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By BURFORD DELANNOY

Author of "The Garden Court Murder"

"The Missing Cyclist" Etc. Etc.



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CHAPTER I

THE DENTIST'S IN FINSBURY SQUARE

The gong fixed in the door frame sounded.

A man entered as Sawyer hurriedly ceased a perusal of the pages of the *Boys of the World*, and stuffed that sample of the literature of young England up his page's jacket.

"Is the boss in?"

"Yes, sir."

"I want a tooth out."

"Yes, sir. Will you take a seat a moment?"

The boy handed the visitor a newspaper as he spoke, and then entered the inner room. To his employer he said:

"Gent wants a tooth extracted, sir."

He had attained the word "extracted" by diligent practice. It had been hard work, but he got home with it at last.

There was a hope prevailing in the dentist's breast that in time the boy would be able to say "gentleman"; at present there were no indications of the realization of that hope beyond the word's first syllable.

The dentist was wearily glancing out of the window. He looked very down in the mouth.

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That is said of him metaphorically, as, actually, it is part of the business of a dentist to do that sort of thing. That is patent.

He had little to do but admire the scenery of Finsbury Circus. It is not an inspiring landscape—weariness naturally follows its frequent observation.

His brother had rooms a few doors away, and was the proprietor of a brass plate which bore four letters after his name—Arthur Lennox, M.R.C.S.

Sawyer was a divided possession. However impossible it may seem for a man to serve two masters, the boy did—it came cheaper that way.

The surgeon and dentist were not having good times.

Patience is necessary in waiting for patients, and the stock of it they had laid in when they started in their respective practices was nearly exhausted.

Overdue rent and unpaid bills stared them in the face. In addition to their kinship they were brothers in misfortune.

It was such a rare thing for a patient to call that, when the page announced one, the dentist quite started. Immediately he said:

"Show him in."

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The boy did so, and retired. To his visitor, the dentist said:

"Good-morning."

"Good-morning. You are Mr. Charles Lennox?"

There was just that twang about the speaker's voice which some persons find so "charming"—and others tip their noses at—American.

"That is my name."

"I saw it up on the wire blind with the word 'dentist' after it."

"You need dental attention?"

"I need a tooth out."

"Will you sit down here?"

"Say! Hold on a minute. There's another combination on your blind. 'Painless Dentistry.'"

"Yes."

"I want to sample that kind."

"You mean—gas?"

"I mean the kind where you yank the tooth out without the owner knowing it. I've heard that it's done that way."

"Oh, yes, very frequently."

"Then fire away, boss."

"I shall have to ask you to wait a minute or two."

"What for?"

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"I must send for a medical man to administer the gas."

"Can't do it yourself?"

"No, it is not usual."

"Will it be long?"

"No, my anæsthetist is but a few doors away."

"All right, then."

"It is proper that I should mention that for the administration of gas an extra fee is charged."

"How do you mean?"

"The charge is half a guinea extra."

"Fifteen and six in all?"

"Yes."

"That's all right. If it really comes out without my knowing it, I shan't ask for my change out of a sovereign. Money's no object with me just now."

The dentist looked his opinion of the speaker, and, opening the communication doors, called the

boy.

"Run in to Mr. Arthur, and ask him if he will come in—gas patient waiting."

The boy ran in—and remained in Mr. Arthur Lennox' rooms, minding them while the surgeon went to help his brother.

As he entered the dentist's sanctum, the man who had been sent for said:

"Good-morning."

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"Good-morning; are you the pain killer?"

"That is my present mission," replied the surgeon, with a smile, as he drew out the rubber gas bag, and prepared the apparatus.

"What happens after I'm loaded? Sort of balloon business, this. How long do I stay gassed up?"

"But a minute, and during that minute the tooth is extracted."

"Sure it don't hurt?"

"Not at all—take my word for it. You are conscious, perhaps, of what is being done, but you will experience no pain."

"All right, then. It's warm in here; do you mind me taking off my coat, mister?"

"Not at all."

"I've been walking around pretty much all to-day winding things up."

"Ah!"

Politeness induced the surgeon to utter that exclamation; he was wholly uninterested. He wondered why patients should be so communicative.

"Yes; I'm off back to the States to-morrow. I have been round to Eldon Street about my passage, and as I walked into Finsbury Circus, blest if this tooth didn't come on aching a treat. I didn't reckon on any dentist being aboard the boat, so, when I saw your sign, I popped right in."

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"And now, if you will sit here.... So. That's it."

"Hullo! what's that?"

"Don't be nervous—just the gas. Imagine you are going to sleep. That is it.... There you are; Charley, he's gone under."

The surgeon walked aside, the dentist took his place, and, instrument in hand, quickly operated.

As he put the forceps down, and picked up a glass of water, he suddenly cried:

"Arthur! what's wrong? Arthur, quick!"

The surgeon was at the window, drumming with his finger-tips on the panes. He turned round hurriedly when he was addressed and inquired:

"What's the matter?"

But he needed no verbal answer. A look at the patient's face told him much.

He clawed up a towel, and putting it beneath the chin, snatched the glass of water the dentist was holding, and dashed it on the livid, colorless face.... It had no effect.

He threw the glass and towel down, and felt the pulse, tore open the man's vest, and applied his stethoscope; seized the body, laid it on the floor, and on his knees was astride it.

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"Brandy," he said, as he started in his muscular endeavor to restore animation.

His brother brought brandy, and poured some between the unconscious man's lips.

"My case is in the bag, Charley," said the surgeon, as he continued his efforts to pump air into the man's lungs. "Fill the hypo-syringe with brandy."

The dentist did so, and handed it to his brother.

The injection had no effect. Once more the manual exercise was tried—tried for nearly half an hour.

The dentist wore a very white face as he watched what was being done—the exercise kept the color in the surgeon's.

But when presently the latter rose to his feet and wiped the perspiration from his brow with his handkerchief, the hue of his face was in close competition with his brother's.

"Lock the outer door, Charley," he said, hoarsely.

The dentist did so without a word, but with a shaking hand. When he returned, the surgeon was drinking neat brandy.

And when he had finished drinking, he poured out more, and handed the glass to his brother.

The dentist looked his inquiry. The surgeon answered it:

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"Yes. Dead. This happens about once in five thousand cases. Our luck, I suppose, our luck still helping us."

He said this very bitterly, as they stood looking down at the body.

Presently the dentist inquired:

"What is to be done?"

The other shook his head by way of reply.

Again the dentist broke the silence.

"Shall we send for the police?"

"What good will that do?"

"It is the usual thing, is it——"

"Usual! The whole thing is unusual. The police spells for us ruin. A thing of this sort gets into the papers, and we might as well put up the shutters at once."

"Can we avoid——?"

"We must. Let me think—yes."

"You have thought of something?"

"Plain and ordinary enough. It did not want much thinking about."

"What is it?"

"Finsbury Circus is deserted at night?"

"Yes."

"Wait till then. Then throw the body over the rails into the Circus garden. Let the police find it there."

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"Horrible!"

"Why? The man's dead. The police have to find the body. What can it matter whether it is found in these rooms or the open air? It can't hurt the dead man to be found there. It will certainly hurt us if he is found here."

"That's so."

There was no help for it. Their exchequer was low enough down as it was—they must prevent the happening of anything which would reduce it still lower.

They had no belief in the proverb that when things were at their worst they would mend—because their condition was as bad as it very well could be, and there was an utter absence of any sign of a mend about it.

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CHAPTER II

WHAT WAS FOUND ON THE BODY

"Couldn't we put the body in a cab and send it home?"

"Could—but it would probably mean putting ourselves in the bankruptcy, if not the police court. The thing would be traced home to us. True, the bankruptcy would come only a little before the appointed time, just hasten things along, as it were."

"Could not we put——?"

"Let's put the body in this cupboard. That's the wisest thing to do for the present.... That's it. Turn the key. Now I'll get round to my rooms and send Sawyer back. That little imp must have no inkling of what has happened."

"He leaves at five o'clock."

"And it is close on that hour. Let him come in, and suppose the place empty. Let him leave at the usual time, in the usual way, and then I will come back."

Things happened that way, and soon after Sawyer had left for the day, the surgeon closed his offices and went into the dentist's.

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He locked the outer door, and walking into the inner chamber, said:

"Charley, I have been thinking it over, and it does seem an awful thing to do that over the railings business. Mind you, I still believe it all sentiment, but, if possible, we will find out where the man lived, and devise a means of driving him home."

"Won't it be dangerous?"

"Yes. Still we will risk it. It seems a brutal thing to do as I suggested. We will put him on his own doorstep late to-night."

"You think we can manage it without——"

"Great point is, where he lived. If in a quiet suburb we can manage it all right. Get a cab here at my door, send the cabby round the corner for some cigars, we mind the horse, and, while he is away, slip the body in. When he comes back he will notice nothing in the darkness."

"But the man said he was going to America to-morrow!"

"Great Scott! So he did. I had forgotten that. Anyway, let us see if he has any address, pocketbook, letters—or anything on him to show where he would have slept if living to-night."

The key was turned in the lock of the cupboard, the body brought out and searched.

In the pockets were a passage ticket for America, letters addressed to "Mr. George Depew (of New York), Armfield's Hotel, Finsbury." [Pg 18]

It was evident from the wording of the letters, which the brothers read, that Mr. Depew had stayed at Armfield's since his arrival from America.

The letters were from a city solicitor named Loide—Richard Loide, of Liverpool Street.

A perusal of those letters showed the whole reason of Mr. Depew's being that side of the Atlantic.

Loide had acted for Depew's aunt in the collection of the rents of certain properties. That aunt died, and Depew was sole legatee.

When the lawyer's letter reached him to that effect, Depew cabled Loide to sell all the property immediately. Another cable, a few hours later, announced that Depew was aboard a liner, and on his way to England. He was coming to look after his own.

The last letter from the solicitor was dated only one day before, and appointed two o'clock that very day—the day of the death—for Depew to attend at the lawyer's office, and receive nineteen thousand pounds, the amount the deceased woman's estate had realized.

The brothers were silent for a few moments after the perusal of that last letter. The consideration of a sum like nineteen thousand pounds, by two poor men, needs a few moments' silence. [Pg 19]

Then they turned over again the contents of the dead man's pockets. The purse contained a few sovereigns and dollars, the steamer passage ticket, two Broad Street station cloak room tickets, and nothing more.

"Nineteen thousand pounds!"

It was the surgeon speaking. He looked at his brother; his brother looked at him. Each look was full of eloquence.

Then they picked up the dead man's coat, felt every inch of the lining thereof, thinking to find a secret pocket, or notes sewn in it. Nothing.

The two cloak room tickets for portmanteaus inspired the dentist to remark:

"Must be in one of the portmanteaus."

The surgeon shook his head.

"No man," he said, "would be fool enough to intrust such a sum to a cloak room's tender mercies."

"Then at the hotel?"

The surgeon did not think so—said as much as he bent over the body and unbuttoned the waistcoat, to make a closer search.

He felt something hard round the waist, investigated further, unbuckled what he found, and brought a money belt to the table and loosed the catch. [Pg 20]

Notes! He pulled them out, and, as he fingered them, the rustle was as sweet music.

There were nineteen of them! Each for a thousand pounds.

They might have dreamed of such things, but they had never expected to actually handle such a sum.

For some while silence reigned. In incidents of this kind silence plays a big part.

There was no need of conversation—the brothers seemed to read each other's thoughts.

"It is a small fortune," presently whispered the dentist.

"And must be ours."

"Will the notes be traced?"

"We must guard against that."

"How?"

"I have been thinking——"

"Well?"

"This ticket—passage—has been booked in London; he will not be known on the ship."

"No."

"He intended going from Broad Street to Euston, thence to Liverpool, in time for the boat to-morrow."

"Well?"

"He will have to go."

"What, in heaven's name, do you mean?"

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"Heaven," said the surgeon grimly, "I am afraid, has little to do with this job. But, see here, Charley, there's time yet. We can be poor and honest, and give up this fortune, or a few hours' nasty work, and wealth—nineteen thousand pounds."

He picked up the notes again, and the rustle made both men's eyes sparkle.

A piano organ in the distance was jiggling out a "Belle of New York" tune, but no sound of it was heard by the brothers. Their ears were full of that crisp, crackling sound.

"But how do you mean that he will have to go?"

"One of us in his name, to America."

"Surely there is no need for that."

"Every need."

"Why?"

"For two reasons. He—this—has to be disposed of."

He indicated the corpse at their feet, and went on:

"Then, again, some one in his name must land in America, and disappear there, so that, when ultimately a hue and cry is raised, no suspicion may arise this side of the water."

"I see."

"While one of us is on the way to America, the other must gradually cash these notes at home. The numbers cannot be stopped for a week or two."

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"Yes. But—but the body?"

"Must be taken aboard the boat."

"Good God!"

"No help for it, Charley. I had better be the passenger; you look after the money. I have more nerve for the work. I shall take the body in two portmanteaus, and manage to drop them overboard *en route*."

"In two portmanteaus?"

"Yes. My old days at the hospital operating table will come back to me. Yes. Don't look so scared; there's no help for it—just lock the door after me while I go in for my case of instruments."

The dentist did so, and stood there waiting his brother's return. Waited with bulging eyes and open mouth.

His training had not been that of the hospital. He had not the coolness in handling the limbs of his fellow-men which practice had given the surgeon.

The piano organ had struck into a religious tune now, and was discharging "Abide With Me." The dentist heard that. Heard it and shivered. The eventide was falling fast.

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CHAPTER III

ON BOARD THE AMERICAN LINER

Arthur returned with his case of knives. He saw his brother would be worse than useless about him in the task he had in hand.

Personally, he had no more compunction about dismembering his fellow-men than a butcher had in disjointing a calf—it was his business.

"Drink this, Charley"—he had poured out some brandy and handed it to his brother. "And now put on your hat and go out; take a cab down to Goffs. Buy two large portmanteaus—second hand—not less than a yard long. Put them on a cab, and come back here with them. Rap three times on the door—don't forget, three times—then I shall know it is you. While you are away I will do what is necessary."

He did. Before his brother returned, there were five small parcels and one larger one—the contents may be guessed—done up in newspaper.

Not a trace of blood or otherwise of his handiwork was visible. He had been an attentive student, and profited by it now. In class he had been marked "clean." [Pg 24]

Three raps at the door. He opened it, and the dentist entered with the portmanteaus.

"Put them down, laddie, and while I pack, you clear out. See here, those bags in the cloak room at the station had better be fetched away; there is no knowing what is in them. If they are not large, get a porter to bring them by hand; if too big, put them on a cab and bring them that way. Here are the cloak room tickets."

And while his brother was away he packed the two portmanteaus with the American, and carefully locked and strapped them.

The keys he tied together with a piece of twine, and put into his pocket. Not that they were of use—the locks were never to be turned again.

He helped his brother in with the two bags from the cloak room. They carefully went through the contents, opening the locks with the keys they had found in the dead man's trousers pocket.

The bags were full of clothing, hosiery, and general wearing apparel; not a scrap of paper or article of any other kind.

"Charley," said the surgeon, "chirp up, old man. There is nothing to fear. Before I am far away on the trip to America you may be sure that every trace of a clue to the contents of those portmanteaus will be lying at the bottom of the sea. A dark night, an open port, and there will be an end of the matter. This passage ticket is, I see, for a two berthed cabin—that makes it easier." [Pg 25]

"I fear——"

"I know you do, old man—early and provident fear is the mother of safety. But there is nothing to fear. Murder will out, that we see day by day. But it is not as if we had murdered the man. We have not that crime on our consciences. Keep cool, and all will be well.

"I shall—must—land in America. I shall clear from the boat, one of the first. There I shall get another outfit, and come back in the next boat in another name. I shall go out, of course, as George Depew."

"I cannot get rid of the fear——"

"No, Charley, I know you cannot. But there is nothing to fear. Think what the money means to you, to us both. To you more than to me. You have a wife and little Edith to think of. Think what the money means, the happiness it will bring to mother and child—to them both."

"I know—I know."

"After all, I am doing whatever is being done, Charley. You conscientious old beggar you, just wipe the thing out of your mind. Let it be a leaf in the book of the past. Paste it down. Don't look at it, don't think of it. Only think of the future—the brightness of a future from which the clouds have rolled away, and which a few hours ago did not seem to have a piece of blue sky in it." [Pg 26]

"Yes—yes."

"The boat starts from Liverpool, calls only at Queenstown, and then steams away across to the States. Why, given ordinary traveling—I shall not be away more than a fortnight, Charley, and when I come back I shall expect you to have cashed all those notes—and turned them into something less traceable."

"How had I better do that? Go to the bank?"

"M'no. I don't think I can trust you to do that, Charley. You would present those notes with such a white face and trembling hand that the most unsophisticated bank clerk breathing would think there was something fishy."

"What shall I do, then?"

"M'well.... I have it! There are two rooms empty above these?"

"Yes."

"Take them to-morrow. Take them in the name of Jones, Brown, Robinson—any name. Get a list of the brokers on the stock exchange, and buy from separate men nine hundred pounds' worth of stock. Good stock—no risk. Railway shares and that sort of thing. Pay each of the brokers with a thousand pound note; you will want the change out of it for working with. Worse come to the worst, if the shares have to be sold, there will only be the loss of a few pounds."

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"I will do that."

"And now get along home, Charley, or you will have your little woman worrying about you. Don't, for heaven's sake, breathe a solitary syllable which will give the faintest clue to what has happened. Your wife is a smart little woman—don't give her too much money at first. Just a pound or two more for housekeeping expenses. Let her think your practice is gradually getting better day by day. And now shake hands. Good-bye."

"But you——"

"Oh! I stop here to-night."

"With those——"

"Yes. I don't let them leave my possession till I drop the contents in the sea. I take no unnecessary risks."

"But—you—can—sleep——"

"Certainly! soundly. Why not? There might be some reason to fear a live man, but a dead one—bah!"

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"I will come up early, and see you off."

"You will do nothing of the sort. Don't do anything a wee bit out of the ordinary course of things. I shall go out for half an hour presently, taking the key of the door with me, get something to eat, buy some collars, shirts, and a few necessary things for the journey, and then sleep in your operating chair."

"The chair he died in!"

"Dear boy, what of that? There, get along. Good-bye."

He literally pushed his brother from the rooms, and closed the door. Afterwards he did as he had said he would do.

In early morning a cab took the four portmanteaus to Euston Station, and he caught the train for Liverpool.

There he had two of the portmanteaus labeled "For Cabin Use!" the others, bags of clothing, were shot into the hold.

He found that the occupant of the other berth, his cabin companion for the voyage, had already turned in—presumably to get as much sleep as possible before the voyage began—and was breathing heavily, the breath of sleep.

A short time after he had got on board the vessel started. He determined not to leave the cabin, or sight of his portmanteaus, till he had thrown them or their contents into the deep waters.

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That he would do when they were fairly out to sea. Then he would pick safer—quite safe.

The vessel steamed on for her one and only stopping—Queenstown, to pick up the mails.

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CHAPTER IV

THE CITY LAWYER AND THE CLIENT FROM THE WILD AND WOOLLY WEST

Aunt Depew had lived on the rentals of the property she had left to her nephew. Loide had been her solicitor for nearly twenty years.

She had a blind confidence in him—that way fraud lies. Absolute trust in a man oft tempts him to break it.

Regularly every quarter he had paid over to her the rentals of the properties; that was all she had cared for. She had never troubled about, or even visited, the places in which the buildings were situated.

She had no idea that by reason of the building of a railway station, and other developing influences, the revenue of her property had gone up by leaps and bounds, and that ultimately, while she was receiving two hundred and fifty pounds a year from property which she thought worth about five thousand pounds, the lawyer was receiving four times that sum, and the real

value was about twenty thousand pounds.

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Could any more sad blow have been aimed at the lawyer than the black edged intimation which reached him one morning—tidings of the death of his best client?

The dead woman had had a companion living with her, and this companion had witnessed the will, and herself after the funeral handed it to Loide.

Otherwise there is a question when the tidings would have reached the legatee in America—if they ever got so far.

Yet that eternal hope we hear of in the human breast, sprang up in the lawyer's, when he reflected that America was a long way off, that he, Loide, was the executor, and would have the proving of the will.

What would be easier than to show the legatee the income his aunt had been deriving, and effect a bogus sale of a part of the property for about five thousand pounds? That he could transmit to America, and end the matter.

He wrote Depew, and when the cablegram came in reply, instructing him to sell the property at once, Loide rubbed his hands together and chuckled with glee. It was just what he had wanted.

But the glee was short lived. Another cablegram came, saying that Depew was on his way to England, and would be there in a few days.

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Then all hope left Loide's heart. Black ruin stared him in the face.

He had been drawing nearly a thousand pounds a year from the property which was to be at once sold. Few city lawyers could view the sudden cutting off of twenty pounds a week of their income with equanimity.

Loide viewed it with clenched hands, curses on his lips, and fear in his heart.

Then the fear gave place to another feeling—hatred. Hatred of this man who was crossing the water to rob him of what he had come to look on as his own.

This cursed American would come over and sell, and disappear with the proceeds.

But would he? Should he—Loide—allow him to do so?

The lawyer sat and thought. Then he determined to wait till Depew came and see what he could make out of him, see what manner of man he was.

It might be possible to handle him—profitably. The lawyer rarely handled mankind otherwise.

But when the American came, the thermometer of the lawyer's hopes dropped down to zero again.

Depew was a powerful, wiry, keen, shrewd, intelligent man of business. He picked the lawyer to pieces in five minutes, and so took greater precaution in seeing that he was fairly dealt with.

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The lawyer had quite an unpleasant time.

"Say, lawyer, things appear to have been handled by my aunt with a light hand. Understand that I am driving now, will you, and the coach won't rock, perhaps."

"How dare——"

"Don't bluster, old son. I come from a land where we make holes in blusterers—round holes, with bullets at the bottom of 'em."

"Do you dare threaten me?"

"What, with a shooting iron? Nary a threat. Ain't even brought one along with me. Away back in the woods where I live I wouldn't open the door without one in reach of my hand. I was warned not to carry arms in this country—that the British didn't take kindly to 'em."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Don't you? What are you looking so skeered about, then? What's your face gone all the color of paste for?"

"Let me tell you——"

"No, don't, old son—you let me tell you. We'll get there all the quicker. I don't say you have robbed my aunt——"

"Robbed!"

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"That's the creckt word. I don't say you robbed my aunt, but I'll take tarnation good care that you don't rob me. See? Now you just set about winding up this here estate quick as greased lightning, and mind that it realizes the best price. See?"

The man's shrewd eyes were fixed on his listener all the while he was speaking. Loide felt that the man saw through him, and the lawyer's shoes held a shaking man.

It was apparent that Depew was not an individual to be played with—successfully.

Within a very short time the property was sold; and, after deduction of the expenses, there was a sum of nineteen thousand pounds to hand over—the handing over nearly broke what was left of the lawyer's heart.

And it was a less fragile one than most men's, too.

"Now, old man," said Depew, as he buckled the notes in a belt he wore, "we'll have lunch together, you and I. The matter's been settled promptly, and I owe you some thanks."

They went into the Great Eastern Hotel, and had as elaborate a lunch as could be served.

The champagne raised the spirits of both. The American's were light enough. Loide's needed raising.

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And while they sat there, a scheme shaped itself in Loide's brain—it was an active, busy, plotting brain—and it found good ground to mature on.

He determined that the nineteen thousand pounds should be his at any cost. He said that again to himself—at any cost. His was a determination not easily shaken.

"What are you thinking of, lawyer?"

Loide started as he answered:

"Really of nothing. I was enjoying my wine."

"Where'll I book my passage—is there a bureau near here?"

"Yes, in Eldon Street there is a passenger agent—close here. I'll walk with you."

"Will you? I'll take it kindly. The streets are thicker here than in New York, and are a bit confusing to a stranger."

Depew paid the bill, and, lighting cigars, the two men walked along Liverpool Street into Eldon Street.

"You are still staying at Armfield's?"

"All the time—it's a good show. I sleep there to-night, and to-morrow on the Atlantic."

They entered the passenger agent's office, and that worthy had a two-berthed cabin vacant.

Depew booked one berth. The agent confirmed it on the telephone at the shipping office, the passage money was paid, and the men left.

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"Well," said the lawyer, "I must get back; which way are you going?"

"Through the Circus here. First I'm going to have an aching tooth out, and then on to the hotel. I've sent my luggage on, but I've got a small bag there still."

"Then you go that way?... Good-bye, good-bye, and a pleasant voyage home."

They shook hands heartily, and separated, going in opposite directions.

The moment Depew was out of sight, the lawyer returned to the passenger agent's office.

"My friend has altered his mind," he said. "He will book the other berth, and so have the whole cabin to himself."

"Right you are, sir."

The same process was gone through as before, and presently the lawyer left the office, with a ticket for the other berth in the cabin Depew was to journey in.

Did he intend to travel to America? Not quite as far.

The only place the boat stopped at after leaving Liverpool, so the passenger agent told them, was Queenstown. Stopped two or three hours there, sometimes, waiting for the tender to bring off the mails.

[Pg 37]

The lawyer determined to leave the ship at Queenstown, and he hoped to bring off his coup there—to bring off the steamer those nineteen crisp Bank of England notes which helped to girdle Mr. Depew's waist.

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CHAPTER V

BETWEEN LIVERPOOL AND QUEENSTOWN

Mr. Richard Loide was getting into the sere, the yellow leaf. A certain amount of baldness on his head he covered with a wig. His age and the wig prompted him to two courses of action.

He knew that he would be at a disadvantage in any personal struggle which might result from the steps he proposed taking. He discreetly determined to avoid one.

Firearms, in dealing with the man with the money round his waist, were out of the question. The noise would frustrate the very object he had in view—would attract the attention of others in the ship.

He did not desire an audience for the performance he had in mind.

So he bethought him of a long, stiletto shaped, yet fine pointed, two-edged knife he had seen for sale in a shop window.

He went to that shop, and acquired the weapon, tested its razor-like edge on a hair, then on a piece of paper, and was satisfied with the result.

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He hoped that Mr. Depew would, soon after leaving Liverpool, lie down in his bunk. He was anxious for that position, because it, apart from the knife, would give him an advantage.

In plain words, he proposed cutting the throat of Mr. Depew. It struck Loide as being an effective way of silencing, in a double sense, his man.

He did not suppose that a cry, if the man were able to raise one, would attract much attention, or be heard above the noise of the ship; but he did not want to take any unnecessary risk.

So he figured in his own mind that method of dealing with the American—killing two birds with one stone.

If, on the other hand, Depew did not lie down, then he would have to use his weapon stiletto fashion. A spring from his bunk on to his victim standing with his back towards him, and a powerful downward sweep and plunge, would be half way successful.

He imagined that most men threw up their arms and staggered back on the happening of such a thing—gathered the idea from witnessing the dramas of the Adelphi—that would enable him to turn and plunge the weapon into the man's heart.

All that would be necessary, then, was to put him in his bunk before the blood began to make a mess, take from his body the notes which engirdled it, and be ready to leave on the tender for Queenstown the moment that vessel came alongside the liner.

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He knew that two-edged weapons were proverbially dangerous, but he was comforted by the recollection of another proverb about cutting both ways.

As to its wig, he determined to change its color. It would be as well.

Not that he feared detection much; still the prudent man always took precautions, and Mr. Loide rated prudence very high.

He knew that when the boat left Queenstown it did not stop again till it got to the other side. That he counted on.

It would enable him to reach London, cash the notes, and be prepared for anything which might happen. He felt that with the money in his possession he would be prepared for anything.

He knew that when the purser went his rounds, or the steward, or whoever it might be, and discovered the dead body, all would be confusion.

The doctor and captain would be sent for, and an examination entered upon—but all the time the vessel would be leaving Queenstown further and further behind.

He knew the coursing of these ocean greyhounds well enough to know that the ship would not put back. That hundreds of passengers would not be inconvenienced, simply because one was dead, that the ship would go plowing her way right on.

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He turned up in the post-office directory the name of a wig maker the other side of London, and took a cab there.

He told some wholly unnecessary lies about the need of a colored wig, but might have saved himself the trouble, because the sale of a wig or wigs was an every-day occurrence with the keeper of the shop.

When Loide saw his reflection in the peruquier's mirror he was astounded at the change in his appearance.

The shopman, thinking he was dealing with an amateur actor, very kindly drew attention to his bushy black eyebrows.

"Want toning down," he said, "to match the wig."

"How do you—how do it?"

The shopman produced a little stick of what looked to the lawyer like cosmetic, and handed it to the customer.

The look of ignorance concerning its use made the man smile.

"Sit down," he said; "it's evident you are a new hand at making up. Let me show you."

[Pg 42]

He did. Daubed the grease paint on the hair, on the brows, and then combed them out.

When Loide looked in the glass again he started in astonishment.... He paid the man, thanked him, and withdrew.

The shop of a ready made clothier's caught his attention. He went in and bought a light colored cutaway coat and vest and soft cap—he had worn black clothing and the regulation chimney pot hat for the last thirty years of his life.

At a hosier's he purchased a colored shirt with a turn down collar, and a colored bow.

His immaculate white shirt, stiff upstanding collar and stock, should be discarded for the time being.

Later on, when he had donned this attire, he marveled at the change in himself. He was confident that no living soul would be able to recognize him.

And curiously enough, nature assisted him.

As he sat in the train to Liverpool, the loss of his upstanding collar and stock made his open neck an easy prey to the draft. When he set foot on the deck of the steamer he had a sore throat and a cold, which made his voice so raucous that no soul would have recognized in it the clear, distinct utterance of Mr. Loide, the lawyer.

His portmanteau on board, after satisfying the officer in charge of his right to a berth, he at once took possession.

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He was lying in his berth—apparently asleep—when the occupant of the other half of the cabin entered.

He was lying with his face to the wall, and only his red hair was visible. That and the smart colored cutaway suit, he felt, made him as much unlike the city lawyer as well could be. He did not fear Depew's recognition.

Soon after the second man entered the cabin, the vessel started. Loide knew at what hour she was expected to arrive off her one and only stopping place.

During the night, it was fair to assume that no officer of the ship would come to the cabin, and during the night he would kill and rob the other man. In the early morning he would leave on the Queenstown tender. That was his scheme.

He kept in his bunk. By the electric light in the cabin his companion read for some time.

He could hear the rustling of the newspaper; he dared not look round. About midnight the paper was thrown down, and the listener heard the sounds of a man making ready for his berth.

And presently the electric button was turned, and the cabin was in darkness.

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The lawyer's heart beat the faster then. So far all was going as well as he could wish.

Darkness, and his victim recumbent, perhaps asleep. What could he wish for more? Fortune was favoring him.

There were three hours now to wait before the reaching of Queenstown, and during those three hours the other man went to sleep.

Loide knew it, because he heard the sleeper's deep, heavy breathing, which bordered closely on snoring.

He handled his weapon, and dropped noiselessly to his stockinged feet. Paused—the same still, regular breathing.

He went to the door and noiselessly shot home the bolt. Paused—the same still, regular breathing.

Then he prepared to stop that breathing forever.

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CHAPTER VI

MURDER ON THE HIGH SEAS

Before his companion had entered the cabin, Loide had located everything in it.

Although in the dark, he knew the exact position of all things. So he reached the sleeper's side without a stumble or noise.

He knew where to place his hand on a towel, and he placed it. Folded it into a sort of pad, and gripped the middle in his left hand.

He bent over the sleeper, heard his breathing, and located his mouth by the feel of the warm breath. He paused to notice that the sleeper was lying on his back, then he gripped his knife—saw fashion.

In another moment he had clapped the towel over his victim's mouth, and drawn down the knife with a sawing, cutting movement.

There was just a faint, gurgling sound for a moment, a convulsive quiver of the whole of the sleeper's body, then stillness. The towel had stifled any possible cry—the knife had done the rest.

Loide stood there for a moment to recover his breath. He could almost hear his own heart beating. [Pg 46]

He tried to still it by thinking that there was not a scrap of risk, that it was all over now, that, presently, he would possess nineteen thousand pounds.

That last thought was not without its comfort. It is a fashion to speak of money as if it were dross, but as a salve to the conscience, pounds, shillings, and pence are unsurpassed.

The towel he was holding, he opened and threw it over the dead man's head and shoulders. He was not hyper-sensitive, but he wanted to avoid seeing what the towel would hide.

Then he turned the button of the electric light.

He looked round—not a sign of a struggle, not a drop of blood. Yet stay—his right hand! He must wash it.

Quickly he had water in the basin and was cleaning that hateful red stain away. While he wiped his hands, he reflected that he had but to pull the head curtains, and the body would appear to be that of an ordinary sleeping man.

That way the ship might get a dozen hours away from Queenstown before discovery. He shook hands with himself over the happiness of the idea he had—so far—carried out so cleverly.

Then he turned up the blankets and sheeting of the bunk. For obvious reasons he preferred turning them up from the feet to turning them down from the head. [Pg 47]

Depew had, with an oath, told him that, sleeping or waking, the belt would never leave him. He thought grimly that now the man was dead the oath would be broken.

He started in surprise; the man was not wearing a belt! He stood still, holding the bedclothes in sheer amazement.

He had expected the thing to be so easy of accomplishment—and the object of his search was not there at all!

He stepped back, and fell rather than sat on his own berth. He was more than surprised.

Then it occurred to him that perhaps, after all, the man had locked the money in one of his portmanteaus. Loide was thankful that he had time before him, in which to make search. He had been wise not to leave things till the last moment.

He felt in the dead man's coat, vest, and ultimately in a trousers pocket found two keys, tied together with a piece of twine. These he presently found fitted the portmanteaus.

He inserted a key in one, turned the lock, and unbuckled the straps. The bag contained but one thing—a huge parcel wrapped in newspapers. [Pg 48]

He would try the other bag—did so. Found it contained five smaller parcels, four long shaped and one something like a large football.

He picked up one of the long parcels and felt it. It had a curious half hard feeling.

He sat on his berth again and opened it on his knees. There was no string round the parcel.

As he held the end of the paper it unwound itself, and the contents dropped on to the floor—a human arm and hand!

He clapped his own hand to his mouth and so stifled a scream.

It is all very well to be cool over your own murderous work, but when you come across another man's, it is apt to startle you. Loide was the most startled individual on the Atlantic at that particular moment.

He sat there in stony amazement and horror. He feared to open the other parcels. Still he had to.

Qualms had to be kept down. The possession of nineteen thousand pounds depended on his search.

He imagined that Depew had murdered some one in England, and was taking the body out, perhaps to hide traces of his crime in the sea.

So curiously fashioned was the lawyer's intellect that he was rather glad that he had killed Depew—looked upon himself as a kind of weapon in the hand of justice. [Pg 49]

There is no accounting for the kinks into which a man's intellect will twist.

The avenger idea gave him the necessary courage to go on examining the rest of the parcels. Not a solitary thing save of the awful kind the first was.

The big parcel in the other portmanteau made him shudder in horror. He was glad when he was able to shut the bags and get rid of the sight of those horrible bundles.

Then another bag—a little hand bag—caught his attention. He felt mad with himself that he had not examined that first.

It needed no key. A pressure of the lock opened it, and he turned the contents on the floor; collars, handkerchiefs, shirts, and socks—nothing else.

Once more he sat on his bunk—sat there with his chin in the palms of his hands, thinking.

How long he sat there he never knew. He was awakened by the steamer's gongs; the engine room was being signaled.

He clambered to the port-hole, and in the gray of the early morning he could see they were off Queenstown, and the tender was nearly alongside.

He had no time to lose. What should he do?

Then it occurred to him that, as a measure of precaution, the man had given his belt to the captain, to be locked up in the ship's strong-room. That was the solution of the mystery, then. [Pg 50]

He cursed his luck, himself, and the dead man. For absolutely nothing he had run all this risk, and killed a man, and had yet to escape.

It was—from his point of view—perfectly monstrous. If the dead man could have wanted revenge, surely he was having it then.

There was a screech from the tender's siren; she was coming alongside.

He put on his boots, and as he did so there was a sound of rapping at the door. He hurriedly pulled the head curtains of his victim's berth, and, shooting back the bolt, opened the door.

"Any letters or telegrams for shore, sir?"

"Is there time to go ashore?"

"Can if you like, sir; the tender will bring you back. You will get about an hour ashore."

"Very well, I will go, then."

"At once, sir. The tender will leave in less than five minutes."

And the officer went on his round collecting letters and telegrams.

Loide put on his hat, flung the blood stained knife out of the port-hole, turned the button of the electric light, and stepped outside, closing the door after him. [Pg 51]

Then he suddenly remembered that the most likely place of all he had overlooked. A sleeping man would place valuables beneath his pillow.

He entered the cabin again, turned the electric light button, and slid his hand under the dead man's pillow—nothing.

To make assurance doubly sure—much as he dreaded looking on the face of the man he had murdered—he pulled aside the towel.

Then for a second time he was paralyzed with astonishment and horror, and thrust his fingers in his mouth to prevent the escape of a cry. He had never before seen the face of his victim. It was not his client Depew.

He had killed the wrong man! [Pg 52]

CHAPTER VII

THE NUMBERS OF THE MISSING NOTES

Loide got off the boat safely. On the wharf at Queenstown he secured a position where, concealed himself, he could watch the liner.

Hours seemed to drag by which were in reality minutes. At last the tender put off with the mails and reached the steamer's side.

With his glasses he could see everything that was going on. There was no excitement.

The bags were handed on board, and presently he made out a wake of foam from the blades of the steamer's screw. The tender had turned and was coming back; the steamer was going on.

Loide breathed a deep sigh of relief. So far nothing had been discovered.

Ultimately he reached London, and let himself into his office after dark—as he had left it.

He made shirt, clothing, and wig, and all the coal he had in his office scuttle into a parcel, and a short while after that parcel was making a hole for itself in the soft mud under London Bridge. [Pg 53]

The disguise was disposed of—and Richard was himself again.

An aggravated, very much upset Richard. He had committed actual murder, and was not a penny the richer for it.

The heinousness of the crime did not present itself to him; he rather looked at it from the standpoint of its barren financial result.

He had so counted on a large profit in connection with his quick return.

He had food for thought, sufficient to last an ordinary man many meals.

But Mr. Richard Loide was not an ordinary man. He no longer imagined those crisp Bank of England notes to be in the steamer's strong-room.

He did not believe they were even on the ship. That towel removed and a tragic story stared him in the face.

What did it mean?

That he could not fathom. One solid fact was existent—there had been foul play.

Some one had the notes. The man in whose possession they were had a hand in the murder. And that is where Mr. Loide hoped to step in and take a part in the drama.

The hand of death had lowered the curtain on the first act, and the lawyer just hankered after getting behind the scenes. [Pg 54]

He formed an idea of his own that, for some reason, Depew was lurking in England; had bargained with the man Loide had killed to personate him on the boat, and so destroy a clue to his existence in London.

What then did the other, the cut up body mean? Who could that have been?

He regretted now that his horror had prevented his looking at the head.

That was another puzzle, and he could not in any way solve it.

But he was bent on one thing—the finding of Mr. Depew, and the bleeding of him for all he was worth.

Being a city lawyer, and moving in city financial circles, blackmailing had not for him the horrid appearance it presented to most people.

One gets used to the atmosphere one breathes daily, and the atmosphere of London city reeks of blackmail.

Suddenly a thought came to him which sent all the blood to his heart, and caused him to start to his feet in alarm.

Suppose he had been deceived? Suppose he had not handed the money over to the real George Depew? [Pg 55]

He broke into a cold sweat at the mere idea!

He remembered how exceedingly lax he had been because Depew had frightened him.

The American had seen through the frauds on his aunt, and practically taxed the lawyer with them. Had he chosen, he could have made him disgorge all those gains of years.

Why had he not? If the real, genuine nephew, cute and sharp as he had been in getting the full value of the estate from the sale, why had he not, with his suspicions aroused, insisted on an inspection of the back accounts?

Why had he not? And once more the sweat of fear beaded on Loide's brow.

He was poor enough as it was. What if a real George Depew appeared on the scene and demanded that which was his?

The perspiration beads grew in size.

The lawyer called to mind how meagre had been the identification. He remembered that, frightened as he had been he had accepted a certificate of birth, and some envelopes directed to Depew in America, as confirmation that he was the real man.

For that the lawyer would never forgive himself. In ordinary circumstances he would have probed much more deeply.

That fright—that was what did it—unmanned him, and made him behave like a perfect ass. He [Pg 56]

could have kicked himself for an hour and rejoiced in the resultant pain.

He told himself that he needed punishment—badly.

He thought of his own disguise; how he had so changed his own appearance that he had not known himself in the mirror.

Why should not Mr. Depew have done a similar thing?

Then another thought. Did disguise account for the different appearance of the man who was now crossing the Atlantic with a gaping wound in his throat?

No; he felt that was not so. Depew was a head shorter than the man he had killed.

He was glad he remembered that, because it removed the slightest doubt. It convinced him that Depew was in London, and it must be his—Loide's—business to find him.

Find him, and put pertinent questions to him; make him do a sum in arithmetic—two into nineteen—and hand over the quotient.

He did not fear an interview. The unexpected always happens, and the unexpectant one is generally at a disadvantage.

Loide felt that. Felt that, in the language of Depew's country, he would be "upper dog" in the interview. [Pg 57]

And then he set his wits to work—how to discover George Depew's whereabouts.

And meanwhile, in the same compass, within the radius of the city of London, another man was thinking—thinking with the same strained look on his face, too.

He was standing looking out of the window of a room in Finsbury Circus, standing there gnawing what was left of the nails of his hand, and watching but for one man's advent—the postman.

He was not looking for the telegraph boy—he knew it was too late for that—but a letter from his brother.

It had been arranged between them that the moment Arthur reached Queenstown in safety he should despatch a wire with the two words "All serene" if things were so.

And in case he should be asleep when the boat was off Queenstown, he had asked the purser to give him a call.

No such wire reached the dentist, hence his own disturbed serenity.

He waited and waited for it till he worked himself into such a state of nervousness—he had not his brother's iron will—that he shook from head to foot. [Pg 58]

That no one in need of dental attention visited him that day was fortunate for the man with the aching tooth.

A trembling hand is not the best kind with which to grip forceps.

As the day passed by and nothing came, the dentist became positively ill. He drank all that was left of the bottle of brandy, and for the first time in his life went home the worse for it.

His wife was surprised, amazed, shocked. That was, perhaps, as well.

In her offended dignity she stood aloof from him. It was better so.

Long before breakfast in the morning he had left the house. He wanted to be in Finsbury Circus before the postman, and he was.

The first delivery—no letter. He staggered back, fell into a chair, and buried his face in his hands. What could it mean?

It did not occur to him that a letter from Queenstown could not reach so quickly.

His brain was pregnant with but two ideas. His brother had promised to telegraph—he had not. His brother had promised to write—he had not.

And he seemed to see that one question standing out in fiery letters on the wall: "What did it mean?" [Pg 59]

He had the notes. He had instructions what to do with them, but he dared not carry out those instructions.

Suppose his brother had been arrested—arrested with the terrible contents of those two portmanteaus in his possession!

As each edition of the evening papers came out, he sent Sawyer for copies, but he gleaned nothing from them, no arrest was reported, nothing in any way bearing on the matter.

The purchase of the papers did no good—save sending him up in the estimation of his satellite.

Sawyer imagined that "the gov'nor had been putting a bit on the four legged 'uns," and was

anxious to peruse the column captioned "All the Winners."

His own sporting instincts made him look up to his employer for the first time.

And the lawyer?

Made up his mind. It was risky what he proposed doing, because, as a man innocent of any knowledge of what had occurred, he was clearly, legally wrong in doing it.

Still he had to find Mr. Depew, and there was only one way to do it.

Fraught with risk—but he risked it. Desperate diseases need desperate remedies.

[Pg 60]

He sat down and pulled a sheet of his headed office paper towards him. Then—as a lawyer—he wrote a letter.

It was to the Bank of England stopping the numbers of the nineteen notes he had obtained from that institution, and paid over to Mr. Depew.

Bold, daring, but must necessarily be successful.

[Pg 61]

CHAPTER VIII

THE SEALED UP CABIN

"Man overboard!"

The cry rang through the ship—as cries of that sort do—first uttered by the man who witnessed the happening, and then passed from mouth to mouth.

As a matter of fact it was a girl—a child—who had fallen overboard, and the nurse was standing with blanched face and clasped hands, watching what looked like a bundle of clothing on the surface of the ocean, which bundle the vessel was now rapidly leaving astern.

Then another cry rang out. It was literally as well as vocally a man overboard this time—a real man.

For such a title is surely due to one who plunges from a liner's deck into the sea to save another's life.

The gongs were ringing in the engine-room before the man touched the water, but a liner traveling at the rate of twenty knots an hour has a way on her.

[Pg 62]

"Full speed astern" showed on the indicator, and then careful handling of the vessel became necessary. Almost directly she stopped.

As she stopped, the boat which had been hanging from the outspread davits with a crew in her was rapidly lowered, and once in the water, vigorously rowed in the direction pointed out by the standing coxswain.

Rescuer and rescued were promptly hauled into the boat, and carried to the waiting ship, neither of them much the worse for their ducking.

The girl was seized by her mother and nurse, and speedily carried off to their own private cabin.

The rescuer—Gerald Danvers, a second-class passenger—at his own request went down the stoke hole.

Brave enough to dive into the sea, he yet had a dreadful fear of rheumatism, to which he was subject; hence his desire for the warmth of the stoke hole.

A drink of brandy and willing hands to rub him down and the warmth of the stoke hole soon made him himself.

He had at hand only the clothes he stood upright in; the rest of his wardrobe, packed in a portmanteau, was in the hold.

The usual custom was departed from, and a man despatched to try to find his portmanteau—a brown one with his initials "G. D." on it.

[Pg 63]

"Don't bring it down here, old chap," said Danvers to the man who had volunteered to fetch it. "Here are my keys. There are only clothes in it. Just bring me underflannels and shirt, that's all. I can wait while these trousers dry."

He had thrown off coat and vest and boots before he had dived.

The things were brought him, and he sat talking to the men while his trousers dried, as they very quickly did in such an atmosphere, and before long he was on deck again.

He would probably have been made to pose as a hero—for a shipload of passengers needs something to occupy its attention—but another more startling sensation came about.

The mere saving of a life sank into insignificance before the loss of one.

The sea was not rough, and very few passengers were in their berths. Nearly all of them sat down to the meals prepared for them.

Before dinner, the steward went over his list, and found that the occupants of one of the two berthed cabins had not figured at breakfast or luncheon.

He went to the door of the cabin, and rapped with his knuckles—twice—thrice. Getting no answer, he turned the handle and pushed open the door.

[Pg 64]

One berth was empty; in the other the occupant was apparently asleep.

"Don't you feel well, sir?"

No answer. Question repeated. Same result.

Then the steward drew aside the curtains, and was transformed into the whitest faced being aboard that ship. For what he saw was a man lying there with his throat cut.

To bound out of that cabin and fetch the doctor and captain was the work of a few moments.

"Suicide."

One word the steward had let drop, and it spread all over the ship like wildfire.

But the doctor shook his head at the suggestion the moment he saw the body.

"What is it?" inquired the captain; "don't you think it suicide?"

"No," answered the doctor laconically; "murder."

"Murder!"

"Yes."

"Who occupied the other berth? Where is he? Find him. What? went ashore at Queenstown—don't know whether he came back on tender? Who received the mails? Tell him to come here."

[Pg 65]

The officer sent for came.

It was in his watch that the tender departed and returned. Had noticed a red-haired man who had come aboard at Liverpool.

"Passenger of this berth was red-haired," interjected the steward.

"Go on," said the captain; "did you see the man come back on the tender? Is he aboard?"

The officer scratched his head and replied:

"Come to think of it, sir, I don't remember that he did come back."

"Are you sure?"

"Well, yes, I am, sir. It was very early morning when we touched, and I noted that only one passenger went on the tender."

"Sure it was the occupant of this berth?"

"Must have been, sir," interrupted the steward, "because when I rapped for letters and telegrams the red-haired man asked whether he could go ashore, and how long he could stop."

"And you—?"

"Told him, sir. I didn't actually see him go, but he was already dressed."

The captain turned to the officer who had received the mails.

"Are you sure the man did not come back on the tender?"

[Pg 66]

"Yes, sir. Certain, now I come to remember."

"He has escaped, then," said the captain. Then, looking at his watch, he continued: "We are nearly twelve hours out from Queenstown. I shall not put back."

"Gives the murderer a good opportunity of escape, doesn't it?" queried the doctor.

"Yes, yes; I know. But we should be more than a dozen hours getting back with this wind, and the ship would be detained. No, I'll go on. Let the American police investigate it."

"Information ought to be furnished as promptly as possible," said the doctor dubiously.

"That's all very well for you, doctor; but what would they say to me as captain of the ship? We will draw up a full report. Just write down as detailed a description of the escaped man as you can, steward. Bryer, run up to the bridge, and tell the mate to steer for any vessel coming in, and fly a flag that we want to communicate. We'll send the description back. That's the best way out of the difficulty, doctor."

It was not the doctor's duty to dispute the captain's authority.

He may have had his own opinion as to what should be done, but he forbore from expressing it. He had his thoughts, and he had his living to get.

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The latter fact often prevents a man's thoughts finding their way to his lips. This is an age of discretion—it often pays better than mere valor.

"Been dead over a dozen hours," he said, after examining the body.

"That seems to confirm the idea of murder and escape at Queenstown."

"Better leave all things as they are for the police to examine, eh?"

"Yes."

Disinfectants were put in the cabin, and the door locked.

At the suggestion of the doctor, the captain affixed seals to a piece of tape fastened to the door and its lintel. The ship steamed on.

Ocean bore a secret on her billowy bosom—it was but one added to the myriads buried in her fathomless depths.

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CHAPTER IX

A WAITING WIFE'S DISCOVERY

In the sight of the harbor of New York the ship slowed down, and the tender came alongside.

The customs officers and port sanitary authority came aboard.

Soon after the liner was moored at her pier, and in compliance with the signal she had hoisted, the police came on board.

Not a passenger was allowed to land until the officers had thoroughly gone into their characters, and investigated the details which the captain had thoughtfully put on paper.

Every passenger, his address, description, and destination had been listed; the evidence of the second mate, doctor, steward, and purser had been committed to paper and signed.

The two berthed cabin spoke for itself—eloquently.

The passengers were allowed to land at last. There was no reasonable excuse for their further detention.

The crowds waiting on shore had wondered at the delay, but the first man off told the news, and it spread.

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The extra editions of the newspapers sold well that evening. It is an ill wind which fails to inflate the circulation of the newspapers.

The people assembled at the pier gradually dispersed, moving away with the friends they had come to meet, until at last only the working staff of boat and shore hands were around.

The public had gone home—all save one member of it, a tall, bony, dressed in country style woman.

She had started from home with whole white cotton gloves on.

As she stood watching the boat now, there was not a whole finger left in one of the gloves—she had nibbled them off in her anxiety.

She attracted the attention of the hands discharging the cargo, and was the object, among themselves, of many humorous remarks.

"Waitin' for some one, missus?" at last one of the men inquired of her.

She was glad. She had been afraid to come forward and make inquiries. Now the spell was broken, she said:

"Yes. Have all the passengers landed?"

"There's one—or two—still aboard," the man answered, grimly.

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But the grimness was lost on the woman. She gave a sigh of relief. She had yet to learn that the passengers spoken of by the man had crossed the Stygian Ferry as well as the Atlantic.

"Mebbe one of 'em's the one I've come to meet."

"I hope not."

"Why?"

The man disregarded the question. Something had occurred to him. He inquired:

"What might be the name of the person you've come to meet?"

The woman hesitated a moment, and then answered:

"Depew."

The man suppressed a whistle of astonishment, and repeated the name:

"Depew!"

"Yes; George Depew. Was he aboard, do you know?"

"Wait here a moment, missus—don't go away. I'll go and inquire for you."

He disappeared in the ship. He went to the captain's cabin, and knocked at the door.

The police officers and witnesses were there discussing the murder.

"Come in."

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And he went. Touched his cap, then took it off, and spoke:

"Woman outside, sir—been waitin' long time."

"Well?"

"I spoke to her—asked who she was waitin' for."

"Yes."

"Said for Depew—George Depew."

The plain clothes officer was on his feet in a moment inquiring:

"Where is she?"

"On the pier."

"I'll go and see her; come, point her out to me."

They left the cabin. The tall, gaunt woman was standing where the sailor had left her. Thanking the man, the officer went towards her.

"They tell me," he said pleasantly, "that you are waiting for a passenger."

"Yes."

"Perhaps you did not see him land."

"I never took my eyes off the gangway."

"Then you think he is aboard."

"I understood the man to say there were one or two passengers there still."

The detective suppressed a smile at the grim humor of the sailor's remark. They were there still—very still.

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"What is the name of the person you were expecting to meet?"

Again there was a slight hesitation before the woman spoke. Then she said:

"Depew."

"George?"

"Yes. Then he is aboard?"

"Well—you—see——"

Then something dawned on, some fear seized the woman. It was in a trembling voice that she inquired:

"You, you are not wearing the ship's uniform. You—you are a policeman?"

"That's so."

"My God! I see. I see why he has not landed. It's all found out—he's in custody."

The detective twiddled the ends of a moustache he had under cultivation.

The case had looked complicated—and he liked complications—indeed, got a living out of them. But this latest phase of the business looked like the envelopment of the puzzle in another one.

"Tell me," she said, "is he aboard?"

"Yes."

"Let me see him."

"Come this way."

She came.

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As they went below, the detective paused a minute. He inquired:

"Are you any relation of his?"

"His wife."

The detective whistled. Then he said:

"Come in here."

"He is not here?"

"No."

"Take me to him."

"Don't be in a hurry. See here, you'd best prepare yourself for a shock."

"Shock!"

"Your husband came aboard this boat at Liverpool."

"I know that; is he here now?"

"His—his remains are."

"His—his——"

"Now brace up. Take the blow like a—like a real woman."

"G-go on."

"He's lying aboard the ship now."

"Lying!"

"Dead."

"D-dead."

"Here, hold up. There, there, pull yourself together, missus——. Here, drink that——. That's better——. We all have to die, you know, sooner or later——. That's it. Sit there a minute or two. Now, you are going along all right, aren't you?"

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"Yes—yes."

"Drop more water? That's it. Now, how do you feel? Well enough to see the body? You'd like to? That's all right, then. Must be identified, you know. Just sit here a minute, and I'll arrange things for you."

He went out, leaving the woman staring stonily at the roof of the saloon. To a subordinate on duty he said:

"Open that cabin, Mace. Tuck a towel round the neck so the wound don't show. Woman's his wife. I haven't told her yet he's been murdered. Time for that after she identifies him. Stand by."

He returned to the saloon in which he had left the woman.

"Now, Mrs. Depew."

The woman started.

"Just lean on my arm, ma'am, and brace yourself up. This way. Mind the step. That's it. In here. There you are, ma'am. There's the body."

The woman moaned, braced herself up as she had been told to, and went forward.

The moment her eyes rested on the dead body she screamed:

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"That!"

She flung up her arms, and burst into hysterical laughter, which ended in a wail as she sank, a nerveless heap, in the officer's arms.

"Too much for her, Mace. Here, give me a hand out with her. That's it. Take her on deck, the air will bring her to. That's it. Fetch a pillow for her head. Heart's beating, and she's breathing all right—it's only a faint. The shock was too great for her."

It was. She had expected to see in the dead man her husband.

It was an expectation she had not realized.

CHAPTER X

HOW THE DEVIL TEMPTED HIM

"There, there," said the doctor; "you will be all right in a few minutes."

The woman closed her eyes again.

"It was the shock of seeing her dead husband."

The doctor spoke this in a whisper, but the woman heard. She opened her eyes. She spoke:

"Let me lie like this for half an hour. I shall be all right then. I—I am subject to fainting fits."

"Certainly. We shall be in that cabin there—there, away where you see the light. You see it? That's all right. We will leave you now, and when you feel well enough, come in, and you shall hear all the particulars."

She moved her head. They walked away.

She shifted on her back, and the eyes in the head resting on the pillow were fixed on the stars. She lay quiet—thinking.

Thinking what to do; or what had happened; how to escape; of the mistake she had made, and whether it would bear bad fruit.

For the dead man lying in the ship's cabin was not named Depew, nor was the living woman lying on the ship's deck named that way. [Pg 77]

It was a case of lying right through, and she thought to herself that she had in a measure given the show away.

So she lay thinking. The mantle of night fell gradually and cloaked things.

Shadows were deep. She might steal off the ship in them unseen.

A boat's lantern hung at each end of the gangway, but there appeared to be no one watching her.

There was not. It was not supposed that there was the slightest chance of her running away.

A woman overcome by emotion as she had been does not run away from the recently discovered body of her dead husband.

So the police argued—argued in the dark—in ignorance of the facts, and left her in the dark in fancied possession of them.

Should she go to that cabin with the light, brave it out there, and carry the lie on further?

Or should she steal off in the gradually growing darker night, and escape home?

Home! Her home more than fifty miles away in the village of Oakville.

She determined to do that. Many reasons prompted her to the act. [Pg 78]

Her husband had not been on the boat. Another man bearing his name filled his berth.

There was trickery somewhere—but that was no novelty where her husband was concerned. She was unprepared for it, and had made a mistake. Best rectify it by escape.

She did. Cleared the ship without a soul noticing it.

Reached the railway station, and hid herself in a corner of the ladies' waiting room till the Oakville train started. In that train she was carried home.

Her real name? Todd—Susan Todd. Her husband? Josh Todd.

All that was left of the husband was in the cabin of the ship she had left. It had traveled in two portmanteaus.

His had been a checkered career, but at last he had handed in his checks.

How did it happen that he masqueraded before Lawyer Loide as George Depew?

Because he was the right hand of the somewhat illiterate western farmer who bore that name, or as he would himself have described it, his head cook and bottle washer.

George Depew could write his name, and his caligraphic talents ended right there. So he took for assistant Josh Todd. [Pg 79]

Josh saw to all the correspondence, opened the letters, read and answered them. His wife, Susan, was the house help.

Between them, they were paid well, and could have put away for the rainy day. But providence was a thing unknown to Josh.

He put nothing away, except an excessive quantity of old Rye. On Saturday nights he went into Oakville, and in the saloon there sat at the table presided over by Mr. Jack Hamblin.

Jack Hamblin was generally the richer by Josh's visits.

Frequent handling of the cards had made him expert in the dealing thereof. He usually dealt.

So Josh—as he figuratively put it—had not a feather to fly with. And he did not like it.

There was farmer George Depew—provident man—putting by a little each year. Not much, but sufficient for his wife and daughter, Tessie, if he should suddenly be beckoned into the next world.

Then one day there came a letter from a London lawyer named Loide, to George Depew.

As usual Josh opened it. He cursed the luck of Depew freely, and then paused—paused to wonder whether he could not make that luck his own.

Susan had been with the Depews when they paid a visit to England many years before. So Josh took counsel with the wife of his bosom, and learned all there was to know about George. [Pg 80]

It was a certain thing that on the other side of that wide water—which the rapidity of our ocean grayhounds has made us come to think so narrow—not a living soul could remember George Depew.

That determined Josh. And when he had determined he always went on.

His scheme was simplicity itself. But for lawyer Loide's fears he probably would not have succeeded so well.

Josh told the real George Depew that he had had a little money left him in Europe, and that his attendance the other side was necessary.

Good-hearted, honest old George congratulated him, and willingly acceded to the request for a month's holiday.

He went into New York, bought two portmanteaus, had the initials "G. D." painted on them, and to them transferred the contents of the bags with which he had left the farm.

A certificate of his employer's birth, a bundle of letters directed to him, two cables to the lawyer, a passage on the next outgoing steamer, and he had all the voyage to think of what he could do next.

A shrewd, keen man, he at once saw through the cheating of lawyer Loide—and handled that limb of the law accordingly. [Pg 81]

Fear of detection blinded the lawyer; he failed to make the usual precautionary inquiries. Conscience doth make cowards of us all.

Susan saw her husband off from New York, and she never saw him again.

She had a cable from him saying which boat he was returning by, and that he had sent a letter to her to be called for at the New York post-office.

She went to New York on the day the home coming steamer was to arrive, and called for the letter sent by the preceding mail. It read:

DEAR OLD GIRL:

All's gone right, and I am as happy as a clam at high water. There's been two hands at the grab game I've been playing, but I've raked in the pool. Nineteen thousand English pounds, old girl. Think of it. Reckon it up, and see what it comes to in almighty dollars.

The property is all sold, and the proceeds will be mine in a day or two. The lawyer here is a cute thief, but he found me cuter. I gave him some chin music he'd never listened to before in his natural. No bunco steerer can come it over Josh, and don't you forget it.

I'll be back by the boat arriving on Wednesday the 13th. I'll cable you certain, so you can come out to meet me.

No more work, old girl. Enjoyment for the future. There's no chance of anything being found out, but all the same we'll skip from the farm. I'm just as full of joy as I was of Old Rye the day you saw me off. [Pg 82]

Only one thing troubling me: that blamed old tooth of mine at the back, that you put the cotton in, is aching like mad. I'll just get a dentist to yank it out if I can find one to do it without pain.—So long, old girl, your loving husband,

JOSH.

P.S.—Burn this when you've read it.

Susan did not comply with the request contained in the postscript. She had read it when she left the post-office, and thrust it into her pocket as she hurried to the pier.

There, the shock of the discovery that her husband was dead, and the double shock of relief and joy to find that the dead man was not her husband, upset her so, that she lost consciousness, and for a time the subsequent proceedings interested her no more.

She came to herself on deck with the letter still in her pocket.

If she stayed in New York there was going to be trouble. She saw that plainly. She must go home and wait for another cable from Josh.

So she went home. And the letter was still in her pocket.

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CHAPTER XI

A LIFE FOR A LIFE

Danvers—the man who had dived from the ship and saved the child—was the bearer of a letter of introduction to George Depew, and the next day he presented himself with it at the farmhouse.

Susan admitted him. Neither had, of course, ever seen the other.

Danvers was a rolling stone—had been a colossal failure as a moss gatherer in the mother country.

He was keen and intelligent, and busy with other people's affairs, but sleepy, indolent, and lazy with his own.

Every one liked him, yet every one shook his or her head when his name was mentioned. It was felt that he would never be a success.

At last it was determined to ship him to a country where he would have to work, from the fact that there there would be no friends to help him.

If he wanted to eat, he must earn his food by his labor. It was felt that it was best for Danvers—and best for the friends he had been living on so long.

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The friends felt that strongly.

The exile jumped at the idea. He had long wanted to see America.

One of his friends had done business with Depew over certain consignments, and to Depew he wrote a letter introducing Danvers, and asking him to do what he could for the bearer.

Others of his friends purchased for him clothing and outfit generally, and saw him off—with their pockets lighter perhaps, but a strong feeling of relief.

Depew welcomed Danvers heartily.

Strangers were rarely seen in Oakville. Come from the mother country, he was doubly welcome.

Danvers felt that he had dropped on both feet.

Straightway, too, he fell in love with the farmer's daughter, and it must be admitted that his city ways found favor in the eyes of Tessie.

The farmer promised to find him work, and meanwhile put him into the position the supposed to be holiday making Josh had filled.

This was a thing which disturbed Susan.

Days went by and she was still without news from her husband, and here was a stranger—she knew now that he came over in the boat she had been on—filling the post her husband had so long occupied.

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She feared, too, lest any of Josh's petty delinquencies should come to light. She knew that his books must bristle with evidence of them.

So things went on for two or three weeks, Susan working herself up to such a state of excitement that at times the blood rushed so to her head that her eyes were blinded to the work she was engaged in.

The acuteness of her agony nearly drove her mad; it arose from the silence which was imposed on her; she dared not make any inquiries.

And then one day she received such a shock that she became mad in real earnest. For she felt convinced that her husband had been murdered, and that Danvers was his murderer.

Did she not at that very moment hold in her hands unquestionable proof of his guilt?

She was standing at the wash-tub when she discovered it. It had been through her hands once before at the weekly wash.

It was simply a flannel undervest, given out with the rest of his washing by George Danvers.

But it bore her private mark, which she had with her own fingers put on to the vest of her missing husband weeks before. It had belonged to and been worn by Josh Todd!

There was no real mystery about it, and if she had opened her mouth the matter would have been made plain to Susan. But her lips were sealed to silence. [Pg 86]

She remained with the firm conviction that her husband was dead, and that his murderer was sleeping beneath the same roof as herself.

She became filled with a fiendish desire for revenge. It was impossible for her to give any information which would convince the police and bring about the murderer's punishment, but she was none the less convinced herself.

She could not insure his sitting in the electrocution chair, but that was no reason why he should go unpunished.

But one desire filled her—she hankered for vengeance.

She sought for means of compassing it. She never closed her eyes at night for thinking about it—thinking how to get level with Danvers.

She wanted a life for a life.

The solution of the mystery? Simple enough. Gerald Danvers' things had been got together by his friends. He had only handled them in packing his portmanteau—a portmanteau which bore his initials.

When in the stoke hole on that day of the child's rescue, he had asked one of the sailors to get his portmanteau and handed the keys from his wet trousers. The man had singled out in the hold a portmanteau bearing the initials "G. D." and the key fitting it—it was the ordinary key, one of which will fit hundreds of the cheaper kind of lock—he had taken out an undervest and shirt. [Pg 87]

That they were not an accurate fit in no way disturbed Danvers; he had not bought them himself, and he imagined that his friends had jumped at his size.

As a matter of fact, the sailor had opened one of Josh Todd's portmanteaus, which, of course, bore the initials "G. D."

It was all capable of simple explanation, but Susan Todd was not in need of simple explanation. She had a large sized thirst for revenge on just then—a thirst she determined should be quenched.

The woman was mad—absolutely mad; filled with all the cunning which madness proverbially entails.

Mere death would not satisfy her. She must make this murderer suffer. That was why she worried.

She had opportunities for killing him fifty times in a day, for she was strong, and bony, and powerful; and an axe or a chopper would have bought about all she wanted.

But the act itself would give her no pleasure. Her mind was full of the leading up to it. [Pg 88]

She wanted the man who had killed her husband to die a slow death by torture, and she was puzzled how to devise this.

She anticipated a pleasure from watching him counting the moments to his death. Three parts of the pleasure of life lies in its anticipation.

Then there came to her an idea. There must surely have been a strain of the old Indian blood in her, for it savored so of those times when the brave was honored who invented the most devilish kind of torture.

The material for her scheme was close at hand, not a mile from the farmhouse—an old, disused water mill.

Disused for want of motor power.

It stood on the banks of what had been a swift, flowing river, but diversion of its course nearer its rise had turned the river into a little stream which could be crossed in almost all parts without water coming over shoe tops. Only in wet weather was it ever deep enough to rise to one's knees.

When it rained above, and the waters gathered, it would come down in a little rush.

Shortly prior to its final abandonment, a new wheel had been put to the mill. That accounted for the wheel being its soundest part—all else was ruin. [Pg 89]

It had been disconnected, and the machinery of the mill removed years ago; but still the big

paddle wheel rested on its axle, and every time it rained sufficiently to swell the stream above and make the water flow stronger, so assuredly, the wheel would revolve—revolve till the strong flow ceased, and the water trickled again as it was wont to do in dry weather.

How the scheme came into Susan Todd's head it is impossible to say, but it came—came to stop.

She would lure her husband's murderer to the old mill. She had no fear of an inability to do that. There she would overpower him by a blow from behind, which would stun him.

His unconscious form she would drag outside the little window, and tie it with a clothes-line to one of the blades or paddles of the wheel.

The accomplishment of the task the muscles of her brawny arms told her would be simple, and she gloated over the enjoyment she would experience in coming to the mill as often as possible to talk to the gagged and bound man.

She would discuss the weather for his benefit, and let him know whether the glass was high or low—whether rain might be expected.

And then, when the rain came, assuredly she must be there, even if it came in the dead of the night.

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She must be there to watch the agony on the upturned face of a starving, thirsty man, an agony bred of a knowledge of what would happen when the water was strong enough to turn the mill wheel.

She wanted to see the mill wheel start; she had watched it before and knew how it acted, and she knew it would act just the same with its human burden.

The water moved it just a little at first, then further, then further, and all the while the bound wretch would be going slowly but surely to that pool of water through which the lower paddles of the wheel always passed.

Half drowned in that, he would be dragged up into air again for the same ghastly performance to commence again.

Oh! it would be beautiful—she hugged herself in the joy of the anticipation.

And when the wheel had ceased whirling, and the waters had gone down, what easier than to cut the bonds, and let the body drop into the pool beneath, buried from human sight forever!

What easier!

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CHAPTER XII

FATHER AND CHILD—THE OLD STORY

"Come here, Tessie."

"Yes, dad."

"Sit down, girlie."

"Let me kneel, here. There, like that, then you can't be very cross, I know. Let me put my arms around your neck, and I know your lecture won't be very serious."

"Kiss me."

"There."

"And now I want to talk to you, seriously, Tessie."

"I knew you did, dad; you had such a long face. What have I done?"

"Nothing yet, girlie. It's to prevent your doing something that I fear you will be sorry for all your life that I am talking to you now."

"Yes, dad."

"Gerald Danvers has been here nearly a month. He's in love with you—that's plain to be seen. There's no blame to himself for that. You are a very pretty girl."

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"Dad!"

"That's so. That don't matter much; and if you are only flirting that wouldn't matter much, either. But the point is—are you? Do you feel that you love him, Tessie?"

She was playing with the seal at the end of his watch-chain, and her eyes were cast down as she answered:

"He's the nicest man round these parts, dad."

"To look at, Tessie—yes. I admit that. He's got the city polish on him. It's a question if that's good though. The bit of veneer on an article of furniture doesn't make the wood beneath any better quality."

"No, but the farm hands, dad! And then at Oakville who is there to talk to?"

"Maybe not polished people, Tessie."

"No, dad, and that's it. Don't think I'm blaming you, dear old daddie, but you see the years you sent me away to boarding-school made a change in me. The girls—I met people of a different class. One must talk, you know, dad, and there isn't a soul for miles round that has an idea beyond the crops."

"I see—I see."

"Don't think I'm finding fault, daddie—not for a moment. I am as happy as possible at the dear old farm. I was born here, and I should like to die here. But one likes to exchange ideas, dad. You might, for instance, circle ten miles round the farm and you would not meet one soul who could tell you what poetry meant."

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"And this man, Danvers, he talks well?"

"He is a gentleman, dad."

"Without a dollar to call his own."

"Dad! is he any the less a gentleman for that?"

"The world thinks so, Tessie."

"Let it, dad, I don't; and I know you don't. A man's a man for all that."

"But a poor man, Tessie—in a double sense. I am really sorry to hear you say this."

"What have I said, dad?"

"Nothing, girlie, nothing. But I can read you. You like Danvers?"

She was playing with the charm on the chain again as she answered:

"I don't dislike him, dad."

The old man sighed.

"I have heard you yourself say, dad, that you liked him."

"Ah! but there's a difference in my and your liking. When a woman begins by liking a man, she generally ends up by loving him."

No answer.

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"Danvers was sent out to me, Tessie, with a letter of introduction. You read it. By the next mail another letter came. I opened it myself, as I have done all letters since Josh went away. It was from the writer of the letter of introduction."

"Another, dad?"

"No. He repeated that he would be glad if I would do all I could for Danvers, but, above all, I was to make him work, and work hard. That his life up, he had never done a stroke of work, that he had always lived on his friends, that his friends had provided him with an outfit and paid his passage money, and hoped that in a new country, where he had not a single friend, he would be forced to work—work for his living."

"Poor fellow!"

"Tessie!"

"Well, dad, isn't he a poor fellow? Fancy, thousands of miles from a friend, and, as you say, without a dollar of his own. Am I wrong, dad, to sympathize with, and say of him 'poor fellow'?"

The old man stifled a groan.

He was acting badly. He felt that. He was trying to paint this man in repulsive colors, and was but exciting a tender feeling! He was putting his foot into it deeper every step he took.

It is curious how persistently parents force their children into the marriages they are so anxious not to bring about.

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Bespatter her lover to a girl, and straightway the girl loves him the more. Call him everything black you can lay your tongue to, and the girl will be framing pretty speeches for future use—to make up to him for it.

"Tessie, think, my girl, you are happy now because you have everything you can reasonably want. Just picture to yourself what your life would be married to a centless man."

"But, dad, why should you think he will always be poor?"

"All his life, Tessie, he has been living on other people."

"But he may reform, dad. You said he was doing the work better than Josh had done it."

"New brooms sweep clean."

"And in a new country, dad, perhaps he has turned over a new leaf."

"Supposing he has, Tessie, what is his future? If he left here, he might get a job as a store clerk; what can he expect to be better? A store clerk with perhaps a dozen dollars a week."

"You are hard on him, dad."

"Come, Tessie, have I been? But for the fact that Josh is away on a holiday, what could I have done with him? There is not an ounce of farm work in him. They send such men out from the mother country—God knows what for—when we want only muscle, strength, and grit." [Pg 96]

"He has been useful, dad."

"Useful! And when Josh comes back, what then? I have told him it is only a temporary job, and perhaps that is the reason."

"For what, dad?"

"His making love to you."

"Dad!"

"Oh, I know the world, Tessie, better than you do. He thinks you are a pretty girl, and that if he can make you love him, he is in for a soft thing."

"Oh, dad, you are unjust."

"I would to God he had never come here."

"Dad!"

"It is true. Marry? Of course you'll marry. It's a woman's mission in life. I can't say I have seen the man yet that I think worthy of you, but that is neither here nor there. But I did think you would fall into the hands of a man who had a bit of land of his own to walk on, and a roof of his own to cover him——"

"You are bitter, dad."

"I feel so, girlie. You are so bound up heart and soul in my heart and soul that what affects you affects me. I want to see you happy." [Pg 97]

"I know that, dad."

"Tell me, he has not spoken to you of love yet?"

"Not—with his lips, dad—yet."

Then the old man groaned aloud. He knew it was hopeless to talk.

He prayed for the return of Josh that he might have a reasonable excuse for packing off Danvers.

And Josh—all that was left of him—after the inquest had been buried in the city cemetery. [Pg 98]

CHAPTER XIII

LOVERS—MORE OF THE OLD STORY

"Tessie, why are you angry with me?"

"Angry?"

His question answered by another, answered to the accompaniment of elevated eyebrows and a pretty little expression of surprise—after the manner of her sex.

"Well—yes. You are—aren't you?"

"Was never better tempered in my life."

"I rather wish that you would get ill tempered."

"Why?"

"Because—because then you are nicer. Nicer to me."

"Nicer, Mr. Danvers?"

"Mr. Danvers!"

"Well, that is your name, is it not?"

"Oh, certainly, Miss Depew."

The girl laughed nervously.

They were walking across the fields from the milking shed, the girl carrying the cream for supper.

"You are laughing now," he said.

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"You said once you liked to hear me laugh."

"Oh, I mean you are laughing at me. Don't feel sufficient interest in me, I suppose? Please don't say it; I will take it you mean that."

"I think you are very horrid this afternoon."

"I feel so. My feelings are oozing up to the surface, I suppose. And I meant to——"

"To what?"

"Oh, it—it does not matter."

"You talk in—well, I can't understand you."

"Like a man awakening from a sleep. Wits have been wool gathering. I have been dreaming. Accept my apologies, Miss Depew."

"Miss Depew! How dreadfully formal you have grown."

"Blizzard came along, and froze me all up."

"Poor fellow!"

"I am glad you have some sort of feeling for me—if it is only pity."

"Oh, I always sympathize with—with people who are all frozen up."

"I suppose it is no use asking you for a plain answer to a plain question?"

"Why not?"

"Well—you are a woman."

"Is that a compliment for my sex, or is it marked 'personal'?"

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"Tessie——"

"That's better; you are thawing."

"Tessie!"

"You have called me twice, and I am listening all the time."

"I don't know how to say what I want to say."

"How curious! You are usually so—well, never at a loss for words."

"You chill me."

"Poor fellow! Going into the Arctic regions again?"

"I am going away from the farm—to the Arctic regions, or to the devil, I don't much care where."

She started when he said he was going away, and caught her underlip between her teeth, and held it there.

It prevented its trembling. Presently she said:

"I thought you were going to stay—quite a while."

"So did I."

"Why are you going, then?"

"Driven away."

"Really."

She was herself again by now. A conscious smile played round her lips as she inquired:

"Who's the driver?"

"Tessie Depew."

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It did not surprise her a bit; she had guessed what was coming. But she simply said again:

"Really!"

And he found it most aggravating. She had said "really" in that surprised tone so often that he began to hate the word.

He swished the heads of the tall grass with the stick he was carrying—the beheading operation was a relief to his feelings.

She watched him from beneath her long lashes, and there was a curve round her lips all the time—she couldn't help a smile.

"I thought at one time, Tessie——"

"Yes?"

"Thought you—well, I was a fool for thinking so, wasn't I?"

"Really can't tell what you did think," she answered demurely. "I am sure I should be a conspicuous failure as a thought reader."

"Last night I went to bed the happiest man in America."

"So?"

"Yes. I am a poor devil of a wandering sort of sheep, and a woman's kind words have come on my ears so seldom——"

"Yes."

"That they influence me when they come."

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"Women," she spoke with assumed carelessness, "have been kind to you, then?"

"You were kind to me last night, Tessie."

"Really! What did I say?"

"Not so much what you said, but the way you said it. Tessie, don't drive me mad. You know—you do—now, don't you—that I love you?"

Of course she knew it, but she was not going to admit it. She looked quite surprised, as if such an idea had never occurred to her.

She was a true woman—an actress to the tips of her fingers, when the subject of the play was love. He went on:

"I led an idle sort of life, Tessie, in the old country, and I came out here to turn over a new leaf. I have turned it over, and fastened down the old one.

"I am not worth a red cent—whatever that is—now, but I have faith in myself, and I believe that presently, if hard work and persistence raise a man on the ladder, I'll be able to climb up. I never expected for a moment that you would climb with me; I would not be such a selfish brute as to ask you to. But there was something I had intended to ask you—only—only——"

"What was it?"

"Your kindness made me think of it. I told you that I went to bed last night the happiest man in all America. But I didn't tell you I slept."

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"I did not. I lay thinking—thinking all the time of you. I thought I would begin that climb with such a heart, with such an eagerness, with such a will, because I would have you for an incentive."

"Well?"

"I thought that last night, because you behaved to me like a—like an angel. And I determined to ask you to-day to—to—that's why I came out to the sheds to meet you."

"What were you—what were you going to ask me?"

"To wait for me, Tessie. To wait a year or two till I was up the tree a bit with a nest I could invite you to share with me. I love you, Tessie, love you with all my heart and soul.

"I suppose I ought to have told you all this differently; then you would have liked me all the better for it. But I am not experienced in love affairs, Tessie. You are the first woman I have ever really loved—the first I have ever told so."

She did not, somehow, seem dissatisfied with his manner of telling it, and the concluding sentence was as wise a one as he could have framed.

They were walking very slowly now, and if the girl did not say much, she thought the more. Nice, pleasant, happy thoughts, and they made her sweet to the man who had inspired them.

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"The plain question I wanted a plain answer to, Tessie, was: Was I a fool last night? Was I ass enough to misunderstand you? Did my vanity make me think you cared for me? Tessie, Tessie, do you love me?"

"You said a plain question, Gerald."

She had her eyes fixed on the ground as she spoke. "But I have counted four questions all in that one breath."

"Tessie, darling, answer me."

"What, all four?"

She had raised her mischievous eyes to his, and fixed them on him in such a way that his heart leaped.

"Tessie!"

"Supposing I answer one?"

"Tessie?"

"The—last—one."

"Yes, yes, yes."

"That is my answer."

"What?"

"Yes."

He caught her in his arms then, and—well, Blossom standing in the middle of the meadow chewing her cud paused in that operation in sheer astonishment.

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CHAPTER XIV

THE METHOD IN SUSAN TODD'S MADNESS

The next day the farmer's daughter went into Oakville shopping. She had arranged to have tea with a friend and be back before dusk.

Danvers had been sent in another direction in the early morning, and knew nothing of this. He was back early in the afternoon, and wondered at seeing nothing of the girl of his heart.

Susan spoke to him presently. She beckoned him as he passed the back of the house.

"I've a message for you, Mr. Danvers."

"Oh! What is it, Susan?"

"Not so loud! From Miss Tessie."

"Ah!"

"She's gone for a ride. Will you meet her in the old water mill at four o'clock?"

"The old—why on earth all that distance away? What is she doing there?"

"That she did not tell me," the woman answered shortly; "don't go if you don't want to. I've given you the message."

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"That's all right, Susan; don't lose your temper. I'll go fast enough."

"She told me to say, too, that you were not to tell any one."

"Trust me, I won't. What's the time by your kitchen clock? Just three. There's an hour to wait. All right."

He went away about his business. Susan watched him out of sight.

Presently she went away about her business—in the direction of the old water mill. She took with her some old pieces of rope which had been used for binding butter kegs, and which she knew would never be missed. They had been thrown aside as useless, because they were so soaked in fat.

She had half an hour to wait before the hands of the kitchen clock would point to four, but she waited patiently.

Her revenge was coming within her grasp, the revenge she had been praying and hoping for—a life for a life.

The roof of the old mill and the rafters and part of the loft flooring were fairly sound.

She tied a heavy stone to her rope, and, after climbing to the loft, pulled up the stone after her. There she waited. The old mill was a baited trap.

She passed the time in coiling the rope, and handling and weighing the stone. She intended to drop the stone on her victim's head.

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She knew it would stun him. She had seen a man fall senseless—and remain senseless for an hour—on the occasion of a far less heavy weight falling on his head.

Ten minutes would suffice for her task, if he remained senseless as long.

She mapped out what she would do if the stone failed. She would drop from above, spring on him from behind, and half choke the life out of him with her strong, long, bony fingers.

Then she would bring him to again, when she had fastened him up. She did not want him to die—yet.

Before four o'clock, Gerald Danvers entered the mill.

Before four o'clock he was lying senseless on the floor, a great ugly gash in the back of his head, and a woman feeling at his heart to know if it was beating, and laughing a maniacal laugh of triumph when she found it was, and that her scheme was successful—so far.

Then she tied him up. Tightly round the ankles and knees, and his wrists close round his waist.

His arms she kept open—open for the binding cords to be looped through.

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The wheel she kept in a fixed position by means of a wooden pin thrust in its side from the interior of the mill. That fixed, it was easy to walk out of the door window on the floor's level, straight to the paddle nearest it.

Susan dragged Gerald's unconscious body along the floor, out of the window, on to the paddle, and then she began to bind him to the blade.

She had come with plenty of pieces of rope, and, slinging one round the paddle, she caught the end of it the other side.

By that means she fastened the feet. Another piece, thrown in a similar way, she drew through the arms, and her prisoner was securely bound then, unable to move, literally, hand or foot.

Then she drew the man's handkerchief from his pocket, and forcing his mouth open, used it as a gag, knotting it behind his head.

She got off the paddle, back into the mill, and gazed on her handiwork.

The figure did not stir. The eyes were closed, and although the blood had ceased flowing, the body seemed lifeless.

This did not suit Susan. She wanted the man to awake, to suffer torture.

She wondered how she could get water to pour over him. She had come without dipper or basin of any kind.

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Could she move the wheel, she wondered. She knew she was strong. If she could gradually turn this, blade by blade, it would go faster and faster, and as the bottom three blades, she could see, were in the pool, it followed that, for a few moments, the man would be—from head to foot—in the cold water. That could not fail to revive him.

She would try. She did.

She withdrew the pin, and pulled and pushed with all the strength that in her lay.

It seemed a hopeless task, but presently she felt the paddle she was pushing move just half an inch, then an inch, then more and more, and at last the second paddle was where the first had been.

The wheel was moving. The man was on his road to the water at the bottom.

The wheel went round faster because the weight of the man told.

The body passed through the water and came up. And then real hard work for Susan commenced.

She had not thought of the additional weight on the upward journey.

But she was bound to bring the body up to a level position, if she broke every sinew in her wiry frame.

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After infinite labor she succeeded, and with a sigh of relief thrust the pin into its place again—the pin which held the wheel firm.

Not that there was any need for that. Lying in a level position, the balance was true.

The wheel would have stayed so without the pin.

Then she looked at the prisoner—he was looking at her! The water had nearly choked him, but it had at the same time brought him back to life, if not to understanding of the situation. The woman spoke to him:

"You are back to your senses. You can understand what I am saying?"

The look in his eyes answered her. She went on:

"You are going to die, Gerald Danvers. Die slowly. I am killing you because you killed my husband. It's a life for a life. Your life for that of the man you killed on the ship.

"You will live there, just as you are, without bite or sup, till the rain comes. You will be able to see the clouds as you lie there, the stars at night and the sun by day. When the rain comes the waters gather above, and where you see that trickling which just escapes your head, a waterfall appears and turns the wheel you are on."

The man had his eyes fixed on her all the time.

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He understood clearly all she was saying now—but he could not fathom what was the reason for it all—what he had done to merit such a revenge.

He did not understand how—as Byron says—sweet is revenge, especially to women.

But for the handkerchief in his mouth, he might have been able to explain; as it was, he could not make a sound. She continued:

"If you want to live, pray that the rain may not come; if you want to die, pray that it may. When you feel that waterfall reaching you, then you may know that presently there will be force enough to turn the wheel, and that you will go round and round, faster and faster, now in the air, now in the water, now in the air, now in the water!"

She was waving her arms round and round to illustrate her meaning—she was so fearful that he should lose any of the horror of his position.

She need not have been. He lost none.

Every word she uttered went home. He realized it the more because he saw the woman was mad. Her eyes alone spoke the fact eloquently.

"If you pray for life, remember it will be a famishing, thirsty, hungry life. If we have no rain for a dozen days, not a taste of food, not a drop of water do you get. You can hear the water always trickling by you, and in a day or two as you get hungry I will bring my dinner here, and you shall see me eat it, you murdering brute, you!"

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He realized, without the maniacal laughter, how mad she was.

His heart almost ceased beating. He was not a coward, but he felt that at this woman's mercy his death was certain. Not a speedy death, but a lingering, torturing one.

Rescue was out of the question. Not a soul came near the old mill, except at haymaking time to cut the grass. That was weeks ahead.

Still the woman talked.

"Till the rain comes, you know what to expect. Till the rain comes. And when it is all over I shall cut your cords and let you drop—splash—into the pool you have just been through.

"You killed my husband, you murderer, you! His blood calls out for vengeance. I am going to take—a terrible vengeance. But it is justice, the justice the parson tells us of—a life for a life—a tooth for a tooth. You took my husband's life—I am going to take yours. You murdering brute!"

It was her farewell speech. She slammed to the door, and he was left alone!

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CHAPTER XV

BOUND TO THE WHEEL

Gerald Danvers was never able to realize how long he lay there.

Blissful moments of unconsciousness came with awful awakenings to the reality of that painful binding. Every time he moved the cords seemed to attain the heat of redness, and to burn into his flesh.

Thirst—that was the most awful feeling. He had not been there an hour before he was assailed with it.

The handkerchief made his mouth water, and the linen seemed to act like blotting paper, absorbing and drawing up every drop of moisture in his body.

He could turn his head, and there, not a yard away, sparkling in the sun, was water trickling down; the waterfall which was to swell in body and force and whirl him to his death.

It was not long before he was praying for death—life seemed so full of pain.

The acute agony of that immovable position, with the cords seeming to cut into his flesh every time he attempted to move, became unendurable.

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He could keep no count of the hours, but when at last the setting sun turned things red, he felt

that he had been there days and days.

Not that he noticed the color of the sun; the blood which had rushed to his head made things all black one moment, all red the next.

Night fell; all was darkness—so black a darkness that in the shadow in which he lay he could not see the faintest outline of the mill.

Presently a little speck of light appeared above him. Water was in his eyes, tears forced there by the pain, blurring his sight.

The little light looked like a flashing diamond. He could not wipe the water from his eyes, but when presently it fell away, and his vision was clearer, he saw that what had appeared as a speck of light was a star in the sky above him.

Then he realized that it was night. He gathered some idea of the time, too.

He knew that the moon did not rise till nine o'clock, and it had not risen yet. It was clear and cloudless, the canopy above him, and he knew that ere long the moon would rise and lighten up his surroundings.

Then he lapsed into unconsciousness again.

From that state he was aroused by a noise—aroused to find that the moon was up, and flooding half the mill wheel with light, and throwing the other half in deep shadow. [Pg 115]

His head and chest were in the former, and the rest of him in darkness.

The noise was slight, but his tense nerves caught it; it was on the wheel, and presently he was conscious that some one was feeling his legs, and then higher up his body, round his waist.

He guessed it was the mad woman come back, and he was not sorry. He still heard the slight noise, and imagined it to be the woman creeping along the paddle.

He closed his eyes.

Not that he feared death. In his conscious moments, for hours past, he had been praying for release from his torturing position—praying for death.

And he felt that it was coming at last. He closed his eyes because he did not want to see in what shape it had arrived.

He guessed that it would be a noiseless weapon, perhaps a knife, and a feeling of wonder stole over him, wonder of how it would feel as the knife sheathed itself in his heart.

No feeling of fear, not a scrap; he would welcome it. It would end the pain. And then he prayed.

He felt the movements about his legs, but his limbs were so numbed that he could not very well tell what was being done. [Pg 116]

And then he felt a weight on his chest, a moving weight. He thought that his last moments had arrived—that his murderer was getting closer and closer. Still he prayed.

His had not been a very religious upbringing. Indeed, there had been times when he had scoffed at godly people, and the idea of entering a church had never occurred to him since his childhood.

There had been nothing particularly vicious in his life, but the idea of prayer had never entered his mind. He had, he had thought, too much to do in thinking of this world to trouble himself about the next one. Time enough for that when he was dying.

Quite a number of persons think that way. The heavenly bookkeepers are troubled only with entries on the debit side during most men's healthy times.

No grateful acknowledgment rises for that same health; it is only when illness reaches the man on earth that he thinks of heaven.

The recording angel can usually gauge a man's health by a reference to the credit side of his ledger account. The entries tell.

Now, with closed eyes, Gerald Danvers prayed. He thanked God for bringing his torture to an end, and asked forgiveness for his previous forgetfulness. He was earnest in his prayer, and he prayed on. And all the time he felt the movement on his chest; but his life was spared. [Pg 117]

Then he wondered why. He knew that his chest was in the moonlight, and that if he opened his eyes he could see his murderer there.

And the suspense was as bad to bear as the previous torture. He would open his eyes.

Danvers opened his eyes. Could he have given vent to a scream it would have been one of mortal fear and agony.

His cry to God was not one of thankfulness now, but of fear, horror, and fear of being eaten alive!

For on his chest, his legs, his whole body, there seemed to be swarming hundreds and hundreds of huge rats!

Perhaps his prayer was answered, for once more he became oblivious of his surroundings. And he remained unconscious for many hours, so much so that, when next he opened his eyes, the sun was rising, and the whole place was bright with the light of daybreak.

He cast his eyes to his chest, to his feet; thank God! not a sign of a rat. Moreover, the feeling of numbness and pain had left him.

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He began to wonder whether it had all been a fearful dream.

And then something happened which startled him. A fly alighted on his face.

Involuntarily he started to brush it away with his hand. And the hand brushed it away!

It was not till he had so used his hand that he realized that that member was free. Then he could not understand.

He lay there quite still with the hand poised in the air—his own hand free. He looked at his wrist, and there were the red marks where the rope had been. He could not understand it.

Gently he tried to move his left hand—and succeeded. Lifted it till it grasped the blade of the wheel to his left.

Still he lay quiet, unable to realize that his hands were free—and what that meant.

But it did not take long for the full meaning to burst on him, and when it did, he lost no time.

A moment after he was in a sitting position, and had wrenched the handkerchief from his aching, parched mouth.

The sitting position pained him intensely for a few moments, after his long recumbent attitude, and he rested for the pain to go off.

He heard a noise, and, looking down over the wheel, saw cattle on the brink of the rivulet—cattle endeavoring to bury their noses in the cool water.

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The sight gave him fresh life; he must reach that water and drink, and drink, and drink.

He essayed to move his legs—he could. He was quite free. Just cramped, that was all.

What could it mean? How had his liberation been effected?

He looked around, and there was not a trace of the ropes which had bound him.

Yet stay, what was that upon which he was sitting? He put his hands beneath him, and withdrew a piece of rope—a piece of greasy rope.

He examined it carefully. It was a piece that had been entirely covered by his body. He examined the ends, and the marks thereon told him all.

The rats which had caused him such horror had been his salvation. Attracted by the fat sodden rope, they had gnawed it and gnawed it all the while he was lying unconscious.

And now—thank God—he was free at last.

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CHAPTER XVI

SUSAN TODD SEES A GHOST

That water—that delicious water! Would he ever forget that drink?

It was some little while before he was able to climb off the mill wheel, and he staggered, too, when he reached the ground.

Prone on his chest, he buried his mouth and nose in the little stream, and sucked up the water. Never had he tasted sweeter.

He looked across the fields. Away in the distance he could see in the clearness of the early morning the windows of the farmhouse with the blinds drawn.

Half way between himself and the house were the milking sheds.

He walked towards them. He could see the cows beginning to gather there, ready for the relief of the early milking.

He stood sorely in need of food—a draft of milk would be as good as a meal.

At first walking was hard work. His late cramped position told.

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But each step he took, the pain seemed to wear away more and more. He reached the sheds, had no difficulty in finding a pail, and was presently gratefully drinking the warm milk. It made a man of him.

It was still early. Susan, he knew, was the first to be up in the household.

If he went to the farm now he would come face to face with the woman who had tried to murder him.

That he determined to do. He was consumed with a feverish anxiety to know why he had been sentenced to death.

At the same time, strong as he felt now, and prepared for assault, he would take precautions.

He looked around for something wherewith to arm himself. An ax hung by a cord from the wall of the shed. He took it and walked towards the farm.

He knew that Susan would come down and make straight for her kitchen; that the first thing she would do would be to open wide the door leading to the garden.

In that garden he would stand. He was curious to see how she would view him. He would stand there and wait—with the ax behind him in case of accidents.

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He did so. Waited a long while. Then he heard the sounds of her footsteps clattering over the hard kitchen floor; the shooting of the top bolt, then the bottom one, the rattle of fingers on the catch, and then the door opened.

He saw the woman—she saw him. The color left her face, she went livid, she threw up her arms, screamed and fell senseless to the floor, muttering:

"A ghost! A ghost!"

Gerald entered the kitchen. The scream had alarmed the people in the house; he could hear them hurriedly moving about up-stairs.

He bent over the unconscious woman. She had struck her head in falling, and it was bleeding slightly.

It would be untrue to record any feeling of pity on Gerald's part. He rather grimly recognized a coincidence.

They both had head wounds. She had let something fall on his, now she had fallen on her own.

"What's this? What—you Gerald! Where have you been? What does this mean?"

It was farmer Depew talking.

"This woman's mad."

"Mad! What on earth do you mean?"

"You will scarcely believe me when I tell you. But the woman is in a faint now. Let us——"

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"You leave her to Harper there. Harper, throw some cold water over her. And now you, Mr. Danvers, just throw some light on these fixings, will you? Where have you passed the night?"

"Bound hand and foot to the old mill wheel!"

"See here—you said she was mad, I shall begin to think——"

"Hear me out—you won't then. I have been nearer death's door than I shall ever be again without entering. Death must keep his hinges well oiled," he added grimly, "or I should have heard them creaking."

"What—how did it happen?"

"I went into the mill yesterday afternoon, just before four o'clock. This young lady"—he indicated Susan with his foot—"was there before me. She had climbed aloft with something heavy. What it was she dropped on my head I don't know, but I know it struck me at the time as being heavy."

"Curious thing to joke about!"

"If you felt as light-hearted as I do, farmer, you would want to skip and dance. It was no joking matter at the time, I can tell you."

"Go on."

"The blow rendered me insensible. When I came to myself I found that my lady here had dragged me on to the wheel, and tied me to it, bound hand and foot, and gagged."

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"Good God!"

"Fact. Look at my wrists. There are the marks, you see, yet. She had evidently thrown pails of water over me, I suppose to bring me to, for I was drenched from head to foot."

"Go on."

"It evidently did bring me to, for I found myself looking her in the face. She spoke. Told me what she intended to do with me."

"What?"

"Leave me there without food or drink till the rain came and made the stream powerful enough to revolve the wheel, and let me be whirled to glory."

"Is—it possible?"

"I don't know. I didn't wait to see."

"Well, you certainly take it light-heartedly——"

"I didn't at the time. I was the most heavy-hearted man in this country. But it is over, and the reaction is immense."

"Did she not give her reason for this behavior?"

"Well—she seemed to think that I had killed her husband, and that it was her duty to lay me out in consequence."

"Killed her husband?"

"That's what she said—killed him on a boat."

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"On a boat? What does she mean? Has she been thinking about the murder on the liner you came over by? She may have heard you talking about it."

"I never thought of that! She said, 'Your life for that of the man you killed on the ship.' Had that man anything to do with her husband?"

"Don't know. Wait till she comes round, we will see. She's moving a bit now."

The woman did move. Opened her eyes, and then seemed to remember how she came on the floor.

She started into a sitting position, and her eyes fell on Gerald. Once more she screamed out:

"A ghost! A ghost! A ghost!"

Then she fell back in a burst of frenzied hysterical laughter, and despite the fact that two men held her down, the tattoo made by the tapping of her feet could be heard all over the building.

Ultimately, she was carried up to her room, quieted, and with the assistance of the farmer's wife and daughter undressed and put to bed.

Danvers was rather struck by the change in positions. He had been afraid for his life of her, now she was afraid of him.

It caused him to hang up the ax. He felt he would be able to get along without it now.

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CHAPTER XVII

A SICK BED CONFESSION

One of the men built the fire, and assistance with the crockery by others meant breakfast being served ultimately.

Gerald had an appetite which some of the farm hands paused to view with a kind of envy. In the rare intervals of the meal, when his mouth was not too full, he told the farmer the rest of the story.

Susan came out of her fit, but it left her lying there as weak as a rat.

It was explained to her that Gerald was really alive, and then she relapsed into sullen silence—she guessed that the sheriff or his men would be the next to interview her.

Later in the day the farmer and Gerald went up to her room.

Danvers was so buoyant over his release, so assured that the woman had a grievance, and above all so curious to get to the bottom of the affair, that he greeted her with a smile on his lips, and no visible anger.

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She answered him never a word.

He sat on the bedside, and addressed her at some length, while the farmer seated himself near the head of the bed.

"Susan, those born to be hanged can't be drowned, you know; so I am here. There's no need to bother you by telling you how I escaped—I'm here. That's good enough. Now, what I want to know is what the dickens made you put me on the wheel."

Sullen silence.

"Don't think I feel more than necessarily angry over it, because I don't. I know perfectly well that you, in your own mind, thought you had a good reason, or you would not have done it. What was

it?"

Sullen silence.

"You said I had murdered your husband. I have never seen him, never even heard his name, and never hurt, killed, or wounded any man, woman, or child in the whole course of my life."

She turned her head and looked at him.

"Yes," he said smilingly, "I can look you straight in the face, Susan. And I should be scarcely likely to do that, should I, if I had killed your husband?"

Still she looked at him.

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"On the steamer in which I crossed the Atlantic there certainly was a man found dead. But whether murdered or suicide, or what his name was, I don't know. Was that your husband, or was the other man?—who, no doubt had been murdered, judging by the way his body was found."

That made her open her lips. She was startled into a speech. She said:

"Other man?"

"Yes; there were two bodies found in the one cabin."

"I only saw one."

That brought the farmer to his feet. He said:

"You saw? How on earth could you see?"

But the woman, annoyed at having been betrayed into speech, was silent.

Gerald spoke again.

"Susan, don't be a fool. If your husband is dead, I did not kill him. Your common sense ought to tell you that. But if he is dead, you ought to know how, and by what means.

"I never saw either of the passengers who were found dead, and do not know their names—if I ever heard them. But it is surely a duty for you to find out the true story. Dead men tell no tales, but live ones do.

"Find out the truth. Come, let me help you. I bear you no malice—not a scrap. Tell me all about it —tell me." [Pg 129]

She spoke at last.

"I don't trust you."

"I see that, Susan," he answered cheerfully; "and it is that distrust I want to wipe away. Why, do you know, over in England, I was in the office of a private detective agency, and there is no knowing how I might be able to help you."

Again she said:

"I don't trust you."

"I know. But why? You have got in your mind some reason for this distrust. It's a wrong reason, absolutely wrong, Susan. Anyway, tell me what causes you to suspect me, and see if it cannot be explained away."

"You are wearing my dear husband's clothes."

"What!"

He sprang to his feet in such genuine amazement, that even Susan's belief in his guilt was shaken.

"Your husband's clothes!" he blurted out; "why, I bought this suit the very week I left England at Samuels', on Ludgate Hill."

"I meant your underclothes," she said shortly.

"Underclothes!" he answered. "Those I certainly did not buy. Friends got the outfit for me. It came on board in my portmanteau, save those things I wore on board. How on earth you can suppose that I am wearing another man's clothes, I can't think." [Pg 130]

"All the same, you have been wearing my husband's shirt."

"Your husband who was on the boat? Stay, though. A light breaks in on me. I changed on board. I got wet through in jumping overboard after a child. I sent one of the men to the hold for my portmanteau. What is your husband's name?"

The woman did not answer—the farmer did:

"Josh Todd."

"That's not it, then," said Danvers. "That is not the explanation. No sailor would be such an ass as

to make a mistake like that. I told him to go to a long, brown portmanteau with the initials 'G. D.' on."

"My initials," said the farmer.

"So they are," said Danvers. "I did not notice it. But that does not affect the matter. No sailor would be fool enough when I told him to go to a bag labeled 'G. D.' to go to one bearing the initials 'J. T.' That throws no light on the thing."

The woman turned uneasily on her bed. Danvers spoke again, earnestly now.

"Susan, tell us everything. You have some knowledge. You know something. I can see you do. What is it? Lying here you will never find the man who murdered your husband, and you seem sure that he is dead." [Pg 131]

"Or he would have written me; I know it, I know it, I know it."

"Yes, yes, I understand. You think he was on the steamer?"

"I did. Then I didn't. I do now."

"Why now?"

"Because when I was there I heard nothing of two bodies."

"Why were you there?"

"I went to meet my husband."

"He was on the boat, then?"

"He cabled me from England that he was coming by it."

"England?"

"Yes; he has been over there."

"You say you saw one body on the boat?"

"Yes; the boat people showed it me, then I fainted from relief that it was not my husband."

"Did they not tell you of the other?"

"No, I did not wait. I came away, back home here as quickly as possible."

"And," interposed the farmer, "that is all she would know. We are right off the map here. There is no one to carry the news. Some weeks we get a N'York paper, other weeks we don't, and I question if Susan ever picked one up." [Pg 132]

"Tell me," she said, "the description of the other dead man."

"I can't, Susan, for I don't know it. I certainly, as a matter of curiosity, read it, but I don't remember."

His humanity made him abstain from telling her how the second body was found. He said:

"We can find all that out for you, Susan. Just trust us fully. It is right you should know, and you shall. Do you believe you can trust me?"

"Now—yes, I do."

"Why the change?"

"Because I can understand your wearing my husband's shirt now."

"You can?"

"Yes, in the change on the boat."

"No; I told you that my bag was marked 'G. D.'—your husband's was not."

"Yes—it was!"

"What!"

"I had better make a full confession, and tell you everything. It is the better way."

She was going to do so. It was no longer a case of rebellious Susan.

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CHAPTER XVIII

A WIFE FOR REWARD

"That time you asked for a day's holiday," said the farmer, "was when you went to meet the boat,

I suppose?"

"Yes. It is a hard thing to say of your husband, farmer, but there is no help for it now, if I am to tell all. My husband robbed you."

"Robbed me!"

"Yes. Of nineteen thousand pounds."

The farmer did not speak. He simply looked at the woman.

The story of the tying to the mill wheel had roused his suspicions as to her sanity—this last speech convinced him.

Nineteen thousand pounds! He had never in his life possessed such a sum or anything like it.

The little nest egg he added to year by year for those he might leave behind him did not count a nineteenth part of that sum.

Nineteen thousand pounds! He smiled.

"You think I am mad?" queried the woman, reading it in his face. "I am not. You had an aunt named Depew living in England?" [Pg 134]

The farmer started. The smile left his face. He said:

"How do you know that?"

"Through Josh. She is dead. She died worth a lot of property—nineteen thousand pounds."

The farmer looked in amazement; he was too astonished to speak.

The woman continued:

"Josh used to open all your letters. One day one came from an English lawyer to say your aunt was dead, and had left you all her money."

The farmer gasped. The woman continued:

"The idea occurred to Josh to take your place."

"Take my place!"

"Yes. He did. He went over to England in your name. Said he was you. Took documents to prove it. He got the money and cabled me that he was coming back on the boat you came by."

She looked at Danvers as she finished speaking, and he said suddenly:

"Now, I see. On his portmanteau there would be the initials 'G. D.' for George Depew."

"Yes. They were painted on before he left New York. He thought of that." [Pg 135]

"Well," said Gerald thoughtfully, "it is the most extraordinary coincidence——"

"Coincidence be damned," interposed the farmer; "where's my nineteen thousand pounds?"

He had got rid of the theory of insanity now. Had almost lost sight of the idea of Josh's supposed murder.

His own loss was predominant.

"My man has been robbed of it, I expect," said the woman; "that would be why he was murdered. Some one must have known he had the money, and killed him for it."

"Have you the cable your husband sent you?" inquired Gerald.

"Yes, and a letter, too. Open that top drawer and you'll see them between the leaves of the Bible under my handkerchiefs."

Gerald opened the drawer and found the documents. He read them both.

The letter commencing "Dear old Girl," and ending "Your loving husband, Josh," told the story.

Gerald was by no means a fool, and he read between the lines of that letter—read the character of the writer; the rejoicing in the success of his villainy; the rogue meets rogue clause; the aching tooth and the fear of pain at the dentist's.

Indeed, it did not require a very shrewd brain to read between the lines of that letter, and understand the nature of the man who penned it. [Pg 136]

"Your knowledge ends there, Susan?"

"Yes."

"May I take these letters? They may prove a clue."

"Yes."

"Will you accept my assurance that I will do all possible to have this matter out, and clear it up

satisfactorily?"

"Yes."

"Very well, then; for the present, good-bye. Next time I see you I may have something to report."

The two men left the room. Gerald seemed a changed man.

His ability to look after other people's affairs in better fashion than his own has been mentioned. He proposed looking after the present business.

"Farmer," he said, "you believe all you have just heard?"

"Of course, and a damned nice——"

"Let me take this matter in hand for you."

"For me?"

"Yes. There's nineteen thousand pounds hanging to it."

"Stolen, if Susan's story is right."

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"Let me trace the money."

"You?"

"Yes. I was in a private detective's agency once, and I know how to set about an affair of this sort."

"What would you do?"

"Get to New York, ascertain all about the man who figured in your name. Get identification. See if the man who was 'packed' was Josh Todd."

"Yes."

"Then ascertain how he shipped. Go across the Atlantic, and find out who paid him the money, and how."

"Yes."

"It is not likely that any man would take nineteen thousand pounds in gold—it would be too weighty."

"No."

"If he took notes, the numbers are traceable."

"True."

"It is worth inquiring into. Being a murder case, the police will give every assistance. What do you say?"

"I don't believe in throwing good money after bad. I fancy that money, if it has been stolen, will never be seen again."

"And I think you are wrong. Fifty pounds wouldn't affect you. Spend that. Let me have it for passage over, and necessary expenses. It is not a great sum even if it is lost. It's a small stake to try to get nineteen thousand pounds with."

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"M' yes."

"It shall not cost you more. There's much in that letter Todd wrote to Susan. It bristles with clues if they can only be followed. I believe I can follow them."

"You seem confident."

"Because I know what I am talking about. What do you say?"

"I'll go to the fifty pounds—but, mind, not a cent more. I am not a wealthy man, and fifty pounds is fifty pounds to me."

"I know that. By the same rule, nineteen thousand pounds would be acceptable."

"Acceptable! When I think of that villain Josh, I——"

"Don't get excited. Does no good. Just tell me all about your aunt who left you this money."

"I have not seen her for years. I was with her when a little boy. I think I am the only relation she had."

"Well, I can soon trace out the property, the name of her lawyers, and what her property was."

"You can?"

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"Certainly. The will's been proved. I go to Somerset House and pay a search fee; reading the will over does the rest."

"I see."

"Now, give me a check on the Oakville branch of the New York Central Bank, and let me get to work at once."

"How about your own payment?"

"I don't ask for any now. Wait till I find the money. Payment shall be based on result."

"What is the payment to be?"

"Not money."

"Not money!"

"No. If I am successful—the hand of your daughter, Tessie."

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CHAPTER XIX

GERALD PUTS HIS NOSE TO THE TRAIL

The intelligence of Gerald Danvers has been remarked on.

He had a long interview with Tessie, and told her that her father had engaged him to do certain work, in which, if successful, his reward was her engagement to himself. Which was true.

What the work was he did not say. The farmer, after giving his promise, was rather ashamed of having done so, and bound Danvers down to secrecy on the subject of his mission.

He did not want his wife to laugh at him for throwing fifty pounds away. A wife's mirth under such circumstances is irritating. It is not a thing easy to get away from.

Gerald cashed his fifty pound check, and, arrived in New York, sat down and thought.

It was clear to him that Josh Todd—if he were one of the murdered men—could not have had about him any writing to lead to identification with the man whose name he had assumed; because no shadow of an inquiry had been made at the farm.

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The latter was some way from Oakville, and Oakville was a long way from New York. So although the papers after the time that the news reached them were full of the name of Depew, taken from the passenger list, not a copy of any journal had found its way to the farm.

That made Gerald ponder.

Was it wise in going to the New York police at all? He knew that a murderer had escaped at Queenstown—it had been common talk on the ship—and that the murder was done in English waters.

Why then wake up the American police by giving them identification clues to Josh, and so possibly foul a trail in England?

It was just possible that the murderer was lulled to an idea of security by the absence of discovery. That would make his own work easier.

The news in the American papers would be copied by the English press, and Gerald's first work was to secure copies of the *New York Herald* and *World* daily editions dating from the day of the arrival of the ship.

He perused these papers with all their sensational hydra headed columns, from first to last.

Nothing had been discovered more than he knew. Not the faintest trace of the identity of the man in the portmanteau could be found.

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It was known that two berths had been booked in the name of Depew, but who Depew was or where he had lived was still unascertained.

The man who had been found lying dead in his berth had been photographed, and the picture was sent to England for the inspection of the passenger agent where the berth had been booked.

He in no way recognized it—had never seen the face! That had deepened the mystery.

It was plain that the New York police knew nothing.

Gerald felt that no good purpose would be served by enlightening them, and that the sooner he got to England, the sooner he would be getting at the root of the matter.

The newspapers gave portraits reproduced by the half tone process from the photograph taken, and Gerald cut one of these out and pasted it on a card.

It went with him to England. He went there himself by the next outgoing steamer.

A photograph of only one of the dead men had been taken—for reasons which will be readily

understood. That photograph in no way resembled Josh Todd.

Gerald knew that, because he had brought away from the farm a daguerreotype of the missing man. Comparison showed its unlikeness to the picture of the man with the cut throat.

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By personating a man with a missing friend—thereby receiving information and giving none—he obtained from the police a description of the head of the man found in the portmanteau.

He told the police that it in no way resembled the person for whom he was looking. All the same he was convinced it was Josh.

Josh packed dead in England and despatched to America, meant that the packers were in Europe with the nineteen thousand pounds.

Danvers was keen on getting that money. The steamer on which the murder had been committed bore him in the direction of it.

He was keen on it, because it meant the possession of Tessie. He wanted her badly.

On board the boat he learned everything there was to be learned.

He checked the evidence of the boat people as it had appeared in the papers by what they said now.

From Liverpool to London. There he rented a cheap room.

He did not communicate with his own friends in any way, but put his nose to the trail.

His first visit was to Somerset House. He paid a fee, and read the will of Aunt Depew.

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From it he learned that the farmer was the sole legatee, and that Lawyer Loide was sole executor. The property left was described—certain east end houses.

Should he go straight to the lawyer? No, he would go down and see the houses first.

He did. Knocked at the doors and asked who, before the sale of the property, had managed it.

"Lawyer Loide," was the answer.

Managed the property, and was sole executor.

Danvers chewed that over. The end was juicy.

He wanted to see Loide—before Loide saw him. He believed in surprises, and he liked to be the surprise party.

He went to Liverpool Street where the lawyer's offices were. Interviewed, and subsequently had a drink with the janitor there. From him obtained a description of Loide.

Loide was no believer in Christmas boxes or tips of any description—how great events from little causes spring!

The janitor did not reverence the lawyer for this want of belief. He was willing to say anything against him he could.

Told Danvers—over the third glass—that he had never been in arrears with his rent before, that he had discharged his two clerks, and had only a junior working for him now, and that even he was under notice to leave.

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They parted. Danvers went home and wrote a letter to Loide. It ran:

DEAR SIR:

I happened to hear that your clerk is leaving you. At the end of the year I am going to Germany to join (as junior partner) a commercial house, where a knowledge of the rudiments of English commercial law may be of much use to me. May I offer my services as your clerk?

You can see I write well, and am quick at figures, and willing to make myself useful. Of course I shall not expect any salary.

Yours truly,
G. DANVERS.

"If he is hard up," muttered the writer, "that last line may appeal to him. It may come off: it may not. If it does, a week will enable me to turn the place inside out for any clue there may be. Was the nineteen thousand pounds ever handed Josh Todd?"

Therein lay the reason for the course Danvers was taking. It seemed to him a reasonable solution of the matter.

Instead of handing Todd the money, the lawyer had killed him, bribed another man to help him, and to divert suspicion, had sent that man with Todd's body on the ship for America, telling him to return and share the spoil.

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But before the ship left English waters, Loide had managed to kill his accomplice, and so, as he

thought, destroy all trace of his crime.

But, thought the pursuer, he has Gerald Danvers to deal with!

Gerald said this to himself, with a note of exclamation at the end of it. Most of us have a trace of melodrama in our natures. Gerald was not without it.

He had a description of the perky, red haired, rough voiced, flashily dressed man who had left the boat at Queenstown, and he quite reckoned that when he saw Lawyer Loide he would—mentally—exclaim, "Thou art the man!"

With that melodramatic trait aforesaid, he no doubt would.

If he found it so, he would not betray the faintest sign of his knowledge. He must work quietly, and give his man no pretext for flight.

He must find where that nineteen thousand pounds was deposited, and draw the meshes of his net so closely around that the bird could not escape—anyway, with the money.

As a matter of fact, Gerald was more concerned about the money than the murder. Because it concerned Tessie more closely. [Pg 147]

Moreover, it was but human to expect that a nineteen thousand pound father-in-law would be generous in the way of wedding presents.

He guessed that the housekeeper's story of Loide's poverty was a piece of acting on Loide's part to divert suspicion.

Perhaps the discharge of the clerks meant only the gradual winding up of his business, and that presently he would sail away to another land. Danvers felt cold at the fear of this. If it were true, there was not the faintest chance of a reply to his application for a situation. His letter could only appeal to a poor man.

And while he was thinking this again the next morning, an answer came. [Pg 148]

CHAPTER XX

INSIDE THE LAWYER'S OFFICE

Gerald opened the letter. The flap of the envelope bore the embossed name and address of the lawyer. The contents read:

I shall be pleased to see you if you will give me a call to-morrow between ten and eleven o'clock, with reference to your letter of yesterday's date.

Gerald was pleased too. He just chuckled with glee. He did not fear obtaining the situation. And then the smile left his face.

His theory that the lawyer had the nineteen thousand pounds had received rather a rude shock. A man with that money would not trouble about the mere saving of a clerk's salary.

Anyway, he thought he would be in touch with the man who last dealt with Josh Todd.

In Todd's letter to his wife, he had spoken of Loide as a "cute thief." Was there anything in that?

There would be the letter books and office papers open to him. If he was unable to get an answer to that question, surely it would be his own fault.

He was in Liverpool Street between ten and eleven o'clock next morning. Saw the lawyer and settled with him. [Pg 149]

He was to begin his duties on Monday—three days after. The lawyer was satisfied with his appearance, and did not ask for references.

He could not very well do so, as the man was giving him his services. Moreover, things were fitting so tightly with Mr. Loide that anything a clerk could filch would not be worth looking at.

When a man's income is suddenly reduced it hurts. Hurts badly.

Loide was experiencing that. At present his little luxuries were knocked off, and in the future he foresaw a difficulty in the procuration of even necessaries.

He had been wont to take home from the city fish shop a middle cut of salmon. Now he took the—perhaps as toothsome but certainly cheaper—fresh herring.

As with the fish, so with all things. His economy was of the studied kind. It had to be.

The cutting off of the twenty pounds a week did not unfortunately mean that sum only. Money breeds money, and Mr. Loide was an excellent breeder—sixty per cent. breed.

He liked to lend a man a five or ten pound note for a week, and charge him one or two guineas

for the loan. If you work that out you will find it quite a big percentage.

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Mr. Loide did not need to do so. He knew. He had done it so often. It was a big source of revenue to him.

Indeed money lending was the profitable part of his business. He had found it so much so, that he had neglected the more legitimate but less profitable legal work.

The result was that that had slowly filtered away. It had not mattered a bit so long as the thousand pounds a year was coming in. In the course of the year his interest enabled him to double it.

So it will be seen that honesty—strictly speaking—if the best was certainly not the most profitable policy with Mr. Loide.

Wipe that nearly forty pounds a week away from his income, and—well, wipe the naught off the forty, and you get at about what his legal work brought him in now.

Four pounds a week is not colossal wealth. It comes very, very hard on a man to have to live on it who has been living on ten times as much.

Loide found it so. Cold, flinty, bed rock bottom hardness.

On Monday morning Gerald took his first step on the trail, and his seat in Loide's office.

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There was not much work to do. Gerald saw that at a glance.

There was no acting about the matter. His employer was poor. What did it mean?

Round the walls of the outer office were black tin boxes, with—real and imaginary—names of clients printed on the flap doors thereof in white letters.

You turned the key and the flap fell down, enabling you to get at the contents. One in particular had a great charm for the new clerk. He fixed his eyes on it with an eager I-wonder-what's-inside-you sort of glance.

It bore the name of Depew.

The locks were poor things. Evidenced by the fact that one key on the bunch seemed to open them all.

Loide kept the bunch in his trousers pocket. If he wanted a paper from a particular box, he would ring his bell, give the keys and ask for the paper to be brought to him.

That seemed to take the pebbles out of Gerald's part—smoothed his course a trifle.

Why? Because he knew it would enable him to examine the Depew papers.

The next time he was asked to get a paper, he first opened the Depew flap, and closed it again without turning the key.

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He kept the flap in position by a small wedge of paper. It was handy that way.

Mr. Loide would go to lunch at one o'clock, and Gerald proposed devoting that hour to an examination of the Depew papers.

He was not the kind of young man to let the grass grow to any extreme length under his feet.

"If you are learning, you should commence at the beginning. Mount the ladder from the lowest rung, and you will know then what the work is like."

So spake the lawyer to Gerald. It was in connection with the letter book.

The indexing of it was in arrear, and Gerald's business was to bring that index up to date.

The lawyer showed him how. He had a system of his own, had Loide. In addition to the name of the sender of the letter, the letter itself was indexed under the name of the action or matter.

It was a good way, because when Loide made out his bills of costs, he did not miss a single letter he could charge for.

There was perhaps no man in the City of London who could make out a better bill of costs than Loide.

There were rivals in his profession who said that if you blew your nose in his office, he clapped down six and eightpence, while if you wiped your feet on his door-mat, it meant three and six.

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But then rivals will say anything, won't they? And again, if there is any reputation for truthfulness in the legal profession, it is not a world-wide one.

Its patron saint is the father of lies.

So it was that, with the letter book in his hand, at his own desk, Gerald turned up in the index "Depew."

There were two entries; one he found applied to a letter sent to Depew in America, which had

brought him over, and the other to a series of letters connected with the winding up of the affair.

The letter to Depew he read, and was not a whit the wiser. Then he took on a perusal of the others.

He started at the last, and proposed to work his way back.

He was surprised to find the last letter of so recent a date. And when he saw it was to the governor of the Bank of England, and read in it that Loide was stopping the numbers of the notes for nineteen thousand pounds, he stopped himself.

Stopped right there and did nothing but look out of the window blankly—he was so unutterably amazed.

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That he had struck a tangled web he knew quite well. That when he was in the lawyer's office he was in the meshes of that web, he guessed.

But he had not expected the spider to give him such a facer as this. He knew—knew most certainly now that Loide did not possess the missing money.

He was depressed, his heart sank a bit, he had been so sure—so sure. Chicken counting before hatchment is a poor game anyway. Gerald indorsed that.

When lunch time came, he did not even open the tin box with "Depew" on it. It had ceased to interest him.

He knew it would not help him along a bit. He sat there all the time thinking.

His theory of Todd's disappearance shaped differently now.

He somehow felt convinced that the lawyer had had a hand in the man's murder, and he tried to piece things together so that he could account for the notes being missing.

His short acquaintance with the lawyer did not favor the idea that he was a man to lose things.

Then ideas came to him. He thought he had struck the solution.

There had been a quarrel about the division of the spoil—the nineteen thousand pounds—between Loide and the man who was lying with his throat cut on the boat. Or Loide had perhaps murdered him for possession of the whole sum.

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He had been disappointed to find that his victim had not the notes in his possession, had probably given them to a friend in London to mind till his return from America.

The moment Loide got back to London he would stop the notes.

He tallied the date of the murder and the date of the letter to the bank. They fitted his idea.

Gerald was aware that where there had been a mere hill, there was a mountain for him to climb now; but he was not dismayed. There was Tessie for certain, and a possible *dot* on the top of that mountain. Its summit was worth reaching.

He meant getting there—he was full up to the brim with excelsior.

He was debating now whether he should keep up the farce of clerkship any longer, or blossom forth—for surprise purposes—as a New York detective, and see what he could frighten out of Loide.

Then he determined to wait a little longer, till he had seen the passenger agent at Eldon Street.

That individual had been away ill, and would be at the office, it was thought, to-morrow or the day after. Gerald decided to wait till then.

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CHAPTER XXI

THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S ART AND ARTFULNESS

When the lawyer came back from lunch, the new clerk went out to his.

His meal consisted—apart from a sandwich and glass of beer—of the absorption of the contents of a catalogue of photographic materials.

He spent the greater part of his dinner hour on the second floor at Benetfink's in Cheapside. That firm's photographic department is there.

He was purchasing a small snapshot hand camera, and the difficulty he had was in getting one which went off at short range.

He wanted to photograph a picture at about two yards' distance. He succeeded finally in procuring what he wanted.

Gerald knew nothing of photography, and the assistant very kindly "loaded" his camera for him.

There is a dark room on the premises kept for the convenience of customers, and a few moments later, Gerald emerged—armed with the loaded camera.

When he returned to the office, Mr. Loide went out to keep an appointment at the West End of London. That left the floor free for Gerald. [Pg 157]

He went into his employer's room, and stood opposite the fireplace. With the "view finder" on his camera, he brought the mantel within focus.

He did that because hanging above the mantel was an oil painting of the lawyer.

There was a little tablet let into the frame of the painting inscribed, "From a grateful client."

Gerald rather wondered whether the artist—the client filled with gratitude—could have been quite sane; but his business just then was with the painting—not the painter.

He had described the room to Benetfink's assistant, the light it faced, and so on; and had been told to pull down the lever, count seventy-five seconds by his watch, and then let go.

These instructions he carried out.

First he measured off two yards, and piling up tin boxes till he got the level he required, he snapped his first photograph for seventy-five seconds' exposure.

He used all six plates, varying the distance of his tin boxes support an inch each time, to insure focus.

Then he packed up his camera, replaced the tin boxes, and waited till closing time. [Pg 158]

He left the office at half-past five, mounted a tram-car in the City Road, and with his camera in a hand bag made for the regions of the Euston Road.

For some reason the Euston Road is famous for the number of its photographers—the lower class of that art.

The double description is used as it is a calling full of artfulness and craft. The this-style-in-a-frame-for-a-shilling sort seem to look on it as a happy hunting ground.

The tout outside produces samples of the photographic art—created perhaps a dozen miles away—and lies with the freedom of a cyclometer.

Night makes but little difference to these artists. They have an arrangement of what the outside man calls "magnesia," which he will assure you "results in as good a picter as if tiken in the brord dielight."

Gerald entered one of these art studios. He found the man inside quite as full of art as the outside one.

When Gerald stated his business and needs, the man shook his head, and spoke of terms which made Gerald put the camera back in his bag.

The art of the photographer fell before that act, and his artfulness came into play—it looked like money walking away. [Pg 159]

When Gerald spoke of trying another photographer, the studio man thought he could manage it—became sure of it, and a bargain was struck.

Benetfink's man had told Gerald something. Told him that after development, the negative could have a bath of spirits of wine, and be dry enough to print from in ten minutes.

He had also sold Gerald a packet of special printing paper, which could easily be printed on by the light from an ordinary gas jet.

Ultimately—things were a trifle tight in the neighborhood of Euston Road; to servant girls and their military admirers photography seemed to have lost its charm—the photographer agreed to develop the six plates, and print one copy of each for six and sixpence.

Four of the plates turned out failures in the developing dish; the other two were all right. When, later on, the printing paper came out of the little printing frames, Gerald was quite satisfied.

He cheerfully paid the six and sixpence, and walked away with two unmistakable pictures of Loide, the lawyer, in an envelope in his pocket.

The next morning he went to Eldon Street before going to his office, and was cheered to hear that the steamboat agent was much better, and was coming to business that morning. [Pg 160]

Gerald asked if he would be in between two and three o'clock, and was answered affirmatively.

So it came about that in his dinner hour he walked round to the agent's. The agent was in.

"I have come to see you about the Europia murder case."

"Have you?" replied the agent, somewhat wearily; "and what particular line is yours—newspaper? If so, I haven't a scrap of fresh news for you."

"No," said Gerald, with a smile; "there's nothing journalistic about me."

"Not the police then again, surely! I understood from Inspector Welch that they had dropped the matter."

"Maybe the English police have," answered Gerald quietly; "but the American force hasn't. I'm from the other side—come over in the Europa last week."

"Oh! Is that so? Anything fresh? I suppose so, by your coming across the pond."

"Well, I think we are striking a trail. I want you to help me a little. I see by one of the newspaper interviews that you stated to a reporter that you would know the two men who booked the particular berth in which the murder took place."

"That's so. One thing, my memory's keen on, is faces. If I see a man once, I know him again. I could locate him in a crowd." [Pg 161]

"That will perhaps help us."

"I don't think so. They photographed one of the bodies found on the boat, and it was sent across here for identification. Inspector Welch brought it here, but bless your soul, it wasn't a tiny scrap like either of the men."

"So I understand."

"Inspector Welch didn't quite believe me. Thought I placed too much reliance on my memory. Almost said so. But I know right enough where my strong point lies. I didn't recognize that photograph simply because it wasn't the picture of either of the men. But the moment I get a photograph of either of the real men before me, you'll see I'll pick it out from fifty others."

"You are sure you would know it?"

"Know it! I'm dead certain—cock-sure."

"Well," said Gerald, as he quietly drew the daguerreotype of Josh Todd from his pocket and put it on the agent's desk, "is that like either of them?"

"That's one!—that one!" cried the agent excitedly, as he banged his fist on the desk. "I'd know him from a thousand. That's the man that spoke with a Yankee accent and came in first."

"So," said Gerald quietly, although in his excitement his blood was racing through his veins, "and possibly this may be the portrait of the other one?" [Pg 162]

He placed the picture he had brought away from the Euston Road studio before the agent.

"By God, sir, you're right! That's 'em—that's 'em both. You've got the right men, sir—you've got 'em. I always said if the American detectives took the case up over here, they'd strike the trail. No English 'tec can touch 'em for cuteness. If you know where to put your hands on these two men, you're able to solve the Europa mystery." [Pg 163]

CHAPTER XXII

THE HANDCUFFS PLAY AN IMPORTANT PART

That was just what Gerald was unable to do.

He knew Todd was dead. His suspicions about Loide were in a measure confirmed.

He was convinced now that the lawyer was involved in this crime—but how far? To know that was what troubled him.

The red haired man was the mystery—a mystery which looked clueless.

Loide had booked a passage after Todd had done so. Todd was found in a parcel, and the other man in the berth with his throat cut, and yet the lawyer was alive!

It was a problem which needed a deal of thought.

Gerald gave it that. He thought all the time.

So far, he still filled the rôle of clerk, but he got no nearer a solution. He waded through the evidence again and again in the hope of spotting a hole which the lawyer would fit.

To run through the disguise shops of London in the hope of tracing a man who had bought a red wig, he knew would be as sensible a task as endeavoring to find the needle in the proverbial stack of hay. [Pg 164]

He read again and again the description of the spruce, smartly dressed, jaunty looking, raucous voiced, red haired missing man, and for the life of him, he could not make it fit in with the present appearance of the lawyer.

He started rehearsing his bogus detective from New York idea. Thought how best he could so surprise the lawyer as to force the truth from him.

He knew him to be a cute old fox, and that if he gleaned anything it would be at a time when the lawyer's shrewdness was overclouded by fear.

His business was to bring on that cloud—to inspire that fear.

It took him a long while to formulate his scheme. He knew that a false move in it would upset everything—that the lawyer would snap it up in a moment, and save himself.

When he had got his idea as near perfection as he thought he could get, he walked into Loide's private room, ostentatiously turned the key in the door, and seated himself opposite the astonished lawyer.

"What the devil does this mean, sir?"

"It means, Mr. Loide, that the game is up."

As he spoke, he drew from his pocket a pair of handcuffs he had hired for a shilling at a theatrical costumer's in the neighboring Houndsditch. [Pg 165]

Even yet, so surprised was he, the lawyer did not understand the situation. He spluttered out:

"What does this play acting business mean in office hours?"

"I'm afraid your office hours, Mr. Loide, are all over. I throw off the disguise of clerk, and appear as Detective Crayle of the New York police."

"Detective!"

"There is a warrant out for your arrest in connection with the murder on the Europa."

The livid face of the lawyer told Gerald all he wanted to know—he had hit the right nail on the head, despite the red hair.

He continued:

"There's been a little trouble in trailing this scent, Mr. Loide, but we've got it all mapped out from the moment of your entrance of the Eldon Street agent's office, and your subsequent purchase of the other half of the berth, down to the present moment. You have been watched right through, Mr. Loide."

The lawyer groaned.

"The American system of police work is different from the English. Every man to his department. Now, mine is not to arrest you. There's a man on the Atlantic now, in response to my cable, on his way here to do that—no, don't look at the door; don't play at silly fools—you know I could put you in the custody of the first policeman we met." [Pg 166]

"If not to arrest me, what is your business, then?"

The hoarse voice of the lawyer showed how deeply he was affected.

"Well, I've been deputed to hunt up that missing nineteen thousand pounds."

The lawyer looked up. Gerald continued:

"Oh, I know you don't know where it is, but if I heard the whole story from your lips, I might be able to find a clue. Now, bargain for bargain—I've told you my business isn't to arrest you.

"I don't personally care whether you go to eternity via our recently invented electrocution chair, or whether you scoot. See? Just tell me the whole story from beginning to end without missing a single detail—and remember, I know the facts, so if you lie or attempt to deceive me, I shall consider the bargain off—do this, and you'll get three days start. I'll leave you to do what you like—go where you like."

"I can believe—rely—on that?"

"I'm no liar in straight business, Mr. Loide. Follow my example, tell me the truth, and we'll say good-bye. If we meet again, it will be your own fault." [Pg 167]

"Very well, I will tell you, then."

"Good. I've my note-book here containing an account of every movement of yours since——"

"Oh, I'll tell the truth. On the day of the settlement with Depew, I handed him nineteen thousand pounds in notes. The numbers——"

"I know them," interposed Gerald—he had got them from the lawyer's letter book—"get on with the story."

"After that we went to the Great Eastern Hotel opposite and had lunch. He did not know where the passenger agent's was, so I showed him. It was the agent saying he had the other half berth which confirmed me in my idea of robbing him, which, as you know, I did not do."

"I know all about it," said Gerald, "but all the same, you tell me the whole thing complete."

"Well, after Depew had bought his ticket, we came outside, shook hands, and parted, and I never saw him again until I saw his cut up remains"—the lawyer shuddered at the recollection—"in the Europia's cabin."

"After you parted, you went back to the agent's, and got the other berth. Where did Depew go; do you know that?"

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"No. I fancy to his hotel. He was staying during his visit to England at Armfield's."

"Did he go in that direction?"

"No. Now I come to think of it, I remember he spoke of an aching tooth, and said he was going to a dentist's in Finsbury Circus to have one—as he called it—'yanked out.'"

The lawyer faithfully detailed every other incident which had occurred, and with which the reader who has followed this narrative will be acquainted.

When he had finished, Gerald said:

"Just write me a letter to the Bank of England, withdrawing that stop on the notes, will you?"

"What?" inquired the lawyer eagerly. "Have you found the missing notes, then?"

"I came over to Europe for that purpose," answered Gerald shortly. "Give me that letter. That'll do, and now good-bye. You deserve a shove into Kingdom Come, but it's not my business to push you."

He put the handcuffs into his pockets and opened the door.

"Now put your hat on and mizzle. I'll take charge of this office. Don't set foot near it again, or you'll have yourself to blame for the consequences."

The lawyer gathered up a few letters, and cramming them into his pocket, walked to the hat rail.

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"This isn't a trap," he inquired; "they are not waiting for me at the bottom of the stairs?"

"I've told you I'm not a liar. You can walk straight away and no soul will attempt to stop you."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

Left to himself, Gerald locked the outer door, and sat down to think.

So far, he had arrived at very little. He knew now that Todd had stopped at Armfield's, that when he left the lawyer he had gone into a dentist's in Finsbury Circus, that when next seen he was unrolled from a newspaper parcel on the boat.

He took down the post-office directory from the shelf and turned up Finsbury Circus.

Surgeons and doctors abounded. That set Gerald thinking.

At the inquest, medical evidence had been given that only a medical expert could have dismembered the body so neatly. He went down the names in the directory carefully.

One thing struck him. There was a Mr. Charles Lennox, a dentist, and a door or two off a Mr. Arthur Lennox, surgeon. There might be nothing in it, but it was worth looking into. The combination was suggestive.

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Gerald made up his mind to have his teeth seen to at one place, and to attend at the other with some imaginary complaint.

He then took the whole of the Depew papers from the tin box, and made them into a compact parcel. They might be useful to the farmer.

Then he put on his hat, and with the parcel under his arm left the building.

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CHAPTER XXIII

AN APPOINTMENT WITH THE DENTIST

At Armfield's Gerald learned but little more.

Nothing had been seen of Depew there after eleven o'clock on the morning of his leaving. His bags he had taken away to the station, paid his bill, and had said he was not sure whether he would sleep there or at Liverpool that night.

There was a small hand bag still at the hotel, containing a shirt, collars, and handkerchiefs—nothing more.

That left Finsbury Circus for Gerald to investigate.

He remembered the names of Lennox, and looked at his short cuff whereon he had penciled the numbers of the houses from the directory.

He saw the letters on the wire blind which had attracted Todd, "Painless Dentistry"; and he remembered what Todd had said in the letter to his wife about the extraction of his tooth.

He went further and saw a brass plate—"Arthur Lennox, M.R.C.S." This determined him.

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He believed in his power of reading faces, and he was eager to try his hand at the doctor's.

He entered the house, and went to the surgeon's door. Knocked and knocked again; and again.

Then he pulled the housekeeper's bell.

In reply to his inquiries he learned that Mr. Arthur Lennox was away abroad; had gone—he tallied the date—the day the Europa sailed with Todd's body aboard.

Further information, the housekeeper told him, could be obtained of the surgeon's brother—a dentist, a few doors off.

Gerald felt that at last he was nearing his goal.

"Ah! I don't want to see the dentist," he said. "I don't know him. I was very friendly with the doctor, and I promised to see him when I came to England. I wasn't quite sure, though, that I had the address correct—indeed, I am not now sure that this Dr. Lennox is the one I want. What sort of a man is he?"

The housekeeper described him. And at each detail of the description Gerald's hopes rose higher and higher.

For she was describing the man who had been found with his throat cut, the man whose newspaper picture Gerald had then in his coat pocket.

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He withdrew that from his pocketbook, and handing it to the housekeeper, said:

"Is that anything like him?"

"Oh, yes," answered the housekeeper in a moment; "there is no mistaking it. That's he right enough."

"Then I haven't made any mistake after all. Thank you for——"

"There goes his brother if you want to see him," interposed the housekeeper hurriedly. "He goes home about this time—they used both to leave at five o'clock."

"No, thank you," answered Gerald; "I am obliged to you. Good-day;" and he went down the steps.

"The dentist has gone," he muttered. "I'll just look at his show now, and interview him to-morrow. A night's thought on this won't do any harm. There's such a thing as being in too great a hurry. More haste, less speed."

He entered the house in which the dentist had rooms.

As he stood looking at the door, it opened, and a boy started to come out.

"Good-afternoon," said Gerald cheerfully, and walking in. "Is it too late to have a tooth seen to?"

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"Just too late, sir," replied the boy Sawyer; "Guv'nor's just gone. He'll be here at ten o'clock in the morning—if he's well enough."

"I'm sorry. Do you mind my sitting down and resting for just a minute or two? I hurried here so fast for fear of missing him, that it set my heart beating dangerously fast."

"Not at all, sir."

"I was recommended here by an American gentleman, a friend of mine."

"Oh, sir."

"Yes. Some while ago he came here—one afternoon—and had a tooth out, and spoke so well of the job that I determined to come here myself."

"Yes, sir."

"He had a tooth extracted painlessly."

"Yes, sir, lots of people has 'em out that way."

"How is it done—chloroform?"

"Bless you, no sir! With the gas."

"Is it dangerous at all?"

"Lor no, sir. 'Sides, there's always a doctor present to help."

"Really?"

"Yes. The gov'nor used to have his brother in to do it before he went abroad."

"Has rooms some doors off, hasn't he?"

"Yes, that's him, sir."

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"Has he been abroad long?"

"Been away just—well, that's curious, sir, as you mentioned an American gent. I haven't seen the doctor since the day the last American gent came here."

"That is very funny. Very likely, too, it happened to be my friend. Do you remember him?"

"Rather, sir. We don't have too many patients here"—with a grin—"as I can't remember em."

"You would know him again if you saw him?"

"Rather."

"Is that like him?"

Gerald handed the boy the daguerreotype of Todd as he spoke.

"Like him!" said the boy; "it is him."

"That certainly is a curious thing. My American friend was a bit of a coward, you know. I guess he made a big fuss about having his tooth pulled. Did he call out in any pain?"

"I don't know."

"I thought you said——"

"You see I minded both places. When your American friend came in and said he wanted the gas, I was sent in for the doctor, and minded his place for him when he came in here."

"I see."

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"When I came back, of course your friend had gone."

"Hadn't, I suppose, fallen asleep on the couch or in the operating chair, had he?"

"No. I said had gone."

"So you did—I thought perhaps you might have overlooked him."

"Not much. I have to put away the things tidily, and I shouldn't overlook much."

"My American friend described to me the chair he sat in—operating chair, don't they call it?"

"Yes, that's it."

"As being a very curious one—is it?"

"Nothing out of the common. This is it."

He opened the inner door as he spoke, and Gerald entered.

"You were right about not overlooking him. If he had been here you must have seen him."

"Yes."

"This cupboard would have held him, though."

"Yes," replied the boy, with a grin. "It is big enough; but we don't stick patients into cupboards, you know."

Gerald laughed heartily at the joke.

"Well," he said, "my heart's quiet enough, now, thanks. I am much obliged to you for letting me rest. I'll come in and see the dentist to-morrow."

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"If he's well enough to come to business, he'll be pleased to see you."

"Ill, is he?"

"Yes, sir. Has been for some weeks, ever since his brother went away."

"That's curious."

"Yes, sir. Shall I make an appointment for you to-morrow, sir?"

"Yes; you can say I'll be here at eleven o'clock sharp."

"Right you are, sir; he'll keep the appointment right enough if he can. He won't fail."

"Nor shall I."

"Good-evening, sir."

"Good-evening."

Down the steps went Gerald, down into the Circus.

He felt more pleased with himself than he had felt for a long while. He was on the right scent now, he was sure.

To-morrow at eleven he must assume once more the guise of the New York detective. The appointment was eleven o'clock. Gerald would not fail to keep it.

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CHAPTER XXIV

AN AMATEUR CARPENTER

Loide left Liverpool Street with trembling limbs, and a heart full of bitterness.

That nineteen thousand pounds he had so counted on getting at least a part of, was safe in the possession of the New York detective, who had been one too many for him—that was his dominant, irritating thought.

It worried him.

Gerald had played a bluff game, and with success. Loide quite believed all he had said about his three days' freedom from arrest.

Either Gerald was an artistic liar, or the lawyer's impressions of the ways and doings of the American police were quaintly original.

He had made up his mind to flee within three days, but the details of his flight were not worrying him just then; he was more easily engaged in taking a tight hold of the fact that he was a ruined man—practically a penniless fugitive from justice—unless—

That "unless."

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He had killed one man with the idea of possessing that nineteen thousand pounds, and although the murder did not lie heavily on his conscience, the ill success attending his effort did—very heavily.

As he walked through his office to the Mansion House station of the electric railway, he was debating in his mind whether he should have another shot for the nineteen thousand pounds the New York detective had in his possession.

En route to Waterloo he made up his mind that he would. His mind did not need much making up—the fancied rustle of those crisp Bank of England notes helped a deal.

He lived at a place called The Elms, on the outskirts of Wimbledon. His house stood in its own grounds, some distance away from the road, and from other houses.

It was a property he had acquired by foreclosing a mortgage. It would be a quiet spot in which to carry out the scheme he was mentally sitting on.

He hoped to hatch out a nineteen thousand pound egg.

His big difficulty would lie in luring the detective to Wimbledon. And again, as an old man, he would be at a disadvantage in any struggle.

To kill the officer would be an easy task, but that was not his intention. Not that he hesitated at the mere taking of a life—that was a detail—but he wanted to profit by his work.

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He was tired of profitless murder. One incident of that sort he felt was sufficient to last a long time.

He guessed that the officer would not walk about all day with nineteen thousand pounds in his possession, that he had stored the notes away safely.

That he had them he was convinced, and his conviction was confirmed by the request for the letter to the Bank of England withdrawing the stoppage.

That letter had helped to form Loide's idea.

He would imprison the detective, keep him without food or drink till he wrote a note to the custodian of the notes requesting the handing over of them to the bearer of the letter. Loide anticipated playing the part of the bearer.

He reached Wimbledon station, alighted, and walked along the road.

As he did so, he reflected that within three days he would have shaken the dust of that suburb from his feet for good and all.

At a furniture dealer's he paused. Entering the shop, he said:

"You know me?"

"Yes, sir; Mr. Loide, the lawyer."

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"That's right. I am leaving the neighborhood—giving up possession of my house."

"Sorry to hear that, sir."

"I am going to live at Brighton. I have hesitated about the expense of moving my furniture, and now I am confirmed in my belief that it would be best to sell it. It is getting old, and would not fit my new house—larger rooms, you know."

"Yes, sir."

"I want you to come along with me now, and make me a cash offer for the houseful of furniture, just as it stands. If your offer is good enough I shall accept it, on condition that you clear the whole lot out before to-night."

"To-night!"

"Yes, to-night. There are only nine rooms—a couple of vans would move it all easily. However, if you don't think you can manage it, I'll try somewhere—"

"Not at all, sir," said the man, taking off his apron, and rolling down his shirt-sleeves; "I'll be ready in two seconds."

He scented a profitable job. Hasty matters of this kind often come in the way of furniture dealers and brokers—generally with much profit to the buyer.

The buyers are wont to sing gladsomely of such transactions. Surrounding creditors usually sang in another key. [Pg 182]

The shopman put on his coat and hat, and went with Loide to The Elms.

Loide let himself in with his key. His servants had been dismissed long since. His meals he had obtained in the city, visiting his home purely for sleeping purposes.

A bargain was struck. The dealer guaranteed that before six o'clock the house should be absolutely clear of furniture—that within an hour the two vans should drive up and clear out all.

They did. The furniture dealer was as good as his word.

Everything was cleared save three feather beds which Loide kept back.

The furniture dealer marveled at this, but he had done well over the deal, and said nothing.

Loide placed those feather beds to his own credit—as an act of mercy. They were to save the detective pain.

The furniture removers had completed their task and driven away. At their heels trod Loide—in the direction of the post-office.

From there he sent a telegram to his late clerk's address. He thanked his memory that he had remembered the address in the letter applying for the situation. [Pg 183]

The telegram ran:

Leaving England to-night, strange and most important information to give you in exchange for your kindness to-day. Come at once, trains every few minutes from Waterloo.

LOIDE, *The Elms, Maypole*

Road, Wimbledon.

He paid the one and eightpence cost of the telegram, and then sought in the high road an ironmonger's.

There he bought two saws, a hammer, chisel, some nails, and some yards of webbing.

At a lamp shop he purchased a pound of candles, a ready trimmed bicycle lamp, and then hurried home with his purchases to The Elms.

Entering, he threw off his coat, and tucked up his shirt-sleeves.

Manual labor was not in his way, but he guessed from having seen workmen prepare for their tasks in that way that it was the correct thing to work coatless—he had some hard work ahead of him.

His bicycle lamp lighted, he set to work, drove four of his long French nails through the floor of the passage.

The four nails formed a square—a square yard.

With his bicycle lamp in hand, he went downstairs to the wine cellar. A stout old door yielded to the key. [Pg 184]

Loide in his palmy days had been a lover of wine, and the cellar had been built to his order. It was the most lofty apartment in the house.

Air and light came to it through strong iron bars, which were on a level with the ground above. The roof was at least fourteen feet from the floor.

On to that roof, formed—apart from the cobwebs—of the rafters supporting the floor boards above, Loide threw the rays of his lantern.

Four bright, sharp points were sticking through the wood, dust, and cobwebs. He grunted with satisfaction as he noted the situation of the points of his nails.

He hurried out of the cellar, up the steps to where the heads of the nails were, and there his real hard work began.

He bored a hole with the aid of the chisel and hammer, then inserting the fret saw, worked through the width of one of the boards, working against the passage wall.

This operation he repeated the other side, and in a few minutes had a length of floor board up—a yard long.

With the larger saw he had bought, he was soon sawing through five other boards and their supports, and there presently gaped an opening more than a yard square.

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He hurriedly put the boards together again as he had taken them up.

Going into a back room, he ripped some laths from the Venetian blinds. These he nailed to the floor boards, fastening them together as a lid for the hole he had made.

He tried it—it fitted well. But for his holding it, the lid would have fallen through the hole.

He cut the parcel of webbing open, and, leaning over the hole, nailed pieces along one side of the square beneath the floor boards.

When he had nailed the other ends of these pieces to his lid, he had a crude but perfectly hinged flap.

Rushing up-stairs, he dragged down two of the feather beds, one after the other, and dropped them through the hole.

That was what he counted as his mercy. He did not want to break any of the detective's limbs.

He just wanted information about the nineteen thousand pounds.

Two pieces of lath slightly tacked under the opposite side of the hole to prevent the lid falling through till trodden on, and he lowered the flap on its hinges.

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Apart from the sawdust around, it looked a perfect floor. He swished away the dust, and stood up with a smile of satisfaction on his face.

He was dog tired with the work, but he had done all he needed to do. The snare was set—the trap was waiting.

Would the bird come to his call?

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CHAPTER XXV

A WOULD BE SUICIDE

At Finsbury Circus next morning dentist Lennox was in attendance.

He had been growing very ill lately, mentally and physically, and this morning he had turned over in his bed with the intention of remaining in it for the day.

Dental patients were so few and far between that he did not fear losing much by his absence.

But when his wife—as was her custom—brought up his cup of tea, and morning letters, there was a post-card from Sawyer—his boy. It was to tell him that a patient would call about his teeth at eleven o'clock.

Despite his really ill condition, he bathed and dressed, and got to the city somehow.

He was in time for his appointment, and waited long for the coming patient. But eleven o'clock struck and he came not.

Calling Sawyer in, he questioned him minutely as to the person making the appointment, and the likelihood of his turning up later.

"Oh, he meant coming right enough, sir. Had been recommended here by a friend who had been."

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"Oh, who was that?"

"Dunno his name, sir. That American agent, sir, what came the day Mr. Arthur went away."

The dentist controlled his emotion, checked an exhibition of it by gripping the arms of his chair, and inquired:

"What did he say?"

"Said the American gent had spoken very 'ighly of the painless manner in which you treated him when he called here."

The dead man, the cut up man, had spoken highly of his treatment!

The dentist's lip was kept from trembling by the grip of his teeth on it. He wiped away the beads of perspiration from his brow, and inquired:

"This gentleman who called was a friend of his?"

"Yus, sir; was most interested about him. Arst a lot of questions, sir, and showed me his picture which he had in his pocket."

Not a word from the dentist; he seemed frozen to his chair.

His head was turned from the boy. Could Sawyer have seen it, he would have wondered at the stony look of fright in his master's face.

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For the dentist feared the worst. He guessed that the man coming was a detective. Conscience doth make cowards of us all.

He sat there, waiting—a prey to indescribable fear. Useless, he knew, to attempt to escape—perhaps even now the place was being watched.

Well! let them arrest him; it would be the end of all—of all the worry and trouble which he felt was hastening him to the grave.

And then he thought of his wife, of his girl child, and groaned aloud.

Was his widow to be shamed by his death; was he to cast a cloud over his child's life, to give people a chance of saying of her: "Her father was hanged for murder."

He groaned again in his mental agony.

Suicide! Ah! why had he not thought of that?

It would save all—the exposure, the torture of the trial, the disgraceful death at the hangman's hand. What a fool that the idea had not occurred to him before!

His brother died with his throat cut, why should he not do the same? Life with its overhanging fears and terrors was not worth the living to him. He would shuffle off this mortal coil.

He walked quietly to the door, and gently turned the key in the lock. Then he unlocked a small safe in the corner of the room, and from the drawer thereof he took out the nineteen Bank of England notes he had always been afraid to attempt to cash.

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He looked at them and shuddered—blood money! Their rustle gave him no pleasure now.

To his desk—then inserting the notes in an envelope, he directed it on the outside, "To the Police, Scotland Yard."

His hand trembled so he could not write more. He had intended giving an explanation of the whole thing, but as he asked himself—who would believe so wildly improbable—so incredible—a story?

He sat, pen in his trembling fingers, intending to write to his wife, and then it occurred to him that to do so would mean ruin to her—that were his death ascribed to suicide, the moneys payable under his insurance policies would be forfeited.

The thought made him pause.

No, he must run no risk. Those scraped together premiums on the policies must not be lost.

He reflected that it was better to die. That then there would be an end to that grinding, scraping, pinching poverty at home—that looking at every sixpence before it was spent.

He was insured for fifteen hundred pounds—a policy issued for the benefit of his wife, so that she would get the whole sum without his creditors being able to touch a penny of it, or any deduction for death dues.

[Pg 191]

He thought how it would lighten the burden of the woman to whom he had been bound till death should them part.

Death! He feared it—feared it horribly. He loathed himself for his cowardice all the while he feared. It was his duty to destroy himself.

His daughter Edith, too—his little Edie—how different her future would be! She would be sent to a first-class school, where they turned out women, and not mechanical scholars, the result of the cramming process of the brass plated Seminary for Young Ladies.

He thought of all this as he considered how he should compass the death which was to bring about these things.

He must do it in such a way that no suspicion should arise; there must be no doubt about the death—it must be ascribed to an accident.

He looked around. His eyes rested on his dead brother's case of surgical instruments.

The case had remained in his rooms since—he shuddered at the recollection of their use. He walked to the side table and opened the box.

The cold glitter of the polished steel made him shudder again, and from his lips came the whispered prayer: [Pg 192]

"Oh, God, give me courage to do this thing."

How should he make assurance doubly sure? By Sawyer's aid.

It was certain there would be an inquest, the boy's evidence would be essential—the last human being to see him alive. He must supply that witness with material.

He took one of the knives in his hand, gently turned the key in the lock, and walked into the outer room.

Sawyer hurriedly concealed the pages of "The Brass Bound Pirate of the Pacific, or the One Eyed Man in the Crimson Mask."

It was the sort of mental food his taste ran to. Exciting and cheap—dirt cheap.

"Do you know that fancy shop—bazar—just opposite the entrance to Liverpool Street Station, Sawyer?"

"Two or three doors from the corner? Yussir."

"They have some hones in the window."

"Some which, sir?"

"Sharpening stones. You will see them in the window at a shilling each."

"Yussir."

"Get me one. Here's a shilling. I want to sharpen this knife." [Pg 193]

"Yussir."

"You understand what I want it for. To sharpen this knife."

"Yussir."

Sawyer went out, procured the required article, and returned with it to his employer.

"You will be going to dinner in half an hour, Sawyer?"

"Yussir."

"When you do so, go into the post-office and register this letter—it is already stamped."

"Yussir."

"Now, I'll sharpen my knife."

The dentist went into his room. His fingers rested on the key in the lock for a moment.

"No," he muttered; "a locked door would create suspicion. Besides, there is no need."

He unfastened his sleeve link, and rolled back the cuff of his shirt.

He was surgeon enough to know which opened vein would drain his body the quickest, for he intended to bleed to death.

It was an almost painless way—the drawback to it, its slowness.

Thrice he poised the knife, thrice the hand holding it dropped to his side, thrice he groaned in his despair—at his own cowardice. [Pg 194]

"Oh, God," he prayed—and if ever heartfelt prayer ascended to the heavenly throne, one went up then—"give me strength and courage to do this thing. My life has been a useless one. Give me courage, God, to end it for my wife and child's sake."

A loud rapping at the door broke in on his prayer.

He had disregarded—had not heard the previous tapping. Relieved at the interruption, he opened the door.

He started when he did so. Was he too late?

For behind Sawyer, who had been knocking, there stood two men in the uniform of the police. [Pg 195]

CHAPTER XXVI

GERALD WALKS INTO THE TRAP

Gerald was enveloped in an atmosphere of tobacco smoke which nearly choked his landlady when she entered the room.

A telegram had come for him, and it being, as she explained, "that dratted gal's night out," she had ascended the stairs with the message herself.

Gerald was thick in smoke, because he had an idea that his brain liked it; he thought better with a pipe in his mouth.

And he was as full of thought just then as a pomegranate is of pips.

He took the telegram, opened it, and raised his eyebrows at the contents.

"What's the meaning of it?" he muttered. "What can have happened since the morning? What more can he know?"

He was in no way suspicious that it was part of a trap.

He did not credit Loide with any revengeful feeling, because he had been dealt with leniently—let fly when his wings should have been clipped. [Pg 196]

Was it possible that there was such a thing as gratitude in that tough old legal breast? He half smiled as he wholly doubted it.

And yet—well, he would go down and see what it was. Wimbledon was not far—he could soon get there and back.

He turned down his lamp, and, putting on his coat and hat, went out, took train to, and reached Wimbledon.

He had some difficulty in finding his way through the ill-lit streets, but at last he reached The Elms.

Through the slats of the Venetian blinds he saw the house well lighted. There was nothing dark or mysterious about it.

A faint suspicion which had been born en route subsided.

Clever Loide had foreseen and disarmed such suspicion by means of his pound of candles, lighted and distributed on the floors of the front rooms.

Gerald opened the gate and walked up the steps to the door. He knocked.

Presently he heard footsteps, and then a voice—a voice he recognized as the lawyer's—saying:

"That is all right, Mary; don't bother to open the door. I will. I know who it is—a gentleman I am expecting. Just put some coals on the dining-room fire, will you?" [Pg 197]

Then there was a rattling of the lock, and the hall door swung open. The lawyer stood there.

"Come in," he said. "Excuse the condition of the hall; the white washers are at work."

Gerald entered, and the lawyer closed the door behind him.

"Straight on," he said. "My room is at the end of the passage, the door facing you."

Gerald walked on. Then suddenly the floor gave way beneath him.

With a cry he stretched out his hands, and gripped the edge of what he perceived to be a trap, saving himself from falling thereby. The lawyer saw this, and endeavored with his foot on Gerald's shoulder to thrust him down.

In turn Gerald released one hand, and made a grab at the lawyer's leg. Just in time Loide withdrew his limb, and Gerald replaced his hand on the edge of the opening, striving to draw himself up.

There was only one thing to be done, and the lawyer did it. He deliberately placed his feet, one on the fingers of each of the hands gripping the wood.

With a cry of pain Gerald released his hold, and fell to the feather bed below.

The lawyer knelt on the edge of the hole, and, throwing the rays of his lantern down, inquired: [Pg 198]

"All right? You aren't hurt, are you?"

"What's the meaning of this devil's trick? Is this the gratitude you spoke of?"

"A little bit of it—just a little bit of it. I'm sorry; really, truly sorry to put you in such a position, but business, you know, business must be attended to."

"I've walked into your trap."

"Just nicely and comfortably."

"Like a fool."

"No, no, don't say that," said the lawyer soothingly. "You couldn't possibly foresee."

"What does it mean? What's your object? How long do you propose to keep me here?"

"Depends entirely on yourself."

"How?"

"Let me handle those nineteen thousand pound notes, and you shall have your liberty within twenty four hours."

"And if I don't do that?"

The grim smile on the lawyer's face seemed to answer him.

"Supposing I cannot?"

Once more the lawyer smiled. He stroked his chin and said quietly:

"You are not a fool. I don't think I am. Let's play this game, then, like men. You are here in my power. You've got to stop here till I handle those notes. I can't afford to let that time be a long one, so I must hurry things on a bit." [Pg 199]

"You mean to torture me?"

"That's as you may choose to put it. You must remember that the torture will cease the moment you care to let it. You've got the check string in your hand."

"What do you intend doing?"

"Nothing, I hope, because I think you will see the game is mine, and hand over the pool."

"You think I have the notes on me?"

"No, I don't, or I should have adopted other means—rendered you unconscious while I despoiled you of them, and then perhaps popped you where you are for some hours while I cashed the notes and cleared out."

"What is it you want me to do, then?"

"Well, you made me sit down and write a note once, didn't you? I have a stylographic pen here, paper, and an envelope."

"Yes."

"I want you to write a letter, authorizing the giving up to the bearer of it the packet containing the notes."

"A letter—to whom?"

The lawyer laughed as he answered:

"To the custodian of them, of course."

"And if I can't—if I don't do that?"

"Then, my friend, you'll gain knowledge. You will know what it is to be hungry and thirsty. I don't know that the information will be of much service to you in the police force, but for all it's worth, it will be yours."

"You will starve me!"

"I shall keep you without bite or sup till you give me what I want, if it's for a day or a week, or—or as long as you can live. If you are obstinate enough, if ultimately your skeleton is found here—for I may tell you that rats abound in the cellar, and they are reputed to be excellent bone pickers—the fault will be yours, wholly yours, not mine."

There was silence for a few moments.

Gerald was in a cold sweat of fear and horror. He knew the lawyer well enough to know that an appeal to his mercy would be wasted.

If he told the truth—that he did not know where the notes were—he would not be believed. If he did convince the lawyer, then what might happen?

At the fellow's mercy he might be killed, just as the man on the boat had been. Human life, he knew, was no sacred thing to the man who held him prisoner.

To lie or to tell the truth—which should he do?

"How do you shape?" presently inquired the lawyer. "Will you make yourself as comfortable on [Pg 201]

those beds as you can for the night without bedclothes, and with rodent company, or will you give me the letter I ask for now?"

"I can't give it."

"Very well," said the lawyer, pretending to smile genially, although he was sick at heart at the answer. "Perhaps a night's reflection will make you change your mind;" he drew up the flap as he spoke.

"Good-night."

"God! Are you going to leave me here in the dark?"

"I am afraid so. I am sleeping in the house, and if the loneliness—but you will have plenty of company—if you should change your mind in the night, call out. I shall hear you, and bring a light."

"If I scream for help the neighbors——"

"Will not hear you. Grip that fact, and it will be a breath saver. This house stands off the road in its own grounds. There is not a living being within earshot."

"Leave me a light, man—it's inhuman."

"I am sorry you think that. However, it's your own fault, you know. Give me the letter I want, and I'll lower this lamp to you, and before this time to-morrow night you shall be as free as air." [Pg 202]

He waited a minute, holding the flap in his hand. No answer.

"I am sorry you don't see your way to it. You don't mind my shutting this flap, do you? You'll get plenty of ventilation from the barred window. By the by, don't waste strength trying the bars. I tried them before you dropped down, and you can take my word that they are firm enough; while as to the door, it's as solid a piece of oak as was ever carpentered. Accept my assurance that you are as secure as it is possible to make you, will you? Good-night."

He put one of the pieces of lath across a corner of the opening as he spoke, and rested the flap on that.

The square border of light, which those eager eyes in the cellar looked up to, the light of the lamp through the cracks, gradually grew fainter and fainter—the lantern had been lifted.

The light faded, then all was darkness. The prisoner was alone. [Pg 203]

CHAPTER XXVII

PECULIAR MESSENGERS

Gerald was alone for some time; he remained in the same position.

He was partly stunned by what had happened. It had all taken place so rapidly, and so unexpectedly, and he feared—greatly—the danger ahead.

Man to man, he would have feared nothing. He was not a coward.

But, as it was, he had a murderer to deal with, and his opponent had the keys.

He considered Loide's character, and he calculated that his own life was a small thing in the lawyers estimation. It was an unwholesome thought.

He turned his head slowly, and then very quickly, for he saw a glimmer of light. It was from the barred window.

The moon was shining, and would soon o'ertop the trees he could see silhouetted on what was his horizon.

He thought of escape—naturally. But it was a poor thought; he anticipated no success. [Pg 204]

A point in his favor was his early athletic training. With finger or foothold he would have been a factor to reckon with in an attempt to get out.

Running the whole length of what was his roof were the supporting beams of the floor boards above. They afforded no grip if he got there—and he had to reach them.

He looked at the window. If he ran and sprang high enough, he would be able to grip the bars.

He essayed it—failed at first, but was clinging successfully the second time.

The width between the bars was not great enough for him to put his head through, but he threw up his left leg and hooked the toe of his boot so that he could rest there, and look round without the heavy strain on his arms.

In the semi-darkness he looked out on what appeared to be a long garden with high trees at the bottom.

Behind those trees he knew the moon was coming up, and that presently that awful darkness would be ended.

The rafters above him—they were his only hope of escape.

By means of the window he could reach those beams, and possibly the trap-door, but he feared—horribly feared—that his fingers would slip from the pieces of square wood, which it seemed impossible to grip. [Pg 205]

He tried it, however. He got both legs up and through the rails till the thickness of his thighs prevented further protrusion.

He sat there with his calves out of window, resting a moment, and getting ready for his test of strength.

Then, his hands at the top of the bars, and his feet resting at their base, he stretched up first one hand and then the other.

He gripped easily the long timbers—gripped them easily while his weight was supported by his feet, but the moment he hung—well, that same moment he dropped to the ground.

In his fall he did not hurt himself at all—he was prepared for it.

He had known, even while testing it, that the task was a hopeless one; there was nothing to grip in the strict sense of the word; all he could do was to pinch the wood with his fingers, and the difficulty of that operation with one hundred and forty pounds depending is apparent.

He felt his way over to the beds, and lay down; his exertions had fatigued him a bit.

He lay very quietly, thinking—thinking of the possibility of escape, and realizing more and more how hopeless the idea was, how secure was the trap he was in. [Pg 206]

He heard a sound and started up—the sound ceased. He called out:

"Who's there?"

And there was a scampering, scraping, scratching noise. What it was burst on him at once. He muttered:

"Rats!"

He was not afraid of them. His limbs were free.

He had read accounts of those rodents attacking living men, but he had looked upon them as mere fiction. He was content to think that he could beat them off if his voice failed to frighten them.

The moon o'ertopped the trees, and he was thankful. The light was a great comfort.

It shone into the cellar, and he lay there on the beds as in a patch of lime-light, the shadow of the bars running as great dark lines across the floor.

He put his hands under his head, and lay quite still, looking up at the moon. Presently a shadow was cast—there was something at the window!

He did not move, and then he saw what it was—a cat—a common or garden cat!

A well cared for, plump, collared member of the feline race—he could see the silver part of the leather collar in the moon's beams. [Pg 207]

The cat looked in between the bars and listened. Then she stealthily ran or dropped, after the manner of her kind, down the wall on to the floor.

It was evident from her manner that this was not her first visit. The squeaking and scuttling of the rats had ceased as by magic.

The fear they had not felt for the man, they instinctively felt for the cat—their natural enemy.

Quite idly, without moving, Gerald said:

"Puss, puss; poor pussie."

The cat paused in her stealthy walk across the cellar floor. Gerald spoke again.

Perhaps she was reassured by his voice, for she did not run away when he stretched out his hand and scratched her neck and head; indeed, she came closer. Evidently Gerald had found her soft spot.

Another shadow! Another cat! Then another!

They followed the example of the first and dropped down—it was evidently a happy hunting ground for the neighboring cats.

Gerald was rather pleased than otherwise—they acted as a kind of police, so far as the rats were concerned.

The moon, as it climbed its way along the heavens, lighted up different parts of the cellar, and presently in looking round a ray of hope entered Gerald's heart—for there, on a nail in the wall, was a coil of wire! [Pg 208]

There were possibilities in it.

He walked to the coil and took it down, and his heart sank again.

It was the thread-like wire used in bottling, and absolutely useless as a means of escape.

Then suddenly a thought occurred to him, which sent the blood rushing to his head, and set his pulse and heart beating faster.

"My God!" he said, "there's a chance yet."

From his breast pocket he drew his note-book and tore three leaves out. In the light of the moon with a pencil he wrote:

"For God's sake, whoever finds this, take it to the nearest police station. I am imprisoned without food or drink in the back cellar of The Elms, Maypole Road, Wimbledon, by a man who threatens to murder me. This is life or death. For God's sake, help."

"That ought to be strong enough," he muttered, as he reread it. "I don't know that I can add to it in any way."

Then he made two copies of the document, and folded all three into flat, long-shaped tapers.

He then broke off a couple of yards of the wire, and called a cat to him. [Pg 209]

Scratching the cat, and fastening the note to the collar with the wire, was not altogether an easy task, but he accomplished it. Then he effected the same thing round the necks of the other two.

One had no collar at all, and Gerald had to make one with the wire. He succeeded, and then one by one he pitched the cats up to the window.

They looked round with ruffled fur at this indignity after such soothing treatment as they had been experiencing, and probably in their hearts thought that Gerald was no gentleman.

They evidenced this thought of him by walking away and leaving him.

He climbed up to the window bars, and watched them as well as he could.

They lingered, probably with a view to the formation of a choir; but Gerald said "Shoo!" and they fled. As they did so, he heard a clock striking.

Counting the strokes, he found it was ten o'clock. He had been in the cellar an hour only, and it seemed days.

He remembered the period of his residence in suburban lodgings. He remembered the care of the proprietors of cats then, how before going to bed they would patiently call "puss, puss, puss" at their back doors, in order to prevent their pets spending a night out. [Pg 210]

He prayed earnestly that the owners of the feline trinity he had just let loose were affectionately disposed towards their cats. He hoped great things from those messages.

If not to-night, surely in the morning one of the three must bear fruit. He prayed so with all his heart and soul. [Pg 211]

CHAPTER XXVIII

A PISTOL AND AN OPEN GRAVE

Eleven o'clock struck. In that upper room at The Elms, where he had left a feather bed, Loide lay smoking and thinking.

He was disappointed at the ill success of his scheme.

His talk of starving out the detective had been all bluff—starvation was a process which would fill too much time.

It would be three days before the man with the warrant touched English shores. Before that time expired, Loide must be away.

But he wanted to flit with the money—the nineteen thousand pounds.

A hundred and one ideas floated through his mind.

Would it be any use trying to bribe the man in the cellar? His life threatened, he would be justified in giving information as to the hiding-place of the notes.

What if he promised to give him a share of the spoil in untraceable gold? But he had not much faith in that idea.

[Pg 212]

He knocked the ashes from his pipe, and replaced the latter in its pistol-shaped case—and that very act gave him an idea.

He had not been firm enough. He had not frightened the detective—that was evident from the man's silence.

Despite the rats and the darkness, he was holding on. Loide felt that he should have played his cards with a firmer hand.

He handled the pipe case—in the dimly lit room it looked remarkably like a pistol. He would play it for that.

Another detail entered his brain, and the humor of it rather appealed to him.

It was grim humor. It pertained to the digging of a grave in front of the barred window.

With the smile on his lips, pipe in his pocket, and lantern in hand, he descended the stairs. He walked slowly along the passage, and stepped across the trap.

Not a sound from the man below. The lawyer bit his lips in vexation.

He turned back and lifted the trap. The light from his lantern showed Gerald lying on the beds.

"Sleeping pretty comfortably?" queried the lawyer genially.

"Sleep! What do you think I'm made of?"

[Pg 213]

"Flesh and blood just at present. So you can't sleep, eh? We will alter that. You shall sleep soundly enough within the next hour, I promise you."

He let the flap fall as he spoke, and walked away in the direction of the back door.

Gerald heard the unfastening of the bolts, the descent of the stone steps into the garden, and presently a glimmer of light from the lantern showed through the window on to the cellar wall.

Springing to his feet, he jumped up to the bars and clung to them.

He could see Loide walking down the garden path, and saw him enter a sort of shed. Soon he came out, carrying a spade.

With this he walked in the direction of the window, and then, putting down the lantern on the ground, with the edge of the spade marked out a space on the earth, about six feet long and two feet wide.

The lawyer then started digging. He never turned his head to note if there was a face at the window, but from the corner of his eye he saw it and chuckled.

Could he have seen Gerald's appearance, he would have been still better pleased, for the eyes in the face at the window were protruding, and the hair on the head was almost on end. The shape of that hole the lawyer was digging caused the fright—it was the shape of a grave.

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Steadily the lawyer went on with his task. He was really digging in the middle of a flower-bed, so that his work was not very difficult.

The hole got deeper and deeper, the digger standing in it and shoveling out the earth, and all the while the white face remained glued to the bars of the window.

As midnight struck, the task was finished. The lawyer stuck the spade into the earth, wiped his brow, put on his coat, and picked up his lantern.

As he mounted the steps leading into the house, Gerald dropped to the floor of the cellar, and waited, dreading—he knew not what.

The flap was flung up, and the lawyer bent over. In one hand Gerald could see a pistol!

This was laid down beside the lantern, and coolly squatting on the floor with folded arms, the lawyer addressed his prisoner.

"You have been down there some little time, policeman, and I dare say you have been thinking of the best way to get out—I guess that's what you would think."

"Yes, I have thought a little of it."

"Has anything struck you? I am asking you for information. I mean, how it would be possible for me to get you out through this hole."

[Pg 215]

"If you mean to let me out"—his heart gave a great leap as he spoke—"surely it would be better to open the door."

"No," said the lawyer, shaking his head. "I am not so young as I was. Age robs one of one's

strength. Besides, you are a big, heavy fellow—by reason of that I have allowed a good two feet wide—I should never be able to drag you up the cellar stairs—I could drag you down all right."

"I could walk," said Gerald hoarsely, full of horrible thoughts engendered of the lawyer's last speech; "you wouldn't need to assist me."

Again the lawyer shook his head.

"I am afraid you don't quite understand the position," he said. "You wouldn't be able to help me. When you leave this cellar you will be beyond help."

"What do you mean?"

It was a startled, hoarse voice which came up from the cellar.

The lawyer picked up the pipe case, and then put it down again. It was an effective bit of byplay.

"You see, my dear fellow, I'm as sorry as sorry can be—but necessity knows no law. I tried to arrange things comfortably. You'll admit I was thoughtful; I did not even want to hurt a limb. I even took the trouble to break your fall with feather beds."

[Pg 216]

"Yes."

"But you didn't respond. I wanted those notes—now I have given up any idea of your telling me where they are. I thought I should cash them, and plant a couple of thousand pounds in gold where you would be able to find them later on. Your imprisonment here would have given you all the excuse you would have needed. But you did not clinch on to the idea."

"It was—it is—impossible."

"Just so, just so," replied the lawyer soothingly. "I admire that trait in any man's character; and seeing you're in the position you are, facing your own grave, why, damme, it positively borders on heroism."

"Heroism?"

"That's it, that's the word. I'm full of unqualified praise. But, as I said, necessity knows no law. As I said to myself when I loaded this pistol"—byplay again—"it's a hundred pities to make holes in the man's head, and then plant him in the back garden,' but what would you do? There's no help for it."

"No—help—for—it?"

[Pg 217]

"Ah, it strikes you so, does it? You see you could have earned your freedom and a couple of thousand pounds, and you prefer going over to the great majority."

"You don't mean to tell me that you are going to murder me in cold blood?"

"Afraid so, dear boy, afraid so. What's troubling me is, how the devil I am to get you out into the garden. Frankly, I don't want to leave you here to be nibbled by the rats—skeletons are such horrible things, and I'm a sensitive sort of beast when you come to know me. I have dug a nice comfortable little grave outside, and you'll be as snug as can be in it."

"You—murderer!"

"Just so, just so. I confessed as much to you once when you had me in your power, didn't I? The positions are reversed now you are in my power, but you don't make any confession of the whereabouts of these notes."

"I cannot."

"Just so, just so. As I have said before, it's heroism—beautiful heroism. I'll have to take my chance of dragging you up the cellar stairs, I suppose. There's no last sort of wish or request you have to make, have you"—byplay again—"before I put a bullet in your brain?"

[Pg 218]

CHAPTER XXIX

THE NEXT MOVE IN THE GAME

Before Gerald could answer the very unpleasant question, there came a sound which caused both men's hearts to cease beating for a moment, the one with hope, the other with fear.

For it was a loud hammering on the front door, and an authoritative voice crying:

"Open instantly, or we break in."

Looking at the door, the lawyer saw through the ground glass a round disk of light, such as a bull's-eye lantern throws, and then silhouetted a helmet—a policeman's helmet.

Loide stood in the passageway with a blanched face—irresolute—for a moment. There was not time to be so longer.

Then he rushed to the back door, and disappeared down the steps into the darkness.

His movements were quickened by the sound of breaking glass. A truncheon had shattered one of the panels in the door, and a coat sleeve, with a striped band round it, was thrust through the hole in the glass.

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There was a hand in the sleeve, a hand feeling around for the catch, a policeman's hand.

The hand caught the catch, and presently the door opened.

Three men in uniform stood on the steps, a sergeant and two constables. They paused a moment listening, and then entered.

"Be careful," said the sergeant. "Throw your light ahead of you. Hullo! What's this?"

He was referring to the open trap which yawned at his feet.

He cast the light of his lantern down the hole, and a voice came up, saying:

"The police! Thank God!"

"Wasn't a hoax then, after all," said the sergeant grimly. "Are you all right?"

"Yes," came the voice; "all right now you have arrived. Had you been five minutes later you would have had a dead man to carry out."

"Who's the would-be murderer?"

"Escaped the back way as you entered the front. I heard him run down the steps."

"Jim, Jack, quick; scour the back, and see what you can find."

The men found nothing. They returned.

"He knew the lay of the land better than we did," said the sergeant; and then stooping over the opening in the floor, he continued, "How are we going to get you out of this?"

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"That's the question which was put to me five minutes ago, only it was proposed to bring me out dead, not alive."

"Shall I try and borrow a ladder, sergeant?" inquired one of the men. "Or a pair of steps would do."

"Where the devil are you going to borrow such a thing at midnight? Slip off your belts. Here's mine; buckle them together. That's it."

He leaned over the hole, and lowered the length of leather.

"Just wrap the end round one wrist," he called out to the man below, "and hold on with the other hand. Got it? Now, Jim, Jack, grip this. Stand on the corner there and pull all together."

The long, strong pull of the three men brought Gerald's head above the hole.

"Catch hold of the side with your free hand," called out the sergeant; "that will relieve the weight. That's it. Stoop down, Jack, and catch his arms. There."

In another moment Gerald formed one of the four panting men in the passage.

"And now," inquired the sergeant, "what's the meaning of this little game? How did you come to get down there?"

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"First tell me," inquired Gerald, "how you came to arrive in the very nick of time?"

"Well, your note—ingenious idea that—round the cat's neck, was noticed by the cat's owner. At first she thought it was a hoax, but ultimately she put on a bonnet and shawl, and came with it to the police station."

"Good woman!"

"It seemed a funny sort of story to find tied to a cat, and at first we shared in the belief that it was a hoax. We probably should have treated it so—for you don't find this kind of thing happening except in books, you know—but one of our men who was standing in the office had reported that two vans had cleared the furniture away from The Elms during the evening.

"I think that decided us. If it had not been for the fact that it was an empty house—empty houses form the backgrounds of a lot of crimes, you know—I don't think we should have taken notice of it."

"That would have been pleasant."

"You can't conceive how the police are hoaxed, or you wouldn't wonder. We seem to be fair game for the practical joker. But now, tell us, how did you get down that hole?"

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"It's a long story," said Gerald, who for obvious reasons could not tell the true one. "I was lured here presumably by a madman, walked into that trap, and when you were knocking at the door, the fellow was standing over me with a pistol. He had dug a grave in the back garden—you can

see it for yourself—and was intending to bury me in it."

"Who was it?"

"The man who lived here—Mr. Loide, the lawyer. I was his clerk. He sent for me to come here to-night, and I came down by train. When I got here—well, the man was mad; there can be no doubt of it."

"Just give me his description," said the sergeant; "we don't want madmen rambling about a quiet little place like Wimbledon. The sooner we spot the old gentleman the better. He seems to be shaping himself for a strait jacket."

"A quiet five minutes with him," replied Gerald viciously, as he clenched his fist, "would, I think, result in his being one of the sanest men in the country. I shouldn't forget in the interview that he tried to murder me."

"You don't want to take the law into your own hands. That's what we are around for. Now, give me his description."

Gerald gave it. Then the sergeant said:

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"Your own name and address."

Gerald gave them.

While the sergeant had been eliciting these particulars, and writing an account of the affair, his men had searched the house from top to bottom, and reported absolute emptiness.

"Now I think we have done here. Better let us take the key," said the sergeant; "we'll go over the place again to-morrow. If he's as mad as you say he is, he's likely to come back. We may be able to clap hands on him if we keep watch."

The street door was locked, and the four men made their way to the high road.

"I would give something for a drink of brandy," said Gerald.

"I fear you are not in such dire distress as to warrant my knocking up a licensed victualer," replied the sergeant. "How would a cup of hot cocoa fit you? There's a stall at the corner."

Gerald sampled it, and found it grateful and comforting.

"Now, about sleeping. Will you come on to the station? We can give you a pitch there on a rug till the morning."

Gerald thanked them and walked to the police station. The next morning he was up betimes, and caught an early train back to London.

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His astonished landlady let him in, and opined with a shaking head that there was only one end for young men who stopped out all night.

Gerald did not want to hear what the termination was, but made his way up-stairs.

In his own room he lay on his bed and slept. He had not found the bench at the police station of a soporific kind.

After the excitement of the preceding evening, he needed sleep, and he took his fill of it.

He did not awake till eleven o'clock; then he had breakfast, and mapped out his plans for the day.

He rehearsed his coming interview with the dentist—he did not suppose it would matter being an hour or so late—what he should say, what he should do, and then went out.

His landlady sarcastically inquired as he passed whether he thought he should sleep at home that night, and he answered by banging the door.

He made his way to Finsbury Circus, and entered the building in which the dentist had rooms. Sawyer opened the door.

"Is Mr. Lennox in?"

"Yessir; will you come inside? What name shall I say, sir?"

"Brown—John Brown."

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Then Gerald sat down and waited while the boy took his name in to his employer.

"Am I going to draw a prize or a blank," he muttered. "Am I coming out of this interview with the notes in sight, or failure?"

His interview with the dentist told him.

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CHAPTER XXX

AT THE DENTIST'S

The dentist himself was left—the last time he was referred to in this chronicle—facing Sawyer and two policemen.

The sight of the policemen caused him to clutch at the door frame for support. He thought the moment of his arrest had come, and his knees seemed to take on a desire to figure as castanets.

The two men touched their caps and did not attempt to enter.

That surprised the dentist. It dawned on him that a salute was not the usual preliminary to an arrest.

One of the men had a note-book in his hand. He spoke:

"Sorry to intrude, sir, but there's a fête on at the Crystal Palace for the police orphanage. Your name's down on the books as subscribing something last year, and we thought we'd just ask if you'd be so kind as to remember the poor orphans again."

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What a feeling, what an intense feeling of relief came over him!

Relief! He almost laughed, the tension for a minute had been so great.

"What did I give last year?" he inquired, in as natural a voice as he could assume.

"Five shillings, sir."

"Then here's the same again. That's all right."

The men thanked him and withdrew. The dentist closed the door and almost sobbed.

Then he changed his mind about the registered letter. Opening the door, he entered the outer room, and took it from Sawyer.

"I'll see to this," he said.

That police visit seemed to have roused some courage in him—it was an element in his nature that needed a lot of rousing.

Why should he be afraid of every shadow? Where was the need for it?

Unless he betrayed himself—and then he remembered the visit of the man yesterday, the man who had made an appointment for eleven o'clock that day.

What could that mean? His inquiries, his reference to the American, all this seemed suspicious.

He would wait another half hour and see. Perhaps after all there was no need for fright.

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During that half hour Sawyer tapped at and opened the door.

"The gent that came yesterday, sir."

"His name?"

"Mr. Brown, sir."

"Show him in."

The dentist braced himself for the interview. He put the envelope containing the notes in his table drawer, and looked up as his visitor entered.

"Mr. Brown?"

"That's it."

"You were recommended here, I think, by some one whose teeth I attended to."

"Well, I don't think you attended to his teeth only."

"No."

"He was rather cut up by your treatment."

Gerald had his eyes fixed on the dentist, and when he had uttered that double meaning remark, he saw the man's face grow pale as death.

He knew then that his bolt had gone home; knew that he was on the right track at last.

He adopted bold measures. The dentist's appearance warranted them.

"Sit down, Mr. Lennox. You don't mind my turning the key in the door, so we shan't be disturbed, do you? That's it."

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He seated himself opposite the dentist, and pulled out his hired-for-a-shilling handcuffs.

The effect of their production was electric. He was more than ever convinced that he was right.

"Of course," he said quietly, "you guess the game's up. That little game you and your brother

played with Mr. George Depew when he came to have a tooth out?"

The dentist was incapable of an answer. He sat there as if turned to stone.

Gerald went on:

"I'm of the American detective force—you have perhaps heard of me, Detective Grabbem. I gave the name of Brown to your boy because I didn't want to give the show away."

Still no answer. Then Gerald said suddenly:

"Where are the nineteen thousand pound notes?"

For answer the tongue-tied dentist with trembling hand opened his drawer, and handed Gerald the envelope he had recently given to and taken from Sawyer.

"You intended them for the London police? I'm from New York."

Gerald opened the envelope and his eyes sparkled as he handled the notes.

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As a measure of precaution he collated the numbers with the entries in his pocketbook—all were correct.

"I'll take charge of these," he said, as he put the notes in his pocket. "Thanks for saving me trouble."

Then Gerald's anxiety was to get away. He said:

"Out of gratitude for saving me bother, is there anything you would like me to do for you? Want to write to your friends or anything?"

He had got all he wanted, and he decided to leave with it as promptly as possible. The dentist found his tongue, and said:

"I would be grateful for half an hour for—for the purpose of writing to my friends."

"It's yours. There is no back way out of this house, I see. I'll just smoke a pipe outside. No tricks, mind. I'll be back in half an hour."

Gerald went out slowly, lighted a pipe within sight of the dentist's window, sauntered with his hands behind him, after the manner of one waiting, and then when he reached the corner, turned it, and bolted in the direction of Moorgate Street.

There he hailed a hansom and was rapidly driven to his lodgings. He was one of the happiest fares in a London cab that day.

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And the dentist? He completed the unfinished work of the morning.

No need now for the subtleties of the sharpening stone—all was known. He might as well use the knife in the quickest possible way, and end it all speedily.

His old cowardice came over him. He loathed himself for it, stamped his foot and strove to attain the courage needed to draw that sharp surgeon's knife under his chin.

He knew its edge was razor-like, that one strong, firm draw and all would be over. But he lacked the nerve.

He almost laughed when he remembered that he had heard it said that a suicide is a coward—he imagined that it required more courage to take one's own life than another's.

He looked at the clock; he had fooled away five minutes. That braced him up—he must avoid the hangman's attention at any cost.

It was not the loss of his life which had deterred him so much as the method of losing it.

Then an idea occurred to him. He had the gas apparatus, why not—no sooner thought than he started to put the idea into execution.

He had a little bench whereat he worked in and about the repairing and making of false teeth.

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At each end were small vises. He fastened the surgeon's long knife into it after the manner of a man who would sharpen a saw.

It was firm and rigid.

The gas apparatus he put on the bench itself, and leaned over to it, his neck almost touching the knife.

As he lost consciousness and the power of standing, he knew what would happen; the weight of his whole body would drag his neck on to the keen edge. Long before he could recover consciousness, all would be over.

Then he expelled a deep breath and inhaled the gas.

When Gerald's copy of the *Star* was brought up to him, a triple head-lined column caught his eye. It was captioned:

**STRANGE DEATH
OF A WELL KNOWN
CITY DENTIST**

and it went on to describe the ghastly details of the find in the dentist's room.

It was put down as a pure accident. The boy's evidence about the sharpening of the knives, the extraordinary position in which the body was found, were chronicled; there was not the breath of a suspicion of suicide. [Pg 233]

Perhaps that soul which had taken its flight to another world knew naught of the happenings in this—would never know that the insurance office paid over the policy moneys, and that the wife and child the dead man had thought so much of benefited by the application of a golden salve in their time of grief.

And yet—who knows? [Pg 234]

**CHAPTER XXXI
MOON BLINDNESS**

"No need to shave this off now."

Gerald was standing next morning in front of his dressing-glass, and referred to his pointed beard.

He had intended shaving as a disguise in case of any bother with the now dead dentist. He had not seen what could arise—what the dentist would dare to do—but the detective's failure to go back for his prisoner would naturally excite suspicion in the dentist's breast.

Now—well, that breast was cold.

"There is no doubt," thought Gerald, "the doctor and the dentist between them did for Josh Todd. Both are now done for. So far as Josh Todd's murder is concerned, that is avenged. A restoration of the money"—he had the bank notes in front of him as he spoke—"to its rightful owner will end the whole thing.

"And," he thought, with a smile of pleasure playing round his mouth, "it will end up like a story too, with a marriage with Tessie—and, please God, a live happy ever after."

He inserted the notes in an envelope. Then in another, and another, and ultimately in a piece of brown paper, which he tied round with twine. [Pg 235]

He went to the head of the stairs, and called out to the landlady, would she lend him a needle and cotton?

The maid of all work came up with it, and Gerald set about using the same.

He took off his coat and waistcoat, and ripped the lining of the latter from the cloth; pushing the envelope of money up, he sewed the lining down again.

"That's on my left side," said Gerald, "over the heart. I put that waistcoat on now"—he did so—"and it shall never leave me till I hand the money over to old Depew. I'll sleep in that waistcoat, and never, night or day, shall it be out of my touch."

He looked up the trains and boat sailings, booked his passage, and arranged to step on board a liner the next day on his way to America—on his way to the girl he loved.

The next day he settled with his landlady. Then he took an omnibus to Euston, sitting on the top of it with his bag on his knees, for his exchequer was running low, and it did not admit of cab hire. By tram he went to the dock, and stepped aboard the vessel which was to bear him to the land of the free.

He had gone to the expense in town of booking both berths in his second class cabin. It left him almost without a pound in his pocket, but he had too much in value about him to run any risk. [Pg 236]

He had provided against any tampering with the bolts or locks of his cabin door by purchasing one of the bell door alarms which fix into the floor, and at the slightest pressure of the door rings a loud alarm.

He did not fear for a moment that any attempt to rob him would be made; he simply took no risks.

Traveling second class, no one would suppose him in possession of nineteen thousand pounds, and as he had made up his mind that the package should never leave his breast, he felt quite safe.

On board the boat, after she sailed, he kept very much to his cabin. He did not make many acquaintances. He occasionally chatted and smoked with a poor looking, club-footed old man, who was a fellow-passenger.

He was moved to this by the extreme sensitiveness of the man; indeed, a veiled pity prompted him to take notice of the only creature on the ship who seemed to be without an acquaintance.

He was surprised when he found from conversation what a mine of information he had struck; that his companion was a well-informed, educated, and apparently wealthy man.

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"Yes," the other said, "I suppose you are surprised to find me traveling second class. I am extremely sensitive. I know with this hideous deformity, a hump back and a club foot, that people talk of me in pitying tones behind my back.

"I don't want their pity," he continued fiercely; "I only want to be let alone, unnoticed. With you, it is different. You are the only man on this ship who looks at me without conveying an impression that you would like to pat me on the back and say, 'Poor old fellow.' Damn their pity!"

Gerald laughed heartily. The man was speaking the truth, he knew.

His almost toothless gums caused chin and nose to come together in a manner strikingly suggestive of Punch, and he spoke with a squeak.

His nose even was deformed, and a swelling on one side of it below the bridge added to the curious appearance of the face. A bald head, with a fringe round it of snow white hair, completed the grotesqueness.

In the more crowded second class cabin, the man escaped notice better than he would have done in the saloon.

So it came about that during the voyage Gerald and the club-footed hunchback passed many hours together.

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Gerald learned much, for there was scarcely a subject on which his companion was not well posted.

The nights were particularly pleasant, for the moon was at the full, and, well wrapped up, they usually spent the after dinner time on deck, while the majority of the passengers were more sociably engaged in the way of games or music.

At one meal the subject of moon blindness had cropped up, and many curious anecdotes were told anent it—anecdotes more or less truthful, after the manner of shipboard stories.

Afterwards, on deck, Gerald's companion continued the conversation. At table he rarely spoke. He said:

"It is quite true. Moon blindness is a terrible thing. The great relief about it is the knowledge that the sight comes back.

"I remember, many years ago, abroad, being foolish enough to insist on sleeping on an open deck. It was, of course, terribly hot weather, or even I—young as I was then—should never have been so foolish. I lay on my back on the deck—on the back is the only comfortable way in which to lie on a hard couch, by the by—and when I woke I could not see my hand before me.

"Fright! God bless me! I believe I went mad."

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"Enough to make you."

"The captain reassured me by laughing at me. It seemed a cruel thing to do, but I have since thought it saved me from going mad. I have always feared blindness so—I have always had weak eyes."

"I notice that you are never without colored glasses."

"That is so. I cannot see a yard away without them.

"Well, on this occasion of which I am speaking, there was no ship's doctor aboard. The captain gave me an ointment to use which he told me would restore my sight in five or six days."

"Did it?"

"In that time my sight became as good as ever it was. As to the ointment—well, the captain afterwards told me that was a mere trick. That nothing but time cured moon blindness, and that he had given me the fat as an ointment merely to keep me busy."

"Smart."

"Yes. There was another effect it had on a fellow-passenger—who slept as I had slept. He got up from the deck, felt his way to his berth, and lay there unconscious for nearly a day and a half.

"When he recovered, he had not the faintest recollection of even lying down on the deck, and was

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amazed to find himself in his clothes in his bunk."

"Curious."

"So I thought. Don't light your pipe—try one of these cigars. They are from a box I have just opened. I want your opinion of them."

"Thanks—want the light?"

"No, I won't smoke any more to-night. I think"—a yawn—"I'll be getting to bed. Good-night."

"Good-night. I shan't turn in just yet; as I've lighted this cigar, I'll smoke it out."

"Give me your opinion of it in the morning. Good-night."

"Good-night."

Gerald sat on in the moonlight smoking, and when in the morning he found himself in his berth with his clothes on, he thought of the story of the moon struck man, thought he had been affected in the same way, and was thankful that he had awakened at his regular hour with nothing worse than a headache.

He determined never to go to sleep on deck again while the moon was shining.

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CHAPTER XXXII

THE LOVERS MEET

New York. Gerald bade farewell to his companion, who pressed him, if ever he returned to England again, to pay him a visit, and they parted.

Gerald's first act, after fixing on a train at the railway station, was to send a wire to Depew.

Have succeeded in every way. Coming by train, arriving Oakville at six. Let Tessie meet me with trap.

GERALD DANVERS.

And Tessie was there to meet him—Tessie, bright, bonnie, and expectant.

Their eyes spoke, but they just shook hands quietly and then drove away.

When they reached the country road, away from people, Gerald took hold of the reins, and pulled the horses up.

"What's that for?"

"Comfort, Tessie. You have just got to give me the biggest kisses you're capable of giving, and I don't like them in a jolting cart."

"Gerald!"

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"That's it. Now another. I can do with another. Greedy, eh? Why, I haven't had a kiss all the time I have been away."

"I should hope not!"

"Little woman, I've come back so full of joy—and I may say of money—that I wonder my feelings aren't too much for me. I wonder I don't burst."

"Is it true, Gerald—all of it? Dad told us when he got your wire."

"What did he say?"

"Well, when he opened it and read it, he said, 'Hallelujah!'"

"That's the old man right enough."

"Then he told us that you had been over for nineteen thousand pounds, and that you said you were bringing them with you."

"That was so."

"And is it true, Gerald? True that you have nineteen thousand pounds about you now?"

"Feel right here, lassie."

"Your heart?"

"No, you can't feel that—you've had it for weeks past."

"Don't be foolish, Gerald."

"Feel there—my vest."

"Paper."

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"That's it—wrapped up in more paper—there's nineteen of them, each for a thousand pounds."

"My!"

"Wants some swallowing, doesn't it? That's what I went across the pond for, to get that money for your dad."

"So he said."

"And before I went I bargained how I was to be paid for my work. I made him promise to give me—you."

"So he said."

"'Pears to me he has told you 'most all there is to tell."

"He had never said a word to mother or to me till your wire came. But he was full enough of talk then."

"Trust the old man for that. When he pops the cork out you can hear him."

"He says that if it had not been for you, he never would have seen a dollar of the money."

"That's so. Sounds egotistical, but I don't sorter reckon he would."

"He's mapped out what he's going to do with part of it."

"Hasn't lost any time!"

"He's not going to give you any of it."

"Don't want it. I've got his word that he'll give you to me, and that's enough for me to handle. I am counting on finding you a handful." [Pg 244]

"I'm sure!"

"Old man's a man of his word; he won't go away from it. Our two beating hearts are going to be made one, Tessie, just as soon as a parson can tie us up."

"I don't see any reason for hurry!"

"Your sight's bad! We'll have to see to it."

"But you haven't asked what he's doing with the part of the money I referred to."

"Don't want to know. Don't care a mosquito's wing what he does with it. I plank those notes into his hand, and I say, 'Farmer, there's your part of the bargain,' then I step across to you and I say, 'and I think this is mine?' Farmer he agrees, and you and I——"

"But Gerald, darling——"

"That's right; you keep on calling me 'darling.' It sounds real sweet—just like molasses—coming from your lips."

"I wish you would be sensible for a minute."

"Couldn't, Tessie, if I tried. I've earned you, my girl, and you're mine, mine, mine!"

"Gerald, don't scream out like that!"

"Don't care. There's only the dicky birds to hear, and it won't frighten them. Catch up the reins, lassie, steer for the farm, let me unload my cargo, and have the right to claim you for first mate on our voyage through life." [Pg 245]

"Gerald! I never saw you so silly."

"Ain't I? I own up. I'm just oozing stupidity at every pore. Gimme a kiss, or I'll stop the horse again."

"How rough you are, Gerald!"

"Ain't I? Gimme another. And another. Hallo! What's the mare stopped for? Gee up! Don't you know you've got a bride and bridegroom behind you? Don't you know the wedding march? Gee up, anyway."

"Gerald! Do be quiet. I want to tell you something."

"Fire away."

"About that money."

"Yes?"

"Dad's going to give me some."

"Well?"

"How much do you think?"

"Dunno—don't care."

"Nine thousand pounds."

"Get away! What are you giving us?"

"Fact. He's not going to give you a cent. He says he promised to give me to you, and he'll settle on me as a wedding portion the odd half."

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"He's a thorough, regular, kiln dried brick!"

"Nine thousand pounds, Gerald!"

"Don't seem as if there could be so much money in the world, Tessie, does it? There's a capital for us to start a life partnership on!"

"As the capitalist partner, I shall keep you in order, my boy."

"You will—you will—I feel it looming."

"You may not be in such a hurry about our marriage after that threat."

"Oh, yes. I am in a greater hurry. I want to get over it."

"You wretch!"

"Ain't I? Biggest wretch on the American continent at this moment. Hullo, Tessie! I didn't see the crape round your sleeve. Who's dead?"

"Poor old Susan."

"No!"

"Yes; she died the second week you were away."

"Poor old soul! She nearly sent me to glory, but I bear her no grudge."

"Did you find out, Gerald, whether her husband was really murdered after all?"

"Not only that, Tessie, but I found who were his two murderers."

"Are they arrested?"

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"They were arrested by the hand of death. No earthly judge and jury will try them. They have to toe the mark before the Judge of All."

"Dead?"

"Yes, and that is all we will say about it. We don't want to talk of death now, Tessie, but of life, the life which is before us, the life which you and I are going to travel in double harness. The life ___"

"Take your arm away, Gerald. There's the farm, and mother and father are standing at the door."

"Hip, hip, hooray, farmer!"

"Come right in, lad, come right in. You, Jim, look after the mare."

"Mother-in-law, give me a kiss."

"I'm sure—"

"It's right, farmer, isn't it? She can kiss her future son-in-law in safety, can't she? I bring you home nineteen thousand pounds, and Tessie and I enter into partnership till death doth us part. Isn't that the bond?"

"Every word of it, sonny, every word. But that money, where is it?"

"Here, right here, farmer; on my beating, palpitating, manly bosom. Mother-in-law that is to be, give me your scissors. No, take 'em yourself. Undo the stitches. There. That's it. 'Open sesame' and out she rolls."

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"Brown paper parcel tied with twine. Don't look worth nineteen thousand pounds, does it, farmer? Open the packet, and you will see a sight for sore eyes. Nineteen crisp, crackling, rustling Bank of England notes for a thousand pounds each!"

The trembling fingers of the farmer gripped the scissors, and he cut the twine. Then he tore off the brown paper and revealed—a piece of folded newspaper!

For a moment there was a silence, but in that moment a great change came over those present.

All the hilarity left Gerald. He stood looking at the packet with surely the whitest face that ever living man bore. The farmer's clouded to the pitch of blackness, and, bringing his hand down on the table with a force which made the crockery on the dresser ring again, he blurted out:

"What damned fool's game is this, anyhow?"

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CHAPTER XXXIII

THIEF!

Gerald never moved, never took his eyes off that packet, never answered.

Then he walked closer to it, picked it up, dropped it, and sank into a chair, still a white faced, speechless man.

The farmer watched him for a whole minute. Then he sneeringly remarked:

"Been robbed of the money, eh?"

Gerald had to moisten his lips before he could ejaculate the word:

"Yes."

Then the farmer laughed, but it was not a pleasant laugh.

He rose to his feet and pointed to the door. He uttered but one word:

"Go!"

"Father!"

"Silence, girl! and stand aside from that lying cheat."

"Cheat!"

Gerald spoke the last word. There was an air of unnatural calm about the farmer, as he answered:

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"Cheat! Fraud! Liar! Bunco-steerer; we're a long way from the sheriff, or, by the God that's in the heaven above, I'd lodge you in jail to-night."

"Lodge—me—in—jail!"

"For robbing me of fifty pounds."

"Robbing!"

"Do you think I don't see through your trickery? Do you take me for a hayseed because I'm a farmer? Do you think I believe a word of what you say?"

"Tell me—tell me again that you had nineteen thousand pounds in that vest of yours, and that you've been robbed of it."

"I sewed—it—in—myself."

Again the farmer laughed—that unpleasant laugh of his.

Then he walked to the wall and took down a whip—a stock whip with a long thong. He drew the lash through his fingers and said:

"This farmhouse has sheltered a thief long enough. I look on that fifty pounds as lost. I give you two minutes to get the other side of that door. If you're not gone then, I'll write a receipt on your back with this lash. So help me, God!"

"Father!"

"Stand back, girl!—this is no place for you."

"Father——"

"Stand back, I say. You're my flesh and blood—the flesh and blood of honest people; you want no truck with carrion like this."

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"Farmer, you think I have robbed you——"

"Thief!"

"You think that I——"

"Thief!"

"I, who wanted to——"

"Thief!"

Gerald walked to the door. Tessie sprang to it, too, and said:

"Gerald!"

"Tessie, I—answer me, lassie; it looks black enough, God knows. Answer me! Do you think I lied when I told you——"

"No, Gerald; I believe in you now as I did then."

"Thank God!"

"My own flesh and blood turnin' agin' me!"

"Farmer, I——"

"Thief!"

"Listen to——"

"Thief!"

"Father!"

"Stand aside, child, and let that thief go out—out before I lash him like the dog he is."

"No, father, you wrong him, you wrong me. He is my promised husband. If he is turned out, I go with him."

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And once more the farmer muttered:

"My own flesh and blood turnin' agin' me!"

"Tessie, my little girl."

Gerald had his arms round her waist, and drew her to him as he spoke.

"God bless you for those words. They put heart, life, and courage into me. But this is your home. Stay here, girlie, till I fetch you from it—till I have found the money of which I have been robbed."

"Gerald!"

"My girlie," there was a little tremble in his voice, "the sky looked so clear and bright as we came to the farm, and it looks all drear and black now I am leaving it. But the blackest cloud has a silver lining, and I know that money is in America.

"I've got to find it, Tessie, and I'm going right away now to do it. Right away into New York, and you won't see me back here again until I come with the money; until I come to make your father apologize for calling an honest man a thief, and admit that it doesn't always do to judge by appearances."

"Gerald!"

"Oh, I don't blame him, lass; things look black, cruelly black; and if he knew all, he'd be more full of wonder than unjust rage. I sewed those notes into this vest myself, Tessie, and sleeping or waking, girlie, it has never left my body."

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"Where—where, Gerald, can the notes be?"

"That, lass, I am going to New York to find out. A kiss, girlie; just one. You'll see me back; trust me."

"I do, Gerald—trust you with all my heart and soul."

"Mrs. Depew, you don't feel so strong about this matter as the farmer; you don't know quite so much. If he's inclined to be rough on this girl here, remember that I tell you that when she defends me, she defends an honest man.

"You told me once that you knew by my eyes I could never tell a woman a lie. I'm looking you straight in the face now, Mrs. Depew, and I tell you that I sewed that money in my vest myself."

"Why," blurted out the farmer, "why didn't——"

"Hold on, there, farmer—you've said enough. I've taken such words from you to-night as no living man can say he has ever uttered to me before. I don't want to hear you talk now. Later on, I'll listen—listen when you beg my pardon for your injustice; as you shall, by God! Good-night."

And he passed through the doorway, out on to the road, his face towards the capital.

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CHAPTER XXXIV

A THEATRICAL MAKE-UP

We leave America for England, and turn back in our history a week or so—to Wimbledon and The Elms on the night of Gerald's adventure there.

The police and Gerald are in the passage by the front door, and a haggard faced man is crouched below the steps listening.

He hears all that Gerald says, and his fury rises to white heat as he realizes by his late clerk's reticence that he is not a detective at all!

No policeman would speak as he speaks—concealing the facts from other officers.

The police and Gerald go away. Indelibly printed on the lawyer's memory is his late clerk's address.

Loide breaks into his own house, and sleeps that night on the bed he had left up-stairs.

Early as Gerald leaves Wimbledon next morning, Loide has left it before him.

The lawyer has profited in his former lesson in make up.

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He remembers that in the Waterloo Road there are two or three theatrical shops. He waits about till they are open, and then enters one.

"You will be surprised at what I want," he says to the man in the shop, "and perhaps you will not be able to give it to me."

"What is it, sir?"

"I want such a complete disguise that my own son will not know me."

"Your son!"

"Yes. It's a ghastly thing for a father to have to confess, but I suspect my son of having robbed me. I want to find out if it is so. If so, I shall ship him abroad.

"I dare not place the matter in the hands of the police, because, if my suspicions are confirmed, I should have to prosecute—that I cannot do, for his mother's sake alone."

"But how will you manage to——"

"I have thought it all out. We have just discharged our old caretaker at the warehouse. I have given out that I am going abroad, and I propose to be the new caretaker for a week or so."

"For a week! You can't expect make up to last a week."

"You think the disguise is impossible?"

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"Well, no——"

"See here, I have false teeth. Now they are out you see what a difference it makes."

"Yes, you're right; pinches in your cheeks, and brings your nose and chin nearer. A good wig——"

"I wear one now. I propose not to wear one at all. I am quite bald at top. Can you color the fringe of hair round?"

"Color wouldn't stand for a week; besides, in daylight it would be seen."

"There is no way, then?"

"Yes; if you don't mind it."

"What is it?"

"Bleach it—won't take five minutes—bleach what you have, and your bushy eyebrows whitened and trimmed will make all the difference in the world."

"Good."

"But, mind, you will have to dye it black again when you want to return to your own color."

"That's all right. Can you suggest anything else?"

"Yes. Your skin is white—'London tint' we call it—that can be stained a darker color—'country tint' our name for it. Complexion is a big factor in a make up."

"I understand."

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"If you don't mind a little pain, we can alter your nose. This little thing put up the nostril distends one side, and contracts the other."

"Good."

"Bodily—you don't mind walking lame?"

"Don't mind anything so long as the disguise is effective."

"Elevators in your boots raise you three inches in height, and a club boot will cause you to walk

altogether differently."

"I see."

"A hump on your back, and a pair of tinted glasses will complete the thing. It would need a very close observer to detect you."

"The voice is the only thing——"

"Need not trouble you. This little thing fixes like the plate of false teeth in the roof of the mouth. Stage dudes wear them. Speak slowly, and you'll find yourself—unconsciously—lisp and stammering. The nose distender adds a little twangy, nasal sound, and it's your own fault if your voice gives you away."

"All sounds good. Can you take me in hand now?"

"Walk in."

Terms were discussed and settled, and for an hour Loide was under the shopkeeper's hands.

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At the expiration of that time he looked in the glass. He started back in amazement.

Truly had he had a son, that son would scarcely have recognized him. He would have been a wise child to know his own father in that disguise.

"The advantage of this, you see," said the make up man, "is that it is what we call a 'daylight get up.' You needn't be afraid of it rubbing off. It'll last. You'll look the same this day week as you look now. It will be more than a week before that stain begins to wear off. Now, try the coat."

Several coats were tried before a fit to suit the shopman was arrived at, and then he gave it out to one of his men with directions.

Meanwhile boots were tried on.

"You will find the height and the club boot strange at first."

"If I look as I feel with these elevators on, I must appear to be a giant."

The shopman laughed.

"It makes a big change. Walk round the shop for five minutes so as to get used to them. Coat ready? Now try this on. That will do, I think. Put on these tinted specs, and you're complete."

Once more Loide looked in the mirror. His bent appearance altered his shape as much as the shopman's art had altered his face—he felt absolutely satisfied.

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Having paid the bill, he left the shop, and started walking towards the bridge; but he did not walk far—he would have been lame in reality—he hailed a hansom.

The direction he gave the driver was the main road, in a street off which Gerald was lodging.

Reaching the end of it he alighted, paid his fare, and boldly walked to No. 9—the number Gerald had given to the police.

It was an ordinary lodging house, and the lawyer was pleased to see a bill in the window, bearing the legend, "Bed for Single Gentleman."

He knocked at the door. He was after that bed.

Yes, the landlady was in, said the girl; would he step inside and wait a minute?

He stepped. The landlady came; she quoted her terms for a bedroom for a week.

Would the gentleman like to see it? The gentleman would—and did.

The second floor was devoted to bedrooms. Loide approved of the one shown him.

He commented on the fact that the tenant of the next room slept late, as his boots were still outside his door; and with a darkened brow the landlady replied to the effect that those who stopped out all night usually slept late the next day.

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Loide's heart beat quicker—he guessed the boots were Gerald's.

He was sleeping in the next room, sleeping there with nineteen thousand pounds in his possession.

In the next room—there were possibilities. Loide smiled pleasantly, and his heart felt lightened.

He paid a deposit, and said that if the landlady would get him a chop that would be all he would require till supper.

He was left alone.

Turning the key in the lock he carefully felt the walls separating him from the adjoining room—as he suspected, lath and plaster! Presently he heard some one moving in there, heard distinctly through the thin wall. Then the door was opened, and the boots taken in. Gerald was going out.

He went. Ear to crack in the door, the lawyer heard the man he was so anxious about speak to the landlady on the next floor, saying he would return in about two hours' time, and would she get him a steak and potatoes for then.

Two hours! There would be time.

The lawyer stood on his bed and took down from its nail a framed and highly colored statement to the effect that The Way of the Transgressor is Hard. [Pg 261]

On that part of the wall the frame had covered he operated with his pocket-knife.

Stripping the paper, he cut away plaster and laths till he could see the back of the paper of the adjoining chamber.

He sighed with satisfaction. His task was over.

He did not care how soon Gerald came back. He would have his eye on him. [Pg 262]

CHAPTER XXXV

NOT A MAN TO STICK AT TRIFLES

The lawyer then rolled up a sheet of stiff note paper from his bag into funnel shape, pinned it so, and made a tiny hole in the wall paper of the other room.

Fitting the small end of his funnel to the hole, he commanded a perfect view of the next room.

He was surprised, too, to find how it improved the sight looking through the tube—it was like a telescope, it seemed to bring things so near.

With the framed text hanging on its hook again, there was not the slightest suspicious thing about the room, and when his chop came up, everything was finished.

Soon after his dinner things were cleared away, Gerald returned.

The lawyer had not troubled to enter the adjoining chamber; the fact that it had been left unlocked convinced him that his man carried the notes on his person.

And he did at that stage, for he had just returned from his interview with the dentist. [Pg 263]

With locked door, and eye to his funnel, Loide watched.

He was seized with a frenzy as he saw Gerald take the notes from an envelope, and count them one by one—nineteen of them.

Had the look on the lawyer's face been seen by Gerald, that gentleman would not have hummed so blithely and looked so happy.

Gerald put the notes in his breast pocket, and pinned the top of it up—he was taking great care of them.

Loide had made up his mind to get those notes. He rather fancied that he would get them that night.

He generally got what he laid himself out to get. He was not a man to stick at trifles.

Presently Gerald drew from his pocket and opened a little box.

Loide knew what it was—he had seen them in a shop window.

A small alarm with points to be pressed into the floor, so that when the door it lay against was pushed—the lawyer's hope of getting possession of the notes that night received a rude shock.

The moment Gerald had swallowed his meal he went out again. He came back within an hour, and once more the lawyer's eye was busy.

Gerald took a ticket from his pocket and put it on the mantelpiece. To the girl who was dusting the room he said: [Pg 264]

"Tell Mrs. Parkes I am leaving to-morrow morning; ask her to have my bill made out, including the morning's breakfast."

The watcher strained his eyes, and ultimately read the ticket on the mantel board.

It was a second class passage on the American liner *Cascaria*.

Loide heard Gerald order tea for six o'clock, and then putting on his hat and breathing a prayer of thankfulness that it was raining—the devil helps his children—he went downstairs and out into the street.

Had Gerald been looking out of the window he would only have seen an umbrella leaving the house—the man beneath was effectually concealed by it.

Loide entered the nearest news agent's shop, and bought the morning paper. Looking down the shipping advertisements, he found to which line the *Cascaria* belonged, and took a cab to the company's head office.

The passenger list was open to inspection. Gerald had booked in his own name.

To the lawyer's chagrin, the whole cabin had been booked. What had looked an easy road, now showed a stumbling block.

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He had counted on sharing that cabin. He had shared one once before, and the performance therein had been—in a measure—a success.

He had looked to a repetition of it—it had been so easy.

He booked—booked, too, a cabin to himself as Gerald had done. He reflected that there were contingencies likely to arise when his sole occupancy of the cabin might be advantageous.

He hoped to secure the notes without risk. He quite recognized the danger attending the luring of Gerald into his own cabin, and then—besides, perhaps he wouldn't be lured; he might turn a deaf ear to the charmer, charm he never so wisely.

Loide purchased a box of cigars to smoke on the steamer. Then he went into a chemist's and bought a tiny hypo syringe, and a certain drug, the potency of which was known to him.

He rather prided himself on his general knowledge—he was a well read man. His reading was now serving him a good turn.

With that syringe he would inject the drug into one of the cigars—there was no knowing when such a thing might prove useful.

He entered the house at ten minutes past six.

He reflected that Gerald would not be through with his tea in ten minutes, and that there was little likelihood of a meeting on the stairs—he was right; he reached his own room in safety.

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Nothing happened that night. The next morning he watched Gerald packing.

He saw by the way he packed his portmanteau that the money was not to be placed in it.

Presently Gerald called out to his landlady for a needle and thread.

The watcher saw him put the notes in the envelopes, then wrap them in brown paper and tie the packet with a piece of white grocer's twine.

The packet lay on the table, and the shape and size thereof were easily seen.

Then the lining of the vest was ripped, the packet pushed in, and the lining sewn down again with the needle and black thread.

Loide made a mental note of further things he needed for the voyage.

Item: needle and black thread; item: brown paper and white twine.

The articles went on board with him in the shape of a parcel—a duplicate of Gerald's.

He guessed the train Gerald would go by, and resolved to travel by it himself.

He did not want to let his man out of his sight more than was absolutely necessary.

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Within four minutes of Gerald's departure, Loide left, and a cab took him to the station.

He was in the train first, and, unseen himself, watched Gerald enter. So on to the boat.

He played his cards well, and during the voyage he and Gerald became close acquaintances.

With his syringe and drug, Loide had doctored his cigars. They rested in his case for use when the occasion arose.

One night on deck the conversation turned on moon blindness, and Loide testified to its effects. If the picture he drew of its results lacked truth, it was at least original, and he had a manner which was convincing.

He concluded the conversation by handing Gerald a cigar and saying, "Good-night," and left him to smoke it.

He came back within three minutes. He had watched from a shadowed portion of the boat, and seen the cigar drop from the smoker's mouth and roll on the deck.

Loide picked it up and threw it overboard—it had served its purpose.

He helped Gerald to his feet, and in a dazed, unseeing way, the drugged man was helped to his cabin. There he sank on his bunk unconscious.

Loide turned on the electric light and fastened the door. He did nothing hurriedly; he knew just how long the effects of the drug would last—he had plenty of time.

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Undoing the coat and vest, he ripped out the stitches which held in the notes.

He put the packet in his pocket, and replaced it by another similar in shape and size.

Then very carefully he sewed up the vest again with a needle and thread he had about him, buttoned up the coat, turned off the light, and found his way to his own cabin.

There he undid the parcel. His eyes glistened.

Nineteen crackling pieces of paper worth a thousand pounds each!

He rolled and pressed them together till they formed a very small ball, and then he took off his clubfoot boot. The thick clump was for lightness—hollow.

By lifting the inner soles he had been able to put his finger into the hollow—now he put the notes.

With the contents of a penny bottle of liquid glue he glued down the leathers he had raised, one by one, and then left the thing to be dry by the morning—which it was, solidly dry.

Brown paper, envelopes, string, needle, thread, glue were all cast from a port-hole into the sea. [Pg 269]

From a bottle he had with him he took a deep drink of brandy—he thought he had earned it.

Then he undressed, carefully fastened his door, turned off the light, and prepared for the earliest night's rest he had had for many a day.

Next morning Gerald woke with a headache—he said nothing of what was not quite clear to him—his finding himself in his bunk with his clothes on.

His first waking movement was to grip and look at his vest—all was secure.

He had not feared anything otherwise, but it was the first night he had slept with his door unlocked.

Still he had the vest on, and after all, he reflected—with a smile—that was the safest place. No one could possibly have tampered with it without his knowing the fact.

And he smiled again. [Pg 270]

CHAPTER XXXVI

ONCE MORE ON THE TRACK

When Gerald was turned out of the farm, it was too late to catch a train to New York. He slept in a roadside shed.

Early next morning he was in the city, and he had made up his mind to go to police headquarters, and tell sufficient of his story to justify a stoppage of the notes.

He passed a money changer's on the other side of the way, and looked at the shop.

As he did so, he saw something which turned him rigid.

Emerging from the money changer's was his close companion of the voyage. It was not so much that which came as a shock to him as the change in the fellow's appearance.

The humpbacked man was no longer humpbacked. The club-footed man was no longer club-footed.

The toothless gums were now filled with teeth, and where there had been a long drawn face, there was now a round one. [Pg 271]

The glasses off, revealed eyes, sharp, shrewd, keen, piercing eyes, which even with the road between them, Gerald recognized in a moment—Lawyer Loide's!

In that moment there flashed on him the knowledge of how he had been robbed.

Loide boarded a passing car, and was carried away.

Gerald hesitated. Should he follow? No, he must first ascertain beyond a doubt that the notes were in the man's possession.

He could follow the car in a hack, and catch it up if need be.

He dashed across the road, and entered the money changer's.

"You are the principal?"

"Yes. What can I do for you?"

"I am an English detective."

"So."

"I am shadowing a man who has just left you. Stolen notes, a thousand pounds each. Has he

cashed one with you?"

"No, no, mine first. He not haf me so. I makes inquiries first."

Gerald pulled out his note-book.

"Was the note he presented one of these numbers?"

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"Dat von."

The index finger of the banker's hand was at work.

"What name did he give you?"

"Loide."

"Richard Loide, lawyer, of Liverpool Street, London?"

"Dat vos so. Here vos his cart."

"Has he left the note with you?"

"I haf lock him in mine safe."

"What to do with it?"

"I am at his oxpense cabling to Englant. Dat is all rights, den I vos pay him—but not now."

"What address has he given you here?"

"Oriental Hall, Seventh Avenue."

"You will not do anything with the note till you see me again? We shall probably arrest him to-night, or in the morning."

"Dat vos so."

"Good-bye for the present."

"Goot-bye."

"Seventh Avenue, Oriental Hotel, drive like fury."

Such were Gerald's instructions to the hackman.

He knew he would get there before Loide. As a matter of fact, he passed the car bearing that individual half way.

When he had paid his fare, the number of dollars he had left he could have counted on his fingertips.

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It was a third-rate hotel. While waiting for the hotel clerk, he looked through the visitors' or arrival book. Loide had signed his own name; it stood out boldly, "Richard Loide, London, Eng."

"Is room No. 40 (the next one to Loide's) vacant?" he inquired.

"Yes."

"I'll book it."

He did so; signed a fictitious name in the visitors' book, received his key, and went up in the elevator to his room.

He sat down and waited, waited till he heard the tenant of No. 41 come along the passage, and pass through the room bearing that number.

Then Gerald flung off his coat, stepped into the passage, satisfied himself that no soul was in sight, turned the handle of the door of No. 41, pushed it open, and sprang on its occupant—Loide.

The surprise party generally has the advantage—Gerald had.

Before Loide could utter a cry, or turn to gaze at his assailant, strong fingers were gripping his throat and half choking him.

The lawyer was being garroted. Resistance ceased.

He became limp. Gerald was holding an unconscious man in his arm.

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Gerald dropped his burden to the floor and sprang to the door, shot the bolt, and then turned to the man on the carpet.

He felt his heart, it was beating—beating furiously. That was all right.

Gerald knew his victim to be a murderer, but he did not want to become one himself.

He went over the man. In the breast pocket, in an envelope, he found the notes. He counted them—eighteen.

One glance at the man, one more feel of the heart, and he went into his own chamber.

Getting into his coat, and putting on his hat, he went out of his room, and, key in hand, was carried by the lift to the ground floor.

Leaving his key in the bureau, he walked away from the hotel, and inquiring of a policeman where the office of the New York Central Bank was, he made in its direction.

At the bank counter he filled a form paying in to the credit of George Depew eighteen thousand pounds.

"Will you wire through to your Oakville branch, telling them to let Mr. Depew know at once that this money has been paid to his account?"

"Certainly, sir. It shall be done immediately."

"Thank you. Give me the name of the most respectable lawyer near here, will you?"

[Pg 275]

"Denison, Coomer & Wall—they rank highest around here."

"Thanks."

Gerald went to the lawyers. To the acting partner he said:

"I was recommended here by the New York Central Bank. I was commissioned by Mr. George Depew, farmer, of Oakville, to go to England to collect nineteen thousand pounds, money left him under a will. I got it, and came over by the *Cascaria*. I was robbed on board. Eighteen thousand pounds of the money I have recovered and paid into the New York Central to Mr. Depew's credit; here is the bank's receipt."

"Yes—that is an order."

"One thousand pounds is missing—I traced it to Myer Wolff's—Exchange Bureau on Broadway. I went in. He has the note."

"I told him not to part with the money for it. The man who left it with him was the thief. He is a shrewd, clever thief; prompt measures must be taken to prevent his getting that thousand pounds."

"Where's Depew?"

"At home in Oakville. I want you to fetch him here express."

"Why don't you fetch him yourself?"

"He thinks I am the thief. I only got hands on the eighteen thousand pounds an hour ago. The whole lot was missing yesterday."

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"He'll have to make a declaration and get bondsmen before that thousand pounds can be successfully claimed."

"He can do that—most respectable man in the section."

"I'll write him now to come along, and send the letter through special. How do the trains run? Can he get here to-night?"

"Dead easy. If you catch the next out with your letter, he can be back here before half past four."

"Good. I'll tell him to be here at five o'clock. There'll be justices around at that time. You'll come back?"

"I will—you'll want me?"

"To join in the declaration—that's so."

"Good. I'll be here."

"Till five o'clock then. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

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CHAPTER XXXVII

THE LAWYER LIFTED INTO ANOTHER SPHERE

Loide lifted himself on his elbow and looked round. Then he remembered—he was in his room at the New York hotel.

He had entered the room and then—of course, some one had sprung on him from behind.

A horrible thought smote him. He plunged his hand into his breast pocket and screamed with rage—the pocket was empty!

The notes were gone!

He sprang to his feet and thought.

What should he do? Give information to the police—would it be safe?

He had—foreseeing possession again—written the Bank of England withdrawing the stop on the notes, saying they were now in his client's possession.

How then was he to account for the holding of them himself? Would not unpleasant inquiries be made?

Would he be able to answer them—without danger?

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Had all his labor been in vain? How had the robber possibly known that he had these notes in his possession?

At the money changer's he had purposely only spoken of one.

He knew it was not the work of a common hotel thief, for his studs, watch, and loose money had not been touched. It must have been some one who knew.

He would, at that moment, have cheerfully given one of the missing notes to know who the thief was.

He was afraid to go to the police, to say that he was an English lawyer bringing the money over to his client, Depew, and that he had been robbed, because if there was a real Depew, he would step forward and claim the money, and he—Loide—would be worse off than ever.

Besides, what explanation of his attempt to cash the one note could he give?

There was the thousand pounds fortunately saved from the robbery. This was safe in the money changer's hands. He looked at his watch. By the time he reached the banker's office, time would have elapsed, the reply cable would probably be back.

He would secure the thousand pounds first, and consider what he should do about the others after. [Pg 279]

He took a car to Broadway and entered the banker's office.

The money changer looked at him.

"You haf come back—alone, eh?"

"Alone?—yes. I told you I was a stranger in New York."

"Dat vos so. But you haf frents here—frents anxious to meet wit you."

"What do you mean? What nonsense are you talking? Have you got a cable back from England?"

"No, mine frent, nor did I cable out there—I saves the oxpense."

"You——"

"You see, von of the peeples vat is so anxious to meet mit you, he comes in directly you leaf here."

"My—friend?"

"Oh, yes. He know you quite well. He say to me, 'Dat vos my very goot frent, Meestair Loide, the lawyer, of London, England, eh?'"

"Said—that—to—you?"

"Ogsactly. I say, 'Yes, dat vos so.' Den your frent he answers that he came after you about stolen notes. He say, 'Dat I change him.' I smile. He go out to seeks you. I am much surprised to see you alone here all by yourself." [Pg 280]

"Alone!"

"Yes, because he say that he tink to-day he arrest you."

"Arrest me!"

"Dat is a way vid detectives; dey do dat wid peoples vot steals bank notes."

"Steals!"

"So."

"This is a trick! Give me back my note."

"Your note?"

"Yes—damn you—give me back my money."

"Shacob," the money changer called to his assistant sitting in the glass office behind, "will you oblige me by ring up the call for the police."

"Police," said Loide.

"So."

"What the devil do you mean?"

"Vait, mine frent. Do not get oxcited. It is big mistakes. Vait till the police come. They explain tings bettaire."

"Curse you!"

"So—if it please you, it pass the times."

"I shall go to my lawyer," he was making for the door as he spoke, "you shall pay for this."

"Ogsactly."

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Loide disappeared. He saw a couple of policemen coming along the sidewalk, and promptly jumped on a car going in the opposite direction.

It took him the way of the hotel. There would be time to go in, get his bag, and leave before the police turned up there.

There was a little money left in the bag; he must secure that.

He got his key in the hotel office, and was carried in the elevator to his floor.

Locking himself in his room, he tore open his bag, and threw the contents on the floor.

Papers—he crammed them into the grate, and, applying a match, set them burning. He destroyed everything which would link him with the name of Loide.

Then he started to resume the disguise which had been so successful on the boat. He would be safe in it, he thought.

He would wait for the police, and give another name and—and then there flashed to his memory the recollection of the register! He had signed there his full name, Richard Loide. His signature would convict him.

He sank with a groan on the bed. What should—what could he do?

The police were on his track without doubt, or why the call at the money changer's? What a fool he had been to set foot in America—how could he set foot out of it?

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If he was to escape, there was no time to be lost. He took his bag in his hand and passed out into the passage.

Looking over the staircase, he saw on the ground floor two policemen talking to the hotel clerk. Was he too late?

One of the officers stepped into the ever moving elevator. Slowly he was being borne upwards.

What should he do? The thought occurred to him that they would find his room empty, and think him gone.

He would hide—on the floor above. They would not think of searching there.

He sprang into the elevator—he should have waited for the next up coming car—the floor was nearly level with his knees when he jumped. The result was that he slipped, staggered, and fell prone on the floor of the lift, his head projecting.

Before he could move, the floor of the compartment reached the next floor of the building.

There was a scream of agony, a sudden wrenching jerk which shook the lift and halted the powerful machinery for half a moment, and then the cars went on in their old automatic way.

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But when the policeman alighted on the floor on which room No. 14 was situate, he was horrified to see a bleeding human head staring him in the face, and marked the trail of blood across the floor leading to it, while the policeman below was equally shocked when the lift reached the ground to see the headless trunk of a human body lying on the floor.

The coroner's jury brought in the usual verdict.

Loide had at one time feared death by hanging, English fashion; later by electrocution, American fashion; he had never feared a French performance—the guillotine—and yet, after all, decapitation was his end.

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CHAPTER XXXVIII

MRS. DEPEW HOLDS THE REINS

At the farm bells jangled. The usual harmony was not prevailing.

No one struck the right key in conversation. After the manner of mothers, Mrs. Depew

sympathized with her daughter, with a result that things were not running smoothly with the farmer.

A wife has facilities for disturbing a husband's tranquillity.

Apart from the displeasure of his wife and daughter, George Depew was not that pleased with himself.

Gerald's behavior when leaving had certainly not been that of a guilty man. And when the farmer came to think things over quietly, he came to the conclusion that he had been a large sized fool to lose his temper as he had done.

He realized Gerald's story must have been true—what would have been the sense of trying to pass off that folded piece of newspaper as bank notes? The trick would necessarily be found out at once.

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The midday meal was under way, and was being disposed of in unusual silence.

Mrs. Depew did not like the red eyed appearance of her daughter, and her husband did not like the glances his wife occasionally favored him with as a result thereof.

A messenger came to the door with a letter for the farmer. He took it and tried to read it, but could only make out a word here and there.

"Here, Tess, just read this out, will you?"

His daughter took it and read.

The farmer said "Jerusalem!" His wife—after the manner of wives—said, "There! I told you so," and the daughter said tearfully, "And you called him a thief, father!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Depew, rubbing it in, after the manner of her sex, "an almost stranger goes out of his way to bring you more money than you have ever dreamed of, and you call him a thief! I've no patience with the man."

"No, old woman, you haven't," replied the farmer. "Mebbe it would be better for all of us if you had. Give me my store coat and hat. I'm going right away to N'York by the next train."

"And what good's that, I should like to know? Sakes alive! Can't the man understand that the money's to his credit here in Oakville?"

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"Yes, the man's got gumption enough for that," answered the farmer grimly. "Just now, it ain't the money that's agitating me—that's all right."

"Then, what on earth do you want to go to N'York for?"

"To make about the most humble apology lips ever vented. I'm going to find Gerald Danvers, and tell him that a bigger old fool don't prowl about this airth than I am; and I'm going to beg him—d'ye hear—beg him to forgive me for insulting him."

"Dear father!"

"That's it, Tess. Because your old dad's a bit of a fool, you don't want to rub it in, do you? You leave that to your mother. Come here, girlie, and gimme a kiss."

"Lawd sakes, now! Just listen to the man! As if I'd said anything!"

"No, mother," said the farmer, over Tessie's shoulder—he was holding her to him—"it wouldn't be you to say anything. Silence is the kind of thing you shine in. Now, Tessie, gimme your sweetheart's address, and I'll get there slick away."

"Father, I don't know it."

"You—don't—know—it?"

"No, father. He will come back here now the money is found."

"Not if I know him, he won't," interposed the farmer's wife. "People that are turned out of doors and called 'thief' and threatened with whips ain't likely to come groveling around."

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"Mother!"

"Oh, yes, 'mother.' But 'mother' won't find that boy, will it? Lawd sakes! When I was a gal, sweethearts didn't behave like that. When your father was courting me, I should ha' liked to see him stalk away to N'York without telling me where he was going to put up. My—yes!"

"Hullo!" said the farmer, "here's a special delivery letter!"

"Perhaps it's from Gerald, father.

"More likely," snorted Mrs. Depew, "from the county lunatic asylum, to say they've a vacancy for a permanency if your father likes to call."

"Here, Tess, girlie, read this. See who it's from, and what it's about."

The girl took the letter and read.

"That makes the nineteen thousand pounds," said Tessie, as she finished reading the letter. "I wondered what eighteen meant."

"There's time to catch the train;" he walked to the window as he spoke, and called out, "You, Sam, just hitch the mare on to the buggy——"

"And what's the buggy for?" interrupted his wife.

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"To drive to the station, of course."

"Well, the buggy won't hold four people, will it?"

"Four?"

"Yes. Sam'll have to go to bring it back. Do you expect me and Tessie to hang on to that axle?"

"What? Are you going?"

"Am I? I reckon. If you think, George Depew, that you are going to career around the streets of N'York, bulging money at every pocket, with nary a sensible soul to look after you, let me tell you, you make a mistake."

"But, mother dear," said Tessie; "you will never be ready. The train goes in twenty minutes, and you will never have time to change your dress."

"Won't I? Sakes alive! You've known me for nigh on nineteen years, and you don't know your mother yet."

She had thrown off her apron and was rolling down her sleeves as she spoke. Then she called out to the hired girl:

"You, Liz, my boots, the ones I wore last time I was in Oakville. Won't be ready, won't I?" she continued, as she bustled up-stairs to change her dress; "I guess I shall be ready before you are."

Her husband changed the order, and the horse was harnessed to a four wheeled trap. By the time the farmer had changed into fresh boots and coat, Mrs. Depew was heard descending the stairs.

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"On time, I reckon, ain't I?" she inquired as she tied her bonnet strings. "Where's that gal? Now, you, Tessie, jump about; never mind your hair, clap your hat on, and come right down at once. We don't need to miss that train."

She was outside getting into her seat, and had taken the reins in hand before she had finished speaking.

Tessie ran down, jumped up, and presently they were driving rapidly in the direction of the station.

The train was caught, and during the journey the situation was discussed with much spirit.

The fact that the hero had appealed to Mrs. Depew, when her husband had turned him out, was not forgotten by that lady. Her "I told you so" song she sang for all it was worth, and kept her foot on the low pedal, too.

"I know a man, I do hope, when I see one," she said, "and at five o'clock this afternoon I hope to put my arms round the neck of one, and give him a good sounding kiss. I'm just real anxious to fill a great gaping hole in our midst. I'm wanting to extend a welcoming hand to a son-in-law that'll fill it, and supply the common sense we're so hard up for with our men folk."

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CHAPTER XXXIX

MRS. DEPEW HAS THINGS HER OWN WAY

Before five o'clock the three Depews—father, mother, and daughter—were in the New York lawyer's office, and punctually at the hour Gerald entered.

The lawyer, who had guessed something of what had happened, judiciously left them together for a few minutes.

Mrs. Depew carried out her threat; she walked straight over to Gerald, and gave him what she called a "smack."

"You, Gerald," she said, "I'm as real pleased to see you as I am to see the snow go away in winter. I believed in you, my lad, from the first, and if I've got an old fool for a husband, remember that he is only an old fool, and there's no scrap of real bad in him—that he's as good a husband, and as good a father as ever stepped in shoes."

"I want to say right here, Gerald," interposed the farmer, "that I'm as real sorry as any man can be for what I——"

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"There's no need for you to say anything to me just now, farmer," interrupted Gerald stiffly; "you

said enough last time we met to last me for many a day."

"I know, lad, I know, lad—don't I know it? You're not going to play heavy on a man old enough to be your father?"

"You were heavy enough on me—young enough to be your son! I have made up my mind"—he sat down with an air of determination as he spoke "to talk to you; to talk to you freely, when the whole of your nineteen thousand pounds is found.

"I've got hold on the balance that's missing, and it only wants the lawyer to put things in trim for it to be recovered. When it is—when the whole nineteen thousand pounds is in your possession—I shall want you to eat the word 'thief' you applied to me."

"Ain't I just eating it, Gerald?" said the old man humbly. "Is there a man here in N'York with as much humble pie in his mouth as I've got? I take back all I said——"

"Maybe, but I——"

And then Gerald paused.

Two soft, warm hands passed over the back of his chair, passed his face, came round his neck; warm lips touched his ear, and a voice he loved better than any other whispered: [Pg 292]

"Gerald!—he is my father."

That did it. Gerald jumped up and took the farmer by the hand.

All his anger had evaporated under the touch of those soft, warm lips.

"Well, farmer, let bygones be bygones. We'll forget all that's been said that ought not to have been said. Here comes the lawyer. Let's get along with the declaration."

"I have it all ready," said the lawyer. "It is a joint declaration." He read it, and then said, "Come along with me to the justice's office; and it can be declared right off."

The justice before whom they presented themselves glanced at the document he was signing.

"Coincidence," he said, "or is it the same? Loide's—an English lawyer—death was reported at the police station this afternoon."

Death! Gerald started. Had he then killed the man he had struggled with? He said:

"You mean Richard Loide." And he mentioned the hotel.

"That's where the accident occurred. Lift accident—there is the certificate just brought in."

"Will you loan this to me?" inquired the lawyer, after perusing it; "I think it will save some trouble." [Pg 293]

"Yes," answered the justice; "if you return it within two hours. It has to go to the coroner by then."

This was promised. Outside the office the lawyer hailed a hackman.

"Get in," he said to his companions; "we will drive straight to the money changer's."

They did. The hackman waited. They entered the office.

"You remember me, Mr. Wolff?" queried the lawyer.

It was evident the banker did—from his obsequious manner in receiving his visitor. Doubtless the lawyer knew something of him.

"You have a thousand pound English note in your possession belonging to my client here."

"I hope you not tink, Meestair Denison, dat I intends——"

"Oh, I know you only want to give it up to the right owner. He's here—this gentleman. Mr. Loide left it with you—Loide's dead. Here's the police certificate of his death."

"Det, eh?"

"He was acting in England as a lawyer for this client of mine, and paid over eighteen out of nineteen thousand pounds. The other thousand pound note was missing. This declaration sworn to before Justice Colonel George F. Vanderwood to-day proves the ownership." [Pg 294]

"So."

It was evident that the mention of the justice had impressed the banker.

"You will give up the note, I suppose, without any trouble?"

"Sairtenly, Meestair Denison, if you say so. I suppose I haf some eendemnity, eh?"

"I have prepared one. Here it is. Mr. Depew, will you sign it?"

Mr. Depew did so, and in exchange got the missing thousand pound note.

"Now, back to my office," said the lawyer, "where the ladies are waiting."

They returned there. The farmer flourished his note, and then threw it into his wife's lap.

"All's well, old girl," he said; "got him. It's all settled."

"And now you have only to settle with me," said the lawyer, with a smile, "and the whole thing will be ended."

"Not much, it isn't," interposed Mrs. Depew. "There's a marriage settlement for you to draw up. My old man is settling nine thousand pounds on our daughter, Tessie, who is to be married to Mr. Gerald Danvers here."

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"No need for a settlement, madam. Give her the money now before they are married, and it's hers as firmly as any deed could make it so."

"Is that so? Then, George, you'd better give it right away—here."

"Plenty of time, old girl, when we get back——"

"Get back! There's no putting back from here with a couple of single people around. Those two is going to be made one before we step out of N'York again."

"Mother!"

"That's me, Tess—you hear me say it.

"You really mean that, Mrs. Depew," inquired Gerald, with sparkling eyes.

"Young man," she answered, "you've evidently got to learn that when your mother-in-law that is to be says a thing, she means it."

"Mrs. Depew, you're the finest mother-in-law the world holds! You're a brick! a regular brick!"

"But, mother," said the blushing Tessie, "I haven't got anything ready——"

"Lawd sakes! Listen to that now! And here are we in N'York with a bank full of money, too! Can't you buy what you want?"

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"Of course she can," interrupted Gerald eagerly. "Mrs. Depew, you're the most sensible woman I've ever met."

"None of your soft soap now!"

"It's a fact. It's a capital idea. Couldn't be better. Don't you think so, farmer?"

Of course the farmer thought so. He valued his domestic peace, and assured it by acquiescence in most of his wife's ideas.

He even went so far as to say that he had thought a similar idea out as they drove along.

Tessie made another—must it be confessed, very faint-hearted?—protest.

"Why should you be in such a hurry, mother?"

"Because I don't believe in long engagements—that's why. Because this boy was promised his reward—that's why. Because you know perfectly well that you are just as anxious to get married as he is to marry you—that's why. Because I'm getting an old woman, and the sooner you get married, the longer I shall have on earth to play with my grandchildren—that's why."

"Mother!"

Of course it was settled that way. When they left New York shortly after, Gerald and Tessie were man and wife.

Mrs. Depew usually contrived to get her own way. If, of that household it was true that the husband was the head, she was the neck—she was so capable of turning the head.

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THE END

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