an intruder found it so easy to make free with a lady's wardrobe, was not pleasant, and she hoped Ruth would not ask her to spend another week in the town. In fact she only stipulated for a fortnight's visit with her friend, Miss Grant, upon which Ruth promised that they would really go very soon, although she was enjoying herself.

Three days later a party of the Glenville's guests set off, after an early breakfast, for a long drive and a day's fishing, at a spot some miles distant and near the north end of the lake, at a famous picnic ground. Mrs. Jamieson was one of the merry crew, and she urged Ruth Glidden to join them, as did the others, all; but Ruth "never fished and detested picnics;" besides, the other people, she declared, were for the most part utter strangers, and Hilda and "Mr. Grant" were not invited.

When Mrs. Jamieson came back with the rest of [Pg 217] the tired merry-makers she knocked at Ruth's door to announce her return.

There was no response, and she entered her own rooms where she found, conspicuously placed, a note. It was in a strong masculine hand, and she opened it quickly, looking first at the name at the bottom of the sheet. It was F. Grant.

She caught her breath, and sat down to read, wondering still and her heart beating strangely.

"DEAR MADAM"—so ran the note—"You will be surprised, I know, to hear of our so sudden departure. Poor Brierly is dead, and we start to-day by the four o'clock express, hoping thus to reach the city before the party from the south arrive there. They started, we learn, on Tuesday morning. Mrs. Myers and Miss Glidden have kindly accompanied us, that my cousin may have the comfort of her friends' companionship, and the protection of the elder lady, whose guest she will be. In the haste of departure I am commissioned to say what they would have gladly said in person. For myself, while I trust we may meet again, and soon, may I presume to ask—in the event of your going away from Glenville, for my cousin has said it was possible—that you will let the doctor know where we may in future[Pg 218] address you? In the hope of seeing you again, at an early date, I am,

"Sincerely
"F. Grant." and hopefully,

An hour later she sent for Doctor Barnes, who came promptly.

"Doctor," she began, as soon as he had entered her room, and closed the door. "I won't try to deceive you. I have had twinges of neuralgia to-day, and my bottle is quite empty. But I want, most of all, to hear more about this sudden flitting. They have left me just a line of farewell. Of course I know about poor Mr. Brierly. There's no doubt of his death."

"Not the least in the world, I regret to say."

"It is very sad, but I suppose they were prepared for the news."

"Yes."

"Now tell me about Miss Grant. Is she not coming back to her school?"

"I don't quite know. Her cousin, who is a very successful man in business, goes abroad soon, and he would like to have her among her friends. Miss Glidden is anxious to keep her for a time at least. I believe she, Miss Grant, had a few words with Doran. I fancy it will end in her resignation."

[Pg 219]

"Then how I wish she would come abroad, if not with her cousin, then with me. For I shall go soon, I quite think. In fact there are business matters, of my husband's, money matters that require my presence. I must write to Miss Grant."

"Then address her at the Loremer House for the present. Miss Glidden has a suite of rooms there."

A week later Mrs. Jamieson, accompanied by her friend, Mrs. Arthur, looked in upon Doctor Barnes.

"I have come to say good-bye, doctor," said the former. "I leave here in the morning. My brother-in-law, who is on his way eastward, after a second hurried western trip, will be in the city to-morrow; I meet him there, and we sail in three days. Mr. Grant has written me that the ladies are all out of the city, so I shall not see them, but he thinks they will all be in London before the end of summer."

Thus of all the active dramatis personæ of our story, but few were left in Glenville by mid-July.

"And so the pretty widow's gone," said Samuel Doran to the doctor, the day after this final flitting. "Looks like Glenville couldn't be a healthy place in July. Even my 'first cousin from out west' skipped out sort of sudden yesterday; couldn't stay another minute."

[Pg 220]

"You don't look heartbroken," suggested the doctor.

"Oh, I can spare him. Anyhow, I guess 'twas time he went. Powerful eater, that first cousin of mine," and Doran grinned from ear to ear.

[Pg 221]

CHAPTER XIX. THROUGH THE MAIL.

From James Myers, Att'y, to Wendell Haynes, solicitor, with offices in Middle Temple Lane, off Fleet Street, which is London's legal heart and brain and life. Fleet Street, with such a history past, present, and to come, as may never be written in full by all the story-telling pens combined in this greatest literary centre, and working harmoniously; no, not in the space of a lifetime. Drafted in the office of the American lawyer, two days before his setting sail from New York, bound for London; and it was received, owing

to stress of weather, five days before its writer set foot on British ground; and read by its recipient with no little surprise.

This is what it contained:

[Pg 222]

"WENDELL HAYNES, Esq.,
"Middle Temple Lane, etc., London.

"DEAR SIR,—After four years I find myself in the act of reminding you of my continued existence, and of your promise of proffered help, should a day come when you, on that side, could aid me, on this, because of what you chose to consider your debt to me. To proceed: in two days I set out for England, and it will take me, upon my arrival, many days, perhaps, to find out what you, with your knowledge of places and people, and your easy access to the records, can do in half a day, no doubt. I feel sure that I can rely upon you to do for me this personal favour, which is not in the direct line of your business routine, perhaps, but is quite within your ability, I trust and hope; and without taxing too much your time and energy. And now to business.

"I have reason to think that a certain Paisley estate over there awaits an heir; and that one Hugo Paisley, or his heirs, have been advertised for. To know the exact status of the case, and something about the people with whom I may have to deal, at once, upon my arrival, will help me much. And it is to ask for this information at your hands that I now address you, and, being sure of your will to aid me, as well as confident of your ability, I shall[Pg 223] trust to hear that which I so much wish to know, upon my arrival in London, and from you.

"I sail by the *Etruria* and shall stop at Brown's.

"Yours sincerely,
"JAS. MYERS."

Wendell Haynes, solicitor, smiled as he read this missive. He had a most vivid remembrance of his first and only visit to America, and of his meeting with James Myers, quite by accident and shortly after his arrival in Chicago, which city had seemed, to the visitor, a more amazing thing than the howling wilderness which he had been in daily expectation of seeing, would have appeared to him.

In his efforts to run down a friend from the suburbs, Myers had consulted a hotel register, and seeing the name of the English lawyer, written by its owner just under his eye, he had first looked at the man, and then at the name, and, upon learning that he was an utter stranger to the city, and to the ways of its legal fraternity, he had presented his card.

Solicitor Haynes had visited America and the "States" to investigate what had appeared to be an effort, on the part of American agents, to cheat the widow of a certain English ranch owner out of her[Pg 224] just rights and lawful income, and the assistance rendered by Mr. Myers had earned him the lasting and earnestly expressed gratitude of his brother attorney, who asked for nothing better than an opportunity to repay the favour in kind, and no time was lost in the doing of it; so that when James Myers arrived at Brown's, and put his name upon the big register, the following letter was promptly handed him across the clerk's desk:

"JAMES MYERS, Esq.,
"Brown's Hotel, London.

"DEAR SIR,—Your favour of ... was very welcome, affording me, as it did, some small opportunity to return a very little of what I owe you for many past courtesies and most valuable service, and I have lost no time in looking up the information you desire.

"There is a large estate, that of the Paisleys of Illchester, awaiting the next of kin, who should be, so far as is known, the descendants of one Hugo Paisley who left this country nearly eighty years ago, and whose heirs, male or female, are entitled to inherit. There has been an effort made to hear from these heirs, and, strange to say, there has been no reply, nor has any other claimant appeared of lesser degree. If you[Pg 225] will call upon me upon your arrival I will give you all details and addresses so far as known to me, and shall be very glad if I can be of yet further use.

"Yours sincerely,
"W. D. HAYNES."

"You see," said Solicitor Haynes, at the close of an hour's talk with Lawyer Myers, "thus far all is quite clearly traced, and there is no doubt of the rights of the Hugo Paisley heirs—if such are to be found, and if they can prove their heirship."

"And the family, here in England, is quite extinct, then?"

"In the direct male line, yes. There may be cousins, or more distant relatives, but the father of Hugo Paisley had four children, the three eldest being boys, the youngest a girl. This girl married young and died childless. The elder son married, had one son, who did not live to become of age, and himself died before he had reached his forty-second year. Then the second son, Martin, inherited, and the last of his descendants died not quite two years ago, a widow and of middle age, I hear."

"And there have been no claimants?"

"None, I am told. The case was advertised, both here and in the United States, but with no results[Pg 226] as yet, unless——" The solicitor stopped short and looked keenly at

his visitor. "Something," he said, "has surprised, and I could almost imagine, disappointed you."

"You are quite sure of this?" the other urged, unheeding the last words. "There have been no claimants, near or remote?"

"Absolutely none." The solicitor looked again, questioningly, into the face of his *vis-à-vis*, and then something like surprise came into his own. "Upon my soul, Mr. Myers, if I were to express an opinion upon your state of mind, I should say—yes, upon my word I should say that you were disappointed, absurd as that would seem."

"Disappointed—how?"

"Because, by Jove, there have not been any applicants or claimants for Hugo Paisley's money."

"Well, you wouldn't be far wrong. I am surprised, at any rate, and I shall have to admit that this fact disarranges my plans, stops my hand, as it were." He got up and took his hat from the table. "I came here with the intention of telling you a rather long story, in the hope of enlisting your interest, perhaps your aid. Now, I find that I must defer the story, and go at once and cable to friends at home."

He wasted no more words, but, promising to dine[Pg 227] with his friend later, hurried back to his hotel, where he found a cablegram awaiting him.

Previous to his departure from New York, Ferrars had given him a code by which to frame any needful cable messages, concerning the business of the journey, or the people whom it concerned. The detective had warned all of the little group, now so closely bound together by mutual interest and in the same endeavour, to be constantly on guard against spies.

"Unless I am greatly mistaken," he said, "every effort will be made to keep in view all who are known to be connected with the Brierlys and their interests, and the fact that we are fighting an unknown quantity makes it the more necessary that we use double caution. We don't want another 'blow in the dark,' any of us; and, above all, we do not want to be followed across the water, and shadowed when there."

The wisdom of this was admitted, for, since the attack upon Robert Brierly, the unseen foe had become a bugbear indeed to Hilda and Ruth; and they abetted Ferrars in all possible ways, no longer questioning and with growing confidence in his leadership, in spite of the seeming absence of results.

The cable message which Mr. Myers read was worded as follows:

[Pg 228]"Jas. Myers, etc., etc.

"H. has seen brother, who is watching affairs, unable to sail at present; letter follows. F."

These were the words; their meaning, according to the chart, was this:

"Hilda has seen the western tourist. He is watching us, and we will not attempt to sail until he is off the scent. F."

Half an hour later this message went speeding back to New York, and from thence westward:

"To F. Ferrars, etc., etc.

"Case all right; way clear; no claimants."

Which meant precisely what it said.

A few days later two letters passed each other in mid-ocean. The one westward-bound read thus:

"MY DEAR FERRARS,—It will not take me long to tell all that I have to tell concerning my mission. As I had anticipated, Mr. Wendell Haynes was more than ready to assist, and had the few facts I now give you[Pg 229] already tabulated and awaiting me. Here they are in the order of your written queries:

"1st. The Paisley fortune is no hoax. There is a fine country seat, a factory, a town house, and various stocks, bonds and city investments amounting in all to above a million in American dollars.

"2nd. The English Paisleys are quite extinct, and the claim to the whole estate can surely be established by our claimant.

"3rd. And this may change all your plans possibly, and will startle you quite as much as it has me. There has been no effort made by any one to claim or get possession of the property, and there is no clue to such a person if he, she, or they exist. This balks us. How shall I proceed? Was ever a trail so completely hidden?

"Mr. Haynes has placed himself, and his knowledge and resources—both being extensive—entirely at our disposal. If you still think well of the advertising plan, wire me. I am idle until I hear from you, and mean to employ myself doing London, which will render my part of the enforced waiting very pleasant.

"By the by, I omitted to say that there have been but two 'notices' published. No unseemly haste, you observe. Awaiting your reply, I am,

"Yours

sincerely,

"JAS. MYERS."

[Pg 230]

The letter which passed this midway was from Ferrars, and contained some information.

"DEAR SIR AND FRIEND"—it began—

"This finds us all in the city, the ladies at the flats, and myself in the old quarters, with which you have lately grown familiar. I fancied that we were quite snugly placed and could pass our period of waiting your summons with some ease of mind. Your house, which looks as untenanted and forbidding as possible, has been viewed, your caretaker says, by a 'party' who, from the description, I take to be the man whom we have termed the 'westerner,' and who was seen for a day or two in Glenville.

"But I have been rudely aroused from my comfortable sense of security. Yesterday Miss Grant and Miss Glidden were down town, and were driven out of the avenue by a long political parade. Driving down a cross street their coachman turned up Clark Street, only to find that another contingent was moving into that street, at the upper corner of the block. It was moving toward them, and the man quickly reined his horses close to the curb to await the passage of the line. Directly opposite the carriage was the sign, so frequent upon that street, of three balls, and while Miss Hilda gazed with some idle curiosity at the,[Pg 231] to her, strange sight, a man came out tucking something into his waistcoat as he stepped down upon the pavement, glanced about him, and, without seeming to observe the carriage, or its occupants, walked quickly away. She had seen him, twice at least, at the Glenville, and she knew him at once. She ordered the driver home by a round-about road, but she is certain that the man was the same whom we thought a spy or worse. The most disagreeable feature of this is that I have not yet seen the man, watch as I would, and if he is watching us, he has the advantage. If the worst comes to the worst we shall have to spread out and go aboard our boat, when the time comes, singly and in disguise.

"Evening—

"Since writing the above I have visited the place of the three gilt balls and have found, at last, 'a straight tip.'

"The fellow had just redeemed a watch, pawned three days ago. It was a very pathetic story that we got out of the warm-hearted pawnbroker. The young man was overjoyed to be able to claim his watch so soon, for it was a keepsake given him by his dead father, and he 'prized it beyond words.' The watch was a fine foreign made affair, and on the inside was engraved Charles A. 'Brailly' or[Pg 232] 'Brierly'; he could not remember exactly. So, you see, the probability is that we have stumbled upon the watch stolen from Brierly's room in Glenville, which the fellow first pawned, from necessity perhaps, and then hastened to redeem, having taken the alarm in some way. He may even have been made aware that a description of the stolen watch and jewels had been lodged with

the police. But all this is guessing. I am still confident that we shall find the solution of our problem on the other side of the Atlantic. Miss Glidden is still bent upon crossing, and your wife is her willing abettor. As for the fifth member of our party, he is at present like wax in our hands. Mind I say our, not mine alone.

"There is nothing new from Glenville—how could there be—now? I need not tell you about ourselves; Mrs. Myers, I know, keeps you well up in our personal history. And so, good luck to you. From yours in good hope,

"F. S. FERRARS."

Two days later this letter reached Ferrars.

"Glenville, July——

"FERRIS GRANT, ESQ.

"DEAR SIR,—Yesterday, too late for the mail, I struck luck, at least I hope you will call it luck.[Pg 233] It came through our 'girl,' that is, the young woman who presides in my kitchen; she has a chum in the kitchen of the Glenville, and last evening they were exchanging confidences upon my back porch. It appears—I'm going to cut the story short—it appears that the night clerk is a kodak fiend, and a month or two ago the fellow, after being guyed about his poor work until he got rattled, vowed he'd contrive to get a picture of every person who set foot in that house for the next month to come, and that they should be the judges as to whether the pictures were good or not. Now it turns out that our traveller from out west was one of the victims of this rash vow, and when I found it out I lost no time in getting that picture. The fellow likes to drive my horses, and he always owes me a pretty good bill. I enclose to you this masterpiece of art. As you never saw him, to your knowledge, and as I had one glimpse, you will be glad, I dare say, to be told that the Glenville House people think it a good likeness.

"There's nothing else in the way of news, and so, good luck to you, and a good voyage.

"SAMUEL DORAN."

When Francis Ferrars had looked long at the picture enclosed in Doran's letter he started, and ejaculated,[Pg 234] in the short, jerky fashion in which he used habitually to commune with himself, "That face!—I've seen it before—but where?" And then he suddenly seemed to see himself approaching the City Hall, and noting, as he walked on, this same face.

It was the habit of the detective to see all that came within his range of vision, as he went about, but he might not have retained a memory so distinct if he had not, in leaving the very same place, encountered the man again, his position slightly shifted, but his attitude as before, that of one who waits, or watches.

For some moments he looked thoughtfully at the picture, which was that of a dark and bearded man wearing a double eyeglass, and then he placed it under a strong magnifier, and looked again.

"Ah!" he finally exclaimed, "I was sure of it! The man is in disguise!"

He took the picture at once to the ladies' sitting room, and held it before the eyes of Hilda Grant.

"Do you know it?" he asked.

"That!" She caught it from his hand, and held it toward the light. "It is the man whom——" She paused, looking at Ferrars, inquiringly.

"Whom you saw at the pawnshop?"

"Yes. And——"

"And at Glenville?"

[Pg 235]

"Yes, at the hotel."

"And he was tall, you say, and broad-shouldered?"

"Yes."

"Strong looking, in fact. As if——" He checked himself at sight of the intent look upon Ruth Glidden's face, and she took the word from his lips.

"As if," she repeated, icily, "he could shoot straight, or strike a man down in the dark." She arose and took the picture. "It is a bad face," she said, with decision.

"It is a disguised face," replied Ferrars. "Nevertheless, I think I shall know it, even without the beard and thick, bushy wig. Let me see?" He took a piece of paper, and a pencil, and placing the photograph before him, began to sketch in the head, working from the nose, mouth, eyes and facial outlines outward, and drawing, instead of the thick, pointed beard, a thin-lipped mouth and smooth chin. Then, when the young ladies had studied this, he copied in the moustache of the photograph.

"It belongs to the face," he observed, as he worked; "and probably grew there."

Late that night, as the detective sat alone in his room with a pile of just completed letters before him, he again drew the photograph from its envelope and studied it with wrinkling brow.

"If you are the man," he said, with slow moving lips[Pg 236] that grew into hard, stern lines as he spoke—"If you are the man I will find you! If you have struck the first blow—and it's very possible—you also struck the second. But the work is not yet finished, and, unless my patience and skill desert me, the last stroke shall be mine."

[Pg 237]

CHAPTER XX.A WOMAN'S HEART.

The blow dealt Robert Brierly by the sham policeman had been a severe one, and at first it had been feared that he would recover, if at all, with his fine intellect dulled if not altogether shattered. But the best medical skill, aided by a fine constitution, and above all, the new impulse given his lately despondent spirits by the appearance at his bedside of Ruth Glidden, her eyes filled with love, and pity and resolve, all had combined to bring about good results, and so, one evening, not quite two months after that blow in the dark, he found himself sitting in an easy chair, very pale and much emaciated but, save for this, and his exceeding bodily weakness, quite himself again. Indeed a more buoyant and hopeful self than he had been for many a day, and with good reason.

At first, and for one week, his mind had been a blank, then delirium had claimed and swayed him, until one[Pg 238] day the crisis came, and with it a sudden clearing of mind and brain.

Through it all Ruth had been beside him, and now she called the doctor aside and spoke with the grave frankness of a woman whose all is at stake, and who knows there is no time for formalities.

"Doctor, tell me the truth. He will know me now, and he must not see me unless—unless I tell him I have come to stay. Will a shock, such a shock, render his chances more critical? The surprise and——" She turned away her face. "Doctor, you know!"

Then the good physician, who had nursed her through her childish ills, and closed her father's eyes in death, put a fatherly hand upon her shoulder. "There must be absolutely no emotion," he said. "But a happy surprise, just now, if it comes with gentleness, and firmness—that tender firmness to which the weak so instinctively turns—will do him good, not harm. Only, it must be for just a moment, and he must not speak. My dear, I believe I can trust you."

He called away the nurse and beckoned Ruth to follow him. Then he went straight to the bedside, where the sick man lay, so pale and deathlike, beneath his linen bandages.

[Pg 239]

"Robert," he said, slowly. "Listen, and do not speak. I bring you a friend who will not be denied; you know who it is. You must not attempt to speak, Rob, for your own sake. If I thought you would not obey me I would shut her out even now." And with the last word upon his lips he was gone and Ruth stood in his place.

Involuntarily the wounded man opened his lips, but she put a soft finger upon them, and shook her head. She was very pale, but the voice, which was the merest murmur, yet how distinct to his ears, was quite controlled.

"Robert, you are not to speak. I have promised that for us both. I have been near you since the first, and I am going to stay until—until I can trust you to others. And, Rob, you must get well for my sake. You must, dear, or you'll make me wear mourning all my days for the only lover I have ever had. Don't fail me, my dear." She bent above him, placed her soft, cool hand upon his own, pressed a kiss upon his brow, and the next moment the doctor stood in her place, and was saying, "Don't be uneasy, Rob, old man; that was a real live dream, which will come back daily, so long as you are good, and remember, sir, you have two tyrants now."

And so it proved.

[Pg 240]

When Brierly was at last fit to be removed to that safe and comfortable haven—not too far from the doctor's watchful care—which they fictitiously named the South, Ruth bade him good-bye one day, with a tear in her eye, and a smile upon her lip.

"You will soon be a well man now," she said to him. "And when that time comes, and the tyrant Ferrars permits it, you will come to me, of course." And with the rare meaning smile he knew and loved so well, and so well understood, she left him, to bestow her cheering presence upon Hilda Grant and Glenville.

And now, on a fine midsummer night, thinner than of old, and paler, with a scar across his left temple, and a languor of body which he was beginning to find irksome because of the revived activity of the lately clouded and heavy brain, Brierly sat in a pleasant upper room of a certain hospitable suburban villa, the only south he had known since they bore him away from the Myers' home, and whirled him away from the city on a suburban train, to stop, within the same hour, and leave him, safely guarded, in this snug retreat.

"You see," the detective was saying, "I had found this series of tiny clues, and thought all was plain sailing, until that mysterious boy paid his visit to your brother's room and

left almost as much as he[Pg 241] took away. That forced me to reconstruct my theory somewhat, and set me to wondering just what status Miss Grant held in the game our unknown assassin was playing. For I will do the young lady, and myself, the justice to say that I never for a moment doubted her. That fling at her gave me, however, a key to the character of the unknown." He was silent a moment, then, "After all," he said, "it was you who gave me my first suggestion of the truth."

"How? when I had no conception of it?"

"By telling of that attack upon your brother the winter before his coming here."

"I do not recall it."

"I suppose not; but in telling me of your brother's career, before his going to Glenville, you spoke of an accident which occurred to him, an accident which was eventually the cause of his going to Glenville. I made a note of this, and, later, questioned Mr. Myers. He told me of the attack at the mouth of an alley. How two men assailed your brother, and only his presence of mind in shouting as he struck, and striking hard and with skilled fists, saved him from death at their hands; how he warded off, and held, the fellow with the bludgeon, but was cut by the other's knife. I might not have been so much impressed by these details, perhaps, had I not learned that your brother was[Pg 242] returning from a visit of charity to the sick, a visit which he had paid regularly for some time. Then I thought I saw light upon the subject."

"Yes." Brierly bent toward the detective, a keen light in his eyes. "I have been very dull, Ferrars, but I have had time for much thinking of late. I think that, at last, I begin to understand."

"And what do you understand?" A slow smile was overspreading the detective's face.

"That my brother and I have had a common enemy. That nothing short of both our lives will satisfy him; that the attack upon Charley, nearly a year ago, was the beginning—that, having taken his life, they are now upon a still hunt for mine—and that, but for you, they would have completed their work that evening when, chafing, like the fool I was, under restraint, I set out alone, and met——"

"A policeman." Ferrars' lips were grave, but his eyes smiled. "It was a close squeak, Brierly. The fellow very nearly brained you. And now"—and he drew his chair closer, and his face at once became grave almost to sternness—"we want to end this game; there is too much risk in it for you."

"You need not fear for me, Ferrars. From this moment I go forward, or follow, as you will, blindly; you have only to command. What must I do?"

[Pg 243]

"Prepare to go aboard the *Lucania* five days from date in the disguise of what do you imagine?"

"A navvy possibly."

"No. I know the boat's captain, luckily, and I know that a party of Salvation Army officers are to sail that day for England. We will go aboard, all of us, in the salvation uniform and doff it later, if we choose."

"You say all of us?"

"I mean Mrs. Myers, who goes to join her husband and see London and Paris; Miss Glidden, who goes because she wills to go and because she believes that Miss Grant can be best diverted from her sorrow, and strengthened for her future life, by such a journey, Miss Grant, *ergo*, and our two selves." He leaned back and watched his *vis-à-vis* narrowly from underneath drooping lashes. He was giving his client's docility a severe test, and he knew it.

As for Robert, he remained so long silent that the detective, relaxing his gaze, resumed—

"I won't ask you to take too much upon trust, Brierly. Our present position, briefly told, is this. We are nearing the climax, but we cannot force it. One point of the game remains still in the enemy's hands. And the scene is shifted to England—to London, to be literal. The next move must be made by the other side. It will be made over there, and[Pg 244] we must be at hand when the card is played. If all ends as I hope and anticipate, your presence in London will be imperative, almost. As for the ladies, Miss Grant's presence may be needed, as a witness perhaps, and certainly nothing could be better for her than the companionship of her friend, Miss Ruth, and the motherly kindness of Mrs. Myers, just now."

Robert Brierly turned his face away, and clinched his hands in desperation. He was thinking of Ruth, and an inward battle was raging between strong love and stubborn pride.

"And now," went on the other, as if all unheeding, "concerning the disguises. I have told you of the person seen by our spies at the Glenville House, for a brief time?"

Brierly bowed assent.

"He, this man, was only described to me, but seen by Miss Grant."

"Oh!" Brierly started.

"Lately, we have received, through the good offices of Mr. Doran, a picture of this man—it's growing late and I'll give the details at another time—I have believed this man to be one of your enemies, quite possibly the one."

"One of them?"

"Yes. And large and muscular enough he is, to have been your assailant, and——"

[Pg 245]

"And my brother's murderer?"

"In my opinion they are not the same. But we must not go into this. Some one has kept us—that is, yourself, Miss Grant and myself, in the character of her cousin—under constant watch, almost. There must have been tools, but this man I believe to be the chief, on this side."

"Great heavens! How many are there, then?"

"Honestly, I do not yet know. The answer to that is in Europe. But this man—he has been shadowed since Miss Grant saw him on Clark Street—has already sailed for England. My man escorted him, after a modest and retiring fashion, to New York, and saw him embark. I propose that we go east by different routes. The ladies one way, you and I by another. They will hardly imagine us all flitting by water, and their spies will hardly be prepared for a sea voyage, even should one of us be 'piped' to the wharf. Of one thing I must warn you; you are not to set foot in London, nor to put yourself in evidence anywhere as a tourist, until you are assured that you may walk abroad in safety. To know you were in England would be to render your opponents desperate, indeed."

"You have only to command. I am as wax in the potter's hand henceforth. And now I ask you on the eve of this long journey why my brother and myself are[Pg 246] thus hunted. How we stand in the way of these enemies of ours I cannot imagine."

"That I am ready to tell you, since you ask no more. You stand between your enemies and a fortune."

"Impossible!"

"I knew you would say that. But wait." Ferrars rose abruptly. "I shall not see you again before we leave for New York," he said, taking up his hat. "Come with me across the way, I must say good-bye to the ladies; they——"

"Do they understand?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Myers and her two charges were pleasantly bestowed just across the street, in one of the cosy and tree-encircled cottages of the aristocratic little suburb, in which the party had found a retreat. And all three were still upon the broad piazza when the two men appeared.

No other occupants of the house were visible, and before long Robert Brierly found that, by accident or design, the detective, Mrs. Myers, and Hilda, had withdrawn to the further end of the long veranda, and that Ruth Glidden had crossed to his side, and now stood before him, leaning lightly against a square pillar, and so near that he could not well rise without disturbing her charming pose.

[Pg 247]

Before he could open his lips she was speaking.

"Robert, don't get up. Please do not. There is something I must say to you. I have seen the trouble, the anxiety in your face to-night. I know what Mr. Ferrars has been saying to you; at least I can guess, and I understand."

"Ruth!"

"Don't speak. Let me finish, Rob. If I didn't know you so thoroughly, if the whole of your big, noble heart had not been laid bare to me, as never before, during your illness, I should not dare, would lack the courage to say what I will say, for your sake, as well as for mine." She caught her breath sharply, and before he could command the words he would have spoken, she hurried on.

"Don't think that I do not know how you look upon this journey abroad, in my company, and now——" She paused again. "This is very hard to say, Rob, and I am not saying it well, but you will not misunderstand me, I know that; and I can't lose your friendship, Rob, dear, and the pleasure your company will be to me, if we can set out understanding ourselves and each other. You have let Charlie's death and the money loss this search may bring you, crush out all hope, and you have been steeling yourself to give me up; to forget me. But do you think I will let you do this? I know your pride,[Pg 248] dear. I love you for it. But why must it separate us utterly? You are not the only man in this world who must win his way first, and whose wife must wait. I have waited, and I shall wait, always if need be. But it need not be. You will be the King Cophetua to my beggar maid yet. Oh, I know. I am afraid of nothing but your horrible self doubt, your fear of being——"

"Of being called a fortune hunter, Ruth."

"Well, you shall not be called that, sir knight of the proud, proud crest. Listen! You must be to me the Robert of old; not avoiding me, but my friend who understands me. We are both free to go abroad, and with a chaperone, as we are going, would not be *de*

rigueur otherwise; and this subject is not to be referred to again, until the quest upon which we are starting—yes, I say we—is at an end.

"Who knows what may happen between our going and our home-coming? At the worst, I am still your friend, and shall never be more to any other man." She was about to move away, but he sprang up and caught her hands.

"Ruth! You have given me new life. And you have shamed me. It is of you I have thought, when I have tried to tear myself away and leave you free to choose another."

"Robert, for shame. Shall you 'choose another' then?"

[Pg 249]

"Never! You know that!"

"If I did not I should never have spoken as I have just now."

"But there are so many who might give you everything."

"There is only one who can give me my heart's desire."

"Ruth, my darling, if I were rich, or if you were poor, no man should ever win you from me. But the world must never call Ruth Glidden's husband a fortune hunter."

"It never shall. Never!"

"And so, you see——"

"I see the folly of what I have said. What do we care for dame Grundy? And why should you and I be foolish hypocrites, deceiving no one? In my heart of hearts I have been your promised wife always. I think I have the little ring with which we were betrothed when we were ten years old. We will go abroad as lovers, Rob, and if you cannot offer me a fortune—it must be a very large one to satisfy me—before we return, I shall give all mine to the London poor, and you will have to support me the rest of my days. What folly, Robert, what wickedness, to let mere money matters come between you and me!"

[Pg 250]

CHAPTER XXI."QUARRELSOME HARRY."

The *Lucania* had been in port forty-eight hours, and Mrs. Myers and her party had been snugly quartered in one of London's most charming rural nooks, at Hampton Court, with Robert Brierly close at hand, before Ferrars ventured to visit the city.

Mr. Myers had discreetly remained in London, going from thence to meet his friends at Hampton Court, but Ferrars, for reasons which he did not explain, went to the city, as soon as he had assured himself of the comfort and safety of his party, this assurance including the provision of a watchful aid, who kept guard whenever Robert Brierly, himself now well convinced of the need of caution, ventured abroad.

Leaving Mr. Myers thus to enjoy an evening with his wife and friends, Ferrars hastened to "the city," where every stone seemed familiar, and many faces were those[Pg 251] of friends or foes, well known and well remembered. To escape recognition his own countenance had been simply but sufficiently hidden behind a disguise of snowy hair and rubicund visage, both assumed as soon as he had parted from the group at Hampton Court, for Ferrars realised that the battle was now on, and he had no idea of giving the foe the chance possibility of an encounter. He was well known at Scotland Yard, as well as to the chief of the department of police, and it was to one of these officials that he made his way, for he had two reasons of his own for hastening on, in advance of the party.

Not long before leaving the "States," he had received a dainty notelet. It could not have been called a letter. It came through the hands of Doctor Barnes, and it was signed, "Lotilia K. Jamieson."

It is late afternoon when Ferrars reaches Oxford Street, after his interview with several official personages, during which he has bestowed upon each a number of typewritten cards, bearing what seems to be a brief descriptive list, and as many photographs, faithful and enlarged copies of the "snap shot" furnished him by the hand of Samuel Doran.

He alights from an omnibus at the end of Regent Street, and stands, for a moment, looking down Oxford[Pg 252] Street. He is not in haste, for he lets cabs and omnibuses rattle by him, or stand, waiting for fares, and walks slowly on and on. A mile and a quarter of shops, that is Oxford Street, but Ferrars foots it sturdily. Past the Circus, beyond the region of Soho, and he slackens his pace and consults a tiny memorandum book. Who ever saw Frank Ferrars produce a letter or card, for reference, in the streets of a crowded city? Then he smiles and paces on.

Bloomsbury. He is walking slowly now, and under his low-drawn hat his eyes are very alert.

And now he is in that portion of Bloomsbury where, earlier, very early in the century, the wealthy, and those of high degree resided. It is comfortable and middle class now, and our pedestrian passes a certain pleasant semi-detached house—not large, but eminently respectable—with a stealthy, lingering glance, pausing, before he has walked quite beyond it, as if to note some object of fleeting interest. Two or three times, within the hour, he passes that house, now on this side, now on that; once on the top of an omnibus, once in a cab, and driving very slowly, and as close as possible.

It is fairly dusk when he slowly ascends the well scrubbed steps, with the reluctant air of a man by no means sure of himself. He carries a small package beneath his arm, and a card between the fingers of his [Pg 253] left hand, to which he shifts the package as he rings the bell.

"I beg your pardon, young Miss." It is a sour-faced damsel of uncertain age who melts perceptibly under this adjective. "Will you tell me if Mrs.—Mrs.——" He peers near-sightedly at the card he holds, and slowly pronounces a name.

"No, sir; this is not the place."

"But, doesn't the lady stop here, Miss? It's some'res in this here block, and somehow they've forgot the number, you see. Is there a lady guest maybe, or a boarder belike?"

But the maid, quite melted now, shakes her head, and tells him that beside her mistress, whom she names, and her mistress' niece, who stops with them, "off and on," there are no ladies in the house.

The detective blunders on down the street, and, when the lamps are lit he passes the house again. The lamps are lighted in the little dining room now, and through a window which projects upon the corner, he can see a table set for two. And now at last he is rewarded, for a maid enters and places something upon the table; a lady follows, glances at the table, walks to the window, and turns, with a quick, imperious gesture, toward the maid; a little lady, with a fair face, pale, fleecy hair and wearing a flowing silken gown of some soft violet shade. [Pg 254] She sweeps past the maid and seats herself at the head of the table, while the young person—it is the same who attended so lately at the door—comes forward to close the curtain. Slowly it is drawn together, shutting in the lights, the table and the violet-clad figure, but not until the watcher outside has caught a glimpse of a man, tall and, yes, handsome, in a dark fierce fashion, who is entering at the door on the other side of the room.

The watcher passes on. He has seen, once more, the woman who has, according to his own confession, aroused in him "a profound interest." And he has also seen, whom and what? A brother? A lover? A rival, perhaps? Ferrars hails a passing cab now, and is driven swiftly towards his room in the Strand, and as he rolls along, this comment, which may mean much or little, passes his lips.

"So my little lady has doffed her mourning. I wonder what that may mean?"

"I'm very sorry, Ferrars, but I fear there's a great disappointment in store for you."

"A disappointment! How? And in what respect, Mr. Myers?"

Ferrars was seated opposite Mr. Myers in the office of Wendell Haynes, solicitor, in Middle Temple Lane, where he had hastened on the morning after his little[Pg 255] adventure in Bloomsbury, and so prompt and eager had he been that he had encountered the American lawyer at the very threshold, Mr. Myers having just arrived, with equal haste and promptness, from Hampton Court.

Solicitor Haynes and the English detective were not unknown to each other, and when they had exchanged greetings, the solicitor left the others together in his inner office. He was, by this time, fully acquainted with all the facts, so far as they were known to Mr. Myers, and he left them with a promise to rejoin them soon, when they should have compared notes and gone over the ground already known to the busy solicitor.

There was a look of suppressed eagerness upon the face of Ferrars, as he seated himself opposite the shrewd American lawyer. His face, his manner, his very silence and alertness as he held himself erect upon his chair, a picture of calm force, long suppressed, but now out of leash and ready for anything—anything except inaction; and that, his very attitude seemed to say was past.

Mr. Myers had waited a moment, after they were left alone together, for Ferrars to speak the first word, but the latter only sat still and waited, and the lawyer, with characteristic directness, spoke straight to the point. He had what he felt to be bad news to impart, and he did not delay or play with words in the doing it.

But if he had expected disappointment or any change[Pg 256] to cross that keenly questioning face, he looked in vain. Ferrars only sat leaning slightly toward him, waited a moment, and repeated his last words.

"In what manner? How disappointed?" And then, as the lawyer still hesitated, he went on. "You find the case as it should be, eh?"

"The case! Oh, yes!"

"Are there any flaws?"

"No," broke in the lawyer.

"Any unexpected delays?"

"No."

"Any new claimants?"

"No, Ferrars. The Hugo Paisley will case is one of the simplest and clearest of its kind. The last incumbent surely must have had a wonderfully clear idea of how to do the thing he meant to do. Once the claim is proven, and he makes that work easy, there need be no delays, no chancery, no holding back for big fees. The agents in the case are paid according to their expedition, and have every incentive to haste. With the proofs in hand the heir could step at once into his fortune, a matter of £200,000."

"An American millionaire, eh?" Ferrars smiled. "That, then, is quite as it should be, especially as the young lady is here. Well, then, you advertised, according to your report?"

[Pg 257]

"Yes, we advertised. A very craftily worded document calculated to arouse the dilatory claimants to prompt action."

"And, did it not?"

"It did, yes."

"Then, in heaven's name why must I be disappointed in any way?"

"Because I fear the claimant—we have seen but one—is not the person you hoped to find."

Ferrars actually smiled. "Describe the person," he said.

Without speaking, the lawyer held out to him across the table a visiting card, a lady's card, correct according to the London mode of the hour, and bearing a name which Ferrars read aloud with no sign of emotion in his face.

"Mrs. Gaston Latham." He looked up with the card still between his fingers. "Is she the solitary heir?"

"No; there are two children; girls of twelve and nine."

"And her proofs?"

"Seem to be perfect, making her the next in line of succession after——"

"After the Brierlys, of course."

Mr. Myers nodded and the detective looked down again at the address upon the card.

[Pg 258]

"Lives in the city, I see! Are the children with her here?"

"Only the younger, I am told. The elder has 'an infirmity,' and is at present in an institution. It seems a great cross to the mother; in fact her anxiety and distress, because of this child, have made her almost indifferent about this business of the fortune. In short"—and here the lawyer glanced askance at his *vis-à-vis*—"I'm afraid she is not the—the sort of claimant you have expected to see. And there seems to be no one of the other sex in the family."

"Well, well!" Ferrars threw himself back in the big office chair, assuming an easy and almost careless attitude.

"Tell me all about her, Myers. Is she old, or young? Handsome or not?"

The face of the lawyer was overspread with a cynical smile. He had expected to see disappointment, consternation, perhaps, in the face of the detective, when he heard that the English claimant to the Paisley fortune was a woman lorn and lone. His heart was in the work they were engaged upon. Robert Brierly's interests were his own; but, still, this cool, emotionless detective, whom he liked well, had more than once piqued and puzzled him. He believed that Ferrars was quite prepared to meet with, and hear of, quite another sort[Pg 259] of claimant, and he was now looking to see him at last stirred out of his provoking calm.

"Mrs. Gaston Latham is not a claimant to whom one could object, upon the ground of unfitness. She would make a very handsome and gracious dispenser of the Paisley thousands."

"Too bad that she will never get them!" And Ferrars smiled.

"She is a woman of medium height, and rather—well—plump, and while her hair is snowy white, she does not look a day over forty. She has the fine, fresh English colour, blue eyes, that require the aid of strong eyeglasses, and a voice that is very high-pitched for an Englishwoman, and that sounds, I am sorry to say—for she's really a very intelligent and winning little lady—somewhat affected at times. She dresses in soft grays and pale lavenders, as you may be interested to know." And here the lawyer smiled broadly.

"That," commented Ferrars, with no cessation of his own gravely indifferent manner, "for a 'plump' woman, is a great mistake. A plump person should never assume light colours." And then the eyes of the two men met, and over each face there slowly crept a smile that grew into a laugh.

"Upon my soul, Ferrars," exclaimed the elder, "I believe you have heard of this Mrs. Latham!"

[Pg 260]

"Not to make a mystery of it, Mr. Myers, I'll explain that I have heard of Mrs. Latham. But, I give you my word, I did not look to find her the claimant. You have heard us, some, or all, speak of Mrs. Jamieson!"

The lawyer nodded and a smile of meaning crossed his face.

"Well, I have lately learned that she might be found at a certain number in Bloomsbury, and addressed, in case of her temporary absence, in care of Mrs. Gaston Latham, an old family friend."

"I see!" The lawyer was silent a moment. Then he looked the detective frankly in the face. "To be perfectly candid with you, Ferrars," he said, "I have thought that you looked to see a different sort of claimant, more than one perhaps, and that this lady could not, by any possibility, be the expected one. I fancied this would trouble, perhaps hinder, if not quite balk you."

"Honestly, Myers, I have wondered not a little what sort of claimant I should meet, and I am neither surprised nor disappointed. I see what is in your mind; you looked to see the conclusion of the game here and soon, eh?"

"I admit it."

"And I hoped it. I do hope it. We must strike our[Pg 261] final blow now if ever. We can depend upon Mr. Haynes."

"Entirely."

"And you have fully enlightened him?"

"To the extent of my own knowledge?"

"Then let's call him in, and I will put my cards upon the table. We shall need his help, but I'll explain that later."

When the English solicitor had joined them, Ferrars briefly reviewed the events surrounding and connected with the death of Charles Brierly, and the attempt upon Robert's life; and when he was sure that they understood each other, thus far, and that the English lawyer was deeply interested in the case and had committed himself to it, he summed up the situation thus.

"You will see, of course, that I might make a bold stroke and arrest my suspects at once; or, at least, as soon as we could lay our hands upon them, but the case is a complicated one, and having it in my power to make our quarry commit themselves altogether, I do not intend to leave them a loophole of escape. I have not been entirely open with you; you must take my word for some things. I have put the Scotland Yard men on the lookout for our man; I do not know his name, but I think they will have no trouble in

finding him, by acting upon my hints. There is much which even I do[Pg 262] not understand, in his connection with the case. I do not believe him to be the master spirit, and I want to let him have his fling over here."

"Do you mean," broke in the solicitor, "that you do not intend to arrest him, as soon as found?"

"He must be kept under close espionage, when traced, but so long as he does not leave London, he must be left quite free to come and go at will. There is much that is still hazy, concerning his appearance in Glenville, and I look to him to lead me to another—to the other, in fact."

"And," urged the solicitor, "do you feel safe in venturing this? May he not shun those places?"

"Listen! The man's name I do not know, but I know what he is. There are plotting villains in this world, who might scheme forever and still be often penniless. This man is a gambler. In Chicago he pawned the watch stolen from Charles Brierly's room, knowing that there was risk in so doing, but desperate for the money it would bring. He won soon after, and aware of danger ahead, for he had good reason to think himself followed over there, he at once redeemed his pledge. He does not dream that we are here, and the finances at headquarters, I have reason to think, are running low. To play he must have money, and when he has lost he will either pledge or sell the remainder of the jewels stolen[Pg 263] from the writing desk. They were of considerable value, as I have discovered."

"Ah!" Mr. Myers looked up quickly.

"Oh, that's no secret. Hilda Grant saw the jewels, and knew their value."

"May I ask why you presume that all the stolen jewels are in this man's possession?" asked the solicitor.

"Because they were stolen, in the first place, not for plunder's sake, but to mislead; and the party who took them lost no time, I am sure, in passing them on, and out of the town. It is hardly likely they would have divided them."

"Then you look upon this man as in truth little more than a cat's paw?"

"In some respects, yes. He does not take this view, however, and now I want to hear all about your interview with this lady, Mrs. Gaston Latham."

"According to your instructions," said Mr. Myers, "I remained in the background. Mr. Haynes was the spokesman."

Ferrars turned toward the solicitor, who began at once.

"There is really very little to tell. Of course I quite understand that the claimant was to be held off, and the next interview to take place in your presence."

[Pg 264]

Ferrars shook his head. "I fear we must change our plans somewhat. The fact is," here he glanced up and met the eye of Mr. Haynes, a queer smile lighting his own, "I have found just now, that I knew a lady who seems to be a friend of this Mrs. Gaston Latham, and an inmate of her house in Bloomsbury. Now it might be a little awkward for me to appear before my—the lady in question, as the opponent of her friend. In fact, I must not appear in the matter—not yet, at any rate. And, upon my word, Mr. Myers, since our friend has taken up the *rôle* of Spokesman-in-chief, you and I will both stand aside, just at first. May we count upon you?"

"I shall need some coaching, of course," suggested the solicitor.

"Of course; and that you shall have at once. But first, when is she to call again?"

"When I give the word."

"Give it at once, then; to-morrow at 2 p.m. Tell her to come alone. You can arrange for us to hear the interview, I dare say?"

The solicitor swung about in his big chair. "You see those two doors?" he asked, quite needlessly pointing at the two doors, at opposite corners of the inner wall, "They open upon my private chamber of horrors. Formerly there was a partition, and two smaller rooms[Pg 265] The partition has been removed. In the morning I will have my man move that tall bookcase across the door at the right. The door, behind it, can then stand open, and you can hear very well. I will have my desk and the chairs moved nearer that corner. Will that do?"

"Excellently; only I must see the lady in some way."

"Then, if you will come in some slight disguise, you can sit at my clerk's desk, over by that window, with your back to the light. I will dismiss you, and you can go out to join Mr. Myers, through the left-hand door."

They inspected the inner room, and Ferrars, gauging the distance with his quick eye, made a suggestion or two regarding the placing of the desks, and the visitor's chair, and then they sat down to discuss the part the solicitor must take in the coming interview.

That evening when Ferrars strolled into his room after an early dinner, he found a note from a certain police inspector, in whose charge he had left the hunt, or rather, the watch for the suspected stranger. The note contained a summons, brief and peremptory, and he hastened to present himself before Inspector Hirsch.

"We have found your man," were the inspector's first words, when the detective was left alone with him. "And it was an easy trick, too, for all your fears to the contrary. I tell you, Ferrars, when a sport who lives[Pg 266] only to gamble and bet on horses, comes back to London after any long absence, he's sure to go to one of a dozen flush places I can name, as soon as he can get there. And, if he's heeled he'll go to them all. Just give him time. I didn't neglect the houses of mine uncle, but I also sent a squad around to these other places."

"And you found him?"

"We found him. And that's not all. We have found a name for him."

"Good! What is it?"

"He goes by the name of 'Quarrelsome Harry' among his kind. Harry Levey is the way he writes it."

Ferrars pondered a moment "M—m—I'm not surprised," he said finally. "I was sure he was that kind. What's his specialty besides being quarrelsome?"

"Cards, and crooked bookmaking, I fancy. But Smithson, who seems to have known him of old, says he's up to most sorts of shady business, when his luck's down."

And the inspector went on describing the search for "Quarrelsome Harry" who had been "spotted" at a time when he was in a fair way to prove his right to his sobriquet. For he had been losing money all the previous night, and had sought his room in a dingy house in Soho, in a very black mood.

Here, so the shadow had reported, "Quarrelsome[Pg 267] Harry" had remained until late noonday, emerging then to lunch at a coffee-house, and to take his way, for what purpose the watcher could only guess, to Houndsditch, where he seemed quite at home among the Jews in several cafés and "club rooms," where he tarried for a greater or shorter time, and seemed to be looking for some one—some one whom he did not find, it would seem, for he left the neighbourhood as he came, alone and with a lowering face.

"Looking for a loan, I'll wager," declared Ferrars. "By to-morrow he'll be visiting my uncle. I'll have to leave him to your men to-night, I suppose, Hirsch, but to-morrow I will go on guard myself."

He made a note of the Soho street and number, where Harry Levey had lodged, and then he took out his cigar case and the two men sat down together to talk about London, and compare notes. For they were old acquaintances, and could find much to say, one to another.

An hour later, when Ferrars arose to go, the inspector looked at his watch.

"By Jove! Frank, you don't mind my calling you that, eh? It seems like old times, half a dozen years ago. Say, it's almost the hour for the Swiss to report. He's on duty now looking after your man; wait till he comes in. Hobson must already have gone to[Pg 268] relieve him, if he can find him. Harry was airing himself along the embankment when last heard from."

It was nearing ten o'clock, but Ferrars resumed his seat and his cigar very willingly, and Inspector Hirsch set out a very pretty decanter of something which he described, while pouring it into the glasses, as both light and pleasant.

At half-past ten "the Swiss," as rank an Englishman as ever ignored his h's, came in beaming.

He had left "'Arry," as he familiarly called the man he had been set to guard, in a front seat in the gallery of the Vaudeville theatre in the Strand, and Hobson was sitting just three seats away, and nearest the "halley."

"E's got a sort of green lookin' young duffer with 'im," went on the Swiss, "and they seem to be goin' to 'ave a night of it."

Ferrars got up quickly. "Come out with me, inspector," he said. "I may want you to call off your man. And, say, let me have one of your badges. It may come handy."

[Pg 269]

CHAPTER XXII. IN NUMBER NINE.

As the inspector and Ferrars approached the theatre they were obliged to slacken their pace, for, although the performance must have been well on its way, there was a crowd about the entrance.

"It's a first night for some new 'stars,' now that I think of it, and you'll find a lot of the sporting gentry here whenever a new and pretty face, that has had the right kind of advertising, is billed. That accounts for our friend's presence here, of course," said the inspector.

They made slowly their way toward the entrance, and as they reached it, and were about to pass within the brilliantly lighted vestibule, Inspector Hirsch grasped his companion's arm and pulled him back within the shadow of a friendly bill board.

"H'sh!" he whispered. "Here's Hobson!" He[Pg 270] drew Ferrars still further out of the crowd. "He must have lost his man, or else—hold on, Ferrars; I'll speak to him." And

he glided into the crowd and Ferrars saw him pause by the side of a flashily-dressed young fellow, who seemed utterly absorbed in trying to revive a smouldering cigar stump. He gave no sign of recognition as the inspector paused beside him, and seemed engrossed with his cigar and his own thoughts, but Inspector Hirsch was back in a moment with a grin upon his face.

"Your man has tired of the Vaudeville," he said, "and Hobson got close enough behind him—the other chap's still with him, too—to hear them planning to go on to the Savoy for a short time. Harry's evidently doing the theatres with his 'young duffer,' as the Swiss calls the fellow, and will probably pluck him if nothing intervenes." He looked hard at Ferrars. "My man won't lose sight of them. Want to go on to the Savoy?"

"By all means," replied Ferrars, and they set out, noting, as they skirted the crowd, that Hobson was no longer visible.

Crossing the street, they hastened their steps, and upon arriving at the Savoy, took up their station near the entrance once more. The crowd here was not dense, and they had not long to wait before two[Pg 271] men approached from the direction of the Vaudeville, walking slowly, and entered the vestibule of the Savoy.

The taller of the two was broad shouldered, dark and handsome, after a coarse fashion, while the other was smaller, with a weak face and uncertain manner. Both were in evening dress, and when they entered the theatre Ferrars and the inspector followed.

"I can stay with you an hour longer," said the latter. "Then I must go about my own affairs."

Ferrars nodded. He was watching "Quarrelsome Harry" closely, and after a time, as that personage began to look about as if in search of some expected face, he procured an opera glass, and with its aid began to sweep the house.

Then, suddenly, he started, and, after a long look at a certain point in the dress circle, he turned quickly toward the inspector.

"Do you know any one in authority here?" he asked.

"I know the head usher over there; or, rather, he knows me."

"That will do. Just call him, won't you? Introduce me. Tell him I'm after a crook who is up to mischief here, and ask him to help me."

After a time this was accomplished, and soon after the inspector took his leave.

[Pg 272]

And now came the entre-acte, and a number of ladies left their places and went, some to the cloak-room, some to the foyer. The two men in whom Ferrars was interested went

out among many others, and Ferrars followed. In the refreshment room they took places at the side, and the detective, contrary to his usual plan, passed them, and took a place midway between that occupied by the two men and a certain table, further down, where a party of six were seated.

To the waiter, who came to serve him, Ferrars said: "Send me your chief waiter," and slipped a coin into his willing hand.

When the chief waiter came, the two exchanged some whispered sentences, and then, as the man withdrew, our detective addressed himself to his light repast. He had been careful to keep himself unseen, so far as Harry Levey was concerned; and he had now chosen his seat behind a pillar, which hid him from view, while he still could, by moving slightly, look around it.

It was while taking one of his frequent peeps around this pillar that Ferrars saw "Quarrelsome Harry" tear a leaf from a small pocket-book and write a few words upon it, doing this in the most unobtrusive manner possible, with the bit of paper upon his knee.

Since they had exchanged those few whispered words[Pg 273] together, Ferrars and the head waiter had not lost sight of each other, and now a slight movement of the brows brought the man to Ferrars' table.

"Now," whispered the detective, "and be sure you are not observed."

The man nodded and passed on, seeming to scan, with equal interest, each table as he passed it. Nevertheless, he saw a note slipped into the hand of a vacant faced young waiter, and a few words of instruction given. Then the young man turned away, and began to move slowly toward the opposite side of the room.

A little beyond Ferrars' table he encountered the head waiter, present arbiter of his destiny.

"Kit," said this personage, in a low tone, "slip that note you carry into my hand and wait behind the screen yonder until I give it back to you. Quick! No nonsense, man; and mum's the word!"

As between a stranger with a liberal tip, and the august commander of the dining-room corps, Kit did not hesitate, and a moment later the head waiter dropped the note into Ferrars' palm with one hand, while he placed a bottle of wine beside his plate with the other.

Putting the bit of paper between the two leaves of the menu card, Ferrars boldly read its pencilled message.

[Pg 274]

"Drive to the Café Royal. Ask to be shown to No. 9. I will join you there soon."

A moment later this note was placed, by Kit, beside the plate of the one for whom it was intended. The next, Ferrars, having tossed off his glass of light wine, arose and sauntered out of the refreshment room.

But he did not return to the theatre. Instead, he took a cab and was driven to the Café Royal.

Here again he sought out a person in authority, to whom he exhibited his star, and a card from Inspector Hirsch, and was at once shown to No. 8.

"If questions are asked," he said, as he slipped a goodly fee into the hand of authority, "remember that No. 8 is vacant, but is engaged for an hour later."

Left to himself, Ferrars moved a chair close to the wall between himself and number nine. It was but a flimsy barrier of wood and he nodded his approval, turned down the jet of gas, until it was the merest speck, and sat himself down to wait. But not for long; soon he heard the next door open, a sweeping, rustling sound, and the scraping of a chair. Then a bright light flashed up, the door closed, and all was still for a short time.

Then, again the door opened, there was a heavy step, low voices, and Ferrars knew that he might, if he would,[Pg 275] lay his hand upon those whom he had sought so long, and, for a time, it had seemed, so hopelessly.

"Are we quite alone here, do you suppose?" It was a man's voice, strong and somewhat gruff. "Let us see." And he rang the bell. The man who had admitted Ferrars, and who had no mind to fall out with the police, responded, and at once showed conclusively that the adjoining rooms, Nos. 8 and 10, were quite deserted, although, he admitted, he had locked No. 8 in order to secure it for a party at midnight; whereupon wine was ordered and he was at once dismissed.

"Well," began the heavier voice again, "why in the name of goodness haven't you pushed things more? I told you, from the first, that all was safe. There will be no crossing the big pond now. How long do you mean to dally?"

"We can't dally now," replied the lighter voice. "Didn't you see the notice in the papers? They are calling for the heirs. I don't understand it, but they tell me that unless we come forward now, the matter will be referred to some other court, and then there must be a long delay. No, I must produce those papers now, and if there should be any question, any flaw——"

"Pshaw!"

[Pg 276]

"Or if they should call for further proof of identity, you know. Suppose some one should be found, at the last moment, acquainted with her!"

"Bosh! How foolish!"

"Or who remembered me!"

"I tell you this is folly! Latham's first wife died so long ago, and at a Swedish spa. And she never had many friends. As for relatives, well, we know there are none now."

"Sometimes I fear the children will remember; that it will all come back to them, some day."

"I tell you this is simply idiotic; the time has come, and everything is in train. You have all the papers, certificate of marriage, copy of will, and who is to prove that the first Mrs. Latham died, and that she was the last of the Paisley line, on this side, or the other? You were married abroad, you have all her family papers and her jewels. Her children call you mother."

"And hate me!"

"Well, that won't cut any figure. Besides, we must have money. You and I have put our little all into this scheme. How much longer can we live decently unless you claim this estate soon? I must have money! Do you mean to see your brother starve?"

"Hush! You are not my brother, remember that; only my brother-in-law."

[Pg 277]

"All right. How lucky that Latham's brother never came back. Now, what did you especially want to say to-night?"

"This. I must meet those lawyers to-morrow."

"Oh! And I as nearest male kin, must be your escort, and support you through the trying ordeal."

"Not at all. I am especially requested to come alone."

"The d——!"

"But they will want corroborative testimony, and I want to beg of you not to take anything to-morrow, and not to stay out the rest of the night. Much depends upon the impression we make. And if we should fail——"

"We can't fail; or you can't. Aren't you next-of-kin?"

Ferrars got up and crept noiselessly to the door. He had heard enough, and he had much to do. A new enquiry to open up. He knew that he should find Hobson, who had not been dismissed, outside and near, and he meant to leave "Quarrelsome Harry" to him once more.

"Look after him sharp, Hobson," he said, when he had found the man in the outer room. "And ask the inspector to have a warrant ready in the morning. We must arrest him to-morrow. He is to be taken for[Pg 278] conspiracy and attempted murder. That will do for a beginning." And leaving the pair in No. 9 to their plotting, and to the watchful care of Hobson, Ferrars hastened from the place.

[Pg 279]

CHAPTER XXIII.TWO INTERVIEWS.

And now let us turn the clock back a few hours, that we may relate how Hilda and Ruth made the well-laid plans of Ferrars of no effect, so far as himself and another were concerned.

Mr. Myers had left the ladies of his party safe in their snug quarters at Hampton Court, and went early to the city to meet Ferrars, as has already been related; but if he expected them to remain in *statu quo* on such a day, and in easy reach of Bond Street, it speaks ill for his knowledge of women, especially of Ruth Glidden, who knew her London well, and who—when Mrs. Myers began to long to see the inside of Howells and James, and their royal array of painted and other rare china, and Hilda looked yearningly over the guide-books for the city—took matters into her own hands.

[Pg 280]

There was no reason why they should not go to town, especially, so she privately informed Mrs. Myers, as Hilda was moping. She could guide them anywhere where they might wish to go.

And this is how the three ladies came to be seen at Marshall and Snelgrove's, linen drapers, so called; at Redmayne's and Redfern's, and at Jay's, for Hilda's sombre bedecking. Jay's has been called the "mourning warehouse" of the world, not because Jay keeps on tap a perennial and unfailing supply of tears, but because "all they (feminine) that mourn" may be suitably clad—at enormous expense, by the way—by Jay and Co.

And here it was that our little party, sweeping into one of the superb parlours where models display Jay's sombre wares, came face to face with Mrs. Jamieson, who, seated upon a broad divan, was gazing at a little blonde, of her own size and colouring, who displayed for her benefit a flowing tea-gown of soft, black silk, lighted up here and there with touches of gleaming white.

Of course there were greetings and exclamations, and such converse as may be held in so public a place; and Ruth, who, somehow, made herself spokesman for the party, exclaimed that they had "just run over for that little outing, and because Hilda needed the change.[Pg 281] Oh, yes, they were well escorted; Mr. Myers was with them, and also Mr. Grant."

At the name, which was the only one by which she knew Ferrars, Mrs. Jamieson flushed and paled, and the smile with which she received this news was slightly tremulous. And then she told them how she was stopping, for a short time, with a friend in Bloomsbury. Her husband's business affairs, that had called her so suddenly back to England, were now almost settled. And then she should leave London for a time. She had been thinking of a place in Surrey; she hoped to be in possession soon, and then surely they would not return too soon for a visit to her among the Surrey Downs? And where were they stopping?

Upon which Ruth confided the fact that they were not yet in permanent quarters. They must be settled soon; however, meantime, etc., etc., etc.

They parted soon, and it was only when they were riding homeward that it occurred to them that Robert Brierly's name had not been spoken, and that Ferrars, perhaps, would not be best pleased to know of their unpremeditated excursion.

As for the little widow, she went back to Bloomsbury in a state of excitement unusual for her.

To know that "Ferriss Grant" was in London, and that she might see him soon, set her pulses beating, and[Pg 282] her brain teeming with plans for their meeting. What had brought him to London just now? What, indeed, save herself? Unless—and here she paled, and her little hands were clenched till the black gloves burst across the dainty palms—unless it were Ruth Glidden.

What was Ruth Glidden to the Grants? she asked herself futilely, and why were they together? And then for ten minutes Mrs. Jamieson wished she had never seen Ferriss Grant.

"I was very well content until then," she assured herself. "And my future seemed all arranged; and now——" she longed to meet him, and yet——

"If he had but waited, or if I had not been so hesitating! Now I must go on, and he must not know. A month later and I might have received them all in my sweet Surrey home, have met him with full hands, and there would have been no need of explanation, while now!" She struck her hands together, and set her lips in firm lines. "I must see him once, and then we need not meet until all is arranged. If I only knew where to send a note."

She had been absent since luncheon, and upon her arrival at home she found this brief note awaiting her:

"MRS. JAMIESON.

"DEAR MADAM,—Being in London for a short[Pg 283] time only, and with little leisure, I take the liberty of asking if I may call upon you in the morning, at the unfashionable hour of eleven o'clock?

"Yours
"FERRISS GRANT."

respectfully,

It was late when she reached Bloomsbury, and she had little time to dress for dinner and the evening, for she was going out again, but she replied to this note, bidding him come, and assuring him of his welcome at any hour. Then, reluctantly, and with a look of distaste, amounting almost to repugnance upon her face, she began to dress for the evening.

When Ferrars reached his rooms, after leaving the café, his lips were set, and his eyes gleamed dangerously, for a little time he paced the floor, and then, impelled by some thought, he looked to see if any letters had arrived during his absence. Yes, there they were, half a dozen of them. He glanced at their superscriptions, and then opened a little perfumed and black-bordered envelope. It was Mrs. Jamieson's reply to his note of the afternoon, and he read it and put it down slowly.

"I shall be prompt," he said to himself, "to keep that appointment, and I wonder whether its outcome will make me more or less her friend. If it will alter or[Pg 284] modify my plans; and if, having met this once I shall have the courage, the hardihood to meet her again, and to say what I must say if we meet." He put down the little note and took up the one next in interest.

The handwriting was that of Ruth Glidden, and the stationery that of a fashionable Piccadilly dressmaker.

"DEAR MR. F."—so ran the note—

"I am aware that you did not wish us, any of us, to be seen of men in London until certain things were accomplished, and I take upon myself all the blame of the little journey we, Mrs. Myers, Hilda, and myself, took this afternoon. We felt quite safe in

visiting a few shops 'for ladies only,' but at the third we met Mrs. Jamieson. This may, or may not, be of moment to you. At all events, I have eased my conscience, and Hilda's, by letting you know. Nothing of any moment was said on either side, and no questions were asked.

"Yours
"RUTH G." penitently,

Over this womanlike note Ferrars wrinkled his brows, and finally smiled.

"I had not meant that they should meet until—but pshaw! What does it matter? Everything seems urging me on and shaping my course. So be it! It is[Pg 285] time for the last stroke, and to-morrow, before this hour, I shall be a free man, or a failure."

Ferrars was prompt in his appearance at the Bloomsbury cottage, and Mrs. Jamieson had been for a long half-hour awaiting him alone in the little drawing-room. Her face was somewhat pale, and there was a hint of agitation in her greeting, and a shade of gravity in his.

She talked of Hilda, and was full of pleasure at their meeting; and by and by she spoke of Ruth, her beauty, her grace, and style. Was it true that she was an heiress? And was she not, in some way, related to Miss Hilda and himself. Or perhaps to the Brierlys?

It was the first mention of that name by either, and Ferrars, looking into her eyes, answered:

"She bore the same relation to Robert Brierly that Hilda bore to Charles. They had been lovers since childhood."

"How sad, strange, and romantic! How pitiful!"

"The sadness outweighs the romance, and it is strange that the same hand should have struck at the happiness of both their friends. I have asked myself," he went on musingly, "what would be the fate of the destroyer of so much happiness, if these two girls could be made judge and jury, with the slayer at their mercy."

[Pg 286]

"Ugh!" The lady shuddered and turned her face away. "The thought is unnatural!"

"I don't know; women have been dread enemies before now, and are generally good haters. They make great criminals, too. But I fancy a woman must always betray——"

"Mercy!" She crossed the room suddenly to change the position of a translucent screen through which the sun had begun to filter. "You are positively gruesome, Mr. Grant! Let us change the subject. Or, first let me ask if they have found any trace of the cr—the person?"

"The clues have been very unsatisfactory for the most part. But the ladies both hope to see justice done yet. We all hope it, in fact."

"And what is most lacking?"

"From the first, the motive seemed most difficult to discover. But we won't dwell upon this longer now, Mrs. Jamieson."

"Ah! And I was just getting up courage to ask you to tell me what had been done, what progress had been made; I was so near to being a witness, you know, and——"

"And of course you are interested, I quite understand that. If you really care to hear, Mrs. Jamieson, I will tell you the whole story when next we meet.[Pg 287] It is quite interesting. I will tell you that and other things." He arose and stood before her. "I must not tarry now. Shall you be at liberty this afternoon?"

"I am so sorry. I am promised to my hostess. She thinks I live too secluded a life. But I am about to make a change." She brightened visibly as she told of her Surrey prospects, and her hope of seeing his party, and himself, there. And then her smile faded.

"I fear I may not see you again for at least a fortnight. I have promised Mrs. Latham, my hostess, that I would go over to Paris with her. She has been very good to me," she faltered. "How long shall you remain in England?" she added.

"More than a fortnight at least."

"I shall see you again?"

"Mrs. Jamieson, never doubt it." He was drawing on a glove, as he uttered the words, and across the busy fingers he looked into her eyes. "It was to see you that I came to England, and so——" he bowed low, "till we meet." He caught up his hat and stick, and before she could put out a hand had bowed himself from the room, and she heard his quick receding step across the little vestibule.

For many moments after, she sat where she had sunk down at his sudden going, and presently the slow[Pg 288] tears fell upon the hands that supported her bowed face.

For years she had been an unhappy woman, living an unloved, unloving life. Then ambition and hope had taken hold of her mind, and she had tested herself, and found, in that small body, the strength to dare much, and to risk much; and now—how she thrilled at the thought—wealth, success, and love; all would come to her together. What else could his words mean? She had only to be courageous and firm for a little while. To be patient for a few more days, and then—— She sprang to her feet and flung her arms aloft. She wanted to shout for triumph. "Victory!" she said aloud. "Is there another woman in all the world who can say that she has conquered fate, and gained all the good she has worked and wished for?"

And just then, the maid's voice broke in upon her dream.

"Madam, the charwoman is here for the money. Do you still wish me to give her the little suit?"

The woman turned as suddenly as if Nemesis had spoken.

"Yes!" she said, and the voice was husky, and the face almost terror stricken.

"Ruth."

[Pg 289]

Robert Brierly came up the piazza steps, where Ruth sat alone, and dropped upon the topmost one, at her feet. "I have just received a note from Ferrars."

Ruth looked up from her bit of needlework. There was a note of suppressed excitement in his tone, which she was quick to observe.

"He seems to have changed his mind," Brierly went on, "and bids me come up with Myers."

"To-day?" The work fell from her hands.

"Now. In half an hour."

"But Robert, after all his caution!"

"Let me read the note, dear," he said, unfolding the sheet he had held in his hand. "It is very brief and pointed:

"DEAR BRIERLY,—Come up with Myers, and be sure that you are not observed when you enter Haynes' office. He will know what to do with you. If I have not been an awful bungler—and I don't think I have this time—you will stand a free man to-night, able to go up and down the earth without menace from the assassin's knife, and will have come into your own, which means a fortune.

"FERRARS."

"Ruth," he spoke softly, "Do you know what that means?"

[Pg 290]

"Better than you do, perhaps." She spoke hurriedly, as if to gain time, and her cheeks were already aflame. "Your mind was so entirely set upon finding Charlie's murderer, Rob, that they thought it best not to risk a new anxiety by telling you too much about

the other; besides, there could be nothing certain, you know, until Mr. Myers had investigated. You had a hint of it."

"Oh, to be sure. And I have not been quite blind to their kindly cunning. Will it be a very great fortune, Ruthie?" He caught her hand, and held it fast.

"Very!"

"Because if it is, I intend to come back and lay it all at your feet, formally, abjectly, and with utmost speed."

Ruth wrestled away the imprisoned hand and gave her chair a backward push.

"Robert Brierly, if you dare to come to me and offer me a fortune, a hateful old English fortune—that I despise; if you only ask me to accept you after you are sure of that money, I won't! I will not! Never!"

"Ruthie!" She sprang up, but he was before her. "Oh, you can't escape now. I intend to propose to you this minute. I'll run no risks, after such a threat as that. Ruth, if you run away, I will shout it after you, and Mrs. Myers and Hilda are half way down the stairs now. Quick, Ruth, dear, will you marry me? I sha'n't let you go until you say yes."

[Pg 291]

And then, in spite of herself, Ruth's laughter bubbled over.

"You stupid! As if we hadn't been engaged for years! At least I have."

Half an hour later when Mr. Myers and Brierly came out upon the piazza together they found Ruth awaiting them there, equipped for a journey.

"Why, Ruth," said the lawyer, "are you going to the city?"

"I am going with you!" the girl replied firmly. "You need not argue. I mean to go. And Mr. Ferrars will not object. He will need me."

[Pg 292]

CHAPTER XXIV. MRS. GASTON LATHAM.

Solicitor Wendell Haynes sat at his desk, at half past two, seemingly busy, while across the room, at a smaller desk, sat a second person, with his shoulder toward the outer door, and a screen partially concealing him. From the inner room came the low hum of

voices. At the side of the room where the clerk's desk stood, and the tall bookcase towered before the concealed door, the curtains were lowered; but there was a strong light upon the solicitor's corner, and upon the chair, placed near his desk, manifestly, for a visitor.

When Ferrars appeared without the disguise he was expected to wear, the solicitor wondered. But the detective explained in a few words. He had made certain discoveries which would enable him to end a very unpleasant piece of business at once, he hoped. And his disguise would only hamper him.

[Pg 293]

"I must ask you, however, to add something to your *rôle*," he said finally, and at once made plain what more would be required of the solicitor.

As for Ruth Glidden, she had waited in dignified silence, and much to the wonder of the politely reserved solicitor, until Ferrars appeared, and then she went straight to his side.

"Mr. Ferrars," she said, so low that the others caught only the soft murmur, "It came to me, almost at the last moment, that a woman might not be amiss here now if she comes alone. You can trust me, surely?"

Ferrars gave her a sudden look of gratitude. "Thank you for showing me my own brutality," he replied. "I can trust you, and I do thank you; there could have been no one else." And Ruth went back to the inner room smiling a little, as she met her lover's eye.

To guard against all emergencies, the detective had left with the inspector a card telling him, and his men, where a telegram would reach him at different hours of the day, and at a quarter past two a message arrived, bearing the signature of the Swiss.

"Q. H. and a lady on the way to meet you now."

So it ran, and having read it, Ferrars asked:

"Is your boy safe, Mr. Haynes? and trusty?"

[Pg 294]

"Quite. I find him really valuable."

"Then please instruct him to go and bring a brace of policemen, as soon as he has shown the next arrivals in." And he held out the telegram by way of explanation, adding, as the solicitor read and returned it, "The man is coming, too. I can't just see why. But we will soon know. By the way, that door on the north side, in the inner room; where does it lead one?"

"Into a side hall, connecting with the other."

"I thought so. Then, as soon as they are in, I will just slip out, myself, and see my man, who won't be far from your door, you may be sure, once his quarry is inside. He will be needed, perhaps, to serve the warrant, which he carries, ready for an emergency. Hist!"

There was the sound of an opening door, and, as Ferrars seated himself, the office boy entered and announced the two visitors.

The lady, who entered and bowed in stately fashion to the solicitor, was all in gray, except where, here and there, a bit of violet protruded. The hair, which was white, rather than gray, was worn low about the ears, and rolled back from the centre of the forehead, giving an effect of length to the face. The eyes looked dark, behind their gold rimmed glasses, and seemed set far back, in dark hollows. The mouth was slightly sunken, but the cheeks and chin, though pale, were sound and [Pg 295] smooth, and the brow showed a scarcely perceptible wrinkle, beneath a veil of gray gauze spotted with black. She had a plump figure, its fulness accentuated by her rustling gray silk gown, with its spreading mantle glittering with steel beads, and finished with a thick, outstanding ruche at the neck. Atop of the high coifed white hair, sat a dainty Parisian bonnet, all gray beads and violets, and the small hands were daintily gloved, in pearl gray.

"I have taken the liberty of bringing my husband's brother, Mr. Haynes," she said, as she advanced into the room, "Mr. Harry Latham."

The tall, dark fellow behind her advanced, and proffered a hand with an air of easy geniality.

"Mrs. Latham," he explained, "fancied I might be of some use by way of identification. I hope my presence is not *de trop*; if so——"

"You are very welcome, sir. Sit down, pray, and we will begin our little inquiry. You have brought the papers, Mrs. Latham?"

Mrs. Latham, who had been looking with something like disapproval upon her aristocratic face, toward the partly visible person behind the screen, turned toward the speaker, and, as she advanced to lay a packet of papers, produced from a little bag, upon the desk, the solicitor called out, as if by her suggestion, "Richards, I [Pg 296] shall not need you for an hour or more." And before the lady could turn toward him again, the man at the desk had vanished through the door just at his back.

Glancing toward this closed door, the lady seated herself, and drew the packet toward her. "I suppose we may begin with these?" she said, untying the packet with deft fingers, and laying the papers one by one upon the desk before the solicitor, as she talked. "I think all the needed proofs are here; my marriage certificate, and that of my mother as well; other family papers that may, or may not, be of use—letters relating to family

matters and to the Paisleys of an earlier day—a copy of the will of Hugo Paisley the first, letters announcing the deaths of various members of the family; also a copy of my grandfather's will. I think you will find them quite correct, and conclusive." She stopped, and looked at him inquiringly. "You will need to examine them, of course, if only for form's sake?" she asked, somewhat crisply.

"Possibly, yes. All in good time, madam." The solicitor took up one of the papers, and glanced at the first words.

"I would like to ask," now spoke Harry Latham, "how soon—supposing of course all things are correct, and Mrs. Latham's claim proved—how soon can she[Pg 297] take personal and complete possession of the property? I am a busy man, myself, and my time——"

"I fancy you will not be needed after to-day," broke in Mr. Haynes, somewhat abruptly. "As to the property, once the claim is proven there need not be a day's delay. The late incumbent was a very far-seeing person." He turned abruptly to Mrs. Latham. "Madam, may I ask why you were not more prompt in putting forward your claim to so fine an estate?"

She turned toward him with a slow smile.

"That is a most natural question. I did not at first imagine myself a claimant; a certain Hugo Paisley, the younger, or his heirs, was before me in the line of succession, and I have waited to see if they would not be heard from. I had no wish to claim that which might not have been mine."

"And you are satisfied now that no such heirs exist? Of course this must be proven."

"Of course, I have been at some pains, and to much expense, to learn if there were such heirs. With the help of friends we made inquiry in the United States, where Hugo went years ago. He was never heard of again."

"And was your search rewarded by definite news?"

"By an accident we learned of a member of the family, and through him traced all the remaining ones. They were three, a mother, the great granddaughter of Hugo[Pg 298] Paisley, and two sons. The mother has been dead some years. They were not a rugged family."

"Consumption," came from the dark man at her elbow.

"Yes, consumption. The two sons died within a few months of each other."

"I see. And of course you have the proofs of death?"

"They can readily be proved at need," the lady coldly answered.

"Then there remains but one more question, where you are concerned. Supposing your claim to be disputed, could you prove beyond a doubt that you are the Bessie Cramer, who was the last descendant in this country of the Paisleys, your mother having been a Paisley?"

"Of course!"

"And you are then able to furnish proof that there was no other Mrs. Gaston Latham? That Gaston Latham married only one wife?"

A loud laugh broke upon this speech, and the man arose.

"Would the word of Gaston's only brother be of any worth as a witness to the marriage, the only marriage of his only brother? Fortunately I knew Miss Bessie Cramer as a slim young girl. I was a boy in roundabouts then."

Solicitor Haynes arose, and looked gravely down[Pg 299] upon his client, ignoring the man's words, and even his presence.

"I must tell you, Mrs. Latham, that there has been a claim set up by the American heirs."

"There are no heirs!" warmly.

"Only yesterday I had a visit from an American gentleman, a Mr. Myers, attorney-at-law. Do you know of him?"

"I know no Americans, and very little of the country."

"Then you have never crossed the ocean?"

"No, indeed! It's quite enough for me to cross the channel."

"Mr. Myers has presented a claim." The solicitor's eyes were narrowing.

"For whom?"

"For—a—I think the name is Brierly; as I was about to say, having made an appointment with you, I thought it best that you should meet him." He touched the bell at his side, as he spoke the last word.

"But," interposed the man, "this is some old claim, or else a fraud! The Brierlys are dead!" The last words harshly guttural.

The office boy had entered now, and Mr. Haynes quietly gave his order.

"See if Mr. Myers is in number seventeen, William."

"Mr. Haynes," said Mrs. Latham, with a touch of[Pg 300] haughtiness, "Why should I need to see this man? These deaths can be proved."

The solicitor bowed formally. "So much the worse for Mr. Myers and his claim," he said. "Of course you must meet him; there's no other alternative. He is a gentleman, and he certainly believes in his claim."

"He's not up to date, then," interposed the brother-in-law, somewhat coarsely, and even as he spoke the door opened, and Mr. Myers, having taken his way around by the side hall, entered, hat in hand.

[Pg 301]

CHAPTER XXV. THE LAST STROKE.

As the solicitor turned toward the newcomer, the man and woman exchanged glances, and while he was still confident, not to say defiant, he looked to the unobservant solicitor with a nervous, apprehensive glance, and leaning toward her would have whispered a word of his anxiety; but she shook her head, and the next moment the solicitor was naming them to each other and, as Mr. Myers paused before the lady, continued with the utmost directness—

"Mr. Myers, this lady denies the existence of any and all American heirs. She fears you may have been deceived. Do you know this man Brierly to be living at present?"

"I believe him to be living."

"Mr. Myers," said the lady, sweetly, "I am very sorry to think or say it, but you have certainly been grossly[Pg 302] tricked! If you have seen a would-be claimant, you have seen a fraudulent one. How long, may I ask, since you left America?"

"I have been in England for some time, and I will admit, madam, that I do not quite understand this case in all its details. Still, may it not be possible that you have been misled? There seem to have been complications." He checked himself, and appeared to be considering his next words, then he resumed—"I think I can help to clear up this misunderstanding. I brought with me here a young man lately from the United States. He claims to have seen a Mr. Brierly very recently. With your permission I will ask him to join us."

The Lathams again exchanged swift glances, and the man gave his head a quick negative shape. But the solicitor went promptly to the door. They did not hear the brief order he gave the boy, and he did not come back at once.

"Who is this young American who has seen the invisible? And how came he here to-day?" asked the man, who was now frowning heavily and moving restlessly in his seat. "What is his name?"

Mr. Myers had picked up a book off the desk, and was turning its pages slowly. He seemed hardly to hear the fellow's words.

[Pg 303]

"He's a very bright young fellow," he said, musingly. "I don't think he would be easily deceived. He's quite a clever detective, in his way." He was studying the pair from under bent brows. Just then Mr. Latham's hat fell from his hands to the floor, and before he had recaptured it, the solicitor had entered, followed by a serious-faced young man, whom he carelessly named to the two strangers.

"Mr. Grant."

The lady's hand went suddenly to her heart, and her face was ashen beneath the dotted veil.

"Are you ill, madam?"

"A twinge," she faltered.

"It's neuralgia," declared the man, drawing his chair toward her. "She's subject to these sharp attacks. Better, Bessie?"

She nodded, and fixed her eyes upon "Mr. Grant," to whom Mr. Myers was saying:

"This lady, Grant, is positive that the Brierlys, of whom you have talked to me, are not now living. There has been tricking somewhere, and deception. Will you help us to understand one another?" The lawyer's face had grown very grave.

Francis Ferrars seated himself directly before the woman, whose eyes never left his face now, and were growing visibly apprehensive.

[Pg 304]

"There has been more than tricking, worse than deceit here, and if I am to make it clear to you, madam, I must begin at the beginning. So far, at least, as I know it."

The woman bent her head slightly. "Go on," said the man. He had never seen Ferrars either in *propria persona*, or as Ferriss Grant.

The detective began with a brief sketch of the Brierly brothers, and then described, vividly, the discovery of Charles Brierly's dead body beside the lake at Glenville. He paused here, and his voice grew stern as he resumed—

"I had never seen Charles Brierly in life, but, standing beside his dead body, looking down into that face so lately inspired by a manly, strong soul, I knew that here was murder. There was no possibility of accident, and such men, I know, do not cheat death by meeting him half way. It was a murder, and yet he had no enemies, they said.

"The case interested me from the first, and when I had seen the sorrow of the fair girl he loved, and who loved him, I gave myself eagerly to the work of seeking the author of this most cowardly blow.

"That night I walked the streets of Glenville alone, and, passing a certain fashionable boarding house, I saw, in a room lighted only by the late moonbeams,[Pg 305] the shadow of a woman, who paced the floor with her bare arms tossing aloft in a pantomime of agony, or shame."

He glanced about him. The two lawyers were standing side by side near the door, erect and stern. The man in the chair opposite was affecting an incredulous indifference. The room was intensely still when the voice ceased and no one stirred or spoke.

"Next morning, early, I viewed the scene of the crime, and I saw how easily the destroyer might have crept upon an unsuspecting victim, owing to the formation of the shore, the shelter of the trees and shrubs, and the protection of the curving Indian Mound. There had been showers two days before, and in certain spots, where the sun did not penetrate, the earth was still moist. Under a huge tree, just where the slayer might have stood, I found the print of a dainty shoe, or rather, the pointed toe of it. In two other sheltered places I found parts of other footprints, and, a little off the road, in a clump of underbrush, I found two well-formed footprints, all alike, small, and pointed at the toe. But I found something more in that hazel thicket. I found my first convincing, convicting clue. It was just a shred, a thread of a black mourning veil, such as widows wear. Later I found a poor simpleton who had been in the wood on the morning of the murder,[Pg 306] and who had been horribly terrified. For a time he would only cry out that he had seen a ghost, but by and by he grew more communicative, and from what he then said—for he described the 'ghost' at last as a thing all white with a black face—I knew how to account for a white fragment which I found not far from the black one. A hired carriage had passed over that lakeside road on that fatal morning, and I learned that the lap cover with it was 'large and white.' Large enough to cover a woman of small stature, who, with a black veil drawn close across her features, and rising suddenly from among that clump of hazel, could easily terrify a simpleton into leaving the place where his presence was a menace."

He paused a moment, but he might as well have been looking upon carven statues. No one stirred, no one spoke, and he resumed his fateful story.

"Then came the inquest. I believed, even then, that I knew the hand that took Charles Brierly's life. But I did not know the motive, and, until I did, my case was a weak one.

Besides, a woman sometimes strikes and still deserves our pity and protection. 'I must know the motive,' I said, and waited. Then, at the inquest, as Robert Brierly, the brother of the dead man, whose presence in the town was known to only a few, came forward to testify, a woman, who did not know[Pg 307] him, and whom he did not know, fainted at sight of him, and was taken out of court. Then I knew the motive."

"Ah-h-h!" A queer sighing sound escaped the lips of the woman still sitting stonily erect before him; but he hurried on.

"But knowledge is not always proof—in a court of law—and I must have proof. That night a woman, dressed as a boy, by courage and cunning combined, forced her way into the rooms so lately occupied by Charles Brierly. Fear of detection had begun its work upon her mind, and she went, most of all, to try and throw justice off the track. In Brierly's desk she left a letter, very conspicuously placed, an anonymous letter, so framed as to throw suspicion upon the dead man's betrothed. This again showed the woman's hand. She also carried away a watch, a pistol, and some foreign jewellery and dainty *bric-a-brac*, to make the work seem that of a thief; and last, she found, upon a letter file, a newspaper clipping, which she also carried away. If she had left that I might have overlooked its value. As it was, I found the paper from which it had been cut, secured a second copy, and discovered my clue to the tangle. It was an advertisement for the heirs of one Hugo Paisley, and I soon found that the Brierly brothers were the sought-for heirs. Then I knew that[Pg 308] Robert Brierly's life was also menaced, and I warned him, and tried to set a guard about him.

"In the meantime a boat had been found, not far from the scene of the shooting; it had been seen on the lake that morning, and its occupant was a spy, keeping watch up and down the road, and the hillsides, while his confederate carried out their programme of death. I had already fixed upon the woman, and now we began to look for the man."

Just here the man calling himself Latham got up stiffly, and moved toward the window near the clerk's desk, where he leaned against the casement, as if looking down upon the street. No one seemed to notice him, and the narrator went on:

"And now I had to find my final convincing proofs of the motive and the deed. The brothers Brierly were, all unknown to themselves, the heirs to the Paisley estates, and of Hugo Paisley, by descent. Through some error the murderers of Charles Brierly had been led to think him the sole living member of the family, and when Robert Brierly stood forth at the inquest, the woman who had shot down his brother with hand and heart of steel, fell fainting at the sight of him, and, perhaps, at the thought of her wasted crime.

"And now it was a drawn game, in which both sides[Pg 309] were forced to move with caution, and, for a time, I could only watch the woman, on the one hand, and the safety of Robert Brierly on the other, for he now stood between the plotters and their goal.

"But despite my watchfulness, the second blow fell, and the first time Robert Brierly ventured upon the city street alone, after dark, he was struck down, almost at his own door. It was a dangerous injury, and, lest the assassins should find a way to complete their work, we took him away, as soon as he could be moved."

The woman was sitting very erect now, her eyes smouldering behind the gleaming glasses, her hands tightly clinched upon her knee.

"I knew that we must force the issue, then," Ferrars went on. "And Mr. Myers came over here to substantiate his client's claim to the Paisley estates, and to look up the pedigree, the past and present history, of the other claimants. How well he succeeded need not here be told. He did succeed."

Mrs. Latham had risen to her feet, and, for a moment, seemed struggling for composure, and the power to speak clearly.

"All this," she said then, "which is very strange, does not explain why you dispute my claim in favour of a dead man. As for this murder—if you have proved what you charge——"

[Pg 310]

"One moment," Ferrars broke in. "Let me add, in that connection, that one night one of my agents, in the character of a burglar, entered this woman's room at her hotel in Glenville. She found in a trunk, the veil from which the black fragment, found on the bush, was torn; and also a suit of boy's clothes. The veil she brought away, the clothes were given away to a poor woman only this morning, and she sold them to my agent. As for the man, he has been traced by the stolen watch and jewelled ornaments. He tried to sell, and did pawn, them in Chicago, in New York, and here in London. In fact the chain of evidence is complete; nothing more is needed to convict these two."

The woman's face was white and set. "After all," she said in a hollow voice, "you have not proved that the Paisley estate is not mine by right. Mr. Brierly, the elder, being dead!"

"Even so, the second wife of Gaston Latham cannot inherit, and her brother, even in the character of brother-in-law, cannot share the inheritance. One moment," for the woman seemed about to speak. "Let me end this. Last night, in room number eight at a certain café, I heard the plotters in conference, and I know that the daughter of Mrs. Cramer, who would have inherited after the Brierlys, is dead. The game is up, Mr. Harry Levey. You and your sister have aimed two heavy[Pg 311] strokes at the happiness of two noble women, and the lives of two good men, but the final stroke is mine! And now, Mrs. Jamieson, if that is——" He did not finish the sentence. The man Levey had drawn closer and closer to the inner door, while Ferrars spoke, and now with a swift spring he hurled himself against it, plunged forward and would have fallen had not Ferrars,

always alert, bounded after him, and caught him as he fell. For the inner door had opened suddenly, at his touch, and when Ferrars drew the now struggling man backward, and away from it, the others in the room saw, in the doorway, a man and woman side by side.

At sight of Robert Brierly's face the woman, who had faced the ordeal of denunciation and conviction almost without a quiver, threw up her hands, and uttering a shrill scream, a cry of mortal terror and anguish, fell forward upon her face.

Then came a moment of excited movement, which would have been confusion but for the quick wit of Ruth Glidden, and the coolness and energy of the detective.

While the entrapped villain was struggling like a fiend in the grasp of four strong men, Ruth knelt beside the fallen woman and lifted her head.

The next moment two or three officers came hastening in, and Ferrars and Brierly, seeing their captive in[Pg 312] safe hands, came together to her aid. She looked up at them with a questioning face.

"Did you know?" she asked, her face full of horror. "Did you know her?"

Ferrars nodded, and as the officers led their captive, cursing and blustering, out at one door, he lifted the senseless woman, and carried her to the couch in the inner room.

"Bring water!" Ruth commanded, "and leave her to me."

As the two men closed the door between them and the two so strangely different women, Brierly laid a hand upon the detective's shoulder.

"Ferrars," he said, "what did Ruth mean? Who is that terrible woman? And how is she concerned in your story? It is time I should know the truth."

"Quite time. That woman is Mrs. Jamieson, or the person you knew under that name. She is cleverly disguised, but I expected some such trick. She went to 'the States' to rid herself of you and your brother; and she took that man, who is really her own brother, and who tried to kill you, as her fellow criminal."

"And did she——" Brierly stopped, shuddering.

"She shot your brother; there is not a doubt of it."

"My God! And I thought——" They were alone in[Pg 313] the office, and Brierly dropped weakly into the nearest chair and dropped his face upon his hands.

"You thought," finished Ferrars, "that I was interested in the woman. I was. I suspected her from the very first, and so did Hilda Grant."

In the inner room, Mrs. Jamieson opened her eyes and looked up to meet the gaze of the fair woman who was in all things what she was not.

Ruth bent over her, a glass of water in her hand.

"Drink this, Mrs. Jamieson," she said simply.

A shudder like a death throe shook the recumbent form. She lifted herself by one elbow, and caught at the glass, drinking greedily. Then, still holding the glass, she said slowly:

"Then you know me?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"By your voice, a little, but mostly by what Mr. Ferrars said."

"Mr. Ferrars!" she gasped. "Do you mean him?"

"I mean the man you have called Grant. Did you never guess that he was a detective?"

"And he knew!" The woman arose to her full height and again, as on a night long since, and in another country, her arms were tossed above her head, as Ruth[Pg 314] nodded her answer, and for a moment her face was awful to look upon, so tortured, so despairing, so full of wrath and wretchedness and soul torture and heart agony, for women can love and suffer, though their souls be steeped in crime.

Ruth, who had taken the half emptied glass from her hand as she struggled to her feet, now put it down, and, startled by her look and manner, moved toward the door, but the woman, her face ghastly, cried "Stop!" with such agonised entreaty that the girl drew back.

"Don't!—I can't see him yet—Wait!—Let me——" She sank weakly back upon the couch, and Ruth noted, while turning away for a moment, how her hand toyed with her dainty watchguard, in seeming self forgetfulness, drawing forth the little watch, a moment later, and looking at it, as if the time was now of importance. Then she threw herself back against the cushions.

"My—vinaigrette—my bag!" she moaned between gasping breaths.

The little bag had been left in the outer office, where it had fallen from her lap, and Ruth opened the door of communication a little way and asked for it, saying, as Ferrars came toward her, "Not yet."

As Ruth turned back, she heard a sharp little click, like the quick shutting of a watch case, and when she[Pg 315] held out the vinaigrette, Mrs. Jamieson was swallowing the remainder of the water in the glass.

"Your salts, Mrs. Jamieson."

The woman looked up with a wild scared look in her eyes, and held out, for an instant, the little jewelled watch.

"For years," she said, in a slow, strange monotone, "I have faced and feared danger, and failure. For years I have been prepared! Because of my cowardice, and my conscience, I have always kept a way of escape." Her fingers fluttered aimlessly and the watch fell upon her lap. Her last words seemed to come through stiffening lips. Her face grew suddenly ghostly gray. Ruth sprang toward the door.

"Don't let him come yet." With these words the dying woman seemed to collapse, and sank limply back into the cushions; her head drooped, her chin dropped.

Ruth flung open the door with a cry of terror, and the four men—for the two lawyers had returned from their escort duty—gathered about the couch. They saw a shudder pass over the limp frame. The fingers fluttered again feebly, there was a spasmodic stiffening of the figure—and that was the end.

Four weeks later, a group of people were standing[Pg 316] upon the deck of a homeward bound steamer, about to set out upon her ocean voyage. They were five in number, and they were welcoming, each in turn, the man who had just joined them.

There had been a quiet wedding, a few days before, at a little English church, and Ruth Glidden had become Ruth Brierly as simply as if she were not an heiress, and her newly made husband not the owner of English lands, houses, stocks, and factories, that changed him into a millionaire.

"I could see no good reason for delay," Brierly was saying, as he grasped the hand of Ferrars, whose congratulations had been hearty and sincere. "Neither of us have need to consult aught save our own wishes; and besides our nearest friends are with us."

"Besides," interposed the smiling woman at his side, "we have been an encumbrance upon Mr. and Mrs. Myers for so long—and it was really the only conventional way to relieve them of so many charges. And then"—and here she lowered her tone, and glanced toward Hilda Grant, who, having already greeted Ferrars, was standing a little aloof—"we can now make a home for Hilda, and have a double claim on her."

"In all of which you have done well," smiled Ferrars. "My only regret is that I must bring into this parting moment an unpleasant element, but you may as well[Pg 317] hear it from me." He beckoned the others to approach; and, when they were close about him,

said, speaking low and gravely: "'Quarrelsome Harry' has escaped the punishment of the law."

"Escaped!" It was Mr. Myers who repeated the word. "Do you mean——?"

"I mean that he is dead. He was shot while trying to escape. He had feigned illness so well that they were taking him to the hospital department. He tried a rush and a surprise, but it ended fatally for him. He was shot while resisting re-arrest."

"It is better so," said Mr. Myers. "They have been their own executioners. What could the law have added to their punishment?"

"Only the law's delays," said Ferrars, and then he turned to Hilda Grant.

"This is not a long good-bye," he said gently. "At least I hope not. I shall be back in 'the States' soon. And, may I not still find a cousin there? Or must I stand again outside the barrier alone?"

"You will always find an affectionate cousin," said Hilda, putting out her hand.

And now it was time to leave the ship. All around them was the hurry of delayed farewells, the bustle of late comers, the shifting of baggage, smiles, tears, last words.

[Pg 318]

Ferrars would remain for a time in London, but he knew, as he answered to the call "all ashore," that when he returned to the United States he would find in one of her fair western cities, a warm welcome and a lasting friendship.

The plot, by which the beautiful tigress-hearted woman whom they had known as Mrs. Jamieson had hoped to achieve riches, was cleverly planned. The real claimant had died in a remote place, and there were no near friends to look after her interests, or those of her young children. And then Harry Levey's sister, beautiful, and an adventuress, from choice, like her brother, had beguiled Gaston Latham, and had, by frequent changes of abode, by cunning, and by fraud, merged her own personality into that of the former wife. Then had come the baffling discovery of heirs in America, the plotting and scheming to remove them from their path—and the shameful end.

"Ferrars is a strange fellow," said Robert Brierly to his wife, one moonlight night, as they sat together, and somewhat aloof from the others on deck. "Do you know he was the sole attendant, except for her servants, at that woman's burial. He went in a carriage alone. Was it from sentiment, or sympathy, think you?"

It was the first time the dead woman had been spoken of, by either, since that trying day of her exposure and[Pg 319] death, and Ruth was silent a moment, before she answered;

the awful scene coming vividly before her. Then she put her hand within her husband's arm, and said, slowly, softly:

"It was because he is a good man; because she was a woman without a friend, and because she loved him."

There was a long silence, and it was Ruth who next spoke.

"Have you ever thought, or hoped, that the friendship and trust that has grown out of Hilda's relation to Mr. Ferrars might, sometime, end in something more?"

"No, dear, and this is why: Yesterday, Ferrars said to me 'There is a friend over in Glenville whom I hope you will not forget. Let him be your guest. And, if the day should come when your sweet sister that was to be should enter society and be sought by others, give the doctor his chance. He has loved her from the first.'"

Ruth sighed.

"Hilda is too young to go through the world loveless and alone. Yes, and too sweet. And the doctor is a noble man. But all this we may safely leave to the future, and to their own hearts."

THE END.

[Pg 320]

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