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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DOROTHY'S DOUBLE. VOLUME 1 (OF 3) ***

DOROTHY'S DOUBLE

BY G. A. HENTY

**AUTHOR OF 'RUJUB THE JUGGLER' 'IN THE DAYS OF THE MUTINY'
'THE CURSE OF CARNE'S HOLD' ETC.**

IN THREE VOLUMES—VOL. I.

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DOROTHY'S DOUBLE

PROLOGUE

A dark night on the banks of the Thames; the south-west wind, heavily charged with sleet, was blowing strongly, causing little waves to lap against the side of a punt moored by the bank. Its

head-rope was tied round a weeping willow which had shed most of its leaves, and whose pendent boughs swayed and waved in the gusts, sending at times a shower of heavy drops upon a man leaning against its trunk. Beyond stretched a broad lawn with clumps of shrubs, and behind loomed the shadow of a mansion, but so faintly that it might have passed unnoticed in the darkness had it not been for some lights in the upper windows.

At times the man changed his position, muttering impatiently as the water made its way down between his collar and neck and soaked through his clothes to the shoulders.

'I must have been waiting an hour!' he exclaimed at last. 'If she doesn't come soon I shall begin to think that something has prevented her getting out. It will be no joke to have to come again to-morrow night if it keeps on like this. It has been raining for the last three days without a stop, and looks as if it would keep on as much longer.'

A few minutes later he started as he made out a figure in the darkness. It approached him, and stopped ten yards away.

'Are you there?' a female voice asked.

'Of course I am,' he replied, 'and a nice place it is to be waiting in for over an hour on such a night as this. Have you got it?'

'Yes.'

'That is all right. Well, chuck your bonnet down there, three or four feet from the edge of the water.'

'And my cloak? I have brought that and a shawl, as you told me.'

'No; give it to me. Now get into the boat, and we will shove off.'

As soon as the woman had seated herself in the punt the man unfastened the head-rope and stepped in; then, taking a long pole in his hand, he let the boat drift down with the strong stream, keeping close to the bank. Where the lawn ended there was a clump of bushes overhanging the water. He caught hold of these, broke off two branches that dipped into the stream, then, hauling the punt a little farther in, he took the cloak the woman had handed to him and hitched it fast round a stump that projected an inch or two above the swollen stream.

'That will do the trick,' he said. 'They will find it there when the river falls.' Then he poled the boat out and let her drift again. 'You have brought another bonnet, I see, Polly.'

'You don't suppose I was going to be such a fool as to leave myself bareheaded on such a night as this,' she said sullenly.

'Well, there is no occasion to be bad-tempered; it has been a deal worse for me than it has for you, waiting an hour and a half there, besides being a good half-hour poling this tub up against the stream. I suppose it went off all right?'

'Yes, there was no difficulty about it. I kicked up a row and pretended to be drunk. Not too bad, or they would have turned me straight out of the house, but I was told I was to go the first thing in the morning. The rest was easy enough. I had only to slip down, get it, and be off, but I had to wait some time at the door. I opened it about an inch or two, and had to stand there listening until I was sure they were both asleep. I am sorry I ever did it. I had half a mind to chuck it up three or four times, but——'

'But you thought better of it, Polly. Well, you were perfectly right; fifty pounds down and a pound a week regular, that ain't so bad you know, especially as you were out of a place, and had no character to show.'

'But mind,' she said threateningly, 'no harm is to come to it. I don't know what your game is, but you promised me that, and if you break your word I will peach, as true as my name is Polly Green. I don't care what they do to me, but I will split on you and tell the whole business.'

'Don't you alarm yourself about nothing,' he said, good-temperedly. 'I know what my game is, and that is enough for you. Why, if I wanted to get rid of it and you too I have only to drive my heel through the side of this rotten old craft. I could swim to shore easily enough, but when they got the drags out to-morrow they would bring something up in them. Here is the end of the island.'

A few pushes with the pole, and the punt glided in among several other craft lying at the strand opposite Isleworth Church. The man helped the woman with her burden ashore, and knotted the head-rope to that of the boat next to it.

'That is how it was tied when I borrowed it,' he said; 'her owner will never dream that she has been out to-night.'

'What next?' the woman asked.

'We have got to walk to Brentford. I have got a light trap waiting for me there. It is a little crib I use sometimes, and they gave me the key of the stable-door, so I can get the horse out and put him in the trap myself. I said I was starting early in the morning, and they won't know whether it is at two or five that I go out. I brought down a couple of rugs, so you will be able to keep pretty dry, and I have got a driving-coat for myself. We shall be down at Greenwich at that little crib you

have taken by six o'clock. You have got the key, I suppose?'

'Yes. The fire is laid, and we can have a cup of tea before you drive back. Then I shall turn in for a good long sleep.'

An hour later they were driving rapidly towards London.

CHAPTER I

A slatternly woman was standing at the entrance of a narrow court in one of the worst parts of Chelsea. She was talking to a neighbour belonging to the next court, who had paused for a moment for a gossip in her passage towards a public-house.

'Your Sal is certainly an owdacious one,' she said. 'I saw her yesterday evening when you were out looking for her. I told her she would get it hot if she didn't get back home as soon as she could, and she jest laughed in my face and said I had best mind my own business. I told her I would slap her face if she cheeked me, and she said, "I ain't your husband, Mrs. Bell, and if you were to try it on you would find that I could slap quite as hard as you can."' "

'She is getting quite beyond me, Mrs. Bell. I don't know what to do with her. I have thrashed her as long as I could stand over her, but what is the good? The first time the door is open she just takes her hook and I don't see her again for days. I believe she sleeps in the Park, and I suppose she either begs or steals to keep herself. At the end of a week maybe she will come in again, just the same as if she had only been out for an hour. "How have you been getting on since I have been away?" she will say. "No one to scrub your floor; no one to help you when you are too drunk to find your bed," and then she laughs fit to make yer blood run cold. Owdacious ain't no name for that wench, Mrs. Bell. Why, there ain't a boy in this court of her own size as ain't afraid of her. She is a regular tiger-cat, she is; and if they says anything to her, she just goes for them tooth and nail. I shan't be able to put up with her ways much longer. Well, yes; I don't mind if I do take a two of gin with you.'

They had been gone but a minute or two when a man turned in at the court. He looked about forty, was clean shaven, and wore a rough great-coat, a scarlet and blue tie with a horseshoe pin, and tightly cut trousers, which, with the tie and pin, gave him a somewhat horsey appearance. More than one of the inhabitants of the court glanced sharply at him as he came in, wondering what business he could have there. He asked no questions, but went in at an open door, picked his way up the rickety stairs to the top of the house, and knocked at a door. There was no reply. He knocked again louder and more impatiently; then, with a muttered oath, descended the stairs.

'Who are you wanting?' a woman asked, as he paused at a lower door.

'I am looking for Mrs. Phillips; she is not in her room.'

'I just saw her turn off with Mother Bell. I expect you will find them at the bar of the Lion, lower down the street.'

With a word of thanks he went down the court, waited two or three minutes near the entrance, and then walked in the direction of the public-house. He had gone but a short distance, however, when he saw the two women come out. They stood gossiping for three or four minutes, and then the woman he was in search of came towards him, while the other went on down the street.

'Hello, Mr. Warbles!' Mrs. Phillips exclaimed when she came near to him; 'who would have thought of seeing you? Why, it is a year or more since you were here last, though I must say as your money comes every month regular; not as it goes far, I can tell you, for that girl is enough to eat one out of 'arth and 'ome.'

'Well, never mind that now,' he said impatiently, 'that will keep till we get upstairs. I have been up there and found that you were out. I want to have a talk with you. Where is the girl?'

'Ah, where indeed, Mr. Warbles; there is never no telling where Sal is; maybe she is in the next court, maybe she is the other side of town. She is allus on the move. I have locked up her boots sometimes, but it is no odds to Sal. She would just as lief go barefoot as not.'

By this time they arrived at the door of the room, and after some fumbling in her pocket the woman produced the key and they went in. It was a poverty-stricken room; a rickety table and two chairs, a small bed in one corner and some straw with a ragged rug thrown over it in another, a kettle and a frying-pan, formed its whole furniture. Mr. Warbles looked round with an air of disgust.

'You ought to be able to do better than this, Kitty,' he said.

'I s'pose as I ought,' she said philosophically, 'but you know me, Warbles; it's the drink as does it.'

'The drink has done it in your case, surely enough,' he said, as he saw in his mind's eye a trim figure behind the bar of a country public-house, and looked at the coarse, bloated, untidy creature before him.'

'Well, it ain't no use grunting over it,' she said. 'I could have married well enough in the old days,

if it hadn't been that I was always losing my places from it, and so it has gone on, and I would not change now if I could. A temperance chap come down the court a week or two ago, a-preaching, and after a-going on for some time his eye falls on me, and says he to me, "My good woman, does the demon of drink possess you also?" And says I, "He possesses me just as long as I have got money in my pocket." "Then," says he, "why don't you take the pledge and turn from it all?" "Cause," says I, "it is just the one pleasure I have in life; what should I do I should like to know without it? I could dress more flash, and I could get more sticks of furniture in my room, which is all very well to one as holds to such things, but what should I care for them?" "You would come to be a decent member of society," says he. I tucks up my sleeves. "I ain't going to stand no 'pertinence from you, nor from no one," says I, and I makes for him, and he picks up his bag of tracts, and runs down the court like a little dog with a big dog arter him. I don't think he is likely to try this court again.'

'No, I suppose you are not going to change now, Kitty. I have come here to see the girl,' he went on, changing the subject abruptly.

'Well, you will see her if she comes in, and you won't if she don't happen to, that is all I can say about it. What are you going to do about her? It is about time as you did something. I have done what I agreed to do when you brought her to me when she was three years old. Says you, "The woman who has been taking charge of this child is dead, and I want you to take her." Says I, "You know well enough, Warbles, as I ain't fit to take care of no child. I am just going down as fast as I can, and it won't be long before I shall have to choose between the House and the river." "I can see that well enough," says you, "but I don't care how she is brought up so as she lives. She can run about barefoot through the streets and beg for coppers, for aught I care, but I want her to live for reasons of my own. I will pay you five shillings a week for her regular, and if you spend, as I suppose you will, one shilling on her food and four shillings on drink for yourself, it ain't no business of mine. I could have put her for the same money in some country cottage where she would have been well looked after, but I want her to grow up in the slums, just a ragged girl like the rest of them, and if you won't take her there is plenty as will on those terms." So I says, "Yes," and I have done it, and there ain't a raggeder or more owdacious gal in all the town, East or West.'

'That is all right, Kitty; but I saw someone yesterday, and it has altered my plans—but I must have a look at her first. I saw her when I called a year ago; I suppose she has not changed since then?'

'She is a bit taller, and, I should say, thinner, which comes of restlessness, and not for want of food. But she ain't changed otherwise, except as she is getting too much for me, and I have been wishing for some time to see you. I ain't no ways a good woman, Warbles, but the gal is fifteen now, and a gal of fifteen is nigh a woman in these courts, and I have made up my mind as I won't have her go wrong while she is on my hands, and if I had not seen you soon I should just have taken her by the shoulder and gone off to the workhouse with her.'

'They would not have taken her in without you,' the man said with a hard laugh.

'I would have gone in, too, for the sake of getting her in. I know I could not have stood it for many days, but I would have done it. However, the first time I got leave to come out I would have taken my hook altogether and got a room at the other end of the town, and left her there with them. I could not have done better for her than that, but that would have been a sight better than her stopping here, and if she went wrong after that I should not have had it on my conscience.'

'Well, that is all right, Kitty; I agree with you this is not the best place in the world for her, and I think it likely that I may take her away altogether.'

'I am glad to hear it. I have never been able to make out what your game was. One thing I was certain of—that it was no good. I know a good many games that you have had a hand in, and there was not a good one among them, and I don't suppose this differs from the rest. Anyhow, I shall be glad to be shot of her. I don't want to lose the five bob a week, but I would rather shift without it than have her any longer now she is a-growing up.'

The man muttered something between his teeth, but at the moment a step was heard coming up the stairs.

'That's Sal,' the woman said; 'you are in luck this time, Warbles.'

The door opened, and a girl came in. She was thin and gaunt, her eyes were large, her hair was rough and unkempt, there were smears of dirt on her face and an expression of mingled distrust and defiance.

'Who have you got here?' she asked, scowling at Mr. Warbles.

'It is the gent as you saw a year ago, Sally; the man as I told you had put you with me and paid regular towards your keep.'

'What does he want?' the girl asked, but without removing her glance from the man.

'He wants to have a talk with you, Sally. I do not know exactly what he wants to say, but it is for your good.'

'I dunno that,' she replied; 'he don't look like as if he was one to do anyone a good turn without

getting something out of it.'

Mr. Warbles shifted about uneasily in his chair.

'Don't you mind her, Mr. Warbles,' the woman said; 'she is a limb, she is, and no mistake, but she has got plenty of sense. But you had best talk to her straight if you want her to do anything; then if she says she will, she will; if she says she won't, you may take your oath you won't drive her. Now, Sal, be reasonable, and hear what the gentleman has to say.'

'Well, why don't he go on, then?' the girl retorted; 'who is a-stopping him?'

Mr. Warbles had come down impressed with the idea that the proposition he had to make would be received with enthusiasm, but he now felt some doubt on the subject. He wondered for a moment whether it would be best to speak as Mrs. Phillips advised him or to stick to the story he had intended to tell. He concluded that the former way was the best.

'I am going to speak perfectly straight to you, Sally,' he began.

The girl looked keenly at him beneath her long eyelashes, and her face expressed considerable doubt.

'I am in the betting line,' he said; 'horse-racing, you know; and I am mixed up in other things, and there is many a job I might be able to carry out if I had a sharp girl to help me. I can see you are sharp enough—there is no fear about that—but you see sharpness is not the only thing. A girl to be of use must be able to dress herself up and pass as a lady, and to do that she must have some sort of education so as to be able to speak as ladies speak. I ought to have begun earlier with you, I know, but it was only when thinking of you a day or two ago that it struck me you would do for the work. You will have to go to school, or at least to be under the care of someone who can teach you, for three years. I don't suppose you like the thought of it, but you will have a good time afterwards. You will be well dressed and live comfortably, and all you will have to do will be to play a part occasionally, which to a clever girl will be nothing.'

'I should learn to read and write and to be able to understand books and such like?'

'Certainly you would.'

'Then I am ready,' she said firmly; 'I don't care what you do with me afterwards. What I want most of anything in the world is to be able to read and write. You can do nothing if you can't do that. I do not suppose I shall like schooling, but it cannot be so bad as tramping about the streets like this,' and she pointed to her clothes and dilapidated boots, 'so if you mean what you say I am ready.'

The thought that she was intended to bear a part in dishonest courses afterwards did not for a moment trouble her. Half of the inhabitants of the court were ready to steal anything worth selling if an opportunity offered. She herself had often done so. She had no moral sense of right or wrong whatever, and regarded theft as simply an exercise of skill and quickness, and as an incident in the war between herself and society as represented by the police. As to counterfeit coin, she had passed it again and again, for a man came up once a fortnight or so with a roll of coin for which Mrs. Phillips paid him about a fourth of its face value. These she never attempted to pass in Chelsea, but tramped far away to the North, South or East, carrying with her a jug hidden under her tattered shawl, and going into public houses for a pint of beer for father.

This she considered far more hazardous work than pilfering, and her quickness of eye and foot had alone saved her many times, as if the barman, instead of dropping the coin into the till, looked at it with suspicion and then proceeded to test it she was off like a deer, and was out of sight round the next turning long before the man could get to the door. The fact that she was evidently considered sharp enough to take part in frauds requiring cleverness and address gratified rather than inclined her to reject the proposition.

'It ain't very grateful of you, Sally, to be so willing to leave me after all I have done for you,' Mrs. Phillips said, rather hurt at her ready acceptance of the offer.

'Grateful for what?' the girl said scornfully, turning fiercely upon her; 'you have been paid for feeding me and what have you done more? Haven't I prigged for you, and run the risk of being sent to quod for getting rid of your dumps? Haven't you thrashed me pretty nigh every time you was drunk, till I got so big you daren't do it? I don't say as sometimes you haven't been kind, just in a way, but you have been a sight oftener unkind. I don't want to part bad friends. If you ain't showed me much kindness, you have shown me all as ever I have known, and yer might have been worse than you have. I suppose yer knows this man, and know that he is going to do as he says, and means to treat me fair, for mind you,' and here she turned darkly to Warbles, 'if you tries to do anything as is wrong with me I will stick a knife into you.'

'I am going to do you no harm, Sally,' he said hastily.

'Yer had better not,' she muttered.

'I mean exactly what I say, and nothing more. Mrs. Phillips may not have been quite as kind to you as she might, but she would not let you go with me if she did not know that no harm will be done with you.'

'Very well, then, I am ready,' the girl said, preparing to put on the tattered bonnet she had taken

off when she came in, and had held swinging by its strings.

'No, no,' Mr. Warbles said, in dismay at the thought of walking out with this ragged figure by his side, 'we can't manage it as quickly as all that. In the first place, there are decent clothes to be bought for you. You cannot go anywhere as you are now. I will give Mrs. Phillips money for that.'

'Give it me,' the girl said, holding out her hand; 'she can't be trusted with it; she would be drunk in half an hour after you had gone, and would not get sober till it was all spent. You give it me, and let me buy the things; I will hand it over to her to pay for them.'

'That would be best,' Mrs. Phillips said, with a hard laugh; 'she is right, Warbles. I ain't to be trusted with money, and it is no use pretending I am. Sally knows what she is about. When she has got money she always hides it, and just brings it out as it is wanted; we have had many a fight about it, but she is just as obstinate as a mule, and next morning I am always ready to allow as she was right.'

'How much will you want, Kitty?'

'Well, I should say that to get three decent frocks and a fair stock of underclothes and boots would run nigh up to ten pounds. If it ain't so much she can give you back what there is of it. When will you come and fetch her?'

'We had better say three days. You can get all the things in a day, no doubt; but I shall have to make arrangements. I think I know just the woman that would do. She was a governess once in good families, I am told; but she went wrong, somehow, and went down pretty near to the bottom of the hill; she lives a few doors from me, and gets a few children to teach when she can. I expect I can arrange with her to take Sally, and teach her. If she won't do it, someone else will; but being close it would be handy to me. I could drop in sometimes of an evening and see how she was getting on.'

'Are you my father?' the girl asked suddenly.

'No, I am not,' he answered readily.

The girl was looking at him keenly, and was satisfied that he spoke the truth.

'I am glad of that,' she said. 'I always thought that if I had a father I should like to love him. If you had been my father I expect as you would have wanted me to love you, and I am sure I should never be able to do it.'

'You are an outspoken girl, Sally,' Mr. Warbles said, with an unpleasant attempt at a laugh. 'Why shouldn't you be able to love me?'

'Because I should never be able to trust you,' the girl said. 'I am ready to work for you and to be honest with you as long as you are honest with me. I s'pose you wouldn't be paying all this money and be going to take such pains with me if you didn't think as you would get it back again. I don't know much, but I know as much as that; so mind, I don't promise to love you, that ain't in the agreement.'

'Perhaps you will think differently some day, Sally; and, after all, two people can get on well enough together without much love. Well, have her ready in three days, Kitty; but there is no use in my coming here for her. Of course, the girl must have a box, and you will want a cab. Drive across Westminster Bridge and stop just across it on the right-hand side. Be there as near as you can at eight o'clock in the evening; that will suit me, and it ought to suit you. It is just as well you should get her out of the court after dark, so that she won't be recognised in her new things, and you will get off without being questioned. I shall be there waiting for you, but if anything should detain me, which is not likely, wait till I come.'

When he had gone the girl flung her bonnet into a corner, then knelt down and made up the fire; then she produced two mutton chops from her pocket and placed them in the frying-pan over it.

'Good ones,' she said. 'I got them at a swell shop near Buckingham Palace; they were outside, just handy. Well, I s'pose them's the last I shall nick; that is a good job.' She then took a jug out of the cupboard. 'I have got sixpence left out of that half-crown I changed yesterday. We have got bread enough, so I will bring in a quart.'

The woman nodded. She had of late, as she had told Warbles, quite determined she would not keep the girl much longer with her, but the suddenness with which the change had come about had been so unexpected that as yet she hardly realised it. Sally was a limb, no doubt. She had got quite beyond her control, and although the petty thievings had been at first encouraged by her, the aptness of her pupil, the coolness and audacity with which she carried them out, and the perfect unconcern with which she started on the dangerous operation of changing the counterfeit money, had troubled and almost frightened her. As the girl had said, she had never been kind to her, had often brutally beaten her, and usually spoke of her as if she were the plague of her life, but the thought that she would now be without her altogether touched her keenly, and when the girl returned she found her in tears.

'Hello! what's up?' she asked in surprise. 'You ain't been a drinking as early as this, have you?' for tears were to Sally's mind associated with a particular phase of drunkenness.

The woman shook her head.

'Yer don't mean to say as you are crying because I am going?' Sally went on in a changed voice. 'I should have thought there was nothing in the world you would be so pleased at as getting rid of me.'

'I have said so in a passion, may be, Sally. You are a limb, there ain't no doubt of that; but it ain't your fault, and I might have done for you more than I have, if it had not been for drink. I don't know what I shall do without you.'

'It will make a difference in the way of food, though,' the girl said; 'I am a onener to eat: still I don't think you can get rid of the dumps as well as I can. You got two months last time you tried it.'

'It ain't that, Sally, though I dare say you think it is, but I shall feel lonesome, awful lonesome, without you to sit of an evening to talk to. You have been like a child to me, though I ain't been much of a mother to you, and you mayn't believe it, Sally, but it is gospel truth, as I have been fond of you.'

'Have you now?' the girl said, leaning forward eagerly in her chair. 'I allus thought you hated me. Why didn't you say so? I wouldn't have 'greed to go with that man if I had thought as you wanted me. I don't care for the dresses and that sort of thing, though I should like to get taught something, but I would give that up, and if you like I will go by myself and meet him where he said, and give him back that ten pound, and say I have changed my mind and I am going to stop with you.'

'No, it is better that you should go, Sally; this ain't no place for a girl, and I ain't no woman to look after one. I have been a-thinking some months it was time you went; it didn't matter so much as long as you was a kid, but you are growing up now, and it ain't to be expected as you would keep straight in such a place as this; besides, any day you might get nabbed, and three months in quod would finish you altogether. So you see, Sally, I am glad and I am sorry. Warbles ain't the man I would put you in charge of if I had my way. He has told you hissself what he means to do with you, and I would a lot rather you had been going out into service; only of course no one would take you as you are, it ain't likely. Still if you keep your eyes open, and you are a sharp girl, you may make money by it; but mind me, Sally, money is no good by itself, nor fine clothes, nor nothing.'

'It was fine clothes and drink as brought me to what I am. I was a nice tidy-looking girl when Warbles first knew me, and if it hadn't been for clothes and drink I might have been a respectable woman, and perhaps missus of a snug public now. Well, perhaps your chances will be as good as mine was. I have two bits of advice to give yer. When you have finished that pint of beer you make up your mind never to touch another drop of it. The second is, don't you listen to what young swells say to yer. You look out for an honest man who wants to make you his wife, and you marry him and make him a good wife, Sally.'

The girl nodded. 'That is what I mean to do, and when I get a comfortable home you shall come and live with us.'

'It wouldn't do, Sally; by that time I reckon I shall be lying in a graveyard, but if I wasn't it would not do nohow. No man will put up with a drunken woman in his house, and a drunken woman I shall be to the end of my life—but there, them chops are ready, Sally, and it would be a sin to let them spoil now you have got them.'

When the meal was over, and Sally had finished her glass of beer, she turned it over.

'That is the last of them,' she said; 'I don't care for it one way or the other. Now tell me about that cove, who is he?'

'He is what he says—a betting man, and was when I first knew him; I don't know what his real name is, but I don't expect it's Warbles. He was a swell among them when I first knew him, and spent his money free, and used to look like a gentleman. I was in a house at Newmarket at the time, and whenever the races was on I often used to see him. Well, I left there, and did not come across him for two years; when I did, I had just come out of gaol; I had had two months for taking money from the till. I met him in the street, and he says to me, "Hello, Kitty! I was sorry to hear that you had been in trouble; what are you doing?"'

'What should I be doing?' says I; 'there ain't much chance of my getting another situation after what has happened. I ain't a-doing nothing yet, for I met a friend on the day I came out who gave me a couple of quid, but it is pretty nigh gone.' 'Well, look here,' says he, 'I have got a kid upon my hands: it don't matter whose kid it is, it ain't mine; but I have got to keep it. It has been with a woman for the last three years, and she has died. I don't care how it is brought up so as it is brought up; it is nothing to me how she turns out so that she lives. I tell you what I will do. I will give you ten pounds to furnish a room and get into it, and I will pay you five shillings a week as long as it lives; and if you ever get hard up and want a couple of pounds you can have 'em, so as you don't come too often.'

'Well, I jumped at the offer, and took you, and I will say Warbles has been as good as his word. It wasn't long before I was turned out of my lodging for being too drunk and noisy for the house, and it wasn't more than a couple of years before I got pretty nigh as low as this. I had got to know a good many queer ones when I was in the public line, and I chanced to drop across one of them, and when I met him one day he told me he could put me into an easy way of earning money

if I liked, but it was risky. I said I did not care for that, and since then I have always been on that lay. For a bit I did very well; I used to dress up as a tidy servant, and go shopping, and many a week I would get rid of three or four pounds' worth of the stuff; but in course, as I grew older and lost my figure and the drink told on me, it got more difficult. People looked at the money more sharply, and I got three months for it twice. I was allus careful, and never took more than one piece out with me at a time, so that I got off several times till they began to know me. You remember the last time I was in—I told you about it, and since then you have been doing it.'

'But what will you do when I am gone?'

'Well, you know, Sally, I gets a bit from men who comes round of an evening and gives me things to hide away under that board. They knows as they can trust me, and I have had five thousand pounds worth of diamonds and things hidden away there for weeks. No one would ever think of searching there for it. I ain't known to be mixed up with thieves, and this court ain't the sort of place that coppers would ever dream of searching for jewels. Sometimes nothing comes for weeks, sometimes there is a big haul; but they pay me something a week regular, and I gets a present after a good thing has been brought off, so you needn't worrit about me. I shan't be as well off as I have been, but there will be plenty to keep me going, and if I have to drink a bit less it won't do me any harm.'

'I wonder you ain't afraid to drink,' Sally said, 'lest you should let out something.'

'I am lucky that way, Sally. Drink acts some ways with some people, and some ways with others. It makes some people blab out just the things they don't want known; it makes some people quarrelsome; it shuts up some people's mouths altogether. That is the way with me. I take what I take quiet, and though the coppers round here see me drunk pretty often they can't never say as I am drunk and disorderly, so they just lets me find my way home as I can.'

'And this man has never said no more about me than he did that first time?' Sally asked. 'Why should he go on paying for me all this time?'

'He ain't never said a word. I've wondered over it scores of times. These betting chaps are free with their money when they win, but that ain't like going on paying year after year. I thought sometimes you might be the daughter of some old pal of his, and that he had promised him to take care of you. I thought that afterwards he had been sorry he had done so, but would not go back from his word and so went on paying, though he did not care a morsel whether you turned out well or bad. Now I am going out, Sally.'

'You don't want to go out no more to-day,' Sally said decidedly. 'You just stop in quietly these last three days with me.'

'I would like to,' the woman said, 'but I don't think it is in me. You do not know what it is, Sally. When drink is once your master there ain't no shaking it off. There is something in you as says you must go, and you can't help it; nothing but tying you down would do it.'

'Well, look here, give me ninepence. I will go out and get you another quart of beer and a quartern of gin to finish up with. I have never been out for spirits for you before, though you have beat me many a time 'cause I wouldn't, but for these three days I will go. That won't be enough to make you bad, and we can sit here and talk together, and when we have finished it we can turn in comfortable.'

The woman took the money from a corner of a stocking, and gave it to Sally, and that night went to bed sober for the first time for months. The next morning shopping began, and Sally, although not easily moved, was awe-struck at the number and variety of the garments purchased for her. The dresses were to be made up by the next evening, when she was to fetch them from the shop herself, as Mrs. Phillips shrunk from giving her address at Piper Court.

During the interval Sally suffered much from a regular course of washing and combing her hair. When on the third morning she was arrayed in her new clothes, with hair neatly done up, she felt so utterly unlike herself that a sort of shyness seized her. She could only judge as to her general appearance, but not as to that of her face and head, for the lodging was unprovided with even a scrap of looking-glass. She had no doubt that the change was satisfactory, as Mrs. Phillips exclaimed, 'Fine feathers make fine birds, Sally, but I should not have believed that they could have made such a difference; you look quite a nice-looking gal, and I should not be surprised if you turn out downright pretty, though I have always thought you as plain a gal as ever I seed!'

CHAPTER II

Epsom racecourse on the Oaks Day. The great event of the day has not yet been run, but the course has been cleared and two or three of the fillies have just come out from the paddock and are making their way at a walk along the broad green track, while their jockeys are chatting together. Luncheons have been hastily finished, and the occupants of the carriages and drags are standing up and beginning for the first time to manifest an interest in the proceedings they have nominally come down to witness. The general mass of spectators cluster thickly by the ropes, while a few take advantage of the clearance of the ground beyond to stroll leisurely along the line of carriages. The shouts of the men with cocoanuts, pincushions, and dolls on sticks, and of those

with Aunt Sallys, rifle galleries, and other attractions, are hushed now; their time will not come again until the race is over.

Two men, one perhaps thirty, the other some three or four years younger, are among those who pay more attention to the carriages and their occupants than to the approaching race. The younger has a face deeply bronzed by a sun far hotter than that of England.

'How fast they change, Danvers. Six years ago I knew almost every face in the carriages, now I scarcely know one. Who is that very pretty girl standing up on the seat of that barouche?'

'Don't you know? Look at the man she is talking to on the box. That is her father.'

'By Jove! it is Mr. Hawtrey. You don't mean to say that is little Dorothy?'

'Not particularly little, but it is certainly Dorothy Hawtrey.'

'I must go and speak to them, Danvers. You know them too, don't you?'

'Well, considering I meet them out pretty well every night somewhere I ought to do,' the other said, as with slower steps he followed his companion to the carriage.

'How are you, Mr. Hawtrey?' the latter exclaimed, looking up at the man on the box.

The gentleman looked down a little puzzled at the warmth with which the words were spoken by one whose face he did not recall.

'Don't you remember me, sir? I am Edward Hampton.'

'Why, Ned, is it you? You are changed out of all knowledge. You have come back almost as dark as a Malay. When did you arrive?'

'I only reached town yesterday evening; looked up Danvers, and was lucky enough to find him at home. He said he was coming down here to-day, and as it was of no use calling on people in town on the Oaks day I came with him.'

'Are you not going to speak to me, Captain Hampton?'

'I am, indeed, Miss Hawtrey, though I confess I did not know you until Danvers told me who you were; and I do not feel quite sure now, for the Miss Hawtrey I used to know never called me anything but Ned.'

'The Miss Hawtrey of those days was a little tomboy in short frocks,' the girl laughed, 'but I do not say that if I find that you are not so changed in reality as you are in appearance, I may not, perhaps, some day forget that you are Captain Hampton, V.C.' She had stepped down from her lofty seat, and was now shaking hands with him heartily. 'It does not seem six years since we said good-bye,' she went on. 'Of course you are all that older, but you don't seem so old to me. I used to think you so big and so tall when I was nine, and you were double that age, and during the next three years, when you had joined your regiment and only came down occasionally to us, you had become quite an imposing personage. That was my last impression of you. Now, you see, you don't look so old, or so big, or so imposing, as I have been picturing you to myself.'

'I dare say not,' he laughed. 'You see you have grown so much bigger and more imposing yourself.'

Suddenly Dorothy Hawtrey leapt to her seat again and touched her father on the arm.

'Father,' she said in a whisper, 'that man who has just turned from the crowd and is coming towards us is the one I was speaking to you about a few minutes ago, who had been staring at you with such an evil look.'

The man, who had the appearance of a shabby bookmaker, and who carried a satchel slung round his neck, and had the name of 'Marvel' on a broad ribbon round his hat, was now close to the carriage.

'Will you take the odds, Mr. Hawtrey,' he said in a loud voice, 'against any of the horses? I can give you six to one, bar one, against the field.'

'I do not bet,' Mr. Hawtrey said coldly, 'and by your looks it would have been better for you if you had never done so either.'

'I have had a bad run lately,' the man said, 'but I fancy it is going to turn. Will you lay a few pounds for the sake of old times?'

Mr. Hawtrey shook his head decidedly.

'I have come down rather in the world,' the man went on insolently, 'but I could pay the bet if I lost it as well as other debts. I have never forgotten how much I owe you.'

Hampton took a step forward towards the man, when a policeman stepped out from between their carriage and the next.

'Now, move on,' he said, 'or I will make you, sharp; you are not going to annoy people here, and if you don't go at once I will walk you off to the police tent.'

The man hesitated a moment, and then, muttering angrily, moved slowly away to the spot where

he had left the dense line of spectators by the ropes.

'Who is he, father?' Dorothy Hawtrey asked; 'does he really know you?'

'Yes, my dear, he is the son of an old steward; he was a wild, reckless young scamp, and when his father died, shortly after I came into the property, I naturally refused to appoint him to the position. He used some very strong language at the time, and threatened me with all sorts of evils. I have met him once or twice since, and he never loses an opportunity of showing that he has not forgiven me; but never mind him now, here come the horses for their preliminary canter.'

Captain Hampton and his friend remained by the carriage until the race was over. The former had been introduced by Dorothy to the other three occupants of the carriage—Lady Linkstone, her daughter Mary, and Miss Nora Cranfield.

As soon as it was over the crowd broke up, the shouts of the men with the cocoanuts and Aunt Sallys rose loudly, and grooms began to lead up the horses to many of the carriages.

'We are going to make a start at once, Ned,' Mr. Hawtrey said; 'I cannot offer you a seat back to town, but if you have no engagement I hope that you will dine with us. Will you come too, Mr. Danvers?'

Danvers was disengaged, and he and Edward Hampton accepted the invitation at once. Ned's father had owned an estate adjoining that of the Hawtreys' in Lincolnshire, and the families had been neighbours for many years. Ned, who was the youngest of three sons had been almost as much at the Hawtreys' as at his own home, as Mr. Hawtrey had a nephew living with him who was just about the lad's age, and during the holidays the two boys were always together. They had entered the army just at the same time, but James Hawtrey had, a few months after he went out to India, died of fever.

'Who was the man who came up and spoke to them five minutes before the race started?' he asked Danvers as they strolled away together.

'There were two or three of them.'

'I mean the man who said it was too bad, Dorothy not coming down on his drag.'

'That is Lord Halliburn; he is very attentive there, and the general opinion is that it will be a match.'

'He didn't look as if he had much in him,' Hampton said, after a pause.

'He has a title and a very big rent roll, and has, therefore, no great occasion for brains; but in point of fact he is really clever. He is Under-Secretary for the Colonies, and is regarded as a rising young peer. He is not a bad fellow at all, I believe; keeps a few racers but does not bet, and has no vices as far as I have ever heard. That is his drag; he drives a first-rate team.'

'Well, I hope he is a good fellow,' Captain Hampton said shortly. 'You see I never had a sister of my own. That little one and I were quite chums, and I used to look upon her almost in the light of a small sister, and I should not like to think of her marrying anyone who would not make her happy.'

'I should think she has as fair a chance with Halliburn as with most men,' Danvers said. 'I know a man who was at Christ Church with him. He said that he was rather a prig—but that a fellow could hardly help being, brought up as he had been—but that, as a whole, he was one of the most popular men of his set. Now we may as well be walking for the station—that is, if you have had enough of it.'

'I am quite ready to go. After all, an English racecourse makes but a dull show by the side of an Indian one. The horses are better, and, of course, there is no comparison between the turnouts and the dresses of the women, though they manage to make a brave show at the principal stations; but as far as the general appearance of the crowd goes, you are not in it here. The natives in their gay dresses and turbans give a wonderfully light and gay appearance to the course, and though, possibly, among quite the lower class they may not all be estimable characters, at least they do not look such a pack of unmitigated ruffians as the hangers-on of an English racecourse. That was a nice specimen who attacked Hawtrey.'

'Yes, the fellow had a thoroughly bad face, and would be capable, I should say, of any roguery. It is not the sort of face I should expect to see in the dock on a charge of murder or robbery with violence, but I should put him down as an astute rogue, a crafty scoundrel, who would swindle an old woman out of her savings, rob servant girls or lads from the country by means of specious advertisements, or who in his own line would nobble a horse or act as the agent for wealthier rogues in getting at jockeys and concocting any villainous plan to prevent a favourite from winning. Of course, I know nothing of the circumstances under which he lost his place with Hawtrey, but there is no doubt that he has cherished a bitter hatred against him, and would spare no pains to take his revenge. If Hawtrey owned racehorses I should be very shy of laying a penny upon them after seeing that fellow's face.'

'Well, as he does not own racehorses the fellow has no chance of doing him a bad turn; he might forge a cheque and put Hawtrey's name to it, but I should say he would have some difficulty in getting any one to cash it.'

There were at dinner that evening only the party who had been in the barouche, Danvers, Hampton, and Sir Edward Linkstone.

'I wish there had been no one else here this evening,' Dorothy Hawtrey said to Captain Hampton before dinner, 'there is so much to talk about. First, I want to hear all you have been doing in India, and next, we must have a long chat over old times; in fact, we want a cozy talk together. Of course you will be tremendously engaged just at present, but you must spare me a long morning as soon as you possibly can.'

'I suppose I am not going to take you into dinner?'

'No, Sir Edward Linkstone does that. We cannot ask him to take in his daughter or Nora Cranfield, who is staying at his house, and besides, it would not be nice. I should not like to be sitting by you, talking the usual dinner talk, when I am so wanting to have a real chat with you. You will take in Mary Linkstone, she is a very nice girl.'

The dinner was a pleasant one, and the party being so small the conversation was general. It turned, however, a good deal on India, for Sir Edward Linkstone had been Judge of the Supreme Court at Calcutta, and had retired just about the time that Hampton had gone out there. After the ladies had left the room, Danvers remarked to their host:

'That was an unpleasant-looking character who accosted you just before the race started for the Oaks, Mr. Hawtrey.'

'Yes; I don't know that I have many enemies, beyond perhaps some fellows, poachers and others, whom I have had to commit for trial, but I do consider that fellow to be a man who would injure me if he could. His father, John Truscott was my father's steward, or agent as it is the fashion to call them now, on his estate in Lincolnshire. He had been there for over thirty years, and was a thoroughly trustworthy and honourable man, a good agent, and greatly liked by the tenants as well as by my father. As you may know, I came into the estates when I came of age. My father had died two years before. Well, I knew that Truscott had had a good deal of trouble with his son, who was three or four years older than myself.

'Truscott kept a small farm in his own hands, and he made a hobby of breeding blood stock. Not to any great extent; I think he had only some five or six brood mares, but they were all good ones. I think he did very well by them; certainly some of the foals turned out uncommonly well. Of course he did not race them himself, but sold them as yearlings. As it turned out it was unfortunate, for it gave his son a fancy for the turf. I suppose it began by his laying bets on the horses they had bred, then it went on and he used to attend racecourses and get into bad company, and I know that his father had more than once to pay what were to him heavy sums to enable him to clear up on settlement day. I don't know, though, that it would have made much difference, the fellow might have gone to the bad anyhow. He had always a shifty, sly sort of look. About four years after I came into the estates I was down in Lincolnshire at our place, when Truscott was taken ill, and I naturally went to see him.

"I don't think I shall be long here, Mr. Hawtrey," he said, "and you will have to look out for another steward. I used to hope that when my time came for giving up work my son would step into my shoes. He has plenty of brains, and as far as shrewdness goes he would make a better steward than I have ever done. For the last year, since I began to fail, he has been more at home and has done a good deal of my work, and I expect he reckons on getting my place, but, Mr. Hawtrey, you must not give it to him. It is a hard thing for a father to say, but you could not trust him."

'I felt that myself, but I did not like to admit it to the old man, and I said:

"I know he has been a bit wild, Truscott, but he may have seen that he was behaving like a fool, and as you say he has been helping you more for the last year, he may have made up his mind to break altogether from the life he has been leading."

"It is not in him, sir," he said. "I could forgive his being a bit wild, but he is not honest. Don't ask me what he has done, but take my word for it. A man who will rob his own father will rob his employer. I have done my best for your father and you; no man can say that John Truscott has robbed him, and I should turn in my grave if our name were dishonoured down here. You must not think of it, sir; you would never keep him if you tried him; it would be a pain to me to think that one of my blood should wrong you, as I know, surely, Robert would do, and I implore you to make a complete change, and get some man who will do the estate justice."

'Of course I assented; indeed, I had heard so much of the fellow's doings that I had quite made up my mind that when his father retired I would look for a steward elsewhere. At the same time I know that if the old man had asked me to try him for a time, I should have done so. A week later John Truscott died, and the day after his funeral, which I, of course, attended, his son came up to the house. Well, it was a very unpleasant business; he seemed to assume that, as a matter of course, he would succeed his father, and pointed out that for the last year he had, in fact, carried on the estate for him. I said that I did not doubt his ability, but that I had no idea of making a man who was a frequenter of racecourses, and who, I knew, bet so heavily that his father had had to aid him several times, manager of the estate.

'He answered that he had had his fling, and would now settle down steadily. Of course, after what his father had said I was obliged to be firm. When he saw that there was no chance of altering my

decision he came out in his true colours; broke out in the most violent language, and had I not been a good deal more powerful man than he was I believe he would have struck me. At last I had to ring the bell and order the footman to turn him out. He cooled down suddenly, and deliberately cursed me, swearing that he would some day be revenged upon me for my ingratitude to his father, and the insult I had passed upon him in thus refusing to appoint him after the thirty years' services the old man had rendered me. I have no doubt he thoroughly meant what he said, but naturally, I never troubled myself about the matter.

'The threats of a disappointed man seldom come to anything, and as there was no conceivable way in which he could injure me his menaces really meant nothing. I have come across him four or five times since. I dare say that I should have met him oftener were I a regular attendant on racecourses, but it is years since I have been to one, and only did it to-day because Dorothy had set her heart on seeing the Oaks for the first time. However, whenever I have met him he has never failed to thrust himself upon me, and to show that his animosity is as bitter as it was on the day that I refused to appoint him steward. He left my neighbourhood at once, turned the stock into money, and as I know that he came into three or four thousand pounds at his father's death he had every chance of doing well. I believe that he did do well on the turf for a time, but the usual end came to that. When I met him last, some seven or eight years ago, I happened to be with a member of the Jockey Club who knew something of the fellow. He told me that he had been for a time a professional betting man, but had become involved in some extremely shady transactions, and had been warned off the turf, and was now only to be seen at open meetings, and had more than once had a narrow escape of being lynched by the crowd for welshing. From his appearance to-day it is evident that he is still a hanger-on of racecourses. I saw he had the name of Marvel on his hat. I should say that probably he appears with a fresh name each time. I think the chance of meeting him has had something to do with my giving up going to races altogether. It is not pleasant being insulted by a disreputable-looking scoundrel, in the midst of a crowd of people.'

'He has never done you any harm, Mr. Hawtrey?' Captain Hamilton asked, 'because certainly it seemed to me there was a ring of triumphant malice in his voice.'

'Certainly not, to my knowledge,' Mr. Hawtrey replied. 'Once or twice there have been stacks burnt down on the estate, probably the work of some malicious fellow, but I have had no reason for suspecting Truscott, and indeed, as the damage fell on the tenant and not on me, it would have been at best a very small gratification of spite, and I can hardly fancy he would have gone to the trouble and expense of travelling down to Lincolnshire for so small a gratification of his ill-will to me. Besides, had he had a hand in it, it would have been the stables and the house itself that would have been endangered.'

'The same idea struck me that occurred to Hampton,' Danvers said, 'but I suppose it was fancy. It sounded to me as if he had already paid, to some extent, the debt he spoke of, or as if he had no doubt whatever that he should do so in the future.'

The subject dropped, but when, after leaving, Hampton went into the Club to which Danvers belonged, to smoke a cigar, he returned to it.

'I can't help thinking about that fellow Truscott. It is evident, from what Hawtrey says, that he has never done him any serious harm, and I don't see how the rascal can possibly do so; but I am positive that the man himself believes that he either has done or shall be able to do so.'

'That was the impression I had too, but there is never any telling with fellows of that class. The rogue, when he is found out, either cringes or threatens. He generally cringes so long as there is a chance of its doing him any good, then, when he sees that the game is altogether up, he threatens; it is only in one case in ten thousand that the threats ever come to anything, and as twenty years have gone by without any result in this case we may safely assume that it is not one of the exceptions.

'Do you remember Mrs. Hawtrey?'

'Yes, I remember her well. The first year or two after their marriage, Hawtrey had a place near town. I think she had a fancy that Lincolnshire was too cold for her. They came down when I was about eight years old. Dorothy was about a year old, I fancy. Mrs. Hawtrey and my mother became great friends. We could go from one house to the other without going outside the grounds, and as I was the youngest of a large family I used to walk across with her, and if Dorothy was in the garden she would come toddling to me and insist upon my carrying her upon my shoulder, or digging in her garden, or playing with her in some way or other. I don't know that I was fonder of children in general than most boys were, but I certainly took to her, and, as I said, we became great chums. She came to us two or three months after her mother died; her father went away on the Continent, and the poor little girl was heart-broken, as well she might be, having no brothers or sisters. She was a very desolate little maiden, so of course I did what I could to comfort her, and when my father and mother died, within three days of each other, three years later, I think that child's sympathy did me more good than anything. That is the only time I have seen her since I entered the army, and then I was only at home a few days, for the regiment was at Edinburgh, and it was a busy season. I suppose I could have got longer leave had I tried, but there was no object in staying at home. I had never got on particularly well with John, who was now master of the house; he was married, and had children, and after they arrived I thought the sooner I was off the better.'

'What became of Tom? We were in the sixth together, you know; when you were my fag. You told me, didn't you, that he had gone out to China or something of that sort?'

'Yes; there had been an idea that he would go into the Church, but he did not take to it; he tried one or two things here and would not stick to them, and my father got him into a tea firm, and he went out for them two years afterwards to Hong Kong; but that did not suit him either, so he threw it up and went to Australia, and knocked about there until he came into ten thousand at my father's death. He went in for sheep-farming then, and I have only heard once of him since, but he said that he was doing very well. I shall perhaps hear more about him when I see John. I must go down to Lincolnshire to-morrow, and I suppose I shall have to stay a week or so there; it is the proper thing to do, of course, but I wish that it was over. I have never been in the old place since that bad time. I don't at all care for my brother's wife. I have no doubt that she is a very good woman, but there is nothing sympathetic about her; she is one of those women with a metallic sort of voice that seems to jar upon one as if she were out of tune.'

'And afterwards—have you any plans?'

'None at all. I shall look out for a couple of rooms, somewhere about Jermyn Street, and stay in town to the end of the season. Then I shall hire a yacht for a couple of months, and knock about the coast or go across to Norway. I wish you would go with me; I did Switzerland and Italy the last year before I went away, and I don't care about going there when every place is filled with a crowd. I have only got a year, and I should like to have as pleasant remembrances to take back with me as possible. Do you think you will be able to come with me? Of course I shall not be able to afford a floating palace. I should say about a thirty-tonner that would carry four comfortably would be the sort of thing. I will try to get two fellows to go to make up the party; some of my old chums if I can come across them. Of course I can get any number of men home on leave like myself, but I don't want anyone from India, for in that case we should talk nothing but shop. You saw how we drifted into it at dinner. I should like not to hear India mentioned until I am on board a ship on my way out again.'

'When would you think of going?'

'Oh, I should say after Ascot—say the second week in July.'

'I can hardly go with you as soon as that; I cannot get away as long as the courts are sitting, or until they have, at any rate, nearly finished work; but I might join you by the end of the month, unless I have the luck to get retained in some important case that would make my fortune, and I need scarcely say that is not likely.'

'But you are doing well, ain't you, Danvers? I see your name in the papers occasionally.'

'I am doing quite as well as I have any right to expect; better, a good deal, than many men of my own standing, for I have only been called seven years, and ten is about the minimum most solicitors consider necessary before they can feel the slightest confidence in a man. Still, it does not do very much more than pay for one's chambers and clerk.'

A week later Ned Hampton was established in lodgings in Jermyn Street. He had been down for three days into Lincolnshire, but had not cared much for the visit. He had never got on very well with his elder brother, and they had no tastes or opinions in common. Mrs. Hampton was a woman with but little to say on any subject, while her husband was at this time of year absorbed in his duties as a magistrate and landlord, although in the winter these occupied a secondary position to hunting and shooting. The only son was away at school, the two girls were all day with their governess; and, after three as dull days as he had ever spent in his life, Ned pleaded business that required his presence in London, and came back suddenly. He had been a good deal in society during his visits to London in the three years that intervened between his obtaining his commission and sailing for India. He had, therefore, many calls to make upon old acquaintances, and as at his military club he met numbers of men he knew, he soon had his hands full of engagements. He still managed, however, to spend a good deal of time at the Hawthreys', where he was always welcome. One morning, when he dropped in, Dorothy, after the first greeting, said, 'I have a piece of news to tell you. I should not like you to hear it from anyone else but me.' There was a heightened colour in her cheek, and he at once guessed the truth.

'You have accepted Lord Halliburn? I guessed it would be so. I suppose I ought to congratulate you, Dorothy. At any rate, I hope you will be very happy with him.'

'Why should you not congratulate me?'

'Only because I do not know Lord Halliburn sufficiently well to be able to do so. Of course, I understand that he is a good match; but that, in my mind, is quite a secondary consideration. The real question is, is he the sort of man who will make you happy?'

'I should not have accepted him unless I thought so,' she said gravely. 'Mind,' she added with a laugh, 'I don't mean to say that I am insensible to the advantages of being a peeress, but in itself that would not have decided me. He is pleasant, and has the advantage of being very fond of me, and everyone speaks well of him.'

'All very good reasons, Dorothy, if added to the best of all—that you love him.'

The girl nodded.

'Of course, Ned. I don't think that I have the sort of love one imagines as a young girl; not a wild, unreasoning sort of love; but you don't find that much in our days except in books. I like him very much, and, as I said before, he likes me. That does make such a wonderful difference, you see. When a man begins to show that he likes you, of course one thinks of him a good deal and in quite a different way from what you would otherwise do, and so one comes in time to like him in the same way he likes you. That seems to me the way with most girls I have known married. You don't see any harm in that?'

'Oh no; I suppose it is the regular way in society; and, indeed, I don't see how people could get to care more than that for each other when they only meet at balls and flower shows and so on. Well, I think I may congratulate you. There is no doubt whatever about its being a good match, and I don't see why you should not be very happy, and no doubt your liking, as you call it, will grow into something more like the love you used to dream about by-and-by.'

The girl pouted.

'You are not half as glad as I expected you to be—and please don't think that I am marrying without love. I only admit that it is not the sort of love one reads of in novels, but I expect it is just as real.'

'If it is good enough to wear well that is all that is necessary,' Captain Hampton said, more lightly than he had before spoken. 'You know, Dorothy, you have my very best wishes. You were my little sister for years, you know, and there is no one whose happiness would give me so much pleasure.'

CHAPTER III

Mr. Hawtrey and his daughter were sitting at breakfast a fortnight later, the only other person present being a cousin, Mrs. Daintree, who had come up to stay with them for the season to act as chaperon to Dorothy. She had been unwell and unable to form one of the party at Epsom. The servant brought in the letters just as they sat down, carrying them as usual to his master, as Dorothy was busy with the tea things. As Mr. Hawtrey looked through them his eye fell upon a letter. On the back was written in a bold handwriting, 'Unless the money is sent I shall use letters.—E. T.'

He turned it over, it was directed to his daughter. He was about to speak, but as his eye fell on Mrs. Daintree he checked himself, placed the missive among his own letters, and passed those for his daughter and cousin across to them. He was very silent during breakfast. Dorothy detected by his voice that something was wrong with him, and asked anxiously if he was not feeling well. When the meal was over he said to her:

'Before you go out, Dorothy, look in upon me in the library.'

Ten minutes later she came into the room.

'Dorothy,' he said, 'are you in any trouble?'

'Trouble, father?' she repeated, in surprise. 'No; what sort of trouble do you mean?'

'Well, dear,' he said kindly, 'girls do sometimes get into scrapes. I did not think you were the sort of girl to do so, but these things are more often the result of thoughtlessness than of anything more serious, and the trouble is that instead of going frankly to their friends and making a clean breast of it, girls will try and set matters right themselves, and so, in order to avoid a little unpleasantness, may ruin their whole lives.'

Dorothy's eyes opened more and more widely as her father went on.

'Yes, father, I have heard of such things, but I don't know why you are saying so to me. I have never got into any scrape that I know of.'

'What does this mean then?' he said, handing her the envelope.

She read it with an air of bewilderment, looked at the address, and re-read the words.

'I have not the faintest idea, father.'

'Open the envelope,' he said sternly. She broke the seal, but there was no enclosure whatever. 'You do not know who this E. T. is? You have not written any letters that you would not care to have read aloud? You have had no demand for money for their delivery? Wait a moment before you speak, child; I don't mean for a moment that there could be anything wrong in any letter that you have written. It can only be that in some country house where you have been staying, you have got into some foolish flirtation with some one, and have been silly enough to correspond with him. I will not suppose that a man to whom you would write would be blackguard enough to trade upon your weakness, but the letters may have fallen into some one else's hands; his valet, perhaps, who, seeing your engagement to Lord Halliburn, now seeks to extort money from you by threatening to send your letters to him. If so, my dear child, speak frankly to me. I will get the letters back, at whatever cost, and will hand them to you to burn, without looking at them, and

will never mention the subject again.'

'There is nothing of the sort, father. How could you think that I could do anything so foolish and wrong? Surely you must know me better than that.'

'I thought I did, Dorothy; but girls do foolish things, especially when they are quite young and perhaps not out of the schoolroom, and know nothing whatever of the world. They fancy themselves in love, and are foolish enough sometimes to allow themselves to be entrapped into correspondence with men of whose real character they know nothing; it is a folly, but not one to deal hardly with.'

'At any rate, father, I have not done so. If I had I would say so at once. I have not the remotest idea what that letter means, or who wrote it. If it were not that it had my name and address on the other side, I should not have had an idea that it was meant for me. Except trifling notes of invitation and that sort of thing I do not think that I had ever written to any man until I was engaged to Algernon.'

'Well, that is a relief,' Mr. Hawtrey said, more cheerfully than he had before spoken. 'It was a pain to me to think even for a moment that you could have been so foolish. It never entered my head to think that you could have done anything absolutely wrong. However, we must now look at this rascally letter from another point of view. Here is a man writing to demand a sum of money for letters. Now, it is one of two things. Either he has forged letters in his possession, for which he hopes to extort money, or he has no letters of any kind, and his only intention in writing in this manner on an envelope is in some way to cause you pain and annoyance. We may assume that the initials are fictitious; whoever wrote the letter would certainly avoid giving any clue to his identity. Sit down, Dorothy. We must talk the matter over quietly and see what had best be done.'

'But this is dreadful, father!' Dorothy said, as she seated herself in an arm-chair.

'Not dreadful, dear, though I admit that it is unpleasant, very unpleasant; and we must, if possible, trace it to the bottom, for now that this annoyance has begun there is no saying how much farther it may be pushed. Is there anyone you can think of who would be likely to have a spite against you? I do not say any of the four or five gentlemen whose proposals you have declined in the course of the past year; all were gentlemen and beyond suspicion. Any woman servant you may have dismissed; any man whose request for money for one purpose or another you may have refused; anyone, in short, to whom you may have given offence?'

'Not that I know of, father. You know my last maid left to get married, and I had nothing to do with hiring or discharging the other servants; they are all under the housekeeper. I really do not know of anyone who has cause for ill-feeling against me.'

'I shall write at once to the Postmaster General and request him to give orders that no more letters of the kind shall be openly delivered. Peters can hardly have helped reading it; it has evidently been written in a large, bold handwriting, so that it can be read at a glance. Of course, I shall speak to him, but he will probably have chatted about it downstairs already. I shall go down to Scotland Yard and inform them of the annoyance, and ask their advice there, though I don't see that they can do anything until we can furnish them with some sort of clue. We may find one later on; this envelope certainly gives us nothing to go on, but we may be sure others will follow.'

'It is dreadful, father,' Dorothy repeated, as she rose, 'to think that such malicious letters as this can be sent, and that they may be talked about among the servants.'

'Well, I do not think there will be any more coming here, dear. I should imagine the Post Office authorities will have no objection to retain them. If there should be any difficulty about it, I will have a lock put on the letter-box and keep the key myself, so that, at least, the servants here will know nothing about it. Are you going out with your cousin this morning?'

'I was going, but I shall make some excuse now; I could not be chattering about all sorts of things with her.'

'That is just what you must do, Dorothy. It has taken the colour out of your cheeks, child, though I suppose cold water and a rub with a hard towel will bring it back again, but, at any rate, do not go about as if you had something on your mind. You may be sure that the servants will be looking at you curiously, whatever I may say to Peters; if they see you are in no way disturbed or annoyed, the matter will soon pass out of their minds, but, on the other hand, if they notice any change, they will be saying to themselves there must be something in it.'

As soon as his daughter had left the room Mr. Hawtrey touched the bell.

'I am going out, Peters; if anyone calls to see me you can say that I shall not be in till lunch-time. I may be detained at Scotland Yard. I am going there to set the police on the track of the fellow who sent that letter to Miss Hawtrey this morning. I suppose you noticed it?'

'Yes, sir,' the man replied, in a hesitating tone; 'as I took the letters out of the box and laid them on the hall table, the envelope was back upwards, and I could not help seeing what was on it.'

'I can quite understand that, Peters, and am not blaming you. The words were evidently written with the intention that they should be read by everyone through whose hands it passed. It is evidently the work of some malicious scoundrel, though we have not, of course, the slightest clue

as to whom it may be, but I have no doubt the police will be able to get on his track. If you have mentioned it to any of the other servants, tell them that on no account is the matter to be spoken of outside the house. Our only chance of catching the scoundrel is that he should be kept entirely in the dark. Probably the fellow is in communication with some one either in the house or acquainted with one of the servants. If he hears nothing about it, he may suppose the letter has not attracted notice, as he intended it should do, and we shall have some more of them, and this will increase our chance of finding him.'

'I have not mentioned anything about it, sir.'

'All the better, Peters. Should another come do not bring it in with the other letters, but hand it in to me privately. Miss Hawtrey is naturally greatly pained and annoyed, and I should not wish her to know if any more letters come.'

'It is hardly a matter that we can take up,' an inspector at Scotland Yard said when Mr. Hawtrey showed him the envelope and explained the matter. 'I suppose at bottom it is an attempt to extort money, though one does not see how the writer intends to go about it. If there should be any offer to drop the annoyance on the receipt of a sum of money sent to a post-office or shop, to be called for, we would take it up, watch the place, and arrest whoever comes for the letter. At present there is nothing to go upon, and I don't see that we can do anything in the matter. If you think it worth while you might put it into private hands, but it would cost you a good deal of money, and I don't see that anyone could help you much.'

'I do not care what it costs,' Mr. Hawtrey said hotly. 'Can you recommend any of these private detectives?'

The inspector shook his head.

'There are some trustworthy men among them, sir, and some thorough rogues, but we make a point of never recommending anyone. No doubt your own solicitor would be able to tell you of some good man to go to.'

Mr. Hawtrey hailed a cab when he went out and told the man to drive to Essex Street. Just as he turned down from the Strand he saw Danvers turn out from the approach to the Middle Temple. He stopped the cab and jumped out.

'I was just going to my lawyer,' he said, 'but I dare say, Danvers, you can save me the loss of time. It generally means at least half an hour's waiting before he is disengaged. Can you tell me of a shrewd fellow who can be trusted to undertake a difficult piece of business?'

'That is rather vague, Mr. Hawtrey,' Danvers laughed. 'I might reply that such a man stands before you.'

'No, I mean a sort of detective business.'

'There are plenty of shrewd fellows who call themselves private detectives, Mr. Hawtrey. A good many of them are too shrewd altogether. Of course, I have been in contact with several of them, and the majority are rogues of the first water. Still, there are honest men among them. If I knew a little more what sort of work you wanted done I should be better able to tell what kind of man you require for it.'

'It is a deucedly unpleasant business, Danvers, but I will gladly tell you what it is, for I want the advice of some one like yourself, accustomed to deal with difficult cases. Can you spare ten minutes?'

'With pleasure. I have no case on to-day. Will you come to my chambers? It is not half a minute's walk, and they are on the ground floor.'

'What do you think of it, Danvers?' Mr. Hawtrey asked, after he had shown the envelope and related briefly his interview with his daughter.

'I don't know what to think of it,' Danvers said after a pause. 'Knowing Miss Hawtrey as I have the pleasure of doing, I, of course, entertain no doubt whatever of the truth of her denial, and believe she is as completely in the dark as yourself as to what this thing means. I must own that it is not often that I should take a young lady's word so implicitly in such a matter. I have seen and still more heard from solicitors of so many astounding cases of the troubles girls have got into, sometimes from thoughtlessness only, sometimes, I am bound to confess, from what seems to me to be an entire absence of moral perception, that scarcely anything in that way would surprise me.'

'That Miss Hawtrey would do anything absolutely wrong is to me out of the question; though she might, from thoughtlessness, when a girl, as you put it to her, have got into some silly entanglement, for such things happen continually; but after the line you took up with her I can but dismiss this from my mind as altogether out of the question, and we must look at the matter entirely from the point of view that it is either an attempt to extort money, or is simply the outcome of sheer malice, an attempt to give pain, and to cause extreme annoyance. Miss Hawtrey is, you say, wholly unaware of having at any time given such offence to anyone as to convert him or her into an enemy. Of course, there are people who are just as bitter over an imaginary injury as over a real one, but I am more inclined to think that this letter is the result of malice than an attempt to extort money.'

'I do not see how money could be extorted by such a letter as this, when there is no foundation for the threat.'

'Quite so, Mr. Hawtrey. No one who wanted to blackmail a young lady would proceed in so clumsy a manner as this. He would write to her, to begin with, a letter full of vague hints and threats, in the hope that although he himself was ignorant of any occurrence in her life that would give him a hold upon her, her own conscience might bring to her remembrance some act of past folly or thoughtlessness which, with an engagement just made, she would certainly shrink from having raked up. For instance, she might have had some foolish flirtation, some sentimental correspondence, or stolen meeting—things foolish but in no way criminal—that at such a moment she would not wish to be brought to the ears of the man to whom she was engaged. A cleverly but vaguely worded letter might then cause her to believe that this affair was known to the writer, and she would endeavour to hush it up by paying any sum in her power.

'Having written two or three letters of this kind without success, her persecutor might then send an envelope like this to show her that he was thoroughly resolved to carry out his threats unless she agreed to his terms. But as a first move it can mean nothing; and the person to whom it is addressed, knowing that it has already been seen by the postman, the servants, and perhaps by others, would in any case be driven to hand it over to her friends. Miss Hawtrey has received no preliminary letters, therefore it is clear to me that this is not an attempt to extort money. We have nothing, therefore, to fall back upon but the idea of sheer malice, and I have known so many cases of wanton and ingenious mischief-making, arising from such paltry and insufficient causes, that I can be surprised at nothing.'

'Still, I don't see how anyone could do such an infamous and cruel thing as this, Danvers, without some real cause for malice. My daughter is altogether unconscious of having an enemy, there is nothing for us to go upon, and I do not see how the business of discovery is to be commenced.'

'At present, certainly, we seem to have no clue to help us. The letter was posted, you see, in London, but that is of no use whatever; were it from a small country town or rural district the matter would be comparatively easy, but London is hopeless. I have no doubt some more letters of this kind will come, and I should say that although the post-marks may afford you no information, the postal authorities might be able to help you. I do not know whether the stamps at all the district post offices are identical, but it is possible that there may be some private mark on them, some little peculiarity, by which the post-office people would be able to tell you the office at which it was posted.

'But even this would help us but little, as the letters are collected and sent to the central district office, and are there, I believe, stamped. At any rate, I see no use in your employing a man now, Mr. Hawtrey. If you get a clue, even the smallest, I have a fellow in my mind's eye who would, I think, suit you. He was at one time a clerk with Buller and Sons. They gave up the criminal part of their business when the eldest son, who had charge of that branch, died, and this man, Slippen, was no longer wanted. He then set up on his own account, as a sort of private detective. He has been employed in two or three delicate cases in which I have held briefs, and is certainly a very shrewd fellow.'

'It would be a relief to me to be doing something,' Mr. Hawtrey said. 'I think I should like to see the man.'

Danvers was silent for a minute.

'I think, Mr. Hawtrey,' he said at last, 'it would be better if you were to entrust the matter to me. I will see him, and without mentioning names state the facts, and say that he may be asked to undertake the case later on. The fewer people know of the affair the better. Whispers will get about, and whispers would be more unpleasant than if the whole story were told openly in court. If you like I will send my clerk over to his place at once and make an appointment for him to come round here this afternoon. If you are going to be at home this evening I will look in and tell you what his opinion of the matter is, and whether he has any suggestions to offer. If that will not suit you I will meet you to-morrow at any time you may appoint.'

'This evening will do very well, Danvers. Dorothy is going with her cousin and a party to the theatre, so if you will come round any time after eight o'clock you will find me alone, and we can have our chat over a glass of port and a cigar.'

'Well, have you seen your man?' he asked, as Danvers came into his study that evening. 'But do not answer until you have made yourself comfortable, and poured yourself out a glass of port; do not light your cigar for a few minutes, the wine is too good to be spoilt.'

'Yes, I have seen him,' Danvers replied, as he followed his instructions deliberately.

'And what does he say?'

'Well, you see, Mr. Hawtrey, he has not the advantage we have of knowing the lady. He naturally has seen a good deal of the seamy side of life, and upon my stating the case to him, he said, without a moment's hesitation, "Of course the thing is as plain as a pikestaff, Mr. Danvers. The man has got hold of some secret, or is holding some compromising letters, and has tried to get her to come to terms. She hangs back and he shows his teeth, and writes her this open message,

which, if it had not happened to fall into her father's hands, would no doubt have brought her to her knees at once."

'My assurance that it was absolutely certain that the lady in question was in entire ignorance of the whole affair, and was as much in the dark as we were as to the author of the letter, was received by him with incredulity. "I have been concerned in cases like this, or at least a good deal like it, a dozen—or, I might say, a score—of times. In every case the lady maintained stoutly that she knew nothing about it, that she had never written a letter to any man whatever, and had received none previous to the one that happened to fall into the wrong hands. In three or four instances I was deceived myself, but there is no telling with women. When a man tells a lie, he either hesitates or stumbles, or he says it off as if it were a lesson he had got by heart, or else he is sulky over it, and you have to get it out of him bit by bit, just as if, though he had made up his mind to lie, he did not wish to tell more lies than necessary. With a woman it is altogether different. When she makes up her mind to tell a lie, she does it thoroughly. Sometimes she is indignant, sometimes she is plaintive; but, anyhow, she is so natural that she would deceive Old Nick himself. Most of them are born actresses, sir, and when they take up a part they do it with the determination of carrying it through thoroughly." Of course, I told him that, whatever it might be generally, this case was altogether an exception; that it was a moral and absolute certainty that the lady had nothing to do with it, and that the investigation, when it was once undertaken, would have to proceed, say, on the line that the author of these communications was a man or a woman having a personal enmity against a lady, and instigated by a desire to annoy and pain her.

"Well, sir," he said, "of course, if you employ me in this matter it will be my business to carry it out according to instructions; but I am afraid that it is not likely anything will come of my search."

"But," I said, "there is nothing impossible or improbable in the fact that someone should have a grudge against her; she has just become engaged to be married."

"That alters the case altogether," he said quickly; "there may be some other woman who wants to marry the man, or there may be some one who may consider that she will be left in the lurch if this marriage comes off; and either of these might endeavour to make a scandal, or to get up a quarrel that might cause the engagement to be broken off. If you had mentioned about the engagement before, that is the first idea that would have occurred to me. There are very few things a jealous woman will stick at. The case looks more hopeful now, and when I come to know the man's name, I ought very soon to be able to put my finger on the writer of the letter, if it is a woman. At any rate, if there is no other clue, that is the one I should take up first."

'That brought our interview to an end. I paid him a couple of guineas for his advice, and he fully understood that he might, or might not, be called in on some future occasion.'

'It is a confounded nuisance,' Mr. Hawtrey said thoughtfully; 'is the fellow really trustworthy, Danvers?'

'He can be trusted to keep the matter to himself,' the barrister said; 'these men are engaged constantly in delicate business, such as getting up divorce suits, and it would ruin their business altogether were they to allow a word to escape them as to the matter in hand. At any rate, I know enough about Slippen to be able to answer for his discretion. However, I hope that there will be no occasion to move in the matter at all. Of course you will not do so unless there is a repetition of the annoyance?'

'I have little hope there will not be, Danvers,' Mr. Hawtrey groaned; 'whoever wrote that letter is certain to follow it up. Whatever effect it was intended to produce he could hardly count on its being effected by a single attack.'

'I own that I am afraid so, too,' Danvers agreed. 'You will, I hope, let me know if it is so.'

'That you may be sure. I am afraid that now you have taken the trouble to aid me in the matter, you will have to go through with it altogether. This is utterly out of my line; anything connected with poaching or stealing fruit, or drunken assaults, my experience as a county magistrate enables me to treat with something like confidence, but here I am altogether at sea and your experience as a barrister is of the greatest benefit to me. What time do you get to your chambers in the morning?'

'I am almost always there by half-past nine, and between that hour and half past ten you are almost certain to find me; but if you come later my clerk will be able to find me in the courts, and unless I am engaged in a case being tried I can always come out to you.'

'I have been wanting to see you, father,' Miss Hawtrey said, as soon as the latter returned home, 'I expect Lord Halliburn will be here soon after lunch, and cousin Mary and I are going with him to the Botanical. Had I better tell him about this or not?'

'That is a difficult question to answer, Dorothy, and I should be sorry to offer any advice about it. You know Lord Halliburn a good deal better than I do, and can best judge how he will take a matter like this; he must certainly be told sooner or later, for even if there is no repetition of this before your marriage there may be afterwards. Many men would laugh at the whole thing, and never give it a moment's thought, while others, although they would not doubt the assertion of the woman they were engaged to, would still fret and worry over it amazingly.'

'I am sure he would not doubt me for a moment, father, but I should think that he really might

worry over it.'

'That is rather my opinion too, Dorothy; still, it is clear that he must be told either by you or me. However, there is no occasion to tell him to-day. A flower show is not the place you would choose for the purpose, even if you had not Mary Daintree with you. We shall see if another letter comes or not; if it does he must be told at once.'

Dorothy looked a little relieved at the necessity for telling Lord Halliburn being postponed for the day.

'It is of no use worrying over it, my dear,' her father said kindly. 'It is an annoyance, there is no denying, but it is nothing to fret over, and as the insinuations are a pack of lies the cloud will blow away before long.'

The next morning, as soon as breakfast was over, Mr. Hawtrey drove to the central post office, where the postal authorities had promised the day before that they would retain any communications of the kind he described. He had been introduced to the official in charge of the department where complaints of stolen letters were investigated and followed up.

'I have an envelope for you, Mr. Hawtrey,' that gentleman said, when he entered, 'and have been more fortunate than I expected, for I can tell you where it was posted; it was dropped into the letter-box at No. 35 Claymore Street, Chelsea. It is a grocer's shop. In tying up the bundles the man's eye fell on this; it struck him at once as being an attempt to annoy or extort money, and he had the good sense to put it into an envelope and send it on here with a line of explanation, so as to leave us the option of detaining it if we thought fit.'

'I am very pleased to hear it,' Mr. Hawtrey said. 'It is a great thing to know there is at least one point from which we can make a start.'

'It is not much, but it may assist you. You must remember, however, that it is scarcely likely that the next letter will be posted at the same office; fellows of this kind are generally pretty cautious, and the next letter may come from another part of London altogether. I have sent a note to the man at this post office, telling him that he did right in stopping the letter, and that he is to similarly detain any others of the same kind that may be posted there. I will send them on to you. The men on your round have been already ordered not to deliver any letters of the kind, but to send them back here. I sincerely hope, Mr. Hawtrey, that you may succeed in getting hold of the fellow, but if you do I am afraid it will not be through our department; the chances against detecting a man posting a thing of this kind are almost infinite.'

It was just half past ten when Mr. Hawtrey reached Danvers' chambers. He found that the occupier had not yet gone to the Court.

'There is another of them,' Mr. Hawtrey said, throwing the letter down before him. 'I got it at the central office.' It was in the same handwriting as that on the previous day: 'Unless you agree to my terms your letters will be sent to Lord H——.' 'The post-office people have discovered that this letter was posted at a receiving office at Claymore Street, Chelsea.'

'That would be valuable, Mr. Hawtrey, if there were any probability of the next being posted at the same place. I could make an arrangement to have a boy placed inside by the box so that he could see each letter as it fell in. Then he would only have to run out and follow whoever had posted it. I should probably require some special order from the Postmaster-General for this, but I dare say I could get that. At any rate, we can wait a day or two. If the next letter is posted there we will try that plan; if it is posted elsewhere it will, of course, be useless.'

Mr. Hawtrey next drove to Lord Halliburn's, in Park Lane.

'I have come on very unpleasant business, Halliburn,' he said. 'Dorothy would have told you herself about it yesterday, but I thought it better to let it stand over for a day, especially as she would not have an opportunity of discussing it with you,' and he then laid the two letters before him, and told him the steps he had taken and the conjectures that he and Danvers had formed on the subject of the sender.

Lord Halliburn was a young man of about nine-and-twenty. He somewhat prided himself on his self-possession, and, although generally liked, was regarded, as Danvers had told his friend, as somewhat of a prig. His face expressed some annoyance as he heard the story.

'It is certainly unpleasant,' he said. 'I am, of course, perfectly sure that Dorothy is in no way to blame in the matter. This can be only a malicious attempt to annoy her. Still, I admit it is annoying. Things of this sort are sure to get about somehow. I am certain that everyone who knows Dorothy will see the matter in the same light as we do, but those who do not will conclude that there is something in it. Probably enough ere long there will be a mysterious paragraph in one of those society papers. Altogether it is certainly extremely annoying. The great thing is to find out who sent them. I quite agree with you it cannot be an attempt to extort money; had it been so, the demands would have been sent under seal and not in this manner. I suppose you have no idea of anyone having any special enmity against either you or her?'

'Not the slightest. The man who, as I told you, Danvers consulted without mentioning any names, was of opinion that it might be the work of some woman, and was intended to cause unpleasantness between you and Dorothy. Of course, in that case you might be more able to form an idea as to the writer than I can be.'

'No, indeed, there is no woman in my case,' Lord Halliburn said. 'I have always been perfectly free from entanglements of that kind; nor have I ever had anything like a serious flirtation before I met Miss Hawtrey; indeed, as you know, I have been travelling abroad almost constantly since I left college. I can assure you, on my honour, that I cannot think of anyone who could have a motive, however slight, for making mischief between us. Of course, it would be out of the question that mischief could be made out of such things as these; they are too contemptible for notice, beyond the fact that they are naturally annoying. I shall see Dorothy this afternoon, and shall tell her not to give the matter a thought, but at the same time I shall be extremely glad if you can put your hand on the sender of these things.'

CHAPTER IV

Mr. Hawtrey's hope that a clue had been obtained was speedily dissipated, for the next letter was posted in the south of London, and the one after it at Brompton. It was clear that the man who sent them did not confine himself to one particular office, and that it would be useless to set a watch on that in Claymore Street, Chelsea. Edward Hampton coming in that afternoon, he relieved his mind by telling what had happened.

'It is a comfort to talk it over with some one, Ned. You were a police-officer for some time out in India, I think, and may be able to see your way through this business. Danvers has been very kind about it, but so far nothing has come of his suggestions.'

'My Indian police experience is not much to the point. I had a police district for a year, but my duties consisted principally in hunting down criminals. Have you told Lord Halliburn?'

'Yes; as soon as the second letter came I went to him; it was only right that he should know.'

'Certainly. How did he take it, Mr. Hawtrey? if I may ask.'

'He was naturally annoyed at it; though, of course, he agreed with me that it was simply a piece of malice. A detective, to whom Danvers had spoken, without mentioning any name, suggested that it might be the work of some woman who had a grudge against him, or felt herself aggrieved at his engagement. I mentioned this to him, and he assured me that, so far as he knew, there was no one who had any complaint against him, and that he had never had any entanglement of any kind.'

'It is a horribly annoying thing, Mr. Hawtrey, and I am sure Miss Hawtrey must feel it very much. I thought she was not looking quite herself when I met her at dinner the night before last. Still, there must be some way of getting to the bottom of it. If it is not the work of an enemy, either of Lord Halliburn or of your daughter, it may be the work of one who has an enmity against yourself—one who is striking at you through yours.'

'That is just possible, Ned; but beyond men I have sentenced on the bench I don't know of anyone who would put himself out of his way to annoy me. Assuredly this cannot be the work of any Lincolnshire rustic.'

'But you have certainly one enemy who is just the sort of man to conceive and carry out such a blackguard business as this—I mean that man who was impertinent to you on the racecourse, and whose history you told us that evening.'

'I had not thought of him. Yes, that suggestion is certainly a probable one. He is evidently deeply impressed with the sense of injury, though, Heaven knows, I did not have the slightest ill-feeling against him, but was driven to do what I did by his own courses, and especially by his father's earnest request that he should not succeed him. There is no doubt as to his malice, and there can be as little as to his unscrupulousness.'

'Danvers and I were both of opinion, Mr. Hawtrey, that by his tone and manner when he spoke to you about payment of debts, that he had already done you some injury or had some distinct plan in his head. At that time your daughter was not engaged to Lord Halliburn, and his ideas may have been vague ones until the public notice of the engagement met his eye, when he may have said to himself, "This is my opportunity for taking my revenge, by annoying both father and daughter."

'It is possible, Ned. I can hardly bring myself to think that the son of my old friend would be capable of such a dastardly action, but I admit that there is at least a motive in his case, and that I can see none in that of anyone else.'

'At any rate, Mr. Hawtrey, here is a clue worth following, and as I have nothing whatever to do, and my own time hangs rather heavily on my hands, I will, if you will allow me, undertake to follow it up.'

'But with no evidence against him, not a particle, what can you do, Ned?'

'My business will be to get evidence. The first thing is to find out where the fellow lives, and to have him watched and followed, and if possible, caught in the act of posting one of these letters.'

'Remember, Ned, I would above all things avoid publicity, for Dorothy's sake. Nothing is more

hateful than for a girl to be talked about, and it is only as a last resource that I would bring a charge against him at the Police Court.'

'I can quite understand that, and will certainly call in no police to my aid until I have previously consulted you and received your sanction to do so. It will be easy enough to find him, for I should know him in an instant, and shall probably meet him at the first racecourse I go to. It is not as if I knew nothing of his habits.'

For the next week Captain Hampton frequented every racecourse within a short distance of London, but without meeting the man he was looking for. Men of the same class were there in scores—some boisterous, some oily-mouthed, some unmitigated ruffians, others crafty rogues.

Several times he accosted one of these men, and inquired if he had seen a betting man having the name of Marvel on his hat; each time the response was the same.

'I have not seen him here to-day. I know who you mean well enough, but he is not here. I can lay you the odds if you like. You would be safe with me.'

Further inquiry elicited the conjecture that 'he might have gone up North, or to some other distant races.'

'There are two meetings pretty well every day,' one said, 'sometimes three, and a man cannot be at them all. What do you want him for? If it is to get money out of him, you won't find the job a very easy one, unless he has happened to strike on a vein of luck. You had much better take the odds from me.'

Captain Hampton explained that his business was a private one, and altogether unconnected with betting.

'Well, if you will give me your name I will let him know that you want to see him, if I happen to run up against him. I should say that he will be at Reading next week.'

But Captain Hampton said his name would be unknown to Marvel, and the bookmaker, after looking him over suspiciously, concluded that it was of no use wasting further time, and turning away set up a stentorian shout of 'Six to one, bar one.'

Captain Hampton tried Reading, but was as unsuccessful here as in his previous attempts.

'Want Marvel?' one man he asked repeated. 'Well, I have not seen him here, and I haven't seen him for the last ten days; so I expect he has either gone down on a country tour, or he is ill, or he is so short of the dubs that he can't pay his fare down. He would be here if he could; for he would manage to make enough money to pay his expenses, anyhow. It is hard when a man cannot do that.'

Captain Hampton was not to be baffled, and after examining a sporting paper took a ticket early next morning for the North. He was away a week, and returned home disheartened. He had not seen the man nor did any of those he had questioned know the name of Marvel. 'It is like enough I may know the man,' one said confidentially, 'but I don't know the name; names don't go for much in the outside ring. A man is Marvel one day, and if when the racing is over he cannot pay his bets and has to go off quiet, he alters the cut of his hair next time and puts a fresh name on his hat, and is ready to take his davy, if questioned, that he was not near the course, and never heard the name of Marvel; and as he is sure to have some one with him to back him up and swear that he was with him at the other side of England on that day, the chap as wants his money concludes that he may as well drop it.'

The day after his return Ned Hampton went to Epsom and there recognised with a start of satisfaction the man of whom he was in search. He had no name in his hat, and was talking to two or three men of his own class, one of whom he recognised as the man who had offered to tell Marvel that he wished to see him. He moved up in the crowd, and placed himself close to the men, but with his back towards them. Marvel was speaking.

'But what sort of fellow was he?'

'A military-looking swell.'

'And he said I should not know his name? I should know it sharp enough if it was down in my book without a pencil mark through the bet. There are people, you know, who, quite accidentally of course, I haven't settled up with.'

There was a laugh among the group. 'A good many I should fancy, Jacob, but I don't think this chap could have been one of them. A man who has been left in the lurch generally takes it out in strong language. If this chap had wanted you for a tenner and you had not forked over, he would probably have spoken of you as a swindling scoundrel and said that if he met you he would take it out of you in another way if he could not get the money. Now he didn't seem put out at all; he wanted to see you about something or other, but I don't think it was anything to do with money. I can always tell when there is anything wrong about that. A man may put it as mild as he likes, but there is something in it that says he is nasty.'

'Well, I don't want to see him whoever he is,' Marvel said, 'so if he comes across any of you again tell him you hear I've retired, or that I have drowned myself, or anything else you like, but that anyhow I ain't likely to be on any of the courses again this season. And mind, you don't know

anything about where I live or where he is likely to get any news of me.'

'But where have you been the last fortnight, Jacob?'

'I have been on another job altogether, and if it turns out well you ain't likely to see much more of me here. I have had about enough of it.'

As he found that he was not likely to hear more, Hampton moved away in the crowd, but continued to keep Marvel in sight. In two or three minutes the man separated from his companions, moved off the course, and stood for a minute or two with his hands in his pockets, meditating. Then his mind was made up. He pushed his way through the crowd, crossed the course, and walked quickly towards one of the entrances. Captain Hampton followed him closely, and was by no means surprised to see him walk to the station.

'He is evidently nervous about what they have told him,' he said to himself, 'and although he cannot tell what my business with him may be, he is determined to avoid me. All the better; I should have had great difficulty in keeping my eye on him in the crowd later on, and now I won't lose sight of him again.'

Entering the station, the man waited until a train came up and then took his place in a third class carriage. Hampton entered the next compartment, but, to his great annoyance, found on arriving at Waterloo that Marvel was not in the carriage.

'Confound it,' he muttered angrily, 'he must have slipped out at one of the other stations without my noticing him. It must have been at Vauxhall, just as those four men were pushing past me to get out. I am a nice sort of fellow to take up the amateur detective business. To hunt for a man for nearly three weeks and then when I have found him to lose him again like this. I will go across and see Danvers. Of course he will have the laugh against me. Well, I can't help that; I will take his advice about it. I am evidently not fit to manage by myself.'

Danvers had just returned from the Courts when Captain Hampton reached the chambers.

'Hullo, Hampton, where do you spring from? Everyone has missed you from your accustomed haunts. Some said you had eloped with an heiress; others that you are wanted for forgery. I met the Hawtreys last night at dinner. They both asked me after you. The young lady quite seemed to take your disappearance to heart. The more so, I think, because she had sent down a servant with a note to your lodgings, and the girl had learnt from your landlady that you had been away for a week. Of course, I could not enlighten her. Her father took me apart and asked me quite seriously about you. He seemed to think that you had been trying to ferret out something about this confounded letter business. He told me he had talked it over with you, regarding you as almost one of the family.'

'That is just what I have been about, Danvers, and I have made an amazing ass of myself.'

'You don't mean to say that!' Danvers exclaimed in affected surprise. 'Well, I know you used to do it at school sometimes, but I hoped that you had got out of the habit.'

'Bosh!' Hampton laughed. 'But I own I have done it this time. You remember that fellow on the racecourse?'

'You mean at the Oaks. Of course I remember him.'

'Well, it struck me that he might be the man who had sent the letters. He had, as Hawtrey told us in the evening, a bitter grudge against him, and such a dirty trick as this was just the sort of thing that a disreputable broken-down knave like him might concoct to gratify his malice.'

'You are right there; I wonder the idea did not occur to me. Well, I retract what I said just now; so far you have told me nothing to justify the epithet you bestowed on yourself.'

'My first idea,' Hampton went on, without noticing the interruption, 'was that as I had nothing particular to do I would go down to some of the races near town where I felt certain I should find him, follow the fellow back, and track him to his home. Then I had intended to come to you and ask your advice as to the next step to be taken.'

'There you showed your sagacity again, Hampton. Well, what came of it?'

'I went for a fortnight to every racecourse near town and asked after Marvel from bookmakers of his stamp. They all seemed rather surprised at his absence, and suggested that perhaps having failed to pay up here he had gone to one of the country meetings up in the North. I was up in Yorkshire for a week but with no better result. I came up last night and went to Epsom this morning and there spotted my man.' He then related the conversation he had overheard and the manner in which he had allowed the man to slip through his fingers. Danvers could not help laughing, though he, too, was vexed.

'I can quite understand your missing him at Vauxhall, Hampton. Of course it is easy to be wise after the event. It would not have done for you to have got in the same compartment with him at Epsom. You don't look like a third-class passenger, and the idea that you were the military swell who had been enquiring after him would probably have occurred to him; but if you had got out at a station or two further on, and then taken your place in his carriage, that idea would hardly have entered his mind.'

'Well, the result is I have thrown away three weeks of my leave in taking a lot of trouble and we

are no nearer than we were before.'

'Not much, except that we have learnt that the man is engaged on a different matter, in which he intends to make money, and also that there is but little probability of his being met with again for some time on a racecourse. Of course, this business may be altogether unconnected with that of the Hawtreys, but on the other hand it may be. I am afraid there is little clue left for us to follow up. Getting out at Vauxhall might mean that he lived in that neighbourhood, or at Camberwell, or Peckham, or Kennington, or anywhere about there; or he might have crossed the river, and there is all the region between Chelsea and Westminster to choose from. If we knew that he went under the name of Marvel something might be done, but it is a hundred to one against that being the name he goes by in his domestic circle. If you have come to me for advice I can give you none; I can see nothing whatever to do but to wait for new developments. Have you seen the "Liar" this week?'

'No; I never look at it.'

'Well, you see there is a nasty paragraph there that unmistakably alludes to the affair. I have no doubt it is Halliburn's doing; he got so annoyed at these letters keeping on coming—and indeed it seems that some have been sent to him with 'Look before you leap,' 'Be sure that all is right before it is too late,' and things of that sort—that he went off to Scotland Yard, kicked up a row there, showed the envelopes he had received to the authorities, and gave them the whole history about the others. Of course, they promised that they would do what they could, and equally of course they will be able to do nothing. Well, I suppose some understrapper there got to hear of it, and probably sold the thing to one of the men who gather up garbage for the "Liar." I have got the paper. There, that is the paragraph: "There is a possibility that a marriage that has been arranged in high life may not come off after all. The noble lord who was to figure as bridegroom has received the unpleasant information that the young lady has been pestered with demands for money in exchange for compromising letters, and has himself received missives calculated to make one in his position extremely uncomfortable. Further developments may be looked for."'

'It is scandalous,' Captain Hampton exclaimed passionately, 'that a blackguard rag like this is allowed to exist!'

'Quite so, Hampton; I agree with you most heartily. Still, there it is, and others like it, and we have got to put up with it. If it had not been for that fool, Halliburn, taking things into his hands this notice would never have got in. One of Hawtrey's servants came round in a cab to fetch me this morning. I found him foaming with rage, talking about horsewhipping and all sorts of things. It is curious how that sort of thing still lingers in the minds of country squires. I told him, of course, that would make it ten times worse. Then he talked of an action, and I said, "Now, my dear Mr. Hawtrey, you are getting altogether beyond my province. As a friend I am very glad to give you my advice as long as it is merely a question of endeavouring to find out the authors of these libels. Now it has assumed an altogether different phase, and you must go to your lawyer for advice. I am sure that he will tell you that you can do nothing, especially as in point of fact the statements are perfectly true. Still, there is no saying how far the thing will go, and whether it may not be necessary eventually to take legal steps; therefore it is only fair to your solicitor that you should put him in possession of the whole circumstances as far as they have gone."'

"Very well," he said, "I will go down at once to Harper and Hawes, and take their advice about it."

'There is one comfort,' Captain Hampton said; 'there are not many people who will understand to whom this paragraph relates. I suppose there have been a dozen lords of one sort and another who have become engaged during the season, so that, except for us who are behind the scenes, there is nothing to point distinctly to the identity of the parties.'

'You need not count on that,' Danvers said shortly. 'This paragraph is merely intended to whet the curiosity of the public. You will see that next week there will be another, saying that they are now able to state, beyond fear of contradiction, that the nobleman and young lady who have been persecuted by anonymous letters are Lord Halliburn and Miss Hawtrey.'

'This sort of thing makes one regret that duelling has gone out of fashion,' Captain Hampton said savagely. 'There is nothing would give me greater pleasure than to parade the editor of that blackguard paper at six o'clock to-morrow morning on Wimbledon Common!'

'It would no doubt be a pleasure to you, my dear Hampton,' Danvers said tranquilly, 'and the result might be a matter of unmingled satisfaction to all decent people; but, you see, it cannot be done. If it could have been he would have been shot years ago, noxious beast that he is. It being impossible, let us change the subject. What are you going to do this evening?'

'I am going to have dinner first.'

'It is only six o'clock, my dear fellow.'

'All the better. I want to get it over, so as to go round and catch the Hawtreys before they go out—that is to say, if they are going to a ball or anything of that sort, and not to a dinner; Mr. Hawtrey knows I have been doing what I could to find out this betting fellow, but has not mentioned it to his daughter, for the same reason, probably, that I have taken pains to avoid meeting them since I began the search. At any rate, I should not like her to think that I have been away for this three weeks on my own pleasure, in perfect indifference to the unpleasant position

in which she is placed, so I shall go to report progress—or, rather, want of progress—and to assure them that I will continue the search until I have run this fellow to earth.'

Danvers looked at his friend through his half-closed eyes with a gleam of quiet amusement.

'The Indian sun does not seem to have cooled the enthusiasm of your youth, Hampton. You used to throw yourself then like a young demon into the middle of a football scrimmage, and rowed stroke in that four of yours till you rowed your crew to a standstill, and then tugged away all to yourself, till they got their wind again. To us, jaded men——'

'Shut up, man!' Hampton said hotly, 'this is no joking matter. Here is the honour and happiness of a girl who, when she was a little child, was very dear to me'—Danvers' eyes twinkled momentarily—'and I should be a brute if I did not do everything I could to put the matter straight; and I am quite sure,' he went on more quietly, 'that although, of course, they are not such friends of yours as they are of mine, you would spare no trouble yourself if you only saw any way in which you could be of real assistance.'

'Perhaps so, old man, perhaps so; but I should not get into fever heat about it. You see, the matter at present principally concerns Halliburn. It is his business and privilege to stand first in the line of defence of the character of the young lady to whom he is engaged.'

'And a nice mess he has made of his first move,' Captain Hampton agreed, pointing to the copy of the 'Liar.' 'Well, I won't wait any longer; they dine at seven o'clock when they are alone, and I will go round at eight on the chance of finding them in.'

Danvers sat looking at the empty grate for some minutes after he had left. 'It is about even betting, I should say,' he muttered to himself, 'and I think, if anything, the odds are slightly on Hampton, though he has not the slightest idea at present that he has entered for the race. The other one has got the start, but Hampton always had no end of last, and he will take every fence well, and it seems to me there are likely to be some awkward ones. Besides, I am not half sure that the other fellow will run straight when the pinch comes.'

When Captain Hampton presented himself at the house in Chester Square, he found, to his satisfaction, that Mr. Hawtrey and his daughter were at home.

'They have just finished dinner, sir,' the servant said; 'dessert is on the table.'

'Then I will go in,' Captain Hampton said, and, opening the dining-room door, walked in.

'I am presuming on my old footing to enter unceremoniously, Mr. Hawtrey,' he said.

'I am glad to see you. You are heartily welcome, Ned. This reminds one of old times indeed.'

Dorothy's welcome was sensibly cooler, while Mrs. Daintree, who had from the first set herself strongly against his intimacy at the house, was absolutely frigid.

Ned saw that Dorothy's colour had perceptibly paled since he last saw her, and that she looked harassed and anxious.

'It is three weeks since I saw you,' he said.

'Is it?' she asked with an air of indifference. He laughed outright.

'That was really very well done, Dorothy, and I quite understand what it means. You think I have been neglecting you altogether, and amusing myself while you were in trouble; and were that the case I should deserve all the snubbing, and more, that you could give me. I believe that your father has not told you what I have been doing, and I do not wish to enter into details now,' and he glanced towards Mrs. Daintree, 'but I feel that I must, in justice to myself, assure you that the whole of my time has been occupied in the matter, and that although I have no success to boast of, I have, at least, tried my very best to deserve it.'

'That is good of you, Ned,' the girl said brightly. 'I have been feeling a little hurt at your desertion, and thought it did not seem like you to leave me in trouble. I always used to rely upon you when I got into a scrape. I don't want to know what you have been doing, though father can tell me if he likes, but I am quite content to take your word for it. Now I must go; it is time for us to dress. I wish I could stay at home and have a quiet evening, but you see I am no longer quite my own mistress.'

'Well, Hampton, what have you been doing, and why have you not been to see me before? I heard you were in town—at least, I heard so ten days ago.'

'I should have come, sir, before, had I had anything to tell you. I have nothing much now, and in fact have to-day bungled matters considerably; still, I shall start on a fresh search to-morrow, and hope to be luckier than I have been so far.' He then gave a detailed account of his visits to racecourses, of his meeting with Truscott that morning, of the conversation he had overheard, and of the manner in which the man had eluded him.

'Well, Ned, you certainly have deserved success, and I am indeed obliged to you for the immense trouble you have taken over the matter. It is too bad your spending your time over this annoying affair, when you are only home on a year's leave. What you have learned is, of course, no direct proof that Truscott has a hand in this affair; at the same time, what he said confirms to some extent your suspicions of him. Would it not be as well to put the search for him into the hands of

a detective, now that there is some one definite to search for? One of these men might be useful, and I really would vastly rather employ one than know that you are spending day after day searching for him yourself. These men are accustomed to the work; they know exactly the persons to whom to apply; they have agents under them, who know infinitely better the sort of place where such a fellow would be likely to take up his quarters than you can do.'

'No doubt that is so,' Captain Hampton admitted reluctantly. 'I should have liked to have run him down myself, now that I have hunted him so long. Still, that is a matter of no importance, the great thing is to lose no time. I will get Danvers to give me a note to the man he spoke to first.'

'On my behalf, remember, Ned; he must be engaged on my behalf.'

'Very well, sir, if you wish it so; but I would rather that you and I arrange with him direct, and that it is not done by your solicitors. Danvers told me that you were going to them this morning about that infamous paragraph in the "Liar."'

'Certainly they shall have nothing to do with it,' Mr. Hawtrey said hotly; 'I was a fool to go to them at all; I might as well have gone to two old women. They have been lawyers to our family for I don't know how many years, and are no doubt excellent men in their capacity of family lawyers, but this matter is altogether out of their line. They looked at each other like two helpless fools when I told them the story, and said at once that they would not undertake to advise me, but that I had better go to Levine, or one of the other men who are always engaged in these what they call delicate cases, that is to say, hideous scandals. However, I have made up my mind to keep clear of them all as far as I can; but, of course, I must be guided to some extent by Halliburn's opinion, or rather his wishes. As to his opinion, I have no confidence in it one way or the other. I'm glad you did not say anything about what you had been doing before my cousin; she is worrying herself almost into a fever about it, the more so because there is no one to whom she can talk about it. She means well, but were it not that just at present it is absolutely necessary that Dorothy should show herself everywhere with a perfectly unconcerned air, I would make some excuse to send Mrs. Daintree down to the country again; as it is, I must keep her as a chaperon, but she is very trying I assure you, and I believe would come into my study to cry over the affair half-a-dozen times a day, if I would but let her. Now, Ned, you must excuse me, the carriage will be round in a few minutes, and as, with one thing and another, I got back too late to dress for dinner, I have not another minute to spare. Shall I give you a note authorising you to arrange with the detective?'

'There is no occasion for that; I shall speak in your name, and as he will want to have an interview with you before long, you can then confirm any arrangement I have made as to his remuneration.'

Hampton called in on Danvers in the morning for the address of the detective, Slippen, and a card of introduction. The address was in Clifford's Inn, and on finding the number Hampton saw the name over a door on the ground floor. A sharp looking boy was sitting on a high stool swinging his legs. He evidently thought that amusement somewhat monotonous and was glad of a change, for he jumped down with alacrity.

'The governor is in, sir, but he has got a party in with him. I will take your card in. I expect he will be glad to get rid of her, for she has been sobbing and crying in there awful.'

'I am in no particular hurry,' Captain Hampton said, amused at the boy's confidential manner.

'Divorce, I expect,' the lad went on, as Captain Hampton took a seat on the only chair in the dark little office. 'I allus notice that the first time they comes they usually goes on like that. After a time or two they takes it more business-like. They comes in brisk, and says, "Is Mr. Slippen in?" just the same as if they was asking for a cup of tea. When they goes out sometimes they look sour, and I knows then that he,' and he jerked his thumb towards the inner office, 'hasn't any news to tell 'em; sometimes they goes out looking red in the face and in a regular paddy, and you can see by the way they grips their umbrellas they would like to give it to some one.'

'You must find it dull sitting here all day. I suppose you haven't much writing to do?'

'I doesn't sit here much. I am mostly about. There ain't many as comes here of a day, and he can hear the knocker. Those as does come calls mostly in the morning, from ten to eleven. There, she is a-moving.'

The inner door opened, and a stout woman came out looking flushed and angry; the boy slid off his stool and opened the door for her, and then took Captain Hampton's card in. A moment later Mr. Slippen himself appeared at the door.

'Will you walk in, Captain Hampton? I am sorry to have kept you waiting. I rather expected,' he said, as he closed the door behind him, 'that I should have a call, either from Mr. Danvers or some one from him, when I saw that paragraph in the "Liar." I made sure it was the case he was speaking to me about, and I said to myself, "They are safe to be doing something now."'

'Yes, it is that case that I come about. I am here on the part of Mr. Hawtrey, the father of the young lady. I am an intimate friend of the family. Mr. Danvers gave you the heads of the matter.'

The detective nodded; he was a rather short, slightly-built man, with hair cut very short and standing up aggressively; his eyes were widely opened, with a sharp, quick movement as they glanced from one point to another, but the general expression of the face was pleasant and good-

tempered.

'He told you my opinion so far as I could form it from the very slight data he gave me?'

'Yes, you thought at first that the writer of the threats really had possession of compromising letters; but upon hearing that she was engaged you thought it likely that the letters might be the work of some aggrieved or disappointed woman.'

'That is it, sir.'

'So far as we can see,' Captain Hampton went on, 'neither view was correct; certainly the first was not. We have, as we think, laid our fingers on the writer, who is a man who believes himself to have a personal grievance against Mr. Hawtrey himself.' He then related the whole story.

'He may be the man,' Mr. Slippen said, when he had finished. 'At any rate there is something to go on, which there was not before. There will be no great difficulty in laying one's hand on him, but at present we have not a shred of real evidence—nothing that a magistrate would listen to.'

'We quite see that. Still, it will be something to find him; then we can have him watched, and, if possible, caught in the act of posting the letters.'

'You will find that difficult—I do not mean the watching him nor seeing him post his letters, but bringing it home to him. I would rather have to deal with anything than with a matter where you have got the Post Office people to get round. Once a letter is in a box it is their property until it is handed over to the person it is directed to. Still, we may get over that, somehow. The first thing, I take it, is to find the man. You say his betting name is Marvel?'

'That is the name he had on his hat at Epsom on the Oaks day, but he may have a dozen others.'

'Ah, that is true enough. Still, no doubt he has used it often enough for others to know him by it; and now for his description.'

'Thank you, that will be sufficient. I think I will send a man down to Windsor at once; the races are on again to-day. He will get his address out of one or other of his pals. It will cost a five-pound note at the outside. If you will give me your address, I shall most likely be able to let you have it this evening.'

'I wish to goodness I had come to you before,' Captain Hampton said. 'Here I have been wasting three weeks trying to find the man, and spending fifty or sixty pounds in railway fares, stand tickets and expenses, and you are able to undertake it at once.'

'It is a very simple matter, Captain Hampton. I have been engaged in two or three turf cases, and one of my men knows a lot of the hangers-on at racecourses. Watches and other valuables are constantly stolen there, and as often enough these things are gifts, and are valued beyond their mere cost in money, their owners come to us to try if we can get them back for them, which we are able to do three times out of four. Whoever may steal the things, they are likely to get into one of four or five hands, and as soon as we let it be known that we are ready to pay a fair price for their return and no questions asked, it is not long before they are brought here. I don't say I may be able to find out this man's exact address, but I can find out the public-house or other place where he is generally to be met with. I don't suppose the actual address of one in ten of these fellows is known to others. They are to be heard of in certain public-houses, but even their closest pals often don't know where they live. Sometimes, no doubt, it is in some miserable den where they would be ashamed to meet anyone. Sometimes there may be a wife and family in the case, and they don't want men coming there. Sometimes it may be just another way. Many of these fellows at home are quiet, respectable sort of chaps, living at some little place where none of their neighbours, and perhaps not even their wives, know that they have anything to do with racing, but take them for clerks or warehousemen, or something in the city. So I don't promise to find out the fellow's home, only the place where a letter will find him, or where he goes to meet his pals, and perhaps do a little quiet betting in the landlord's back parlour.'

'That will be enough for us, to begin with at any rate.'

'Of course, the private address is only a matter of a day or two longer,' Mr. Slippen went on. 'I have only to send that boy of mine up to the place, and the first time the fellow goes there he will follow him, if it is all over London, till he traces him to the place where he lives. If, as he said, he is going to give up attending the races for the present, he may not go there for a day or two. But he is sure to do so sooner or later for letters.'

'Thank you. It would be as well to know where he lives, but at any rate when we have what we may call his business address we shall have time to talk over our next move.'

'Yes, that is where the real difficulty will begin, Captain Hampton. I expect you have got to deal with a deep one, and I own that at present I do not see my way at all clear before me.'

CHAPTER V

That evening Mr. Slippen's boy presented himself at Captain Hampton's lodgings with a note. It

contained only the words 'Dear sir,—Our man uses the "White Horse," Frogmore Street, Islington. I await your instructions before moving further in the matter.'

'Well, youngster, what is your name?' Captain Hampton asked, as he put the note on the table beside him.

'Jacob Wrigley,' the lad replied promptly.

'Here is half-a-crown for yourself, Jacob.'

'Thank you, sir,' the boy said, as he took it up with a duck of the head and slipped it into his pocket.

'Your office hours seem to be long, Jacob; that is, if you have been there since I saw you this morning.'

'No, sir, I ain't a-been there since one o'clock, not till an hour ago. I have been down at Greenwich, keeping my eye on a party there. I got done there at six o'clock, and as the governor had said "Come round and tell me what you have found out, I shall be in up to nine o'clock," round I went in course. The governor and me don't have no regular hours. Some chaps wouldn't like that, but it doesn't matter to me, 'cause I sleeps there.'

'Sleep where, Jacob?'

'In where you see me. The things is stowed away in that cupboard in the corner, and I get on first-rate. It is a good place, especially in winter. I lays the blankits down in front of the fire, and keeps it going all night sometimes.'

'But haven't you got any place of your own to go to, Jacob?'

The boy shook his head. 'I was brought up in a wan, I was,' the boy said. 'I hooked it one day, two years ago, 'cause they knocked me about so. I pretty nigh starved at first, but one day I saw a chap priggging an old gent's ticker. The old one shouted just as he got off; I was on the look-out and as the chap came along I chucked myself down in front of him and down he came. I grabbed him, and afore he could shake me off a lot of chaps got hold of him and held him till a peeler came up. They did not find the watch on him, but I had seen him as he ran pass something to a chap he ran close to and pretty nigh knocked down. I gave my evidence at the police court. The governor happened to be there, and arter it was over and the chaps had got six months, and the beak had said I gave my evidence very well, and gave me five bob out of the poor box, he came up to me and said, "You are a smart young fellow. Do you want a job?" I said I just did, and so he took me on; that is how it came about, you see. The only thing I don't like is, he makes me go to a night school. He says I shan't never do no good unless I can get to read and write; so I does it, but I hates it bitter.'

'He is quite right, Jacob. You stick to it; it will come easier as you get on.'

'Yes, I know I wants it, for letters and that sort of thing, but it is bitter hard. I would rather stand opposite a house all day in winter than I would sit for an hour trying to make my pen go where I wants it to. It allus will go the other way, and the drops of ink will come out awful. Good night, sir.'

'Good night, lad. Tell Mr. Slippen when you see him that I shall probably be round to-morrow or next day.'

On the following morning Captain Hampton called early at Chester Square. Mr. Hawtrey and Dorothy had just finished breakfast. Mrs. Daintree, as was her custom after being out late the night before, had taken hers in bed.

'I have good news so far. I have discovered, or rather Slippen has, where Truscott is to be found. He frequents a public-house called the White Horse, Frogmore Street, Islington.'

'That is good news indeed, Ned,' Mr. Hawtrey said warmly, as he shook hands with him. As he turned to Dorothy, he saw with surprise that she had turned suddenly pale, and that her hands shook as she put down the cup.

'You are pleased, are you not, Dorothy?' he asked in surprise.

The girl hesitated. 'Yes,' she said, 'of course, I am pleased in one way, but not in another. It frightens me to think that the man may be brought up, and that I may have to give evidence; it is horrid being talked about, but it would be much worse to stand up to be stared at, and to have it all put in the papers.'

'Pooh, pooh, my dear, your evidence will be very simple,' her father said. 'You will only have to tell that you received the first of these letters, that you know nothing of the man, and that his assertion that he has letters of yours is utterly false.'

'Yes, father, but I have noticed that in all trials of this sort they ask such numberless questions, and that they always manage somehow to put the witnesses into a false light. They will say, "How do you know that he has no letters of yours? Do you mean to tell this court that you have never written any letters?" And when I have said I have never written any letters that I should object to having read out in court they will insinuate that I am telling a lie, and that I have done all sorts of dreadful things; and though they will not be able to prove a word of it, I shall know, as I go out,

that half the people will believe that I have. I shall hate it, and I am sure that Algernon will hate it even more.'

'Well, Algernon has no one but himself to thank for its having come to this pass,' Mr. Hawtrey said sharply. 'It was his interference, and his going down to Scotland Yard, that caused that paragraph to appear in the paper. If he had left the matter alone nothing whatever would have been heard about it outside our circle. I like Halliburn, but I must say that at present nothing would give me more satisfaction than to hear that he had gone for a month upon the Continent, for he comes round here every afternoon, and worries and fusses over the matter until he upsets you and fills me with an almost irresistible desire to seize him by the shoulders and turn him out of the room.'

'He is a little trying, father,' Dorothy admitted, 'but of course he does not like it.'

'Nor do any of us. It is a hundred times worse for you than it is for him, and yet—But there, let us change the subject. What is it you were saying, Ned? Oh yes, you have heard where Truscott lives.'

'Not exactly where he lives, but the public-house where he is to be met with, and in his case it comes to pretty well the same thing. I had nothing to do with finding it out. The man Slippen took it in hand, and in a few hours did more than I had done in three weeks. He sent a fellow down to Windsor, to some betting men he knew, and sent me word in the evening. It was rather mortifying, I must confess, and I feel as if I had been taken down several pegs in my own estimation.'

'And what is to be done next, father?' Dorothy asked anxiously.

'Ah, that is the point we shall have to talk over, my dear. At present we have not a thread of evidence to connect him with the affair. We must, in the first place, bring it home to him. Afterwards, we will see whether we must have him arrested and charged in court, or whether we can frighten him into making a confession. I am very much afraid that, after all that has been said about it, there will be nothing for it but a public prosecution; however, there will be time to think of that afterwards.' Captain Hampton saw Dorothy go pale again, and mentally resolved that he would do all in his power to save her from the ordeal from which she evidently shrank. He was a little surprised at her nervousness, for as a child she had been absolutely fearless, but he supposed that the worry, and perhaps the fidgeting of Halliburn had shaken her somewhat, as, indeed, was natural enough. 'You are going round to see this detective, I suppose?' Mr. Hawtrey asked.

'Yes, I came in on my way for instructions. Slippen will no doubt propose that a sharp watch shall be kept over his movements, and I suppose that there can be no doubt that is the right thing to be done.'

'I should say so, certainly.'

'That, at least, Miss Hawtrey, will commit us to nothing afterwards, and I trust even yet we may find some way of avoiding the unpleasantness you feared.'

'I may as well go with you, Ned,' Mr. Hawtrey said; 'I have nothing particular to do this morning; a walk will do me good. I am getting bilious and out of sorts with all this worry, and would give a good round sum to be quietly down in Lincolnshire again. Dorothy evidently feels it a good deal more than I should have thought she would,' he went on as they left the house.

'It is a horribly annoying sort of thing to happen to anyone, Mr. Hawtrey; because it is so desperately difficult to meet anonymous slander of this sort, and of course her engagement makes it so much the worse for her.'

'Yes, that is the rub, Ned. I am not at all pleased with the fellow; he seems to think of nothing but the manner in which it affects himself. I have had, once or twice, as much as I could do not to let out at him. I had it on the tip of my tongue to say, "Confound it, sir! What the deuce do I care for you or your family? The ancestors through whom you got your title were doubtless respectable enough, and as far as I know, may, two or three generations back, have been washer-women, when our people had already held their estates hundreds of years." Of course, Dorothy takes his part, but my own belief is that it is he who is worrying her, quite as much as the scandal itself.'

'Dorothy is not marrying for a title; she refused a higher one than his last autumn. I don't say that his being a lord might not have influenced her to some extent; I suppose all girls have vanity enough to like to carry off a man whom scores of others will envy her for, but I don't think that went very far with her. I believe that, as far as she knew of him, she liked him for himself; not, I suppose, in any desperate sort of way, but as a pleasant, gentlemanly sort of fellow of whom everyone spoke well, and whom she esteemed and thought she could be very happy with. She has no occasion to marry for money; of course my estate is, as I dare say you know, entailed, and will go to my cousin, Jack Hawtrey, who is a sporting parson down in Somersetshire—a good fellow, with a large family; but there will be plenty for her from her mother, besides my unentailed property.'

'I cannot help thinking that Halliburn's worrying, and the very evident fact that he thinks more of the scandal as affecting his future wife than of her feelings in the matter, may have shown her that she had over-estimated him, and that although he may be a very respectable and well-behaved young nobleman, he is a selfish and shallow-minded fellow after all. Dorothy may say

nothing now, but she is not the sort of girl to forgive that sort of thing, and I don't mind saying it to you, as an old friend, Ned, that I should not be at all surprised if, when once this affair is thoroughly cleared up, she throws Halliburn over altogether.'

Captain Hampton made no reply, but had his companion turned to look at him he could hardly have avoided noticing that the expression on his face expressed anything but sympathy with the tone of irritation in which he had himself spoken.

Mr. Slippen was in when they arrived at Clifford's Inn. The door was opened by him when they knocked, a proof that the boy was not at his post.

'Come in, Captain Hampton; I fancied that you would be down here.'

'This is Mr. Hawtrey, Mr. Slippen,' said Ned, as they followed him into his room; 'he thought he would like to talk over with you the plan of campaign.'

'I am glad you have come, sir; it is always more satisfactory to meet one's principal in matters of this kind; there is less chance of any mistake being made. It is surprising sometimes to find, after one is half through one's work, that one has been proceeding under an entirely false impression. One may think, for example, that one's client is bent upon carrying a matter out to the bitter end, and will not hear of anything of a compromise, and then one discovers that he is perfectly ready to condone everything, and to make every sacrifice to avoid publicity. Of course, if one had known that in the first place, it would have immensely facilitated matters.'

'I should be very glad to avoid publicity myself,' Mr. Hawtrey said, 'but unfortunately the matter has gone so far that I do not see how it can possibly be avoided.'

Mr. Slippen shook his head.

'I don't see, myself, at present,' he agreed, 'how the scandal is to be set at rest, except by the prosecution of its author—that is to say, if we can get evidence enough to prosecute him. Of course, if we had such evidence it would be easy enough to force him into making a complete retraction; but, if we did, such a retraction would hardly be satisfactory, as, supposing it were published, people would say, "How are we to know that this letter is written by the fellow who wrote the others? If it is the man, how is it that he is not prosecuted for it?" Certainly there would be a strong suspicion that he had been bought off.'

'I see that myself,' Mr. Hawtrey agreed. 'I don't see any other way of clearing the matter up except by putting him in the dock, though I would give a great deal to avoid it. My daughter is extremely averse to the idea of the publicity attending such an affair, and especially to having to appear as a witness, which is not surprising when one knows the outrageous licence given to counsel in our days to cross-examine witnesses.'

Captain Hampton noticed the sudden keen glance shot at his client from Mr. Slippen's eyes, followed by a series of almost imperceptible little nods, and was seized with a sudden and fierce desire to make a violent assault upon the unconscious detective.

'At any rate,' Mr. Hawtrey continued, 'I see nothing at present but to let the matter go on, and for you to obtain, if possible, some decisive proof of the man's connection with these letters. So far we have really only the most shadowy grounds for our suspicion against him.'

Again Mr. Slippen nodded, this time more openly and decisively.

'Quite the most shadowy, Mr. Hawtrey. I am far from saying that he may not be the man, but beyond his having, as I understand, a grievance of very many years' duration against yourself there is really nothing whatever to connect him with the affair.'

'Nothing, Mr. Slippen. It is, in fact, simply because there is no one else against whom we have even such slight grounds as this to go upon, that we suspect this fellow of being the author of these rascally communications.'

'You will understand, Mr. Hawtrey, that being employed by you I consider it my duty to let you know exactly the light in which the matter strikes me. Of course, I do not know the man as you do, but from what I have learnt from Captain Hampton he seems to be an unprincipled blackguard; a man who has been concerned in various shady transactions on the turf, and who has come down to the rank of the lowest class of betting men; a fellow who pays his bets when he has made a winning book on a race and is a welsher when he loses.

'Of course, it may be that such a man is of so vindictive a nature that he may have taken all this trouble simply to annoy you, but I cannot help thinking that if he had embarked upon it he would have played his hand so as not only to annoy but to extort money to cease that annoyance. Now the writer of these letters has certainly not done that. Had he had any idea of extorting money he would have sent some sort of private intimation to you, by means of a cautiously worded letter, to the effect that an arrangement could be made by which the thing could be put a stop to. You have received no such missive; therefore, if this man is the author he is simply a malicious scoundrel, and not, in this instance at any rate, a clever rogue, as I should certainly have expected to find him from his antecedents.'

'That is to say, you do not think he is the man?'

'Yes, I think it comes almost to that, Mr. Hawtrey. I do not know him, and, of course, he may be

the man, but I own that I shall be a good deal surprised if I find that he is so. Still, in the absence of any other clue whatever, I propose to follow this up. It will be something at least to clear it out of the way and to have done with it. I shall detail my boy to watch the public-house till the man comes to it, and then to find out where he lives and what are his habits; to follow his footsteps and take note of every place where he posts a letter. We shall get, at any rate, negative evidence that way. If, for instance, a letter is posted in the south of London, and we know that on that day the man never went out of Islington, I think that it will be very strong proof that he has nothing to do with the matter. Of course the reverse would not be so convincing the other way; but if we had the coincidence, three or four times repeated, of the letter bearing the mark of a district in which he had dropped one into the post, we should feel that we were a long way towards proving his connection with the affair.'

'Quite so,' Mr. Hawtrey agreed; 'that will, as you say, either go far to confirm our suspicions, or will altogether clear the ground so far as he is concerned, and we must then look for a clue in some other direction altogether.'

That afternoon Captain Hampton, having nothing to do, made his way up to Islington. The lad was not to be put on the watch until the next morning, and he thought that he might see this man at the public-house he frequented, and perhaps glean something from any conversation he might have with the men he met there. After some inquiry as to the direction of Frogmore Street, he turned up the Liverpool Road, and had gone but a few hundred yards when his eye fell on a couple engaged in earnest conversation on the raised walk, on the opposite side of the street. He paused abruptly in his stride. One was unquestionably the man for whom he was seeking. He was better dressed than when he had seen him before, and had more the air of a gentleman, but there could be no question as to his identity. The other was as unmistakably Dorothy Hawtrey.

There was no question of an accidental likeness; it was the girl herself, and he recognised the dress as one he had seen her wear. Turning sharply on his heel he turned down a bye street, and came out into Upper Street. There were too many people here for him to think; he passed on, walking in the road at the edge of the pavement, to the Angel, and then turned down the comparatively quiet pavement of Pentonville Hill.

What could it mean? He could see but one solution, and yet he refused to accept it. To believe it was to believe Dorothy Hawtrey to be guilty of deception and lying. Was it possible that, after all, this man could have possessed letters of hers, and that she had been driven at last to meet him and redeem them? He remembered her pallor when she had heard that morning that this fellow's whereabouts had been discovered, and how she had urged that no steps should be taken against him. It had all seemed natural then; it seemed equally natural now under this new light—and yet he refused to believe it. So he told himself over and over again. That he had seen her in conversation with Truscott was undeniable; of that, at least, he was certain, but equally certain was it to him that there must be some other explanation of the meeting than that which had at first struck him. What could that explanation be? No answer occurred to him; he could hit upon no hypothesis consistent with her denial of any knowledge whatever of the writer of these letters.

He was at the bottom of the hill now; disregarding the hails of various cabmen, he crossed the road and made his way down through the squares. It was better to be walking than sitting still. He scarcely noticed where he was going, and was almost surprised when he found himself in Jermyn Street. He went upstairs, lighted a cigar, and sat down.

'What is coming to me?' he said to himself. 'I am generally pretty good at guessing riddles, and there must be some explanation of this mystery, if I can but hit upon it.'

But after thinking for another hour, the only alternative to the first idea that had occurred to him was that Dorothy, in her horror of the idea of a public trial and of being forced to appear in the witness box, had taken the desperate resolution to find this man herself, at the address he had mentioned to her and her father, to bribe him to desist from his persecution of her, and to warn him that unless he moved away at once the police would be on his track.

It was all so unlike the high-spirited child he had known, and the girl as he had believed her still to be, that it was difficult to credit that she would allow herself to be driven to take such a step as this, in order to escape what seemed to him a minor unpleasantness.

Still, as he told himself, there were men of tried bravery in many respects who were moral cowards, and it might well be that, though generally fearless, Dorothy might have a nervous shrinking from the thought of standing up in a crowded court, exposed to an inquisition that in many cases was almost a martyrdom. It was an awful mistake to have made. If the scoundrel had been bribed into silence now, he would be all the more certain to recommence his persecution later on, and after having once met with and paid him for his silence how could she refuse to do so when another demand was made?

One thing seemed to Ned Hampton unquestionable. He must maintain an absolute silence as to what he had seen—the harm was done now and could not be undone. He was certain that she had not noticed him, and could never suspect that he had her secret. As for himself there was nothing for him now but to stand aside altogether. Filled as he was with the deepest pity for Dorothy, he was powerless to help her. When the next trouble came it was her husband who would have to stand beside her, and to whom, sooner or later, she would have to own the false step she had taken.

He felt that at any rate it was out of the question that he should see her again at present. It was

fortunate that he had retired from the investigation in favour of Mr. Slippen, and could therefore run away for a bit without seeming to have deserted Mr. Hawtrey. He had thought about hiring a yacht, and this would serve as a pretext for him to run down to Ryde. He could easily put away a fortnight between that town, Cowes, Southampton, and Portsmouth. As to the yacht he had no real intention now of looking for one. He must wait for a while and see what happened next. He was sure to meet men he knew at Southsea, and anything was better than staying in London.

He accordingly at once wrote a note to Mr. Hawtrey, saying that it would be some time before Slippen obtained such evidence against Truscott as would put them in a position to bring it home to him, and that as he could not be of any use for a time he had resolved to run down for a week to Southsea, and look round the various yards in search of a yacht of about the size he wanted, for a cruise of six weeks or two months, with the option of taking her up the Mediterranean through the winter. Then he wrote several letters of excuse to houses where he had engagements, and started the next morning by the first train for Portsmouth. He was a fortnight absent, and on his return called on Mr. Hawtrey at an hour when he knew that he was not likely to meet Dorothy.

'So you are back again, Ned? Your note took me quite by surprise, for you had said nothing as to your going away when I met you early in the day.'

'No, sir, it was a sort of sudden inspiration. I was sick of London, and had had a very dull time of it going about to races for three weeks before; so I thought that I would have a complete change, made up my mind at once, packed my portmanteau, and was off. Have you had any news from Slippen?'

'None. He has written to me two or three times; his last note came this morning, saying that his boy has been watching the public-house ever since, and that the man has certainly not been there. The boy is a sharp fellow and found that the fellow had called in there on the very day before he began his watch, and he also discovered by bribing a postman where he had lodged, but upon going there found he had given up his room on the same day he had last been at the public-house, and had left no address, nor had the people of the house the slightest idea where he had gone. I suppose the fellow took fright at the publicity there had been about the affair; at any rate, no more of those letters have come since. That is certainly a comfort, but it looks as if we were never going to get to the bottom of the mystery. Of course, it is extremely annoying, but I suppose we shall live it down. Halliburn offered a reward of a hundred pounds for the discovery of Truscott's, or as he calls him Marvel's, address. That was a week ago, and he has received no answer as yet, which is certainly a fresh proof that the fellow was the author of the letters. If not, he himself would have turned up and claimed the reward.'

'That is not quite certain, Mr. Hawtrey. He has doubtless been concerned in many other shady transactions, and may think he is wanted for some other affair altogether.'

'You are right, that may be so; I did not think of that. Still, it is strange the offer of a reward has brought no news of him. He must be well known to numbers of men who would sell their own father for a hundred pounds.'

'If he is really alarmed he may have changed his name, and gone to some part of the country where he is altogether unknown, or he may have crossed the Channel to some of the French or Belgian ports. There is a lot of betting carried on from that side, and he may manage to live there as he has lived here—by fleecing fools.'

Two days later, Hampton met the Hawtreys at a dinner-party. Dorothy was looking pale and languid, but at times she roused herself and talked with almost feverish gaiety. Lord Halliburn was there; he was sitting next to Dorothy, and seemed silent and preoccupied, and looked, Hampton thought, vexed when she had one of her fits of talking. When they had rejoined the ladies after dinner Hampton was chatting with the lady he had taken down, and who was an old friend of his family.

'Is it not awfully sad, this affair of Miss Hawtrey's?' she said. 'It is evidently preying on her health. I never saw anybody more changed in the course of a few weeks. Of course, everyone who knows her is quite certain that there is no foundation whatever for these wicked libels about her. Still, naturally, people who don't know her think that there must be something in it, and she must know, wherever she goes, that people are talking about it. It is terrible! I do not know what I should do were she a daughter of mine.'

'Yes, it is a most painful position; there does not seem any method by which these anonymous libels can be met and answered. The most scandalous part of the business is that any notice of a thing of this sort should get into the papers. The form in which it was noticed rendered it impossible to obtain redress of any kind; the statements contained as to the annoyance caused by these letters, and as to the nature of their contents, were accurate, and Mr. Hawtrey is therefore unable to take any steps against them. I have known Miss Hawtrey from the time that she was a little child; as you are aware they are my greatest friends, and I assure you that one's powerlessness in these days to take any step to right a wrong of this sort, makes me wish I had lived at any time save in the middle of the nineteenth century. A hundred years ago one would have called out the editor or proprietor, or whatever he calls himself, of a paper that published this thing, and shot him like a dog; four hundred years ago one would have sent him a formal challenge to do battle in the lists; if one had lived in Italy a couple of centuries back, and had adopted the customs of the country, one would have had him removed by a stab in the back by a

bravo—not a manner that commends itself to me I own, but which, as against a man whose journal exists by attacking reputations is, I should consider, perfectly legitimate.'

'But he is not the chief offender in the case, Captain Hampton.'

'I don't know. The anonymous libeller could really have done no harm had it not been that there were organs that were ready to inform the world of his attacks upon this lady; the letters could have been burnt and none been any the wiser, and in time the annoyance would have ceased.'

'Do you think the author of these things will ever be found out?'

'I should hardly think so. It is clearly the outcome of malice on the part of some man or woman who has either a grudge against Mr. Hawtrey, his daughter, or Lord Halliburn, or of some one interested in breaking off Miss Hawtrey's engagement.'

'I don't think Lord Halliburn has behaved nicely in the matter,' Mrs. Dean said. 'If he had shown himself perfectly indifferent to the affair from the first, people would never have talked so much. It is his palpable annoyance that has more than confirmed these gossiping rumours.'

'Between ourselves, Mrs. Dean, although I should not at all mind his knowing it, my opinion is, that Halliburn is a cad.'

Mrs. Dean laughed. 'It is next door to blasphemy to speak in society of a peer as a cad, Captain Hampton; still, I am not at all sure that you are wrong. But I must be going; my husband has been making signs to me for the last ten minutes.'

CHAPTER VI

Captain Hampton had spoken harshly of Lord Halliburn, but then he was scarcely able to appreciate the difficulties of the young nobleman. Lord Halliburn was in many respects a model peer. His talents were more than respectable, his life was irreproachable, he was wealthy and yet not a spendthrift. The title was of recent creation, his father being the first holder of the earldom, having been raised to that rank for his political services to the Whig party, just as his grandfather, a wealthy manufacturer, had been rewarded for the bestowal of a park, a public library, and other benefactions to his native town, by a baronetcy. And yet Lord Halliburn supported his position as worthily as if the earldom had come down in an unbroken line from the days of the Henrys, and was held up as an example to less tranquil and studious spirits.

He had scarcely been popular at Eton, for he avoided both the river and the playing fields, and was one of a set who kept aloof from the rest, talked together upon politics, philosophy, and poetry, held mildly democratic opinions as to the improvement of the existing state of things, were particular about their dress, and subdued in their talk. That they were looked upon with something like contempt by those who regarded a place in the eight or the eleven as conferring the proudest distinction that could be aimed at, they regarded not only with complacency, but almost with pride, and privately considered themselves to belong to a far higher order than these rough athletes. At college, his mode of life was but little altered. He belonged to a small coterie who lived apart from the rest, held academic discussions in each others' rooms upon many abstruse subjects, were familiar with Kant, regarded the German thinkers with respectful admiration, quoted John Stuart Mill and Spencer as the masters of English thought, were mildly enthusiastic over Carlyle and Ruskin, and had leanings towards Comte and Swedenborg.

It was only at the Union that Lord Everington, as he then was, came in contact with those outside his own set, and here he quite held his own, for he was a neat and polished speaker, never diverging into flights of fancy, but precise as to his facts and close in his reasoning. His speeches were always listened to with attention, and though far from being one of the most popular, he was regarded as being one of the cleverest and most promising debaters at the Union. Just as he was leaving college a terrible blow fell upon him, for at the sudden death of his father, he succeeded to the title. To some men the loss would not have been without its consolations. To him it meant the destruction of the scheme on which he had laid out his life. He had intended to enter Parliament as soon as possible, and had sufficient confidence in himself to feel sure that he should succeed in political life, and would ere many years become an Under-Secretary, and in due course of time a member of the Cabinet.

Now all this prospect seemed shattered. In the Peers he would have but slight opportunity of distinguishing himself, and would simply be the Earl of Halliburn, and nothing more. It was, however, to his credit that even in the dull atmosphere of the Gilded Chamber he had, to some extent, made his mark. He studied diligently every question that came up, and, while clever enough not to bore the House by long speeches, he came, ere long, to be considered a very well-informed and useful young member of it, and had now the honour of being Under-Secretary for the Colonies. It was a recognition of his work that he enjoyed keenly, although he felt bitterly how few were his opportunities in comparison to what they would have been had his chief been in the Peers and he in the Commons.

As it was, his fellow peers evinced no curiosity whatever in regard to colonial matters, and it was of rare occurrence that any question was asked upon the affairs of which he had charge. Nevertheless, it was a great step. It brought him within the official circle, and more than once the

mastery of the subject shown in his answers had won for him a few words of warm commendation from the Leader of the House.

Then came, as he now thought it, the unfortunate idea of marriage. It would add to his weight, he had considered. As a bachelor his house in Park Lane, his place in the country, and his wealth, were but of slight advantage to him, but, as his chief one day hinted to him, he would be able to be of far more use to his party were he in a position to entertain largely.

'We are rather behindhand in that respect, Halliburn. Four-fifths of the good houses are Tory. These things count for a good deal. You may say that it is absurd that it should be so, but that does not alter the fact that it gratifies the wives and daughters of the country members to have such houses open to them. You have plenty of money, and you don't throw it away, so that you can afford to do things well. If I were you, I should certainly look out for a wife.

'She need not be a politician. She need not even belong to one of our families. Whatever her people's politics she will naturally, as your wife, come in time to take your views; and besides, there is no harm, rather the reverse, in keeping up a connection with that side. You must see as well as I do that the time is fast coming when there will be a considerable change in politics. Even now we are far nearer, upon all important points, to the Tories than we are to these Radical fellows who at present vote with us, but who in time will want to control us. The Tories have come much nearer to us, and we to them. Already we are scarcely in a majority on our own side of the house, and it will not be many years before we shall have to concede the demand to give a large share of ministerial appointments to Radicals. We shall then perceive that we must choose between becoming the followers of men whose ways and politics we hate, or the allies of men of our own stamp, whose way of looking at things differs but very little from our own. Therefore, I should say it would be just as well for you to choose a wife from their ranks as from your own.'

Lord Halliburn had, as was his custom, thought the matter over coolly and carefully, and had come to the conclusion that it would be well for him to marry. He was by no means blind to the fact that there would be no great difficulty in his doing so. He was not unobservant of the frequency of invitations to houses where there were daughters of marriageable age, and had often smiled quietly at the innocent manœuvres upon the part both of mothers and daughters. He had, however, never seriously given the matter a thought, being rather of opinion that a wife would interfere with his work, would compel him to take a more prominent part in society, and would expect him to devote a considerable proportion of his time to her. Now that the matter was placed before him in another light, he saw that there was a good deal to be said on the other side. The fact that the suggestion came from his chief was not without weight, and he decided accordingly to marry.

He proceeded about the matter in the same methodical manner in which he carried out the other work of his life, and was not very long in deciding in favour of Miss Hawtrey. She was one of the belles of the season, and, as was no secret, had refused two or three excellent offers. There would, therefore, be a certain *éclat* in carrying her off. She belonged to an old county family. Her father, although a Conservative, had taken no prominent part in politics, and his daughter would no doubt soon prove amenable to his own opinions and wishes. Above all, she would make a charming hostess. Having once made up his mind, he set to work seriously, and soon became interested in it to a degree that surprised him.

To his rank and his position in the Ministry he speedily found that she was absolutely indifferent, and was as ready to dance and laugh with an impecunious younger son as with himself. This indifference stimulated his efforts, and as a man, as well as a peer and politician, he was gratified when he received an affirmative reply to his proposal. His chief himself congratulated him upon his engagement, and he knew that he was an object of envy to many, for in addition to being a belle, Miss Hawtrey was also an heiress, and for a short time he was highly gratified at the course of events. It was thus he felt cruelly hard when, within a fortnight of his engagement, this unpleasant affair took place.

It seemed intolerable to him that the lady whom he had chosen should be the subject of these libellous attacks. He did not for an instant doubt that she was, as she said, wholly ignorant of the author of these letters, and that there was nothing whatever on which these demands for money could be based. Still, the business was none the less annoying, and in his irritation he had taken the step that had unfortunately resulted in the matter becoming public. He was angry with himself; angry, although he could have given no reason for the feeling, with Dorothy; very angry with society in general, for entertaining the slightest suspicion of the lady whom he had selected to be his wife. That such suspicion should, even in the vaguest manner, exist, was in itself wholly at variance with his object in entering upon matrimony. The wife of the Earl of Halliburn should not be spoken of except in terms of admiration; that the finger of suspicion should be pointed at her was intolerable.

His house might even be shunned, instead of the entry there being so exclusive as to be eagerly sought for. Of course, it was not her fault, and it should make no difference as to his course. Still, the affair was, he freely owned, annoying in the extreme. He had had but few troubles, and bore this badly. The belief that the clerks in his office were talking of his affairs kept him in a state of constant irritation, and he fancied that even the impassive door-keeper smiled furtively as he passed him on his way in and out. Being in the habit of attaching a good deal of importance to his personality he believed that anything that affected him was a matter of much interest to the world at large, and that it occupied the thoughts of other people almost as much as it did his own. For the first time he felt that there were some advantages in a seat in the Upper House. In

that grave, and for the most part scanty, gathering of men, generally much older than himself, he could feel that his troubles elicited but little more than a passing remark, and, indeed, the only sign of their knowledge of them that even his irritated self-love could detect was a slightly added warmth and kindness on the part of two or three of his leaders.

With the younger men it was different. 'I never thought much of that fellow Halliburn,' said Frank Delancey, who had been in his form at Eton, and was now, like himself, an under secretary, but in the Commons. 'I never believe in fellows who moon their time away instead of going in for the water or fields, and Halliburn is showing now that he is not of good stuff. He has not got the cotton out of his veins yet. Of course, it is not pleasant for a girl you are engaged to, to be talked about; but a man with any pluck and honour would not show it as he does. Instead of going about looking bright and pleasant, as if such a paltry accusation was too contemptible to give him a moment's thought, he gives himself the airs of Hamlet when he begins to suspect his uncle, and walks about looking as irritable as a bear with a sore head. He hasn't even the decency to behave like a gentleman when he is with her, I hear. Young Vaux, of the Foreign Office, told me yesterday that he met them both at dinner the day before, and the fellow looked downright cross, instead of being, as he ought to have been, more courteous and devoted than usual. I fancy that you will hear that it is broken off before long. I don't think Dorothy Hawtrey is the sort of girl to stand any nonsense.'

'No, I quite agree with you, Delancey,' his companion—Fitzhurst, member for an Irish constituency—said. 'Still, I should say it would last until this blows over. As long as the engagement goes on it is in itself a sort of proof that everything is all right, and that these reports are but a parcel of lies. The girl would feel that if she broke it off fresh stories would get about, and that half the people would say that it was his doing and that the stories were true, after all.'

'I will bet you a fiver that it does not come off, Tom.'

'No, I would not take that, but I would not mind betting evens that it lasts three months.'

'Well, I will go five pounds even with you, and I will take five to one, if you like, that it does not last another month.'

'No, I will take the even bet, but not the other. There is no saying what developments may turn up.'

But Dorothy had even before this offered to release Lord Halliburn from the engagement; he had refused the offer with vehemence, declaring himself absolutely unaffected by the story, and, indeed, taking an injured tone and accusing her of doubting his love for her.

'I am not doubting your love, Algernon,' she replied, 'but it is impossible for me to avoid seeing that the matter is a great annoyance to you, and that it is troubling you very much. You have several times spoken quite crossly to me, and I am not in the habit of being spoken crossly to. My father is naturally quite as annoyed as you are, but as he believes, as you do, that the accusations are entirely false, he is not in any way vexed with me.'

'Nor am I, Dorothy; not in the slightest degree, though I own that the knowledge that people are talking about us does irritate me; but certainly I did not mean to speak crossly to you, and am very sorry if I did so.'

And so the matter had dropped, but Dorothy had none the less felt that at a time when Halliburn ought to have been kinder than usual, and to have helped her to show a brave front in the face of these rumours, he had added to instead of lightening her troubles.

One morning at breakfast Dorothy gave an exclamation of surprise upon opening one of her letters.

'What is it, my dear?'

'I don't understand it, father. Here is a letter from Gilliat, saying he would be obliged if I will hand over to an assistant who will call for it to-day, whichever of the two diamond tiaras I may have decided not to retain, as he expects a customer this afternoon whom it might suit. I don't know what he means. Of course I have not been choosing any jewels. I should not think of such a thing without consulting you, even if I had had money enough in my pocket to indulge in such adornments.'

She handed the letter to her father.

'It must be some mistake,' he said, after glancing it through; 'the letter must have been meant for some one else. It must be some stupid blunder on the part of a clerk. We will go round there together after breakfast. I have not bought you anything of the sort yet, dear, and was not intending to do so until the time came nearer; indeed, I had intended to get your mother's diamonds re-set for you. Of course, I should have gone to Gilliat's, as we have always dealt with his firm.'

After breakfast they drove to Bond Street.

'I want to see Mr. Gilliat himself, if he is in,' Mr. Hawtrey said.

Mr. Gilliat was in.

'My daughter has received a letter which is evidently meant for some one else, Mr. Gilliat. It is about two diamond tiaras, which, it seems, somebody has taken in order to choose one of them. Of course it was not intended for her.'

Gilliat took the letter, glanced at it, and then at Dorothy. 'I do not quite understand,' he said doubtfully.

'Not understand?' Mr. Hawtrey repeated with some irritation. 'Do you mean to say that Miss Hawtrey has been supplied with two diamond tiaras?'

'Would you mind stepping into my room behind, Mr. Hawtrey?' the jeweller replied, leading the way into an inner room. As he closed the door his eye met Dorothy's with a look of inquiry, as if asking for instructions. Hers expressed nothing but surprise. 'Am I to understand, Mr. Hawtrey,' he asked gravely, after a pause, 'that Miss Hawtrey denies having received the tiaras?'

'Certainly you are,' Mr. Hawtrey said hotly, 'she knows nothing whatever about them.'

The jeweller pressed his lips tightly together, thought for a moment, and then touched a bell on the table. An assistant entered. 'Ask Mr. Williams to step here for a moment.'

The principal assistant entered: 'Mr. Williams, do you remember on what day it was that Miss Hawtrey selected the two tiaras?'

'It was about three weeks ago, sir; I cannot tell you the exact day without consulting the sales book.'

'Do so at once, if you please.'

Mr. Williams went out and returned in a moment with the book.

'It was the 15th of last month, sir—July.'

'You served her yourself, I think, Mr. Williams, or, rather, perhaps you assisted me in doing so?'

'Certainly, sir.'

'What was the value of the tiaras, Mr. Williams?'

'One was twelve hundred, the other was twelve hundred and fifty, sir.'

'She took them away herself?'

'Certainly, sir; I offered to place them in the carriage for her, but she said it was a few doors up the street, and she would take them herself.'

'You have not a shadow of doubt about the facts, Mr. Williams?'

'None whatever, sir,' the assistant said, in some surprise.

'You know Miss Hawtrey well by sight?'

'Certainly, sir; she has been here many times, both by herself, for repairs or alterations to her watch or jewellery, and with other ladies.'

'Thank you, Mr. Williams, that will do at present.'

The door closed and the jeweller turned to his customers.

Mr. Hawtrey looked confounded, his daughter bewildered.

'I do not understand it,' she said. 'I have not been here, Mr. Gilliat, since the beginning of May, when I came to you about replacing a pearl that had become discoloured in my necklace.'

'I remember that visit perfectly, Miss Hawtrey,' the jeweller said gravely, 'but I must confirm what my assistant has said. Allow me to recall to you that, in the first place, you told me that in view of an approaching event you required a tiara of diamonds, and of course, having heard of your engagement to Lord Halliburn, I understood your allusion, and came in here with you, and had the honour of showing you five or six tiaras. Of these you selected two, and said that you should like to show them to Mr. Hawtrey before choosing. I offered to send an assistant with them, but you said that your carriage was standing a few doors off and that you would rather take them yourself. Our firm having had the honour of serving Mr. Hawtrey and his family for several generations, and knowing you perfectly, I had, of course, no hesitation in complying with your request. I may say, as an evidence of the exactness of my memory, that Miss Hawtrey was dressed exactly as she is at present. I had, of course, an opportunity of noticing her dress as she was examining the goods. She had on that blue walking dress with small red spots, and the bonnet with blue feathers with red tips.'

'Will you give me the hour as well as the day at which you say my daughter called here?' Mr. Hawtrey said sternly.

'My own impression is that it was about three o'clock,' the jeweller said, after a moment's thought.

'Will you call your assistant and ask him?'

Mr. Williams being summoned said that he had no distinct recollection as to the precise time, but that it was certainly somewhat early in the afternoon. He had returned from lunch about two, and it was not for some little time after that that Miss Hawtrey called; he should say it was between three and half past three.

'That will be near enough,' Mr. Hawtrey said. 'You shall hear from me again shortly, Mr. Gilliat; I know that I can rely upon you to say nothing in the meantime to anyone on the subject.'

'Certainly, Mr. Hawtrey.'

'Now, Dorothy, let us be going.'

Dorothy at the moment was unable to follow her father; she had sunk down in a chair, pale and trembling; her look of intense surprise had given way to one of alarm and horror, and it was not until she had drunk some water that the jeweller brought her, that she recovered sufficiently to take her father's arm and walk through the shop to the carriage.

'Well, Dorothy,' Mr. Hawtrey said, as they drove off, 'what does all this mean?'

'I have not the least idea, father; I am utterly bewildered.'

'You still say that you did not go to the shop—that you did not examine those tiaras and choose two of them?'

'Of course I say so, father. I have never been in the shop since I went about that pearl. Surely, father, you cannot suspect me of having stolen those things.'

'I am the last man in the world to suspect you of anything dishonourable, Dorothy, but this evidence is staggering. Here are two men ready to swear to the whole particulars of the incident. They are both sufficiently acquainted with your appearance to be able to recognise you readily. They can even swear to your dress. That you should do such a thing seems to be incredible and impossible, but what am I to think? You could not have done such a thing in your senses; it would be the act of a madwoman, especially to go to a shop where you are so well known.'

'But why should I have done it, father? I could not have worn them without being detected at once.'

'You could not have worn them,' her father agreed, 'but they might have been turned into money had you great occasion for it.'

Dorothy started.

'Do you mean, father—oh, surely, you never can mean that I could have stolen those things to turn them into money in order to satisfy the man who has been writing those letters?'

'No, my dear. I don't mean that myself, but that is certainly what anyone who did not know you would say. There, don't cry so, child,' for Dorothy was sobbing hysterically now; 'do not let us talk any more until we get home. We have got the day and hour at which you were supposed to have been at Gilliat's. Perhaps we may be able to prove that you were engaged somewhere else, and that it was impossible you could have been at Gilliat's about that time.'

Nothing more was said until they reached home.

'You had better come into my study, Dorothy; we shall not be disturbed there. Now, dear,' he said, 'let us have the matter out. I can only say this, that if you again give me your assurance that you are absolutely ignorant of all this, and that you never went to Gilliat's on the day they say you did, I shall accept your assurance as implicitly as I did before; but before you speak, remember, dear, what that entails. These people are prepared to swear to you, and will, of course, take steps to obtain payment for these things. If such steps are taken the whole matter will be gone into to the bottom. Remember everything depends on your frankness. It will be terribly painful for you to acknowledge that, after all, you had got into some entanglement, and that you did in a moment of madness take these things in order to free yourself from it. It would be terribly painful for me to hear this, but upon hearing it I should of course take steps to raise this twenty-five hundred pounds, for at present I do not happen to have so much at my bankers, and to settle Gilliat's claim. But even painful as this would be it would be a thousand times better than to have all this gone into in public. On the other hand, if you still assure me that you know nothing of it I must refuse to pay the money, both because to do so would be to admit that you took the things, and because, in the second place, whoever has taken these tiaras—for that some one has done so we cannot doubt—may again personate you and involve us in fresh trouble and difficulties.'

'I did not do it, father; indeed I did not do it. I have had no entanglement; I was in no need of money; I have never been near Gilliat's shop, unless, indeed, I was altogether out of my mind and did it in a state of unconsciousness, which I cannot think for a moment. I have worried over this until I hardly knew what I was doing, but I never could have gone to that shop and done as they say without having a remembrance of it. Why, the last place I should choose if I had ever thought of stealing would be a place where I was perfectly known. Indeed, father, I am altogether innocent. I cannot account for it, not in the least, but I am sure that I had nothing to do with it.'

'Then, my dear, I will not doubt you for another moment,' Mr. Hawtrey said, kissing her tenderly. 'Now we just stand in the same position as we did in regard to the other affair; we have got to find out all about it. In the first place, get your book of engagements, and let us see what you

were doing on the afternoon of the 15th.'

Dorothy went out of the room and soon returned with a pocket book.

'Not satisfactory, I can see,' Mr. Hawtrey said, as he glanced at her face.

'No, father; here it is, you see—"Lunch with Mrs. Milford;" nothing else. I remember about that afternoon now. I drove in the carriage to Mrs. Milford's, and had lunch at half-past one; there was one other lady there. Mrs. Milford had tickets for a concert, at St. James's Hall I think it was, but I am not sure about that. I had a headache, and would not go with them; and, besides, I had some shopping to do. I got out of her brougham in Hanover Square. I went into Bond Street certainly, and I got some gloves and scent; then I went into Cocks' and looked through the new music and chose one or two pieces, then I went into the French Gallery. Mrs. Milford had been talking about it at lunch, so I thought I would drop in. There were very few people there, so I sauntered round and sat down and looked at those I liked best. It was quiet and pleasant. I must have been in there a long time. When I came out I took a cab and drove straight home. It was six o'clock when I got back, and I remember I went straight up to my room and had a cup of tea there, then I took off my gown and my maid combed my hair, as it was time for me to dress for dinner. My head was aching a good deal and it did me good. We dined at the Livingstones' that evening.'

'It is unfortunate, certainly, Dorothy. I had hoped we might have been able to have fixed you somewhere that would have proved conclusively that you could not possibly have been at Gilliat's that afternoon. As it is, your recollections do not help us at all, for your time from somewhere about three till six is practically unaccounted for. The people you bought the gloves and scent from could prove that you were there, but you probably would not have been many minutes in their shop. Cocks' may remember that you were there a quarter of an hour or so.'

'I think I was there half-an-hour, father.'

'Well, say half-an-hour; the rest of the time you were really in the picture gallery, but it is scarcely likely that, even if the man who took your money at the door or the attendant inside noticed you sufficiently to swear to your face, they would be able to fix the day, still less have noticed how long you stayed. At any rate it is clear that it would be possible for you to have done all you say you did that afternoon and still to have spared time for that visit to Gilliat's.'

'I see that it is all terrible, father, but what can it all mean?'

'That is more than I can understand, Dorothy. At present we are face to face with what seems to me two impossibilities. I mean looking at them from an outsider's point of view. The one is that these shopmen should have taken any one else for you when they are so well acquainted with your face, and are able to swear even to the dress. No less difficult is it to believe that did you require money so urgently that you were ready to commit a crime to obtain it, you would go to the people to whom you were perfectly well known, and so destroy every hope and even every possibility of the crime passing undetected. One theory is as difficult to believe as the other. Those letters were a mystery, but this affair is infinitely more puzzling. I really do not know what to do. I must take advice in the matter, of course. I would rather pay the money five times over than permit it to become public, but who is to know what form this strange persecution is to take next?'

'Do you think there is any connection between this and the other, father?'

Mr. Hawtrey shook his head. 'I do not see the most remote connection between the two things. But there may be; who can say?'

'I would rather face it out,' Dorothy said, passionately. 'I would rather be imprisoned as a thief than go on as I have been doing for the last six weeks; anything would be better. Even if you were to pay the money the story might get about somehow, just as the other did. Then the fact that you paid it would be looked upon as a proof that I had taken the diamonds. Who will you consult, father?'

'My lawyers would be the proper people to consult, undoubtedly; but they were quite useless before, and this is wholly out of their line, I think. I will take a hansom and go across to Jermyn Street, and see if I can find Ned Hampton in. I have great faith in his judgment, and no one could be kinder than he has been in the matter. You don't mind my speaking to him?'

'Oh, no, father. I would rather that you should speak to him than to any one.'

Captain Hampton was in and listened in silent consternation to Mr. Hawtrey's story, and for a long time made no answer to the question.

'I can make neither head nor tail of it, Ned. What do you think?'

At first sight it seemed to him that this story explained the meeting he had seen opposite the Agricultural Hall. She had either turned the diamonds into money or had handed them over to this man to buy his silence. Then his faith in Dorothy rose again. It was absolutely absurd to suppose for a moment that she should have thus committed a crime which must be certainly brought home to her, and which would ruin her far more than any revelations this man might make could do.

'It is an extraordinary story, Mr. Hawtrey,' he said, at last; 'even putting our knowledge of your

daughter's character out of the question, is it possible to believe that any young lady possessed of ordinary shrewdness would go to a place where she was well known, and, have acted in the way that she is reported to have done?'

'It would certainly seem incredible, Ned, but here are two or three people prepared to swear that she did do so, and that they identified her by her dress as well as by herself.'

'We must look at the matter in every light, Mr. Hawtrey; however confident you may feel of her innocence, we must look at it from the light in which other people will regard it. They will say, of course, that Miss Hawtrey had urgent need of money for some purpose or other, and will naturally suppose that reason to be her desire to silence the author of those letters. They will say, that although she would of course know that the bill would be sent in to her father, she would be sure that he would rather pay the money than betray her sin to the world.'

'I quite see that,' Mr. Hawtrey agreed, 'but if she had been driven to desperation by this fellow, why did she not come direct to me in the first place, instead of committing a theft to drive me to pay, when she might be pretty sure in some way or other the facts would leak out, and do her infinitely more harm with the world than any indiscretion committed years ago could do? Besides, had she done it for this purpose, would she not have carried through that course of action, and when the bill came in have implored me to pay it without question, and so save her from disgrace and ruin?'

'That certainly is so,' Captain Hampton said, as his face brightened visibly; 'the more one thinks of it the more mysterious the affair seems. I should like to think it all over quietly. I suppose you will not go out this evening?'

'Certainly not. There will be no more going out until this mystery has been cleared up. It has been hard enough for Dorothy to bear up over her last trouble, but it would be out of the question for her to go into society with this terrible thing hanging over her.'

'Then I will come round about nine o'clock. I shall have had time to think it over before that.'

Captain Hampton's cogitations came to nothing. He walked up and down his little room until the lodger in the parlour below went out in despair to his club. He tried the effect of an hour's stroll in the least frequented part of Kensington Gardens. He drove to Mr. Slippen's to inquire if any clue had been obtained as to Truscott's movements. He ate a solitary dinner at his lodgings and smoked an enormous quantity of tobacco, but could see no clue whatever to the mystery. The meeting he had witnessed was to him a piece of evidence far more damning than that of the jeweller and his assistants. If she could explain that, the other matter might be got over, though he could not see how. If she could not explain it, it was evident that he had nothing to do but to advise her father to settle the business at any cost.

CHAPTER VII

At nine o'clock Captain Hampton called at Chester Square and was shown into the drawing-room, from which, as previously arranged, Mr. Hawtrey had dismissed Mrs. Daintree, telling her that he had some private matters to discuss with Ned Hampton.

Mrs. Daintree had retired tearfully, saying that for her part she preferred hearing nothing about this painful matter—meaning that of the letters, for she was ignorant of the later development.

Dorothy looked flushed and feverish. Her eyes were large and brilliant, and there was a restlessness in her manner as she shook hands with her old friend.

'Well, Ned,' she asked, with an attempt at playfulness, 'what is your verdict—guilty or not guilty?'

'You need not ask me, Dorothy. Even the evidence of my own eyes would scarcely avail to convince me against your word.' Then he turned to her father. 'I have done nothing but think the matter over since you left me, and I can see but one solution—an utterly improbable one, I admit—but I will not tell you what it is until I have spoken to Miss Hawtrey. Would you mind my putting a question or two to her alone?'

'Certainly not, Ned,' said Mr. Hawtrey, rising.

But Dorothy exclaimed: 'No, no, father, I will not have it so. I don't know what Captain Hampton is going to ask me, but nothing that he can ask me nor my answers could I wish you not to hear. Please sit down again. There shall be no mysteries between us, at any rate.'

'Perhaps it is best so,' Captain Hampton agreed, though he felt the ring of pain in the girl's voice at what she believed to be a sign that he doubted her. 'I am willing, as I said just now, to disbelieve the evidence of my own eyes on your word. I am determined to believe you innocent. It is impossible for me to do otherwise. But there is one matter I want cleared up. On the fifteenth of last month—that is the day on which these things were missed—I saw a lady so exactly like you in face and in dress that I should under any other circumstances be prepared to swear to her, speaking to the man Truscott, in the Liverpool Road, Islington. This was at about half-past four in the afternoon.'

A look of blank wonderment passed across Dorothy's face as he spoke, and then changed into one of indignation.

'I was never in Islington in my life, Captain Hampton; I never heard the name of Liverpool Road that I know of. I have never seen this man, Truscott, since that day at Epsom. And you have believed this? You believe that I would meet this man alone, for the purpose, I suppose, of bribing him to silence? I have been mistaken in you altogether, Captain Hampton. I thought you were a friend.'

'Stop, Dorothy,' her father said, authoritatively, as with her head erect she walked towards the door, 'you must listen to this; it is altogether too important to be treated in this way. We must hear what Captain Hampton really saw, and he will tell us why he did not mention the fact to me before. Sit down, my dear. Now, Captain Hampton, please tell it to us again.'

Ned Hampton repeated his story, and then went on,

'You know I went suddenly out of town, Mr. Hawtrey. That I had been mistaken never once occurred to me. Up to that time I had never for an instant doubted your daughter's assertions that she knew nothing as to any letters in the possession of Truscott. That morning, as you may remember, I mentioned before you the name of the place where he was to be found, and when, as I thought, I saw her with him, it certainly appeared to me possible that after the dread Miss Hawtrey expressed of appearing in a public court to prosecute him, she might, in a moment of weakness, have gone off to see the man, to warn him of the consequences that would ensue if he continued to persecute her, and to tell him that unless he moved he would in a few hours be in custody. I thought such an action altogether foreign to her nature, but I own that it never for a moment occurred to me to doubt the evidence of my own eyes, especially as the person was dressed exactly as your daughter had been when I saw her that morning. That the person I saw was not her I am now quite ready to admit. In that case it is morally certain that the person who took away those jewels was also not her; and this strengthens the idea I had before conceived, and which seemed, as I told you, a most improbable one, namely, that there is another person who so closely resembles your daughter that she might be mistaken for her, and, if so, this person is acting with the man Truscott. Should this conjecture be the true one it explains what has hitherto been so mysterious. The letters were designed to injure your daughter in public estimation, and to prepare the way for this extraordinary robbery, which would enrich Truscott as well as gratify his revenge. What do you think, Mr. Hawtrey?'

'The idea is too new for me to grasp it altogether, Ned. Until now there seemed no possible explanation of the mystery. This, certainly, strange and improbable as it is, does afford a solution.'

'Well, father, I will leave you to talk it over,' Dorothy said, rising again, 'unless Captain Hampton has seen me anywhere else and wishes to question me about that also. And I think, father, that it will be much better in future to put the matter altogether into the hands of a lawyer; it would be his business to do his best for me whether he thought me innocent or guilty. At any rate, it is more pleasant to be suspected by people you know nothing about, than by those you thought were your friends.' Then without waiting for an answer she swept from the room.

'No use stopping her now,' her father said, shrugging his shoulders; 'it is not often that I have known Dorothy fairly out of temper from the time she was a child, but when she is it is better to let her cool down and come round of herself.'

'It will be a long time before she comes round as far as I am concerned,' Captain Hampton said. 'I am not surprised that she should be indignant that I should have suspected her for a moment, but I don't see how I could have helped it. I saw her, or someone as much like her as if it was herself in a looking-glass, talking to this man Truscott, the very day when we had for the first time found out where we were likely to lay hands on him. What could anyone suppose? I did not think for a moment that she had done anything really wrong, or even, after what she had said, that he could hold letters of any importance; but she had evidently so great a dread of publicity that, as I say, it did strike me she had gone to meet him in order to warn him, and perhaps to get back any trumpery letters he might have had, stolen from her or from some one else. I did think this up to the time when you told me of this affair at the jeweller's. That seemed so utterly and wholly impossible that I became convinced there must be some entirely different solution, if we could but hit upon it, and the only idea that occurred to me was that of there being some one else exactly like her, and that this person, whoever she is, has been used by Truscott both to injure your daughter and to obtain plunder.'

'I don't see how you could have helped suspecting as you did, when you saw Truscott speaking with some one whom you did not doubt being Dorothy. Had I been in your place and witnessed that meeting, it seems to me that I must have doubted her myself. Though I am her father, I own that I did doubt her for a moment this morning when I heard the story at Gilliat's; but let us leave that alone for a moment, Ned; the pressing question is, what am I to do?'

'I will give no opinion,' Captain Hampton said firmly; 'that must be a question for you and Miss Hawtrey to decide. If my conjecture is right, and this man, Truscott, and some woman closely resembling your daughter are working to obtain plunder on the strength of that likeness, you may be sure that this successful *coup* they have made will only be the first of a series. On the other hand, you have not a shadow of evidence to adduce against Gilliat's claim; there is simply her assertion against that of two or three other people, and if he sues you, as, of course, he will if

you do not pay, it seems to me certain that a jury would give the verdict against you—unless, of course, we can put this other woman and Truscott into the dock. Should such a verdict be given, although some might have their doubts as to this extraordinary story, the public in general would conclude that Miss Hawtrey was a thief and a liar. There is no doubt that your daughter's advice is the one to be followed, and if I were you I would go to Charles Levine, the first thing in the morning, lay the whole case before him, and put yourself in his hands.'

'I will do so, Ned. Should I mention to him that you saw her, as you thought, with Truscott?'

'That must be as you think fit, sir. I don't think I should do so unless it were absolutely necessary. He does not know your daughter as we do, and would infallibly put the worst construction upon it. I should confine myself to the story of the letters and the jewels, stating that you believe there is a connection between them, and that, as you implicitly believe Miss Hawtrey's word, the only conclusion you can possibly come to is that the person who visited Gilliat's was some adventuress bearing a strong resemblance to her, and trading on that resemblance.'

'But how about the dress, Ned?'

'If it was, as I take it, a preconceived plot, carefully prepared, one can readily conceive that Miss Hawtrey's movements had been watched and that a dress and bonnet closely resembling hers had been got in readiness.'

'It is an ugly business, Ned,' Mr. Hawtrey said, irritably. 'You and I believe Dorothy to be innocent, but the more one looks at it the more one sees how difficult it will be to persuade other people that she is so. However, I will see Levine in the morning. He has had more difficult cases in his hands than any man living.'

'That is the best thing you can do, sir. Now I will say good-night. You know where I am to be found, and I must ask you to write to me there and make an appointment for me to meet you if you want to see me. I shall still do what I can in the matter, and shall spare no efforts to endeavour to trace this man Truscott, and if I can find him it is probable that I shall be able to find the woman; but please do not let Miss Hawtrey know that I am taking any further part in the matter. She is deeply offended with me, and from her point of view this is perfectly natural. She thinks I ought to have trusted her and believed in her in spite of any evidence whatever, even that of my own eyes, and she is naturally extremely sore that one whom she regarded as a close friend should not have done so. I regret it deeply myself, but seeing what I saw—'

'You could not help doing so, Ned,' Mr. Hawtrey broke in warmly; 'as I told you I should have doubted her myself. Do not worry yourself about that. When she thinks it over she will see that you were in no way to blame.'

'That will be a long time first,' Captain Hampton said, gravely; 'situated as she is, and harassed as she has been, it is very difficult to forgive a want of trust on the part of those in whose faith and support you had implicit confidence. I shall be very glad if you will let me know what Levine advises.'

'That I will certainly do. I will write to you after I have seen him and had a talk with Dorothy. There is the affair with Halliburn, which complicates the whole question confoundedly. I wish to goodness he would start for a trip to China and not come back until it is all over. It is lucky that that they have got a serious debate on to-night in the Upper House, and that he was, as he told us when he called this afternoon, unable to go to the Alberys; if it hadn't been so he would have been here by this time, to inquire what had occurred to make us send our excuses at the last moment. He will be round here the first thing after breakfast. Well, good night, Ned, if you must be going.'

On reaching his lodgings Captain Hampton found a boy sitting on the doorstep.

'Halloa,' he said, 'who are you? Out of luck, and want something to get supper with, I suppose?'

'I wanted to speak to you, Captain,' the boy said, standing up.

'Why, you are the boy from Slippen's; have you got any news for me?'

'No, Captain, I ain't come on his account, I have come on my own. I have left Slippen for good.'

'Well, come up stairs; we can't talk at the door. Now what is it?' he asked, as he sat down.

'Well, sir, it is just this: I have left Slippen. You see, it was this way: I was a-watching a female party and she wur a good sort. I got up as a crossing sweeper, and she never went across without giving me a penny and speaking kind like, and one day she sent me out a plate of victuals; so I didn't much like the job, and when Slippen wanted me to say I had seen a bit more than I had, I up and told him as I wasn't going to. Then he gave me a cuff on the head and I gave him some cheek, and he told me to take myself out of it and never let him see my face again, so you see here I am.'

'I see you are. But why are you here?'

'Well, you see, Captain, you allus spoke nice to me over there, and I says to myself, "If I was ever to leave the governor, that is just the sort of gent as I should like to work for." I can clean boots with any one, and I could run errands, and do all sorts of odd jobs, and if you still want to find that chap I was after I would hunt him up for you all over London.'

'You are quite sure, Jacob, that you have done with Mr. Slippen? I should not like him to think that I had taken you away from him.'

'I ain't a-going back to him no ways,' the boy said, positively, 'not even if he would have me; and after what I said to him he would not do that. He called me a blooming young vaggerbond, and I says to him, "Vaggerbond yourself, ain't you wanting to make up false evidence agin a female? You are worse nor a vaggerbond," says I. "You are just the worst kind of a spy," says I, "and a liar at that." Then I had to make a bolt for it, and he arter me, and he run nigh fifty yards before he stopped; that is enough to show how mad he wor over it. First of all I thinks as I would go to the Garden, and take to odd jobs and sleeping under the waggons, as I used to do afore I took up with him. Then I says to myself, "There is that Captain Hampton; he is a nice sort of gent. I could get along first-rate with him if he would have me.'"

'But those clothes you have got on, Jacob; I suppose Slippen gave you those?'

'Not he; Slippen ain't that sort; he got the clothes for me, and says he, "These 'ere clothes cost twenty-two bob. I intend to give you half-a-crown a week, and," says he, "I shall stop a bob a week for your clothes." I have been with him about half a year, so we are square as to the things.'

'But how did you live on eighteenpence a week?'

'I got a bob now and then from people who came to Slippen. When they knew as I was doing the watching for them they would tip me, so as to give me a h'interest in the case, as they said. I used to reckon on making two bob a week that way, so with Slippen's eighteenpence, I had sixpence a day for grub. I have got my old things wrapped up in the cupboard. I used to use them mostly when I went out watching. I can get them any time; I have got the key. I used to have to let myself in and out, so I have only got to watch till I see him go out, and then go in and get my things, and I can leave the key on the table when I come out.'

Captain Hampton looked at the boy for some time in silence; it really seemed a stroke of good luck that had thrown him in his way. There was no doubt of his shrewdness; he was honest so far as his ideas of honesty went. He wished to serve him, and would probably be faithful. He himself felt altogether at sea as to how to set about the quest for this man and the unknown woman who must be his associate. Even if the boy could be of no material assistance, he would have him to talk to, and there was no one else to whom he could say anything on the subject.

'Well, Jacob,' he said at last, 'I am disposed to give you a trial.'

'Thank you, Captain,' the lad said gratefully. 'I will do my best for you, sir, whatever you tell me. I knows as I ain't much good to a gent like you, but I will try hard, sir, I will indeed.'

'And now what am I to do with you?' Captain Hampton went on. 'I am sure my landlady would not like to have you down in the kitchen, so for the present you had better get your meals outside.'

'That is all right, Captain. I can take my grub anywhere.'

'Very well, then, I will give you two shillings a day for food; that will be sixpence for breakfast and tea and a shilling for dinner. I suppose you could manage on that.'

'Why, it would be just a-robbing of you,' the boy said, indignantly. 'I can get a breakfast of a big cup of tea and a whopping piece of cake for twopence at a coffee-stall, and the same at night, that is fourpence, and for fourpence more I can get a regular blow out: threeha'porth of bread and two saveloys for dinner. I could do first-rate on eightpence.'

'That is all nonsense, Jacob. If you are coming to be my servant you must live decently. I daresay if you had a place where you could see to your own food you might do it cheaper, but having to pay for things at a coffee-shop, two shillings a day would be a fair sum. As I don't want you to do anything for me in the house at present I do not see that it will be of any use getting you livery, so we won't talk about that now. You will most likely want another suit of clothes of some sort while going about to look for this man, whom I still want to find. As for your lodgings, I will see if there is a room vacant upstairs; if not, you must get a bed out.'

He rang the bell, and his landlord, who acted as valet to his lodgers, appeared.

'Richardson, I have engaged this boy to run errands for me. I do not want him to interfere in the house, and have arranged about his board, as no doubt you would find him in the way downstairs; but if you have an attic empty I should like to arrange for his sleeping here.'

'I could arrange that, sir. I have a small room at the top of the house empty; I would let it at four shillings a week.'

'Very well then. He will sleep here to-night.'

'Perhaps he will step up with me and I will show it to him, sir.'

Hampton nodded, and the boy followed the man out of the room. He returned in a couple of minutes.

'That will do, I suppose, Jacob?'

'It just will do,' the boy said; 'it is too good for a chap like me. The bed is too clean to sleep in: I would a sight rather lie down on the mat there, sir.'

'That won't do at all, Jacob. You must get into clean and tidy ways if you are to be with me. Tomorrow morning I will give you some money, and you must go out and get yourself a stock of underlinen—shirts, and drawers, and stockings, and that sort of thing, and another pair or two of shoes. And now it is getting late and you had better go off to bed. Give yourself a thorough good wash all over before you turn in, and again in the morning. Here are two shillings for your food to-morrow. Be here at nine o'clock and then we will talk things over. Here is another half-crown to get yourself a comb and brush.'

The next morning the boy presented himself looking clean and tidy.

'In the first place here is a list, Jacob, of the things you must get, or rather that I will get for you, for I will go out with you and buy them. And now about your work. I still want to find this man. Did you discover what name he was known by at his lodging?'

'He was known there as Cooper, Captain, I got that out of the servant girl, but lord bless you a name don't go for anything with these chaps. No, he may call hisself something else at the next place he goes to.'

'You learnt he went away in a cab?'

The lad nodded.

'The first thing to do is to find that cab. It may have been taken from a stand near; it may have been one he hailed passing along the road. How would you set about that?'

'Offer a reward,' the boy replied promptly. 'Get a thing printed and I will leave it at all the stands in that part.'

'Yes, that will be a good way.' Captain Hampton wrote a line or two on a piece of paper. It was headed—A Reward.—The cabman who took a man with several boxes from——'What is the address, Jacob, where the man lodged?'

'Twelve, Hawthorn Street.'

'From Hawthorn Street, Islington, on the evening of the 15th July, can earn one pound by calling upon Captain Hampton, 150 Jermyn Street.'

'That will do it,' the boy said, as the advertisement was read out.

'Well, I will get a hundred of these struck off at once, then you can set to work.'

Having gone to a printer's and ordered the handbills, which were to be ready in an hour, Captain Hampton went with the boy and bought his clothes.

'Now, Jacob, you will go back to the printer's in an hour's time and wait until you get the handbills. Here are five shillings to pay for them; then take a 'bus at the Circus for Islington and distribute the handbills at all the cab stands in the neighbourhood. I shan't want you any more to-day, but if I am at home when you come in you can let me know how you have got on. Be in by half-past nine always. You had better go on at your night school; you have nothing to do after dark and there is nowhere for you to sit here. There is no reason why you should not go on working there as usual.'

'All right, Captain; if you says so in course I will go, but I hates it worse nor poison.'

On his return Captain Hampton read the paper and wrote some letters, and was just starting to go out to lunch when Mr. Hawtrey was shown in.

'I am very glad I have caught you, Ned; I meant to tell you I would come round after seeing Levine. This business will worry me into my grave. This morning Dorothy declared that the thing must be fought out. Her objection to going into court has quite vanished. She says that it is the only chance there is of getting to the bottom of things, and that if that is not done we must go away to China or Siberia, or some out-of-the-way place where no one will know her. Then I went to Levine. Danvers called for me and took me there. I wrote to him last night and asked him to do so. Nothing could have been more polite than Levine's manner—I should say he would be a charming fellow at a dinner table. I went into the whole thing with him, he took notes while I was talking, and asked a question now and then; of course, I told him our last notion, that there must be somebody about exactly like Dorothy in face and figure. "And dress, too?" he asked, with a little sort of emphasis. "Yes, and dress too," I said. When I had done he simply said that it was a singular case, which I could have told him well enough, and that he should like to take a little time to think it over. His present idea was that I had best pay the money. I told him that I did not care a rap about the money, but that if this thing got about, the fact that I had compromised it would be altogether ruinous to my daughter. He said, "I think you can rely upon it that Gilliat will preserve an absolute silence. I can assure you that jewellers get to know a great many curious family histories, and it is part of their business to be discreet." "Yes," I said, "but don't you see if, as I believe, this fellow Truscott got up the first persecution purely to revenge what he believes is a grievance against me—if that is so, and if he has any connection with this second business, you may be sure that somehow or other he will get something nasty about it put in one of these gutter journals." That silenced him, and he again said he would think it over. When I got up to go he asked Danvers to wait a few minutes, as he took it that if the matter went into court he would, as a matter of course, be retained on our side. So I came away by myself and drove here. The worst of it is, I believe that the man thinks that Dorothy did it. Of course, as he does not know her he is

not altogether to be blamed, but it is deucedly annoying to have to do with a man who evidently thinks your daughter is a thief.'

'Did he say anything as to our idea that some one else must have represented her?'

'Not a single word; he listened attentively while I told him, but he made no remarks whatever about it.'

After the doors of Mr. Levine's office had closed behind Mr. Hawtrey, the solicitor leant back in his chair and looked at Danvers with raised eyebrows.

'You have heard the story before, I suppose?' he asked.

'I heard about the first business, but not about this matter of the jewels; except that he gave me a slight outline as we drove here this morning. It is a curious business.'

'It is a very unpleasant business, but scarcely a curious one,' the lawyer said, with a grave smile. 'I have heard so many bits of queer family history, that I scarcely look at anything that way now as curious. You would be astonished, simply astonished, did you know how often things of this kind occur.'

'Then you think that Miss Hawtrey took the jewels?'

Mr. Levine's eyebrows went up again in surprise at the question. 'My impression so far is,' he said, 'as between solicitor and counsel, that there is not the slightest doubt in the world about it. The girl had got into some bad sort of scrape; some blackguard had got her under his thumb. She had a good marriage on hand; it was absolutely necessary to shut the fellow's mouth. A largish sum was wanted, and she dared not ask her father, so she played a bold stroke—a wonderfully bold stroke I must say—relying upon brazening it out and getting her father to believe—as she evidently has succeeded in doing—that there is a double of herself somewhere about, who represented her. All the first part of the case is a comparatively ordinary one. This is curious, even to me—in its daring audacity, it is really magnificent. Of course, her father must pay the money; to defend it would be to ruin her utterly. Do you mean to say you don't agree with me?'

'I hardly know what to think,' Danvers said, doubtfully. 'I know Miss Hawtrey intimately, and have done so for some years, and in spite of the apparent impossibility of her innocence, I own that I cannot bring myself to believe in her guilt. She is one of the brightest, frankest, and most natural girls I know.'

The lawyer looked at him with a smile of almost pity.

'You surprise me, sir. My experience is that in the majority of cases of this kind it is just the very last girl one would suspect who goes wrong. Why, my dear sir, if we were to set up such a ridiculous defence as this in an action to recover the price of the jewels, we should simply be laughed out of court.'

'Mr. Hawtrey tells me that his daughter is most anxious that he should defend the case.'

Again the eyebrows went up.

'Of course she would say so. She must know well enough that, whether her father put himself into my hands or any one else's, the advice would be the same: Pay the money; you have no shadow of a chance of getting a verdict, and to bring it into court would utterly ruin your daughter's prospects. Of course, it is her cue to appear anxious for a trial, knowing perfectly well that such a thing is out of the question.'

'I think you might alter your opinion if you saw her.'

'I certainly should be glad to see her,' Charles Levine said. 'I admire talent, and she must be amazingly clever. I have a great respect for audacity, and I never heard in all my experience of a more brilliant piece of boldness than this. She must be a great actress, too; of the highest order. Altogether I should be very glad to see her. She deserves to succeed, and as there is no doubt that you and I will be able to persuade her father that there is nothing for it but to pay the money. I think her success is pretty well assured.'

'I agree with you that this money must be paid, but I am not prepared to go further yet.'

'My dear sir,' the lawyer said, 'you confirm the opinion I have always held, that the judgment of no man under fifty is worth a penny where a young and pretty woman is concerned. Mind, there are many men, perhaps the majority, who cannot be trusted in such a matter up to any time of life, but up to fifty the rule is almost universal.'

'I am glad to hear it,' Danvers said, 'for in that case your own judgment cannot be accepted as final.'

'I rather expected that, Mr. Danvers, but you must remember that in matters of this kind I have had more experience than a dozen ordinary men of the age of eighty. Now, I really cannot spare any more time. I have given your client a good two hours, and my waiting-room must be full of angry men. I shall write to Mr. Hawtrey to-morrow to say that upon thinking the matter well over my first impressions are more than confirmed, and that I am of opinion that no jury in the world would give him a verdict, and that it would be nothing short of insanity to go into Court. I shall mention, of course, that I am much struck with his theory of the affair, which indeed appears to

me to furnish the only complete explanation of the matter, but that in the absence of a single confirmatory piece of evidence it would be hopeless for the most eloquent counsel to attempt to persuade twelve British jurymen to entertain the theory. I think it would be as well if you were to call on him this evening or to-morrow morning and shew him that your view agrees with mine. That much you can honestly say, can you not?'

'Certainly. However difficult I may find it to persuade myself that Miss Hawtrey is in any way the woman you picture her, I am as convinced as you are that it is absolutely necessary that the money should be paid.'

On Mr. Hawtrey reaching his home he found Mrs. Daintree upon the sofa in tears, while Dorothy, with a book in her hand, was sitting with an unconcerned expression a short distance from her.

'What is the matter now?' he asked testily. 'Upon my word I believe my annoyances would have upset Job.'

'Would you believe it? Cousin Dorothy has just declared to me her intention of writing to Lord Halliburn to break off the match.'

Mr. Hawtrey did not explode as his cousin had expected that he would do.

'It is not a step to be taken hastily,' he said, gravely, 'but it is one upon which Dorothy herself is the best judge. You have not written yet, child?'

'No, father. I should not think of doing so without telling you first. I have, of course, been thinking a good deal about it, and it certainly seems to me that it would be best.'

'Well, a few hours will make no difference. The idea is at present new to me: I will think it over quietly this afternoon, and this evening we will talk it over together.'

'It would be nothing short of madness for her to do so,' Mrs. Daintree said, roused to a state of real anger by Mr. Hawtrey's defection, when she had implicitly relied upon his authority being exerted to prevent Dorothy from carrying out her intention. 'It would be madness to break off so excellent a match. It would make her the talk of the whole town, and would seem to confirm all the wicked rumours that have been going about.'

'As to the match, cousin, there are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it. As to the public talk, it is better to be talked about for a week or two than to have a life's unhappiness. That is the sole point with which I concern myself.'

Dorothy, with a softened face now, got up and kissed her father.

'That is right dear,' he said. 'Now let us put the matter aside for the present. I have been busy all the morning and want my lunch badly; so even if you are not hungry yourself, come down and keep me company. Come, cousin, dry your eyes, and put your cap straight, and come down to lunch.'

'Food would choke me,' Mrs. Daintree said; 'I have a dreadful headache, and shall go and lie down.'

CHAPTER VIII

'Mr. Danvers is in the library, sir,' a servant announced at nine o'clock that evening.

'Will you come down, Dorothy?'

'No, father, I do not want to hear what is said. No doubt he will suppose I took the diamonds.'

'No, no, my dear, you should not say that.'

'But I do say that, father. When even Captain Hampton was willing enough to believe me guilty, what can I expect from others?'

'You are too hard on Ned altogether, Dorothy, a great deal too hard. He spent a month of his leave entirely in your service, and now because he could not disbelieve the evidence of his own eyes you turn against him.'

'I am obliged to him for the trouble he has taken, father, but that is not what I want at present. I want trust; and I thought that if any one would have given it to me fully it would have been Ned Hampton, and nothing would have made me doubt him.'

'Well, my dear,' her father said, dryly, 'you may think so now, but if you were to see him filling his pockets out of a bank till, I fancy for a moment your trust in him would waver. However, I will go down to Danvers.'

He returned at the end of twenty minutes.

'His advice is the same as that which, as I mentioned this afternoon, Levine gave when I told him of the circumstances, and which I have no doubt he will repeat when he has further thought the matter over, namely, that unless we can obtain some evidence to support your denial, we have no

chance of obtaining a verdict if we go into court. Danvers says that, of course, to those who know you, the idea of your taking these diamonds is absolutely preposterous; still, as the jury will not know you, and the public who read the report will not know you, they can only go by the evidence. He says that trying to look at it as a stranger, his opinion would be that it was an extraordinary case, but that unless we believed thoroughly that you had not taken the things, we should never have taken so hopeless a case into court. Still, he thinks that the verdict of those who only look at the outside of things would be that the denial was almost worse than the act. Had it not been for the unfortunate rumours previously circulated, many people might be of opinion that it was a case of kleptomania, and that no woman in her senses would have thus openly carried the things away from a place where she was well known.'

'I see all that, father; the more I have thought it over, the more I feel that it is certain that every one will be against me.'

'Then in that case, Dorothy, why fight a battle we are certain to lose? From the money point of view alone, it would be better to pay this twenty-five hundred pounds than the twenty-five hundred pounds plus the costs on both sides, which we might put down roughly at another thousand. If we pay it now, the matter may never become public, for even if the scoundrel was malicious enough to try and get a rumour about it into one of these so-called society papers I should doubt whether he could do so. In the last case they got the report, no doubt, from some one in Scotland Yard, but no editor would be mad enough to risk an action for libel with tremendous damages merely on an anonymous report, or at best, a report given only on the authority of an impecunious hanger-on of the turf. It seems to me, therefore, that we should have everything to lose, and nothing to gain, by bringing the matter into court.'

'But the same thing may be done again, father; if they have succeeded so well now they are sure to try and repeat it.'

'We might take measures to prevent their doing that. The moment the thing is settled we will go down into the country, and when we return to town next season I will get a companion for you—some bright, sensible woman, who will not be half her time laid up with headaches, and who will always go with you whenever you go out; so that were such an attempt made again, you would be in a position to prove conclusively where you were at the time. Danvers suggested that if I pay the money to Gilliat I should do so with a written protest, to the effect that I was convinced that you had not been in his shop on the day in question, but that as I was not in a position to prove this I paid the money, reserving to myself the right to reclaim it, should I be at any time in a position to prove that you had not been at his shop on that day, or be able to produce the woman who represented you. Should the matter by any chance ever crop up again, a copy of this protest would be an advantage.'

'At any rate, father, I could never marry Lord Halliburn unless this matter were entirely cleared up; it would be unfair to him in the extreme. He might receive an anonymous letter from these people, and if he asked me if it was true, what could I say? He has been greatly upset by the other business, what would he say did he know that I have been accused of theft? That brings us back to the subject of my engagement. You have been thinking it over since lunch, father?'

'Yes, dear, I have been thinking it over as well as I could, and I again repeat that the only light in which I can regard it is that of your happiness. I quite see that your being engaged to a man in his position does add to the embarrassment and difficulty of the position. We have to consider not only ourselves but him. Still, that matters after all comparatively little. Supposing this matter were all cleared up satisfactorily, how would you stand then? You might then bitterly regret the step you now want to take.'

'No, father; up to the time when this trouble first began I don't think that I thought very seriously about it. Lord Halliburn was very nice, I liked him as much as any man I have met. I suppose I was gratified by his attentions; every one spoke well of him; I own that I was rather proud of carrying him off, and it really seemed to me that I was likely to be very happy with him. Since then I have looked at it in a different way. I knew, of course, that husbands and wives are supposed to share each other's troubles, but it had never really seemed to me that there was a likelihood of troubles coming into my life. Well, troubles have come, and with them I have come to look at things differently. To begin with, I have learnt more of Lord Halliburn's character than I probably should have done in all my life if such troubles had not come.'

'I have been disappointed in him. I do not say that in the first matter he doubted me for an instant—it was not that; but I found out that he is altogether selfish. He has thought all through, not how this affected me, but how it would affect himself; he has been querulous, exacting, and impatient. Had he been the man I thought him he would have been kinder and more attentive than before; he would have tried to let every one see by his manner to me how wholly he trusted me; he would have striven to make things easier for me; but he has made them much harder. If I held in my hands now the proofs [missing text] against me, I would send them to him and at the same time a letter breaking off my engagement. When I think it over, I am sometimes inclined to be almost grateful to this trouble, because it has opened my eyes to the fact that I have been very nearly making a great mistake, and that, had I married Lord Halliburn, my life might have gone on smoothly enough, but that there would never have been any real community of feeling between us. He would have regarded me as a useful and, perhaps, an ornamental head to his house, but I should never have had a home in the true sense of the word, father; that is, a home like this.'

'Then that is settled, my dear. Now that you have said as much as you have, we need not say another word on the matter. I must say, frankly, that I have of late come almost to dislike him, and it has several times cost me no inconsiderable effort to keep my temper when I saw how entirely he regarded the matter in a personal light, and how little thought he gave to the pain and trouble you were going through. I am in no hurry to lose you, my dear, and the thought that it might be a few months has given me many a heartache. And now, how will you do it?—Will you write to him or see him?'

'I would rather tell him, father.'

'You see, dear, both for his sake and your own it must be publicly known that the engagement is broken by you, and not by him. It would be very unfair on him for it to be supposed that he has taken advantage of these rumours to break off his engagement, and it would greatly injure you, as people would say that he must have become convinced of their truth.'

Dorothy nodded. 'I will see him, father. I shall speak to him quite frankly; I shall tell him that this attack having been made on me it is possible that there may be at some future time other troubles from the same source, and that it would be unfair to him, in his position as a member of the Ministry, for his wife to be made the target of such attacks. I shall also tell him that quite apart from this, I feel that I acted too hastily and upon insufficient knowledge of him in accepting him; that I am convinced that our marriage would not bring to either of us that happiness that we have a right to expect. That is all I shall say, unless he presses me to go into details, and then I shall speak just as frankly as I have done to you.'

'Well, dear, I can only say I am heartily glad,' Mr. Hawtrey said, kissing her, 'and am inclined to feel almost grateful to that fellow Truscott for giving me back my little girl again. Of course, I know it must come some day, but after having been so much to each other for so many years, it is a little trying at first to feel that one is no longer first in your affections.'

'The idea of such a thing, father,' Dorothy said, indignantly, 'as if I ever for a moment put him before you.'

'Well, if you have not, child, it shows very conclusively that you did not care for him as a girl should care for a man she is going to marry. I do not say that it is so in many marriages that are, as they term it, arranged in society, but where there is the real, honest love that there ought to be, and such as I hope you will some day feel for some one, he becomes, as he should become, first in everything.'

'It seems to me quite impossible, father, that I could love any other man as I do you.'

Mr. Hawtrey smiled.

'I hope you will learn it is very possible, some day, Dorothy. Well, at any rate, this has done away with your chief reason for objecting to my paying for these diamonds. No doubt I shall hear from Levine some time to-morrow; at any rate, there is no reason to decide finally for another day or two. Gilliat can be in no hurry, and a month's delay may make some difference in the situation.'

'Well, dear, is it over?' Mr. Hawtrey asked next day, when Dorothy came into his study. 'It was a relief to me when I saw his brougham drive off, for I knew that you must be having an unpleasant time of it.'

'Yes; it has not been pleasant, father. He came in looking anxious, as he generally has done of late, thinking that my request for him to call this morning meant that there was news of some sort, pleasant or otherwise. I told him at once that I had been seriously thinking over the matter for some time, and that I had for several reasons come to the conclusion that it would be better that our engagement should terminate, and then gave him my first reason. He was very earnest, and protested that as he had never for a moment believed in these rumours he could not see that there was any reason whatever for breaking off the engagement. I said that I did him full justice in that respect, but that the matter had certainly been a great source of annoyance to him, and that I was convinced of the probability of further trouble of the same kind, and that as we had been powerless to detect the author of this we might be as powerless in the future. Then I frankly told him that I knew that his hopes were greatly centred in his political career, and that for him to have a wife who was the subject of a scandal would be a very serious drawback to him. He did not attempt to deny this, but then urged that a breach of the engagement at present would be taken to mean that he had been affected by the rumours. I said that full justice should be done to him in that respect; then, as he still protested—though I am convinced that at heart he felt relieved—I added that there were certain other reasons into which I need not go fully; that I thought that I had accepted him without sufficient consideration, and that I had gradually come to feel that we were not altogether suited to each other, and that a wife would always occupy but a secondary position in his thoughts, politics and public business occupying the first. I said that I had been brought up perhaps in an old-fashioned way and entertained the old-fashioned idea that a wife should hold the first place.'

'He was disposed to be angry, because, no doubt, he felt that it was perfectly true. However I said, "Do not be angry, Lord Halliburn. I shall be very, very sorry if we part other than good friends. I like and esteem you very much, and had it not been for these troubles I should never have thought of breaking my engagement to you. As it is, I am thinking as much of you as of myself. I am convinced I shall have further troubles, and perhaps more serious ones. I have already, in fact, had some sort of warning of them, and if they come it would make it much harder

for me to bear them were our names associated together, for I feel that your prospects would be seriously injured as well as my own."

"You talk it over very calmly and coolly," he said, irritably.

'I said that I had been thinking it over calmly for a month and more, and that I was sure that it was best for both of us. So at last we parted good friends. I have no doubt it is a relief to him as it is to me, but just at first, I suppose, it was natural that he should be upset. I don't think he had ever thought for a moment of breaking it off himself, but I am quite sure that if this other thing comes out he will congratulate himself most heartily. Well, there is an end of that, father.'

'Yes, my dear; I am sorry, and at the same time I am glad. I don't think, dear, that you are the sort of girl who would ever have been very happy if you had married without any very real love in the matter. For my part I can see nothing enviable in the life of a woman who spends her whole life in what is called Society. Two or three months of gaiety in the year may be well enough, but to live always in it seems to me one of the most wretched ways of spending one's existence. And now, dear, let us change the subject altogether. I think for the next few days you had better go out again. I propose that we leave town at the end of the week and either go down home or, what would be better, go for a couple of months on the continent. That will give time for the gossip over the engagement being broken off to die out. You did not put off our engagement to dine at the Deans' to-day?'

'No, father, I could not write and say two days beforehand that I was unwell and unable to come.'

'Very well then, we will go. I always like their dinners, because she comes from our neighbourhood and one always meets three or four of our Lincolnshire friends.'

'It is the Botanical this afternoon, father. Shall I go there with Cousin Mary?'

'Do so by all means, dear.'

As they drove that evening to the Deans', Mr. Hawtrey said, 'I had that letter from Levine as I was dressing, Dorothy. He goes over nearly the same ground as Danvers did, and is also of opinion that I should pay under protest, in order that if at any time we can lay our hands on the real offender, we can claim the return of the money. I shall go round in the morning and have a talk with Gilliat.'

Dorothy was more herself than she had been for weeks. Her engagement had, since her trouble first began, been a greater burden to her than she had been willing to admit even to herself. Lord Halliburn had jarred upon her constantly, and she had come almost to dread their daily meetings.

At an early stage of her troubles she had thought the matter out, and had come to the conclusion that she had made a mistake, and was not long in arriving at the determination that she would at the end of the season ask him to release her from her engagement. Before that she hoped that the rumours that had affected him would have died out completely, and would not necessarily be associated with the termination of the engagement. Had not this fresh trouble arisen, matters would have gone on on their old footing until late in the autumn, but this new trouble had forced her to act at once, and her first thought had been that it was only fair to him to release him at once. She was surprised now at the weight that had been lifted from her mind, at the buoyancy of spirits which she felt. She was almost indifferent as to the other matter.

'You are more like yourself than you have been for weeks, Dorothy,' her father said, during the drive.

'I feel like a bird that has got out of a cage, father. It was not a bad cage, it was very nicely gilt and in all ways a desirable one, still it was a cage, and I feel very happy indeed in feeling that I am out of it.'

Dorothy enjoyed her dinner and laughed and talked merrily with the gentleman who had taken her down. Mrs. Dean remarked to her husband afterwards that the absence of Lord Halliburn, who sent a letter of regret that important business would prevent his fulfilling his engagement, did not seem to be any great disappointment to Dorothy Hawtrey.

'I never saw her in better spirits, my dear; lately I have been feeling quite anxious about her; she was beginning to look quite worn from the trouble of those abominable stories.'

'I expect she feels Halliburn's absence a positive relief,' he said. 'You know you remarked, yourself, the last time we saw them out, how glum and sulky he looked, and you said that if you were in her place you would throw him over without hesitation.'

'I know I said so, and do you know I wondered at dinner whether she had not come to the same conclusion.'

'Dorothy has lots of spirit,' Mr. Dean said, 'and is quite capable of kicking over the traces. I should say there is no pluckier rider than that girl in all Lincolnshire, and I fancy that a woman who doesn't flinch from the stiffest jump would not hesitate for a moment in throwing over even the best match of the season if he offended her. She is a dear good girl, is Dorothy Hawtrey, and I don't think that she is a bit spoiled by her success this season. I always thought she made a mistake in accepting Halliburn; he is not half good enough for her. He may be an earl, and an Under-Secretary of State, but he is no more fit to run in harness with Dorothy Hawtrey than he is to fly.'

When the gentlemen came up after dinner Dorothy made room on the sofa on which she was sitting for an old friend who walked across to her. Mr. Singleton was a near neighbour down in Lincolnshire; he was a bachelor, and Dorothy had always been a great pet of his.

'Well, my dear,' he said, as he took a seat beside her, 'I am heartily glad to see you looking quite yourself again to-night, and to know that I have been able to help my little favourite out of a scrape.'

Dorothy's eyes opened wide. 'To help me out of a scrape, Mr. Singleton! Why, what scrape have you helped me out of?'

'I beg your pardon, my dear,' he said hastily. 'I told you we would never speak of the matter again, and here I am, like an old fool, bringing it up the very first time I meet you.'

Dorothy's face paled.

'Mr. Singleton,' she said, 'I seem to be surrounded by mysteries. Do I understand you to say that you have done me some kindness lately—helped me out of some scrape?'

'Well, my dear, those were your own words,' he replied, looking surprised in turn; 'but please do not let us say anything more about it.'

Dorothy sat quiet for a minute, then she made a sign to her father, who was standing at the other side of the room, to come across to her. 'Father,' she said, 'will you ask Mr. Singleton to drive home with us; I am afraid there is some fresh trouble, and, at any rate, I must speak to him, and this is not the place for questions. Please let us go as soon as the carriage comes. Now, will you please go away, Mr. Singleton, and leave me to myself for a minute or two, for my head is in a whirl?'

'But, my dear,' he began, but was stopped by an impatient wave of Dorothy's hand.

'What is it, Singleton?' Mr. Hawtrey asked, as they went across the room.

'I am completely puzzled,' he replied; 'what Dorothy means by asking me to come with you, and to answer questions, is a complete mystery to me. Please don't ask me any questions now. I have evidently put my foot into it somehow, though I have not the least idea how.'

Ten minutes later the carriage was announced. As she took her place in it, Dorothy said, 'Don't ask any questions until we are at home.'

The two men were far too puzzled to talk on any indifferent subject. Not a word was spoken until they arrived at Chester Square.

'Has Mrs. Daintree gone to bed?' Dorothy asked the footman.

'Yes, Miss Hawtrey; she went a quarter of an hour ago.'

'Are the lights still burning in the drawing-room?'

'Yes, miss.'

They went upstairs.

'Now, Dorothy, what does all this mean?' her father asked, impatiently.

'That is what we have got to learn, father. Mr. Singleton congratulated me on having recovered my spirits, and took some credit to himself for having helped me out of a scrape. As I do not in the least know what he means, I want him to give you and me the particulars.'

'But, my dear Dorothy,' Mr. Singleton said, 'why on earth do you ask me that question? Surely you cannot wish me to mention anything about that trifling affair.'

'But I do, Mr. Singleton. You do not know the position in which I am placed at present. I am surrounded by mysteries, I am accused of things I never did. Now it seems as if there were a fresh one; possibly if you tell us the exact particulars of what you were speaking of it may help us to get to the bottom of it.'

'I don't understand it in the least,' Mr. Singleton said, gravely. 'You are quite sure, Dorothy, that you wish me to repeat before your father the exact details of our interview?'

'If you please, Mr. Singleton; every little minute particular.'

'Of course I will do as you wish, my dear,' the old gentleman said, kindly, 'it seems to me madness, but if you really wish it I will do so. If I make any mistake correct me at once. Well, this is the story, Hawtrey. I need not tell you it would never have passed my lips, except at Dorothy's request. A short time since, a fortnight or three weeks, I cannot tell you the day exactly, my servant brought me up word that a lady wished to see me. She had given no name, but I supposed it was one of these charity collecting women, so I told her to show her in. To my surprise it was Miss Dorothy. After shaking hands she sat down, and to my astonishment burst into tears. It was some time before I could pacify her, and get her to tell me what was the matter; then she told me that she had got into a dreadful scrape, that she dared not tell you, that it would be ruin to her, and that she had come to me as one of her oldest friends, to ask me if I could help her to get out of it.'

'Of course, I said I would do anything, and at last, with great difficulty, and after another burst of crying, she told me that she must have a thousand pounds to save her. She said something about wanting to pawn some of her jewels, but this would not come to enough. Of course, I pooh-poohed this, and said that I was very sorry to hear that she had got into a scrape, but that a thousand pounds were a trifle to me in comparison to the happiness of the daughter of an old friend. She was very reluctant to receive it, and wanted, at least, to pawn her jewels for two or three hundred pounds, but I said that that was nonsense, and eventually I drew a cheque for a thousand pounds, which I made payable to Mary Brown or bearer, as I, naturally, did not wish her name to appear at all in the matter.

'She was most grateful for it. I told her that, of course, I should never allude to the matter again, and that she was not to trouble about it in the slightest, for that I had put her down for five thousand pounds in my will and would change the figure to four, so that she would only be getting the money a little earlier than I had intended. This evening, unfortunately, I was stupid enough, in saying that I was pleased to see her looking more like her old self, to add that I was glad to know that I had been the means of helping my little favourite out of a scrape. It was stupid of me, I admit, to have even thus far broken my promise never to allude to the thing again, but why she should have insisted upon my telling a story—painful to both of us—to you, is altogether beyond my comprehension.'

Mr. Hawtrey was too much astonished to ask any questions, but looked helplessly at Dorothy, who said quietly—

'Thank you for telling the story, Mr. Singleton, and thank you still more for so generously coming, as you believed, to my assistance. You cannot remember exactly which day it was?'

'No, my dear, but I could see the date on the counterfoil of my cheque-book.'

'Was it the fifteenth of last month, Mr. Singleton?'

'Fifteenth? Well, I cannot say exactly, but it would be somewhere about that time.'

'And about what time of day?'

'Some time in the afternoon, I know; somewhere between three and four, I should say. I know I had not been back long after lunching at the Travellers'. I generally leave there about three, and it is not more than five minutes' walk up to the Albany.'

'Now, father, please tell Mr. Singleton about Gilliat's.'

'But, Dorothy,' Mr. Singleton exclaimed, when he heard the story, 'it is absolutely impossible that you could have done such a thing.'

'It seems to me impossible, Mr. Singleton, but here is the evidence of two people that I did do it; and now I have your evidence that on the same afternoon I came to you and obtained a thousand pounds from you. Either those two men were dreaming or out of their minds, and you were dreaming or out of your mind, or I am out of my mind and do things unconsciously. My own belief is that I can account for my whole afternoon,' and she repeated the details that she had given her father as to her movements. 'But even if I could have done these things without knowing it, where are the jewels and where is the cheque?'

'The cheque was presented next day and paid. It came back with my bank book at the end of the month.'

'It is not often I go out in the morning,' Dorothy said, 'and I should think I could prove that I did not do so on the morning of the 16th; but I cannot be sure if, in a state of somnambulism or in a sort of trance, I did not call at the jewellers and on you. I might, had I gone out, have changed that cheque in a similar state. That would have been a straightforward thing, but how could I get rid of the jewels? If I had them now and wanted to raise money on them I should not have the least idea how to do so, and I could hardly have carried out such a scheme in a state of unconsciousness. The jewellers say I was dressed in a blue dress with red spots, and I went out in a gown of that pattern on that day.'

'I did not notice the dress particularly,' Mr. Singleton said, 'but it was certainly a blue of some sort. Of course it is quite out of the question that you could have done all these things unconsciously; but what does it all mean? I am absolutely bewildered.'

'We have only one theory to account for it, Singleton. We believe, in fact we are positively convinced, that there is somewhere a girl so exactly resembling Dorothy that even those who know her well, like yourself, might take one for the other, and that she and perhaps an accomplice are taking advantage of this likeness to personate Dorothy. They have even gone the length of having a dress made exactly like hers. I will now tell you the real history of that affair that got into the papers. You will see that the party we believe to be at the bottom of it would know, or would have means of finding out, that Gilliat was our family jeweller, and that you were an intimate friend. Our theory is that revenge as well as plunder was the motive, and that the first part of the affair was simply an endeavour to injure Dorothy, and to suggest a motive for her need of money just at this time.'

'It is an extraordinary story,' Mr. Singleton said, when he heard it all. 'I cannot doubt that it is as you suggest. That my little Dorothy should behave in this way is too ridiculous to be believed for

a moment; though I own that I should have been ready, if obliged, to swear in court that it was she who came to me.'

'Did she wear a veil?' Dorothy asked, suddenly. 'I forgot to ask Mr. Gilliat that.'

'Yes, she had a veil on and kept it down all the time. It was a warm day and I rather wondered afterwards at your wearing it, for I do not think I ever saw you in a veil. But I supposed that you did not want to be seen coming up to me, and that perhaps you felt that you could tell your story more easily behind it.'

'Was it a thick veil?'

'No, it seemed to me the usual sort of thing ladies wear.'

'Did you notice anything particular about the voice?'

Mr. Singleton thought for a minute. 'I did not notice anything at the time. Of course it differed from your ordinary voice as I am accustomed to hear it. You see she was crying, with a handkerchief up to her face, and spoke low and hesitatingly. All of which changes the voice. I never doubted it was you, you see, and as I had never heard you speak in low, broken tones, sobbing and crying, any difference there may have been did not strike me.'

'But altogether, Mr. Singleton, even now that I declare that I was not the person who called upon you, you can, thinking it over, see nothing that would lead you to doubt that it was myself.'

Mr. Singleton shook his head. 'No, Dorothy, I am sorry to say that I cannot. Your word is quite sufficient for me, and I feel as certain that this woman was an impostor as if she herself came forward to own it. The likeness, however, in figure and in face was extraordinary, although I admit that the veil made an alteration in the face. It always does. I frequently pass ladies I know well, and if they have thick veils down do not recognise them until they bow and smile. There was just that difference between the face and yours as I usually see it. I can remember now that as you, or rather this woman came into the room, I did not for the first instant recognise her owing to the veil; it was but momentarily, just the same hesitation I have so often felt before, neither more nor less.'

'However, it was possible, Mr. Singleton, that the resemblance may not have been absolutely perfect, and that had she not had a veil on you would have seen it at once.'

'That is possible, quite possible,' Mr. Singleton assented.

'And now, Singleton, as an old friend, tell me what is to be done. To-day we had all but settled that I should pay the value of those diamonds to Gilliat. Dorothy has been anxious that I should fight the case, but Levine, into whose hands I put myself, and Danvers, who would have been one of our counsel, were both so strongly of opinion that we had no chance whatever of getting a verdict, and that it would greatly damage Dorothy, that I persuaded her to let me pay. But, you see, this affair of yours changes the position of affairs altogether. As she has victimised you, so she may victimise others of my friends, as well as other tradesmen, and it seems to me that the only way to put a stop to that will be publicity.'

'I think, Hawtrey, that the first person to be consulted in the matter is Lord Halliburn. You see this game may go on again in the future on even a larger scale, for the Countess of Halliburn's orders would be fulfilled without a moment's hesitation by any tradesman in London.'

'There is no need to consult him, Singleton; Dorothy broke off the engagement with him this morning. You need not commiserate her,' he went on, as Mr. Singleton was about to express his deep regret. 'I may tell you, as an old friend, that there were perhaps other reasons besides these troubles, and that, for myself, I am heartily glad that the engagement is at an end.'

'Well, if that is the case, I may say I am glad too, Hawtrey. Of course, the match was a good one, but I never altogether fancied it, and had always felt some disappointment that my little favourite should be, as I thought, making a match for position instead of for love. So it was that, young lady, and not, as I was fool enough to fancy, getting out of a money scrape, that made you so bright and like yourself at dinner this evening?'

Dorothy smiled faintly.

'It was getting out of a scrape, you see, Mr. Singleton, although not the one you thought of. I think you are a little hard on me. I certainly should not have accepted Lord Halliburn unless at the time I had thought I liked him very much; but I think that during the trouble I had I came to see that something more than liking is necessary, and that a man who may be a very pleasant member of society would not necessarily make so pleasant a partner in life.'

'Well, now as to your advice, Singleton.'

'I can give none, Hawtrey. The matter is too important and too much out of my line for my opinion to be worth a fig; but I will tell you what I will do. It is clear that you must see Levine and tell him about this affair; if you write and make an appointment with him to-morrow, say at twelve o'clock, I will call here at half-past eleven and go with you. If you will take my advice you will take Dorothy with you. Levine is pretty well accustomed to read faces, and I think he will be more likely to take our view of the matter when he has once seen her. You may as well sit down and write a note at once; I will post it as I drive back. I think, too, I would write to Danvers and

ask him to be there; he is a clever young fellow, and his opinion may help us. While you are writing I will get Dorothy to tell your footman to whistle for a hansom for me.'

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