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DOROTHY'S DOUBLE

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DOROTHY'S DOUBLE

CHAPTER IX

Just before twelve o'clock on the following day Mr. Hawtrey's carriage drew up at Charles

Levine's office. In the waiting room they found Danvers, who had arrived shortly before them.

'Thank you for coming,' Mr. Hawtrey said, as he shook hands with him; 'I think I am rather afraid of Levine by himself. Of course I know that he is the best adviser one can have in a business of this sort, but that way he has of lifting his eyebrows makes me nervous. I feel as David Copperfield did with that man-servant of Steerforth's; he thought him very young indeed. It does not make me feel young, but rather that he is considering me to be an old fool. I don't suppose he means exactly that, but that is the impression I get from those eyebrows of his.'

'I am sure he does not mean that, Mr. Hawtrey,' Danvers laughed, 'though it may be that the action is expressive of a passing doubt in his mind, or rather of his perceiving some point that is unfavourable to the cause he is retained to defend. I hope you have come here to say that you agree with our view in the matter.'

'You will hear presently, Danvers. I came to that conclusion yesterday, but the position is somewhat changed.'

At this moment the door opened, and a clerk asked them to follow him, as Mr. Levine was now disengaged.

'This is your client—my daughter Dorothy,' Mr. Hawtrey said, as he introduced her to the lawyer; 'this is Mr. Singleton, an old friend and neighbour of ours.'

Mr. Levine shook hands with Dorothy, looking at her scrutinisingly as he did so; she looked as frankly at him.

'So you thought I was guilty, Mr. Levine?'

'I am sure that your father will do me the justice to say that I said nothing that could in any way be construed into such an opinion, Miss Hawtrey,' he replied, courteously.

'Perhaps not, but you thought so all the same. I am learning to be a thought reader. I saw that, and also I think that a slight feeling of doubt came into your mind as you shook hands.'

'I must be careful, I see,' he said, smiling; 'however, without either admitting or denying anything, I may say that I am glad that Mr. Hawtrey brought you with him.'

'And now, Mr. Levine,' Mr. Hawtrey said, 'I will tell you what we have come about. Yesterday we had quite made up our minds to take your advice, although my daughter assented to it only with the greatest reluctance. A fresh complication has occurred which I will leave Mr. Singleton to tell for himself.'

Mr. Levine took up a pen and prepared to take notes, as Mr. Singleton began the story with his conversation with Dorothy at Mrs. Dean's. At the point when Dorothy called her father, Mr. Levine interposed.

'Pardon me for interrupting you, but it is very important that I should understand the position exactly before you go farther. Whatever this matter may be of which you are about to tell me, do I understand that it was one entirely between Miss Hawtrey and yourself?'

'Entirely.'

'It was one of which you never intended to have spoken, and of which Miss Hawtrey felt perfectly confident that under no circumstances whatever would you have revealed it?'

'Certainly, I have known her from a child, and nothing whatever would have induced me to have mentioned it to any one, and Miss Hawtrey had, I am certain, an absolute confidence that I would not do so.'

'It was then, therefore, a wholly spontaneous action on the part of Miss Hawtrey in summoning her father to her side, and asking him to take you home with him.'

'Entirely so; I was myself absolutely bewildered at what appeared to me her determination to make her father acquainted with the particulars of the painful scenes of which I will now tell you.'

And he then related the particulars of the interview in his chambers.

'At the time,' he concluded, 'no doubt whatever entered my mind, that the person who called upon me was Miss Hawtrey. Thinking it over now, and having an absolute confidence in her, I see that I may have been mistaken; she was veiled when she entered, and in all the years I have known Miss Hawtrey I have never seen her wear a veil. A veil certainly alters the appearance of a face, and for an instant when she entered I did not recognise her, but the likeness must be very great, for my hesitation was only momentary. Afterwards she had a handkerchief up to her face during the greater part of the interview, and during the whole time she spoke in a low voice broken by sobs. No doubt there must be some similarity between the voices, but heard in that way it was so different from her usual outspoken tones, that I should be sorry to be called upon to swear whether at other times it would resemble her voice or not.'

'I may add, Mr. Levine,' Mr. Hawtrey said, when he had finished, 'that I have this morning received a bill from Allerton's, where my daughter usually gets things, for four silk dresses and two mantles which were ordered on the same day and at about the same hour at which the jewels were stolen and this interview with Mr. Singleton took place. I drove down there after breakfast,

and found that the goods were taken out and placed in a cab that was waiting at the door, my daughter saying that she wished to take them at once to her dressmaker. I also called in at Gilliat's, and found that there, as well as at Allerton's, the woman was veiled when she gave the orders.'

Mr. Levine had listened with close attention to Mr. Singleton, glancing keenly at times towards Dorothy, who was sitting with her side-face to him, absorbed in the repetition of the story.

When Mr. Hawtrey ceased speaking, he was silent for a minute, and then said—

'In the first place, Miss Hawtrey, I have to make an apology to you. You were right. I see so much of the bad side of human nature that I own that, until I saw you, I did not entertain a shadow of a doubt that you, driven by some pressure, had resorted to this desperate expedient of raising money. The whole story appeared to be consistent only with your guilt, providing that you were possessed of an extraordinary amount of self-possession and audacity. I admit and apologise for the mistake, now that I hear the same thing has been done in two other cases, and that within an hour or two of the first; it is to me conclusive that your father's theory is the correct one, and that you were personated by some clever woman who must bear an extraordinary likeness to you. That a young lady of your age, driven into a corner, should commit a barefaced robbery is a matter that my experience has taught me to believe to be very possible, but that she should a few minutes afterwards proceed to raise money from a friend, and still more, to commit the petty crime of swindling a tradesman of four silk dresses, or rather the materials, of the value perhaps of thirty or forty pounds, seems to me incredible. For once I have been entirely at fault.'

'Now as to paying this money for the jewels, Mr. Levine,' Mr. Hawtrey said, 'do you still advise it?'

'I must think that over. It is an extremely difficult matter on which to give an opinion, and I shall be glad, in the first place, to have Mr. Danvers' opinion about it. Perhaps he will be good enough to come and see you after we have talked it over; but I will not give a final opinion until I have turned it over in my mind for a day or two. Perhaps I may ask you to come and see me again.'

Danvers went out to the carriage with them. 'I congratulate you most heartily, Miss Hawtrey,' he said. 'There is no doubt that this will immensely strengthen your position. It has had, at any rate, a great effect on the mind of Levine. It is not often he has to own that his first impressions are entirely erroneous. I will come round this evening if you will be at home.'

'We will be at home, Danvers,' Mr. Hawtrey said, 'and I particularly want to see you about another matter. Come to dinner. Half-past seven. Can you come too, Singleton?' he went on as the carriage drove off. 'You are in the thick of it now, and are indeed one of the parties interested, for of course I shall see that you are not a loser by your intended kindness to Dorothy.'

'If I hear any nonsense of that sort,' Mr. Singleton said, hotly, 'I will get out of the carriage at once and have nothing more to do with the affair. Dorothy is my god-daughter, and if I choose to give her one thousand or ten I have a perfect right to do so. So let us hear no more about it.'

Mr. Hawtrey shook his old friend warmly by the hand. 'You always were an obstinate fellow,' he said 'and I suppose I must let you have your own way. Dorothy, I think I will get out at the top of St. James's Street, and if Ned Hampton is not in leave my card with a line, asking him to join us at dinner. He has worked most nobly for us, Singleton, as I told you last night, and ought certainly to be told of this new development. It will make us an odd number, for my cousin, Mary Daintree, has—I was going to remark I am glad to say, but I suppose I oughtn't—not yet recovered from the shock given her by Dorothy breaking off her engagement, and is keeping to her bed. However, it does not matter about there being an odd number.'

'Of course you can ask Captain Hampton if you like, father,' Dorothy said, coldly, 'but at any rate for my part I would rather that he did not meddle any more in my affairs.'

'Hulloa! hulloa!' Mr. Singleton exclaimed, 'what is in the wind now, Dorothy? I thought you and Ned Hampton were sworn friends, and next to yourself, Ned has always stood very high in my regard. A nicer lad than he was I have not come across; I only wish he was master of the old place down there instead of his brother, who is by no means a popular character in the county; although, perhaps, that is his wife's fault rather than his own. What have you been quarrelling with him about? I should have thought that for a young fellow, after being six years from England, to give up everything for a month, and spend it in your service, was in itself a strong claim to your regard.'

'There has been no quarrel between Captain Hampton and myself,' Dorothy said, as coldly as before. 'I do not say that it was not kind of him to take the pains he did about my affairs; but he acknowledged that he had doubted me, and after that I do not wish him to trouble himself any further in the matter.'

'What nonsense, Dorothy,' her father said, warmly. 'Who could have helped doubting you under the circumstances? Why, without half the excuse, even I was inclined to doubt you for a moment. Levine doubted you; Danvers, though he has not said as much, no doubt took the same view; and even Singleton here, when he gave you, as he believed, that money, thought that you had got into some horrible scrape. Singleton could not disbelieve the evidence of his eyes, and you are not angry with him for it. Why should you be so with Hampton, who also believed the evidence of his

eyes?'

'What was that, if I may ask?' Mr. Singleton said. 'I have heard nothing about that, and I am quite sure that Ned Hampton would not have doubted Dorothy without what he believed to be very strong evidence.'

'Well, Singleton, I will tell you, though I should not tell either Levine or Danvers, for it is undoubtedly the strongest piece of evidence against Dorothy. He went up to Islington late in the afternoon of the day when all this took place, to see if he could light upon that scoundrel Truscott, and he saw Truscott in close confabulation in a quiet street with the woman who came to your chambers, and whom he, like you, of course, took to be Dorothy. At that time neither he nor any one else knew of the jewel robbery, but naturally it struck him, as, of course, it would have struck every one, that Dorothy had got into some scrape, and that she had met that man to endeavour to persuade or bribe him to give up the letters, or, at any rate, to move, and so escape from the search we were making for him. Ned went out of town at once, and came back just about the time we heard of the jewel robbery. By that time he had, on thinking it over, concluded that his first idea was altogether erroneous, and when, at my wits' end, I told him of the jewel affair, he said at once it was absolutely impossible that Dorothy could have done such a thing, and that indeed it seemed to him a confirmation of the theory he had formed that some adventuress having a singular likeness to Dorothy was personating her. The idea had never occurred to me, and I was delighted on finding a possible explanation of what seemed to me a blank and absolute mystery. I consider that Dorothy is even more indebted to him for that suggestion than for the pains he took in trying to discover Truscott.'

'I certainly think you are wrong, Dorothy,' Mr. Singleton said, gravely, seeing that the girl listened with cold indifference to her father's explanation. 'He did no more than I did, namely, believe the evidence of his eyes, and on that evidence both of us were forced to believe that you had got into a scrape of some sort, and were under the thumb of a rascal.'

'I cannot argue about it, Mr. Singleton. I only know that I believed Captain Hampton would trust me implicitly, as I should have trusted him, and it is a great disappointment to me to find that I was mistaken. I do not defend myself; I admit that it may be silly and wrong on my part. I only say that I am disappointed in Captain Hampton, and that I would much rather he did not interfere in any way in my affairs.'

Mr. Hawtrey shrugged his shoulders. Mr. Singleton lifted his eyebrows slightly and then glanced with a furtive smile, which it was well that Dorothy did not detect, at her father, who looked somewhat surprised at this unexpected demonstration.

'At any rate, Dorothy,' the latter said, 'I must ask him to dinner; there will be no occasion for him to interfere farther in the matter, so far as I can see, and I should think that after your manner to him he will not be inclined to do so; still, it is impossible, after the pains he has taken in the matter, not to acquaint him with what has occurred here. We are at the top of St. James's Street,' and he pulled the check string. 'I suppose you will get out here too, Singleton?'

'Certainly, it is my lunch time; I will walk round with you to Ned Hampton's, and you had better lunch with me at the Travellers'. I will take him round there too, if we find him in.'

'Tell James we shall be five to dinner, Dorothy, as soon as you get back.'

As the carriage drove away Mr. Singleton indulged in a quiet laugh.

'What is it, Singleton? I could not make out that glance you gave me in the carriage. I own I see nothing at all laughable in it; to my mind this fancy of Dorothy's is at once utterly unreasonable and confoundedly annoying, and is, I may say, altogether unlike her.'

'My dear Hawtrey, I would ask you a question. Has it ever entered your mind that you would like Ned Hampton as a son-in-law?'

'As a son-in law!' Mr. Hawtrey repeated in astonishment. 'What do you mean, Singleton? No such idea ever occurred to me—how should it? There was a boy and girl friendship of a certain kind between them before he went away, but at that time Dorothy was a mere child of twelve years old, and of course no idea about her future marriage to him or any one else had entered my mind. When he came home the other day she was on the verge of being engaged to Halliburn, and was so engaged a week later. So again the idea could not have occurred to me. He is the son of an old friend and was constantly in and out of our house as a boy, and I have a very great regard and liking for him, but I certainly should not regard him as a very eligible match for Dorothy.'

'I should think, Hawtrey, you have had enough of eligible marriages,' Mr. Singleton said, sarcastically, 'and I should think Dorothy has, too. Next time I hope her heart will have something to say in the matter. I don't see why Ned Hampton should not be eligible. He is a younger son 'tis true, and has, I believe, only about four hundred a year in addition to his pay. Dorothy has, I know, some twenty thousand pounds from her mother's settlements, and some land that brings in about two hundred more, and she will some day have what you can leave her besides, which, as you have told me, would be something like fifteen thousand more; so with her money and his, it would come some day to not very far short of two thousand a year. As I told you, I have put her down in my will for five thousand. I should have put her down for more had I thought she wanted it, but as it seemed likely that she would make a good match, I did not think it would be of any use to leave her more. I have put him down for a like sum, and certainly if those two were to

come together, I should considerably increase it. I have no children of my own. My relations, as far as I know of them, are well-to-do people, and therefore I am perfectly free to do what I like with my money and estate. That being so, I think you may dismiss from your mind any idea that Dorothy is likely to come to poverty if she marries Ned Hampton.'

'Well, old friend, that certainly alters the case. However, as you see, there is no probability whatever of the young people taking that view of the case. Ned Hampton has always been like an elder brother or, if you like, a favourite cousin of Dorothy's, and since he came home I have never seen the slightest change in his manner towards her. As to her, you have just heard what she has said.'

'I know nothing of his ideas on the subject, Hawtrey, but as Dorothy was and is, so far as he knows, engaged to the Earl of Halliburn, Ned, whatever he might think, would scarcely embark in a flirtation with her. As to Dorothy, as you say, she showed pretty clearly the state of her mind just now.'

'Yes, she has evidently taken a strong prejudice against him, Singleton. It is a pity, too, for I like him exceedingly, and I don't know any one to whom personally I would more willingly entrust Dorothy's happiness.'

'I don't know,' Mr. Singleton remarked meditatively, 'why fathers should be so much more blind about their daughters than other people are. You don't suppose that if Dorothy had been quite indifferent as to Ned Hampton's opinion of her she would have been so exceedingly sore at his having doubted her. I do not say she loves him. I do not even suppose that she has the remotest idea of such a thing. I only say that she evidently attaches a very great weight to his good opinion, and is proportionately grieved at what she considers his want of confidence in herself.

'She makes light of having broken off her engagement to Halliburn, but we know she must feel it a great deal more than she pretends to do. No girl in her position in society would break off such a match without feeling sore about it—however convinced she might be that it was the best thing to do—and in that temper the defection, as she considers it, of a faithful ally would naturally be keenly felt. Of course, there is nothing to do but to let the matter rest; only, please do not attempt to argue the point with her, but let her have her own way, without comment. She is far more likely to come round in time if left alone than if constantly put upon the defence. But, bless me! here we are at Waterloo Place, and have forgotten altogether the business in hand, which is to call at Ned Hampton's lodgings. Well, they are about half-way along Jermyn Street, so that we may as well turn up here. Now—to continue our conversation for another minute or two—I should say we had best put all this out of our minds for the present, and leave matters to right themselves. There are more urgent things to think of, for I am afraid, Hawtrey, there is a good deal of trouble ahead for her and for you, whatever course you may decide to take about Gilliat's matter. We who know and love Dorothy may be absolutely certain of her innocence in these matters, but you must remember that unless we can produce the woman, it will be uphill work indeed to get the world to see matters in the same light, if it comes to a trial and all the facts come out. On the other hand, if you compromise, it is morally certain these things will go on. You will be absolutely driven to fight one of these claims, and every claim you pay you will make it harder to resist the next, so that either way there is trouble, I am afraid great trouble, ahead, and the only way out of it that I can see is to find this man and woman, who may for aught I know at the present moment be on the other side of the Atlantic. There does not seem to be a shadow of a clue which we can follow up, and a wild-goose chase is a joke to it.'

'I agree with you entirely, Singleton. Of course, in an affair like this money is nothing, and I shall employ the best detectives I can get. Levine will be able to tell me of good men. If I find Ned Hampton in I will tell him the whole story at once, which will save explanations this evening.'

'You mean you will tell him while we are at lunch, Hawtrey, for it is past two o'clock now, and at my age one cannot afford to neglect the inner man in this way.'

They met Captain Hampton half way along the street.

'We were just coming for you, Ned,' Mr. Hawtrey said. 'Singleton wants you to come and lunch with him. He and I want to have a talk with you.'

'I have only just finished my lunch, but I am perfectly ready for the talk, Mr. Hawtrey.'

'Where were you going now?'

'I think I was principally going to smoke a cigar. I have been in all the morning, and on a day like this one gets restless after a time.'

'Then you shall take a turn for twenty minutes, Ned. There is nothing more unpleasant than looking on at people eating, unless it is eating with people looking on; besides, we could not begin our talk now. What do you say, Hawtrey? Shall we join him, say, at the foot of the Duke of York's steps, turn in to St. James's Park and sit down, if we can find a bench free of nursemaids? as I daresay we shall, as they won't come out till later. At any rate, we don't want to be overheard, and we can never make sure of that in a club smoking-room.'

'That will suit me very well, Mr. Singleton, but don't hurry over your lunch; you will see me somewhere about when you are coming down the steps. I have just time to stroll down the Mall and back by Birdcage Walk.'

'Well, we will say in half-an-hour from the time you leave us.'

'This is another proof, Mr. Hawtrey, that our suspicion that Truscott is at the bottom of it all is well founded,' Captain Hampton said, when he had heard the story. 'It must have been somebody who was accurately acquainted with your affairs; some one who knew that Mr. Singleton was an intimate friend; so intimate that your daughter would be likely to go to him were she in any trouble, and that he would be likely to assist her.'

'It is certainly another link in the chain,' Mr. Hawtrey agreed.

'I would give a thousand pounds if we could lay our hands on the fellow,' Mr. Singleton exclaimed fiercely.

'But if we could find him, Singleton, we could not touch him; you and I, Ned, may be morally certain that he is at the bottom of all this, but we have not the remotest shadow of evidence on which a magistrate would grant a warrant for his arrest. If we found him, he would snap his fingers in our face.'

'You forget, Mr. Hawtrey,' said Ned, 'if we find him we are pretty sure of being able to find this woman. I do not say we are certain to find her, because we know nothing of their relations to each other; perhaps they are only united to carry out this piece of swindling. Truscott is shrewd enough to see that it would be better for them to part; perhaps they kept together until they went over to Hamburg, and sold the diamonds; then she might go over to Paris, and he to America, or they may have gone to any other two widely separated places in the world. If they have kept together, and are still in England, I should say they are most likely to be at present in some quiet and respectable lodgings at some large watering-place, where they pass as father and daughter. I quite agree with you in what you say that the fact of these two fresh robberies altogether alters the case, and that you can never calculate upon being free of annoyance, still I should say that you are safe for some little time. They ought to be satisfied with what they have got, and will naturally wait to see whether there is any stir made, and what comes of it, before repeating the same game. Have you seen Levine again?'

'Yes, we were there an hour and a half ago, and I am glad to say these last occurrences have completely changed his opinion of the case. We left him going into the matter with Danvers, who is coming to dine with us this evening, and will tell us what they think as to fighting Gilliat.'

'What does Halliburn think of it?' Captain Hampton asked, suddenly. 'After all, everything will depend, I should think, upon his opinion.'

'On that point, fortunately, we have not got to consult him, Ned—Dorothy has definitely broken off the engagement. As soon as we heard from Gilliat of the robbery, she declared that it was positively impossible that the matter should go on, and I quite agreed with her decision.'

Captain Hampton made no remark for a minute or two.

Mr. Hawtrey presently went on. 'I want you to come round to dinner too, Ned. There will only be Singleton and Danvers, and it will be a sort of family council.'

'Thank you, Mr. Hawtrey,' Captain Hampton replied, after a pause, 'I think I would rather not come. I have been unfortunate enough to offend Miss Hawtrey deeply already, and I don't think that my presence at such a council would be in any way agreeable to her, and that being so, I need hardly say that it would not be pleasant to me.'

'Tut, tut, lad, that is all nonsense. For a moment I was inclined to doubt her myself; those fellows' story seemed so terribly straight-forward that I was completely taken aback. Singleton let himself be led to believe that she had got into some terrible scrape, and how could you disbelieve your eyes more than he could? She will soon get over her little touchiness.'

'I rather doubt it, Mr. Hawtrey. I think it natural that she should feel very much hurt. Just at present my taking any part in the affair would, I feel sure, be very distasteful to her. But when you say to me, "Dorothy has quite got over her indignation and wants you to come and have a chat with her," I shall be delighted to come. In the meantime I would rather give no opinion whatever as to the matter, but I shall, nevertheless, work quietly in my own way and do my best to discover some clue as to the movements of this man. I have the great advantage of knowing him by sight, which no detective would do. I am certain I am not likely to make any mistake as to the woman. Please don't mention to Dorothy that I am taking any further part in the affair. Levine will, I should think, advise you to put the matter into the hands of detectives, and I shall be glad to know from time to time what their opinion is and whether they have gained any clue as to their whereabouts. I would suggest that you should get from Allerton two or three small pieces of each of the silks that were taken; should there be anything at all peculiar in colour or pattern, it might be an aid to the detectives.'

'You are right there, Ned,' Mr. Singleton said; 'an adventuress of that kind, having got hold of some handsome silks, would not be able to forego the pleasure of having them made up and showing off in them. Do you mean to pay Allerton, Hawtrey?'

'I gave him a cheque at once. I told him that this was one of several robberies that had been committed by some woman personating my daughter, but that it would be so unpleasant to go into the matter, and so difficult to find the thief, that I would rather pay the money at once. In addition to the patterns of the dresses I will get him to have some sketches made of the mantles.

They will probably have some others like them, but if not they are sure to know the exact particulars of them. There may be some slight peculiarity about the fashion of the things that would help a detective.'

'I think you would do even better than that,' Captain Hampton said, 'if you got a dozen of your daughter's daguerreotypes; they would assist detectives much more than anything else in making inquiries; they would only have to show them to a waiter in any hotel where this woman stopped, and they could hardly fail to be recognised at once, for she would certainly attract attention wherever she went. Dorothy gave me one a few days after I came back, but as I should be very sorry to have that knocked about I should be glad if you would let me have another.'

'That is an excellent idea, Ned. I will order a couple of dozen of her photos this afternoon from Watson, who took the last she had done. Well, I am sorry you won't come and dine with us; though I don't know but that it is better for you to leave her to herself for a short time. I admit that she has not quite got over it yet, but I expect that she will come round before long. Which way are you going?'

'I think I shall sit where I am for a bit, Mr. Hawtrey; it is very pleasant here in the shade, and I want to think over all that you have been saying. I must try and see what I had best do next.'

He got up, however, half an hour later with an impatient exclamation.

'What is the use of my wasting my time here? I was three weeks looking for the fellow before, and Slippen found him a few hours after taking the matter in hand. I will take his advice anyhow. He is more likely to have an idea as to what a fellow like this would do under the circumstances than I could have.'

'I have been doing nothing more about that case, Captain Hampton,' the detective said, when the caller was shown in by a boy who reminded him strongly of Jacob; 'I wrote to Mr. Hawtrey that the man had altogether disappeared, but that I would have the racecourses watched, and that if he turned up at any of them we would let him know. That is three weeks ago, and he certainly has not shown up at any racecourse, and my men have ascertained beyond much doubt, that none of his usual pals have seen or heard anything of him from the day he left his quarters at Islington. I am glad you have come, as I was going to write to Mr. Hawtrey, to ask if he considered it worth while keeping up the search. Certainly it seems to me that if a man like that, who has been a constant attendant at the races for the last twenty years, and makes his living out of them, doesn't go near them for three weeks, it must be because he has either gone away or is very ill, or has taken to some new life altogether.'

'That is just the opinion that I have formed, Mr. Slippen, and I wanted to ask your opinion about it. We have a very strong idea that there is a woman acting in concert with him, and between them they have victimised a friend of Mr. Hawtrey's out of a considerable sum of money. We may take it then for granted that they have means sufficient to live on for some little time, or to take them wherever they may want to go. I fancy myself that they must have left London; a man like that could hardly keep away from racecourses altogether; therefore I agree with you, that nothing but severe illness or absence can be the cause of his staying away from racecourses and from all his own intimates for three weeks.'

'That is just how I reasoned it, Captain Hampton; and now that you tell me that he has got hold of some money, I have not the least doubt that he has sloped.'

'Well, from your experience in such matters, Mr. Slippen, where do you think that a man like that would be likely to go?'

'There is no saying at all. He might go down to some quiet place in the country, but Lor' bless you, a man like that could never stand three weeks of it. It is very likely that if he is in funds and has got a clever woman with him they may have got themselves up and be staying at some swell hotel at one of the seaside places, or at Harrogate or Buxton, and be carrying on some little swindle there. Then again, after this job you say they have managed, they may think it best to make themselves scarce altogether, and may be at some foreign watering-place. A clever sharp can always make his living at those sort of places, especially with a woman to help him. I suppose she is young and pretty?'

Captain Hampton nodded.

'Bound to be,' the detective went on. 'Well, a sharp fellow with a girl like that, if she is shrewd and clever, can just turn over money at places of that kind. They are full of young fools, most of whom have got money in their pockets. Well then, again, they may have gone across the water somewhere—more likely the States than anywhere else; it is a big place for hiding in, and when a fellow has done a bit of clever sharping here and knows that he is wanted, he somehow always makes for the States, just as naturally as a duck takes to water.

'Have you agents who would be of any use at these places?'

'No, I will acknowledge frankly that I have not, Captain Hampton. It would be no use taking Mr. Hawtrey's money for a job of that sort; it is too big for me. If there was any one place to which you could track them I could send out a man there well enough. But I could not work either the Continent or the States. If you have got proof of a bad piece of swindling against this man, your best plan will be to go to Scotland Yard and get them to put a man at your service. The foreign police would not move a finger if I were to write to them, but they would be willing enough to

move if Scotland Yard had the thing in hand.'

'Mr. Hawtrey has put himself in Charles Levine's hands, and in these matters he will have to act as he suggests; but I am taking the matter up on my own account. I have spent a good deal of time over it, and don't like to be beaten, and if you could have undertaken it, and it would have been at all within my means, I would have arranged with you. As it is, I shall come to you again for advice and assistance if I require them. I think you had better send in your account to Mr. Hawtrey for the work done so far, with a letter asking for instructions. He may like to have the racecourses watched for a bit longer. If you see him do not mention this talk with me. By the way, I found that boy you had, on my door-step a few days ago. He told me he had left you, and as he seemed a sharp little fellow I have taken him on to run errands and that sort of thing.'

'He is not a bad boy, as that sort of boy goes. They are all young scamps, but he took it into his head to be cheeky, and I had to kick him out. I am glad to hear he has not gone on the streets again. You will have to look pretty sharp after him, but you may find him useful, if, as you say, you are going to try to unearth this fellow we have been in search of.'

CHAPTER X

'We shall be only four at dinner, Dorothy,' Mr. Hawtrey said, when he returned. 'I could not get Hampton to come.'

'Engaged, I suppose,' Dorothy said indifferently.

'No, dear, he simply said that as he had had the misfortune to displease you—I think those were his very words—he thought it would be better to stay away. I could not say that I did not agree with him and so the matter dropped. Of course I am sorry, for I have always liked the lad. Naturally the interest he has shown in us in this trouble and the pains he has taken about it have quite renewed the old feeling. I have turned to him for advice and talked matters over with him almost as if he had been a son, and, of course, I shall miss him a good deal now—but it cannot be helped.'

'I am sure I don't want him to stay away from the house, father,' Dorothy said, in an aggrieved tone.

'I don't know whether you want it or not, Dorothy; but naturally that has been the effect. You do not suppose that a man who has been on so friendly a footing with us for the last twenty years is going to put up with being called Captain Hampton, and addressed as if he were a stranger, and treated with a sort of freezing politeness by a girl whom, almost from the day when he arrived in England, he has been giving up his time to assist. I think he is perfectly right to keep away from the house, and I think any man of spirit would do the same.'

'Did he say that he resented it, father?'

'Well, no, he didn't. He seemed to think that while it was reasonable that I, your father, should have had doubts, and that your old friend, Singleton, should have readily accepted the evidence of his senses and have believed that you had got into some sort of bad scrape, that you should feel hurt because he did so. Singleton and I both said that it was preposterous. However, he stuck to his own opinion just as you do to yours. However, there is an end of the matter. I am heartily sorry. I don't think one makes so many real friends as he has of late shown himself to be, that one can afford to throw even one away, especially just at a time like this. Well, it is of no use talking about it any more.'

Danvers' report of the consultation between himself and Charles Levine left matters pretty nearly as they were before. It was greatly desirable for the purpose of preventing any further personation that the jeweller's claim should be contested, but upon the other hand it was equally certain that it would be an extremely unpleasant thing for Mr. and Miss Hawtrey. The chances of obtaining a verdict were very slight, as they had merely an hypothesis to oppose to the direct evidence of the jeweller and his assistants. It was a case that the principals must decide for themselves. In case they were willing to meet the inevitable unpleasantness of a trial, it would be incumbent on them to use every possible effort to obtain some evidence in confirmation of their hypothesis. Scotland Yard should be communicated with and detectives set to work; a reward, say of 100*l.*, might be offered in the papers for information that would lead to the arrest of the female who had been personating Miss Hawtrey and in her name obtaining goods under false pretences, a description of the woman's appearance being given. Even if no evidence was forthcoming from the advertisement it would serve as a preparation for the trial, and the defence to the claim would not come as a surprise. Moreover, the appearance of the advertisement would deter the woman from attempting for some time to repeat her operations. Mr. Levine also recommended that a letter should be sent to all the shops where they dealt, to warn them that it was possible that a person very closely resembling Miss Hawtrey might attempt to obtain goods, and that everything ordered should be sent to the house, and not delivered personally; and it would be desirable, if possible, that they should be told that in future Miss Hawtrey, when giving an order, would give her visiting card, and that of Mr. Hawtrey; and that any person purporting to be her, and being unable when asked to give her card, should be detained, and given in charge of the police. This, at least, was the line which they recommended should be adopted; but, of

course, the matter would be further considered and gone into later on, if Mr. Hawtrey decided to contest the claim.

'Levine considers it one of the most difficult cases he has ever been engaged in,' said Danvers. 'He says frankly he does not think you have the remotest chance of getting a verdict, unless before the trial comes on you can lay your hand on this woman, and he suggests that you and he together should see Gilliat—who, of course, has no personal feeling in the matter, and would naturally be most averse to taking anything like hostile action against you—and inform him of the exact position of the case, and your desire that they should not send in their account to you for another three or four months. This would give at least six months before the trial would come on, and in that time, if ever, we ought to be able to lay our hands on this woman, and you would still have the option of paying, if before the case comes on you can obtain no evidence. Lastly, he says that, unpleasant as it is to contemplate the possibility of such a thing, it must not be forgotten that in the event of the trial coming on, and the verdict being an adverse one, it is quite upon the cards that if public opinion is strongly aroused on the subject, the Treasury may feel compelled to order a prosecution of Miss Hawtrey for perjury—if not for obtaining goods under false pretences—or possibly for theft.'

'Would it be possible to trace the jewels in any way?' Mr. Hawtrey asked, after a long pause.

'Quite possible, if they were pawned or sold to a jeweller in this country, but that is hardly likely to be the case. Very few jewellers would purchase such goods without making enquiries as to the vendor, and the same may be said of the class of pawnbrokers who would be in a position to advance so large a sum. It is much more probable that the tiaras were broken up an hour after they were stolen and the setting put in a melting pot and the diamonds taken over to Hamburg, and as they have not been advertised there would be little or no trouble in disposing of them to a diamond merchant there. Enquiries can be made in that direction, only we must obtain from Gilliat the technical description of the size, number, and weight of the gems.'

'Do I understand that your opinion completely agrees with that of Charles Levine, Danvers?'

'Precisely; those are the two courses, Mr. Hawtrey; and it is a matter entirely for you and Miss Hawtrey to decide upon. The easiest, the most pleasant, and, I may say, the cheapest—for costs will follow the verdict—would be to pay the money; the other course would involve immense trouble and annoyance, the payment of detectives, public scandal, and, I am afraid, an adverse verdict from the public as well as from the jury.'

'I should say, Hawtrey,' Mr. Singleton put in, 'you had better take a sort of middle course; tell Gilliat that the thing is a swindle, but that if you cannot obtain proof that it is so within six months you will pay him, and in the meantime move heaven and earth to discover these people. If you succeed, well and good. If you don't, pay the money; it seems to me that anything would be better than going into court and being beaten.'

'I think that is very sound advice,' Danvers said, eagerly. 'Gain time, fight if you can fight with a chance of success, but if not, pay him; in that way you will save all legal expenses, for you can arrange with Gilliat to take no steps until you give him a decided answer six months hence, and you will avoid all the terrible scandal the trial would entail. The detectives will, of course, cost money, but I do not see how that is to be helped.'

'I think that would be the best plan,' Mr. Hawtrey said. 'I hope you agree with me, Dorothy. I own that the prospect of a trial terrifies me, and I would do anything to avoid it.'

'Just as you like, father; it seems to me that I would rather fight than be robbed; but as everyone seems to think that we should be certainly beaten I am willing to agree to anything you wish.'

'Then we will consider that matter settled, Danvers,' Mr. Hawtrey said, in a tone of relief, 'and the decision has taken a tremendous load off my mind. Will you kindly see Levine? Tell him I put myself entirely in his hands as to the employment of detectives. I got samples after I left you, Singleton, of the silks that hussy took, and I am bound to say that they are handsome and do credit to her taste. I am to have sketches of the mantles to-morrow. Will you ask Levine, Danvers, whether he advises I should still put in the advertisement you spoke of, and write to the tradesmen? You can mention that we shall go abroad next week, and on our return go down into Lincolnshire, so that perhaps it would be well not to stop these people, for of course if they were to repeat the trick when we were in a position to prove that we were hundreds of miles away at the time, it would be a pretty conclusive defence if we fought Gilliat's claim.'

'It would be so conclusive a defence, sir, that Gilliat would never bring the case into court. The moment he saw that there really was an impostor going about as Miss Hawtrey, he would see that he had been victimised, and that his only course was to apologise to Miss Hawtrey for having doubted her word, and to withdraw his claim. Yes, there is no doubt it would be the wisest plan to do nothing whatever in the way of advertising or warning the tradespeople.'

A week later the authorities at Scotland Yard had notified the French, Belgian, and German police that a man and woman whose description was accurately given, and a likeness of the latter sent, would be probably passing themselves off under an assumed name, and that should they show themselves they were to be arrested as swindlers. Small samples of four pieces of silk and drawings of the mantles were also enclosed to aid in the identification of the female prisoner, who would probably have these clothes with her.

Similar letters were also sent off to the police authorities in all large towns and watering-places in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Hawtrey called twice in Jermyn Street, but found that Captain Hampton was away. He wrote him, however, a full account of all that had been decided upon, and asked him, should he return before they started for the Continent, to call and see them. He came in on the last evening before they left town.

'I only returned an hour ago,' he said. 'I was delighted to get your letter, and to find the decision you had arrived at.' He had shaken hands cordially with Mr. Hawtrey, formally with Mrs. Daintree and Dorothy. Mr. Hawtrey glanced at the former and shook his head, to intimate that that lady had not been taken into the family council.

'Mary knows nothing about it,' he took occasion afterwards to say, in a low voice; 'the whole thing has been kept a secret from her. She kept her bed for four days after that Halliburn affair, and had she known that Dorothy was accused of stealing, she would have had a fit.'

'You mean as to going away before the season is quite over, Captain Hampton,' Mrs. Daintree said, in reference to his remark on entering. 'Yes, I think it is very wise. Dorothy has been looking far from well for the last month, and the excitement and late hours have been too much for her. I shall be very glad myself to be back again in my quiet home. The season has been a very trying one.'

'I am sorry to hear you have been poorly, Mrs. Daintree. London seems pleasant enough to me, though there have been two or three very hot days.'

'What are you going to do, Ned?' Mr. Hawtrey asked. 'I suppose you are not going to stay after every one else has gone? I have heard nothing more about that yacht you talked of.'

'I have given up the idea. I daresay I should have enjoyed it very much, but one wants a pleasant party, and it does not seem to me that I can get one together, so I have abandoned it and intend taking a run across the Atlantic for two or three months. I did Switzerland and Italy before I went away, and should not care about doing Switzerland again at the time when every hotel is crowded; and as for Italy it would be too hot. I have always thought that I should like a run through the States, and I am never likely to have a better opportunity than this.'

'I suppose you will be back by Christmas, Ned? I need not say how glad I shall be if you come down and spend it with us; it would be like old times, lad.'

'Thank you, Mr. Hawtrey, I should like it greatly, but I will make no promises.'

'Well, suppose you come down to my den and smoke a cigar, Ned. There are several matters I want to chat with you about.'

'Why I want to get off in a hurry,' he went on, when they were seated in the library, 'I saw Halliburn on the day after the affair was broken off, and I suggested to him that the matter should not be made public for a week or two. The House will separate next week, and I thought it would be pleasanter to both parties if nothing was said about it till after that, when both will be away, and society scattered, so that all gossip or annoying questions would be avoided. He agreed with me thoroughly, as he evidently objected quite as much as I did to there being any talk on the subject; so I wrote a paragraph with his approval. It will be sent round to half-a-dozen of these gossipy papers the day after Parliament goes down. This is it: "We are authorised to state that the match arranged between the Earl of Halliburn and Miss Hawtrey will not take place. We understand that the initiative in the matter was taken by the lady, who, in view of the malicious reports concerning her that have appeared in some of the papers, has decided to withdraw from the engagement, much, we believe, to the regret of the noble Earl."'

'That will do excellently,' Captain Hampton agreed. 'I may tell you frankly, Mr. Hawtrey, that the idea of going to the States only occurred to me after reading your letter. For the last week I have been working along the south coast watering-places, giving a day to each. I began at Hastings and went to Eastbourne, Brighton, Worthing, Southsea, and Southampton, and took a run to Ryde and Cowes. I went to every hotel of any size at each of those towns, saw the manager and two or three of the waiters, and showed them the photograph and the scraps of silk, but none of them had had any lady at all answering to that description, or resembling the likeness, staying there. I intended to have made the entire tour of the seaports, but now that instructions have been sent to all the local police officers I need spend no more time over it. They will do it infinitely better than I could, for whereas I could only see to the hotels, they will naturally keep an eye upon all visitors, and it is as likely that they may be in lodgings as at an hotel; more likely, indeed, for at present they are flush of cash, and would not want to make the acquaintance of people, especially at hotels, where there would be the risk of running up against somebody who knew Miss Hawtrey. So with England and the Continent both provided for I am free to try the States. I should not have said anything to you about it, but I want you to write to me if the police find any trace of them. I will go to the Metropolitan Hotel at New York, and when I leave will keep them posted as to my whereabouts, so that they can forward any letter to me.'

'My dear Ned,' Mr. Hawtrey said, feelingly, 'you are indeed a good friend. I do not know how to thank you enough, but I really do not like you to be wasting your holiday in this fashion.'

'Don't worry about that; if it hadn't been for this I should have been hanging about with no particular object, and should have been heartily sick of doing nothing long before my year was

out. This will give an interest and an object in travelling about, and it is always a pleasure to be working for one's dearest friends. There are but few people in England now for whom I really care. I never got on with my brothers, and beyond yourself and kind old Mr. Singleton, I have really no friends except Army men or school chums, like Danvers, and every time I come home their number will diminish. You must remember I am a police officer, and I suppose the instinct of thief-catching is strong in me. Certainty I shall not feel happy until I have got at the root of this mystery. You must remember the hypothesis as to this woman is my own, and I feel that my honour is concerned to prove its correctness; but, mind, Mr. Hawtrey, I particularly request that Dorothy shall know nothing of the matter.'

'Why not, Ned?'

'I have not been successful so far, and in fact have done more harm than good, and the betting is very strongly against my succeeding. They may not have gone to America. I simply choose it because the other ground is occupied, and also because there is an undoubted tendency among criminals to make for the States. In the next place, even if they are in America, it is almost like looking for a needle in a cart-load of hay. Still, if fortune favours me, I may possibly succeed; but if I do not, I certainly do not wish to let Dorothy know that I have been trying. I have wronged her by having doubted her for a moment, and I do not wish to compel her to feel under an obligation to me merely because I have united amusement with a little work on her behalf.'

'Well, I think you are wrong, Ned—wrong altogether; but of course you must do as you like in the matter. Have you sketched out any plan for yourself?'

'I have not thought it over yet, but it will be similar to that I have been just working. If they have gone to America, New York is, of course, their most probable destination. I suppose there are not above five or six hotels that are usually frequented by people coming from England. I shall try them first, then go down rather lower in the grade, and if I do not succeed there I shall try Boston; then I must take the other ports to which liners run, until I have exhausted them. I have at least one advantage there. There will be no question as to their going direct into lodgings. They will be certain to put up at an hotel at first. There is no saying as to where they will go afterwards. My movements will depend entirely on whether I can pick up a clue. If I cannot get one at any of the seaports there is an end of it, for it would be mere folly to search at random in the interior. Of course, before starting I shall go to all the steamship offices in London, and find what vessels sailed between the 17th and 24th of last month. That will give me a margin of a week. If they did not go within a week after the robbery they won't have gone at all.'

'Perhaps we had better join the ladies again or they may be suspecting us of arranging some plan or other.'

'I will just go up and say good-bye and go. I hope I shall find Dorothy looking better on my return. The troubles of the last eight weeks have told their tale on her, but I hope that two months' change and then a time of rest and quiet will soon set her up again.'

'Well, God bless you, Ned. I hope that your search will be successful; but I shall not build upon it at all, and pray do not worry yourself if you do not succeed.'

They went upstairs again. Mrs. Daintree had already gone to bed.

Dorothy was sitting with the tea-tray before her when her father and Ned Hampton entered.

'I was just going to send down to you, father; I thought that you must have nearly finished your cigars.'

'Thank you, I won't take any tea, Miss Hawtrey,' Captain Hampton said, as she was about to pour out two cups. 'I only came up to say good-bye and to wish you a pleasant time abroad. As I only came back half an hour before I came across to you, I have a pile of notes to open and answer, and as I shall sail in a day or two, I shall have my hands full.'

Dorothy stood up and shook hands.

'Good-bye, Captain Hampton; thank you for your good wishes; I hope that you too will enjoy your trip.' It was said in the tone of voice in which she might have said good-bye to the most ordinary acquaintance.

Captain Hampton dropped her hand abruptly, and shook hands heartily with Mr. Hawtrey, who said, 'Good-bye, Ned; don't get yourself into any scrapes with Indians, or grizzly bears, or anything of that sort.'

'I will try not to, sir,' and Captain Hampton turned and left the room. Mr. Hawtrey turned as the door closed, and was about to say something sharply, when he saw that there were tears in Dorothy's eyes. He gulped down his irritation, took his cup of tea off the tray, and stirred it with unnecessary violence. Then he abruptly asked Dorothy if her packing was all finished.

'We must breakfast at seven sharp,' he said, 'so as to catch the boat with a quarter of an hour to spare. The exodus has begun and there is sure to be a crowd.'

'Ten minutes in the morning will finish everything,' Dorothy said. 'I will be down at a quarter to seven. Mildred can put the rest of the things in while we are at breakfast. All the boxes are packed and corded but one, and can be brought down as soon as I am out of the room. Is Captain Hampton going to shoot bears and that sort of thing, that you gave him warning?'

'He does not seem to have any fixed plan, Dorothy, but I fancy from what he said that he is more likely to wander about and look at the towns, and such places as Niagara and the other places tourists go to as a matter of course. He certainly did not say a word about shooting, and my warning was in no way given seriously. If we were not going away ourselves I should miss him amazingly, for a better fellow never trod in shoe leather. Now, it's half-past ten, dear, and the sooner we are both in bed the better, for we are to be called at six.'

While Ned Hampton had been away Jacob had spent his whole time in wandering in the suburbs in the vain hope of catching sight of the man and woman of whom he was in search. Ned had shown him the portrait, and the boy had examined it closely.

'I shall know her when I see her, Captain; one doesn't see gals like that every day. I seem to have seen some one like her, but I can't think where. I am sure she was not so pretty as that, not by a long way; but there is something in the picture that I seem to know.'

He was in when his master returned from the Hawtreys.

'No luck, Captain,' he said, apologetically, 'and it ain't been from want of tramping about, for I have walked about every day from eight in the morning and got home at evening that tired I could hardly get upstairs to bed.'

'By the way, Jacob, have you ever thought of whom the likeness reminded you? I told you to try and think who it was.'

'Yes, I know who it was now, but it ain't in our way at all. Four or five years ago I lived up a court at Chelsea, not far from that big hospital where they put the old soldiers. Well, there was a gal about two years older than me lived up in the attic of one of the houses in the court along with a woman. I don't remember what the old one's name was now, but she used to drink awful. She was about fifteen—the gal I mean—and I was about twelve. That gal had something of the look of the lady in the picture, except that the picture is smiling, and she used in general to look cross. I don't know what there was in her face that comes back to me as being like the picture, but there must have been something, else it would not have made me think of her.'

'Was the woman her mother?'

'I don't know, sir.'

'Well, you go down to that court to-morrow, Jacob, the first thing, and find out if that woman is there still, and whether the girl is with her; and if they have moved, try to find out where they have gone to. I don't suppose there can be the slightest connection between that girl and the woman that I am in search of, for the woman must have been educated to a certain extent, or she would have been detected by the jeweller or Mr. Singleton directly she spoke; still, as there is nothing else for you to do, it would be just as well for you to make inquiries.

'There is something else I want to speak to you about, Jacob. In a day or two I shall leave for America, and may be away some months—I only settled the matter an hour ago—and I don't see what I am to do with you; I don't know what sort of place you are fit for here, and if I did know I don't see how I could get it for you.'

'Take me with you, Captain,' Jacob said promptly. 'Couldn't I be of use to you there, sir, as well as here? I knows as I haven't done no good yet; but it ain't been for want of trying, I will take my davy on that.'

'I don't say that you would not be of use Jacob, but you would add very heavily to my expenses; the distances there are very great, and the extra train fares would come to quite a large sum. You would not cost much besides; not more perhaps than here.'

'I would not cost so much, Captain,' Jacob said confidently. 'I calls it just chucking money away as it is now. I would be willing to live on dry bread if you would take me. Three pennyworth a day would do me fine, and I could take my old clothes with me and put them on at nights and sleep anywhere. As to the trains, Captain, I could walk first-rate, and I expect I could get a lift in a waggon sometimes.'

'Well, I will think it over, Jacob. I don't quite see what use you would be to me, though there might be occasions when I might want some one to keep watch. Well, go off to bed now. I shall have thought it over by the time I see you in the middle of the day.'

While Captain Hampton sat smoking he finally settled the question. Common-sense, as he told himself, was altogether against taking the boy. His passage out and back in the steerage would cost eight or ten pounds, there was no saying how much the railway fares would be if he got on these people's track and found they had gone inland. It was not likely that the boy could be of any material use to him.

The more he thought of it the more absurd the idea of taking him appeared, and yet that was what he decided upon doing. It was a luxury, but he had laid by money each year to enable him to enjoy his trip home thoroughly. Circumstances had occurred that had altogether upset the programme he had formed, and there was no reason why he should not enjoy the luxury of having Jacob with him.

He had taken a strong liking to the boy. Jacob had attached himself to him without any other reason than that he liked him, and he was certain that he would serve him faithfully. He was as

sharp as a needle, with that precocious sharpness which comes of want and necessity. Supposing these people were found, they would certainly have to be watched until an extradition warrant could be obtained from England; but, above all, in such a quest it would be a satisfaction to have some one to talk to, some one who would be as keen in the search as he was himself.

'I don't suppose it will cost more than fifty pounds,' he said, finally, 'and that bit of extravagance won't hurt me.'

In the morning his first visit was to Danvers' chambers.

'I was wondering where you had hidden yourself, Hampton. I have seen scarcely anything of you for the last fortnight.'

'I have been trying to get to the bottom of this affair of Hawtrey's on my own account, and of course have failed. I am going for a run over to the States. I don't care for the Continent in August and September, the hotels are so frightfully crowded. It has struck me that it is possible that these people may have gone to the States, and I will stop a day or two in New York to see if I can find any trace of their having passed through there. I found a letter from Hawtrey when I came home last night, telling me all that you are doing. As you are acting in the matter with Charles Levine I thought it would be a help to me if you would get a letter for me from Scotland Yard to the police there, saying that I was in search of two notorious swindlers, and asking them to give me any assistance they can.'

'That is a very good idea, Hampton. It is quite on the cards that they made for the States directly they had realised the money for their plunder.'

'How long do you think they would have been doing that?'

'Two or three days. It is not likely they would sell the diamonds here. The man probably started with them for Hamburg the night they were stolen, and a few hours would be sufficient there.

'The robbery was on the 15th of last month. There is no reason why they should not have sailed by the 20th from Liverpool; or he may have taken her with him, Danvers, and they may have gone by one of the German steamers.'

'That is likely enough,' Danvers agreed, 'if they have gone to the States; and if there happened to be a steamer anywhere about at that time, it is the route they would naturally choose. They would, of course, be pretty sure that it would be some days before the robbery of the diamonds would be discovered; still longer before it occurred to anyone that Miss Hawtrey herself had nothing whatever to do with it. Still, they would not care to delay, and would certainly prefer a route that would obviate the necessity for their passing through England.

'Well, I will see about this matter at once, I have not been in communication with Scotland Yard myself; of course, all that comes into Levine's province. I will go down to him, and ask him to get the letter at once. When are you leaving?'

'I have nothing to keep me here, and if I find there is a steamer going on Wednesday I will take a berth in her; I can be ready to leave here to-morrow night; indeed, I could leave to-night if necessary.'

'Wednesday is the regular mail day; that is, I know letters have to be posted here on Tuesday afternoon. So you will get one of the fast boats on Wednesday. You have heard all the fresh developments, I suppose, in Miss Hawtrey's affair?'

Captain Hampton nodded.

'I tell you it surprised me, and it surprised Levine even more. He scoffed altogether at the suggestion, of which Mr. Hawtrey told me you were the author, that it was a case of personation, but these two cases staggered him. I don't think that the getting money from Singleton would have done so alone, but the getting the silk dresses seemed to him conclusive. He quite believed that a girl might be driven to any straits if threatened by a scoundrel who had a hold on her, but that Miss Hawtrey should have taken to motiveless petty swindling seemed to him incredible. I was not as surprised as he was, because, strong as the case seemed against her, I could not bring myself to believe altogether that she was guilty. I am heartily glad, at any rate, that we have persuaded Hawtrey to pay the money if he cannot get any evidence in support of the impersonation theory.'

'So am I, Danvers. Hawtrey told me that you both said he had no chance whatever of getting a verdict, and I quite agree with you; but even if the jury had been persuaded, numbers of the public would still have believed her guilty, and the story would have told against her all her life.'

'I am very sorry that I am engaged this evening, Hampton, or else we might have dined together. It is one I cannot very well get out of. How long do you mean to be away?'

'It is quite uncertain. If I can get any trace of these people I mean to follow it up if it takes months to do it.'

The other nodded.

'I suppose Hawtrey told you that that engagement was broken off?' he said carelessly.

'Yes,' Hampton said shortly, 'Hawtrey told me. I was very glad to hear it, for this sort of thing

might have been started on an even bigger scale if she had married him, and might have ruined her life altogether. It is bad enough as it is.'

'No means of writing to you, I suppose, while you are away?'

'I shall be glad if you will write to me to the Metropolitan Hotel, New York, if anything should be heard of these people here or on the Continent, and I shall telegraph to those hotel people two or three times a week saying where I am, so that they can forward anything on to me; but I don't think that letters will be likely to overtake me, as I shall be moving about. I suppose you have arranged to telegraph at once to him if you get any news from the foreign police?'

'Yes; he is going to send me a line three or four times a week with his address for the next day or two.'

'Then in that case it would be of no use your writing to me, as he will know directly you do if anything turns up. Well, good-bye, old fellow.'

'Good-bye. I suppose that you will be back by the end of the year? At any rate, I hope so. I am off to-morrow myself; I am going to Vienna. I have a case coming on next sessions and want to see some people there, so I can combine business with pleasure. I think it possible that I may go on from there to Constantinople, and then go down to Greece, and home by water. I should have started a week ago if it had not been for this business of Hawtrey's, which seemed at one time to look so serious that I really did not like to go away until something was settled.'

Captain Hampton's arrangements occupied him little more than half-an-hour. He bought a case of cartridges for his revolver, took a passage for himself, and one in the steerage for Jacob. He hesitated as to whether to get the boy some more clothes, but decided to put that off till he got out, as there might be some slight difference in make that would attract attention; the only thing he bought for him was a small portmanteau. After taking his passage, therefore, he went home and read the paper till Jacob came in.

'Well, Jacob, to begin with, what is your news?'

'The woman died two years ago, sir; drank herself to death, the neighbours say. The gal had left her two years before. No one knows where she went to, no one saw her go. The woman let out some time afterwards as she had gone: "A friend had took her," she said; but no one heard her say anything more. She wasn't a great one for talking. The woman wasn't buried by the parish; an undertaker came and said he had been sent to do the job, and she was buried decent. There were a hearse and a carriage, and some of the people in the court went to the funeral, 'cause she wasn't a bad sort when she was sober. And please, Captain, am I going with you?'

'Yes, I have made up my mind to take you.'

The boy threw up the cap that he held in his hand to the ceiling and caught it again. 'Thank you, sir,' he said; 'I laid awake all night thinking on it. I will do all that you tell me, sir, and if I don't act right, just you turn me adrift out there—there ain't nothing as would be too bad for me.'

CHAPTER XI

The Hawtreys were ten days out from England, and were spending the day in a trip up Lake Lucerne. Not as yet were the great caravansaries that have well nigh spoiled Lucerne and converted the most picturesque town in Europe into a line of brand new hotels that might just as well be at Brighton, Ostend, or any other watering place, so much as thought of. Not as yet had the whole of the middle class of England discovered that a month on the Continent was one of the necessities of life, nor had the great summer invasion from the other side of the Atlantic begun. Such hotels as existed were, however, crowded when the season was over in London, and those who had met so frequently during the last four months came across each other at every turn, in steamboats, diligences, and in hotels. Not as yet had the steam whistle seriously invaded Switzerland, and travellers were content to jog quietly along enjoying the beauties of Nature instead of merely rushing through them from point to point. Mr. Singleton was with the Hawtreys. He had said good-bye when he left them on their last evening at home, without a hint of his intention of accompanying them, but he was quietly walking up and down the deck of the boat at Dover when they went on board.

'Why, there is Mr. Singleton, father,' Dorothy exclaimed in surprise, as her eye fell upon him as she went down the gangway. 'Why, he did not say anything about coming over when we said good-bye to him last night.'

'Well, my dear,' her godfather said, as he came up to them, 'you did not expect to see me.'

'No, indeed, Mr. Singleton. Why didn't you say yesterday when we saw you that you were going across to-day?'

'I don't know that I had quite made up my mind, Dorothy. I had been thinking about it; but I often think of things and nothing comes of it. After I had left you I thought it over seriously. I had not been abroad for some years, and I said to myself "If I don't go now I suppose I shall never go at all. Here is a good opportunity. It is lonely work when one gets the wrong side of sixty, to travel

alone; at my age one does not make acquaintances at every turn, as young fellows do. No doubt I should meet men I know, but, as a rule, people one knows are not so fond of each other's society as they are in London. I think my old friend Hawtrey, and my little god-daughter, would not mind putting up with me, and I can travel with them till they begin to get tired of me, and then jog quietly back my own way."'

'Then you will stop with us all the time, Mr. Singleton. I am delighted, and I am sure father is, too.'

'That I am,' Mr. Hawtrey said heartily, understanding perhaps better than Dorothy did why his friend had at the last moment decided to go with them. 'When did you come down?'

'I came by the same train you did. I came straight on board, for I have brought my man with me and he is looking after my things. I have got into regular old bachelor ways, dear, and am so accustomed to have my hot water brought in of a morning, and my clothes laid out for me, and my boxes packed and corded, that I should feel like a fish out of water without them.'

'It is your first trip abroad, isn't it? At least, I know you went to Paris last year, but I don't think you got any further?'

'No, we stayed there a fortnight, but that was all.'

'Well, you had better take your things down now,' Mr. Hawtrey broke in, 'in case you have to lie down. There seems to be a fresh wind blowing outside.'

'Oh, I don't mean to be ill, father. I think it was a rougher day than this last time, and I did not go below. Still, I may as well secure a place.'

'This is awfully good of you, Singleton,' Mr. Hawtrey said; 'I know you are doing it out of regard for her.'

'A little that way, perhaps, Hawtrey, and a good deal because I am sure I shall enjoy myself greatly. As a rule, I should be very chary of offering to join anyone travelling; a third person is often a nuisance, just as much so in travelling as at other times. I own that I don't much care for going about by myself, but I thought you really would be glad to have me with you. Dorothy has had so much to try her of late that I felt this was really a case where a third person would be of advantage. I can help to keep up conversation and prevent her from thinking and worrying over these things. Besides, there is no doubt you will be running continually against people you know. The announcement that will appear to-morrow of the breaking off of her engagement will set people talking again. It is just one of the things that the last arrival from England will mention, as being the latest bit of society news, and I think, somehow, that three people together can face public attention better than two can.'

'Thank you, old friend; it will be better for her in every way. I am not a good hand at making conversation, and it will be the thing of all others for Dorothy; she always chatters away with you more than with anyone else, and I can assure you that I feel your coming a perfect god-send. She scarcely said a word coming down this morning, and though I tried occasionally to talk about our trip, she only answered with an evident effort. I am afraid it will take some time to get all this out of her mind.'

'It would be strange if it didn't, Hawtrey. For a girl who has practically never known a care to find herself suddenly suspected and talked of, first as having compromised herself with some unknown person, and then as being a thief, is enough to give her a tremendous shaking up.

'Then the breaking off of her engagement was another trial. I don't say that it was the same thing as if she had loved the man with a real earnest love; still, it is a trial for any girl to break off a thing of that sort, and to know that it will be a matter of general talk and discussion, especially coming at the top of the other business.

'Here she comes again, and looking a hundred per cent. better than she did before she caught sight of you, Singleton. I shall begin to be veritably jealous of you.'

They had stopped two days in Paris, and as much at Basle, and had now been four days at Lucerne, where they had met many of their own set. The news had already been told, and Dorothy was conscious of being regarded with a certain curiosity at the *table d'hôte* as the girl who had just broken off a brilliant match, but she betrayed no signs of consciousness that she was the object of attention, and those who had been most intimate with her, and had been inclined to condole with her, felt that in face of the light-hearted gaiety with which she chatted with her father and Mr. Singleton, and the brightness of her looks, anything of the kind would be out of place.

'She looks quite a different girl to what she did during the season,' one of her acquaintances said to Mrs. Dean, who had arrived at Lucerne the day before the Hawtreys. 'I suppose she never really cared for Halliburn after all. No doubt those curious stories that there were about had something to do with the affair being broken off. For my part I think it would have been better taste for her——'

'To have gone about with a long face. I don't agree with you at all,' Mrs. Dean replied warmly. 'I am an old friend of hers and am delighted to see her look so much happier and better. I said a month ago that I thought the marriage would never come off. I was at a dinner party with them,

and Halliburn was there. If I had been Dorothy Hawtrey I would have given him his *congé* that evening. His conduct was in the worst taste. Instead of showing the world how entirely he trusted her and how he despised these reports, he was so fidgety and irritable that it was impossible to avoid noticing it. The man is a peer and a rising politician, a clever man and a large landowner, but for all that he is not a gentleman. I always said that he was not good enough for Dorothy, and I am heartily glad she has broken it off. At any rate, it is quite evident that she feels no regret about it, whatever was the actual cause of the rupture. She might laugh and talk and try to look unconcerned—any girl of spirit would do that under the circumstances—but she couldn't have got her natural colour back again or have made her eyes laugh as well as her lips, unless she had really felt relieved at being free again.'

Mrs. Dean had been a good deal with the Hawtreys during their four days at Lucerne, and Dorothy had felt her society a great assistance to her in supporting the first brunt of public remark. She was the only person who had spoken to Dorothy of what all the others were talking about.

They were standing together on the deck of a steamer going up the lake, when Mrs. Dean said suddenly,

'I know, Dorothy, you will not mind an old friend speaking to you, and I really want to congratulate you heartily on breaking off your match. I don't know the exact reasons that influenced you, but I am sure that you were right. I don't think you would ever have been really happy with him; there would never have been any true sympathy between you. Some women could be content with rank and wealth, but I am sure you could not.'

'No. I think it was a mistake altogether, Mrs. Dean,' Dorothy said thoughtfully. 'I did not become engaged to him for that—I mean for rank and wealth. I don't say they did not count for something, but I honestly did think I liked him, and there was no real reason for its being broken off, except that I found that I had made a mistake. I should not say so, of course, to anyone but an old friend like you. I shall never say anything about it, but let people think what they like; and I know that you will never repeat it.'

'Certainly not, Dorothy; but if you don't say it in words I think everyone could see that, at least, there is no regret on your part at the match being broken off. The wonder won't last long—another week and something fresh will be talked of, and by next year the whole affair will have died away. People have wonderfully short memories in society. Do you know, I rather take credit to myself as a prophetess, for on the evening of that dinner party where I last met you and Halliburn together, I told Captain Hampton that I didn't think your match would ever come off. By the bye, what a nice fellow he is. He is wonderfully little changed since I knew him as a boy down in Lincolnshire, before he went into the army. Sometimes boys change so when they become men, that it is quite a pleasure to meet one who has grown up exactly as you might have expected he would do. You saw a good deal of him I believe?'

'Yes, at the beginning of the season. We did not see so much of him afterwards. I don't think he is so little changed as you do.'

Mrs. Dean gave a quick, keen glance at Dorothy, who was looking a little dreamily at the mountains at the head of the lake.

'No?' she said carelessly. 'Well, of course, you knew him better than I did; he was so often over at your father's. You were but a child then and I daresay that you endowed him, as most young girls do boys older than themselves, with all sorts of impossible qualities.'

'No; I don't know that it was that,' Dorothy said; 'but he seems to me to be changed a good deal in many respects; he was almost like an elder brother of mine then.'

'Yes, dear, but then, you see, when he came back he found that another had stepped into a much closer place than even an elder brother's, and he could hardly have assumed his former relationship. These brother and sisterhoods are very nice when the young lady is twelve and the boy eighteen or nineteen, but they are a little difficult to maintain when the boy is a man of six-and-twenty and the girl eighteen, and is engaged to somebody else who might, not unreasonably, object to the relationship. A boy and girl friendship is not to be picked up again after a lapse of six years just where it was dropped; it would be very ridiculous to suppose that it could be so. It seems to me that you have been expecting too much from him. For my part I think he has changed very little.'

'I did not expect anything of him, Mrs. Dean, one way or the other. I had often thought of him while he was away, because he was very kind to me in the old days. I used to write to him when he first went out, and he wrote to me. Of course that dropped. But when he came home, just at first, it seemed to me that he was exactly what I expected, though I found, in some respects, that he was changed. However, I don't know why we are talking about him. Captain Hampton has gone to America, I believe, and it is likely enough we may not see him again before he goes back to India.' Then she changed her tone. 'It is rather a sore subject to me, Mrs. Dean; it is the last of my illusions of childhood gone. I quite agree with you that it was very foolish of me to think that we could drop quite into our old relations, especially as things stood, but at least I expected something and was disappointed. He has been very kind and has taken an immense deal of trouble to assist my father to get to the bottom of some of the things that have been troubling us. I have not the least ground for complaint—on the contrary, I have every reason to be grateful to him; but, as I say, I have, all the same, been disappointed in some of my illusions, and I would

rather not talk about it. What a change it is to be on this quiet lake and among these great silent hills after six months in London; there one always seemed to be in a bustle and fever, here one feels as if nothing that happened could matter.'

'The London season is pleasant enough,' Mrs. Dean said, 'and though this is all very charming and delightful for a change, and very restful, I fancy that before long we should get tired of this changeless calm of Nature and begin to long for, I won't say excitement, but the pleasure of society—of people you like. We only came up to town for three months, and I own that I enjoyed it heartily, there is so much to look at. I have no daughters to marry off, no personal interest in the comedy, so I look on and like it, and enjoy my home during the other nine months all the better for having been away. We do not often come abroad. I suppose now these railways are being made everywhere there will be a great deal more travelling about, but I don't think we should often come. You talk of the bustle of life in London, it is nothing to the bustle of travelling. As soon as one gets settled down at an hotel it is time to be going on. If I come out again next year I shall persuade my husband to take a little châlet high up on the hill there, where one can rest and take one's fill of the view of those mountains. I shall bring plenty of work with me, and my own maid; then I could sit in the shade and pretend to embroider and talk to her while William read his "Times" and amused himself in his own way, which lies chiefly in going about with a hammer and collecting geological specimens.'

This last was addressed partly to Mr. Dean, who just then came up with his friends.

'I fancy you would be tired of that sort of life long before I should, Sarah,' he said laughing. 'Women always seem to have an idea, Hawtrey, that one rock is as good as another, and that if a man goes out with a hammer it can make no difference to him whether he brings in twenty specimens from a radius of a hundred yards from a house or the same number collected during a fifty miles ramble. Personally I should not at all mind making my head quarters for six weeks or so on this lake, providing one did not go up too high. One wants to be within a quarter-of-an-hour's walk of a village, where one can hire a boat, to land where one likes, and make excursions among the hills. I should not want to do any snow-climbing, but there are plenty of problems one would be glad to go into, if one could investigate them, without that. It is really a treat to me, after Lincolnshire, to get into a country where you can go into geological problems without having to begin by digging.'

'I may frankly say that I know nothing about it,' Mr. Hawtrey replied. 'The only problem connected with digging that I have been interested in is how to get the heaviest crops possible out of the ground. Well, here we are at the head of the lake. It will be two hours before a steamer goes back. I propose lunch in the first place, and then we shall have time for a walk to Althorp, where we can examine the market-place where William Tell shot at the apple; that is to say, if—as now seems doubtful—William Tell ever had an existence at all.'

'I won't have it doubted, Mr. Hawtrey,' Mrs. Dean exclaimed. 'It would be the destruction of another of one's cherished heroes of childhood,' and she glanced with a little smile at Dorothy, who smiled back but shook her head decidedly.

A group of people were gathered on the wharf to see the steamer come in.

'Why, there are the Fortescues—father, mother, and daughters,' Mrs. Dean exclaimed, 'Captain Armstrong and Mr. Fitzwarren. One cannot get out of London.'

A moment later they were exchanging greetings on the wharf. The Fortescues had arrived that morning in a postcarriage from Milan. Captain Armstrong and Fitzwarren had got in an hour before by diligence from Como. Both parties were going down by the boat to Lucerne.

'It is too hot for anything in Italy,' Mrs. Fortescue said; 'it was foolish of us trying it. Of course, we ought not to have gone over there until the end of September, or else in May. May was out of the question because of the House. September was equally so, because of the shooting; so my husband paired till the end of the session, and we started early last month. We have been doing Florence and Bologna and Venice, and the places along to Milan, and then I struck. The heat was unbearable; so now we shall spend a fortnight in Switzerland before we go back. I suppose there are lots of people one knows at Lucerne?'

'But you won't be back in time for the 1st, Mrs. Fortescue, if you do that.'

'No; we have lately settled to give up the idea. It would be such a pity now we are here to deprive the girls of the pleasure of a ramble through Switzerland. So Mr. Fortescue has made up his mind to sacrifice himself, and we have promised faithfully that he shall be back in time for the pheasants.'

Mr. Fortescue, a tall, powerfully-built specimen of English squiredom, shrugged his shoulders unseen by his wife. He was not altogether unaccustomed to sacrifices. His career as a legislator was altogether a sacrifice. He hated London, he hated Parliament, where his voice was never heard except upon some question connected with the agricultural interest, and if he had had his own way he would never have been seen outside his native county. But as Mrs. Fortescue held that it was clearly his duty, for the sake of his family, that he should represent his division, and that the season should be spent in town, he had in this, as indeed in almost every other matter, to give way. Experience had taught him that it was well to do so at once, for that it always came to the same thing in the end. Upon the present occasion he had indeed remonstrated. He hated travelling, and was longing to be at his country seat; and to keep him out another five weeks was

a clear and distinct breach of the agreement that had been made before starting.

While they were talking with Mr. Hawtrey and Mrs. Dean, the girls and Dorothy, who had been intimate in London, were holding a little colloquy apart.

'Is it true, dear—the news we heard at Milan just before we started?' the eldest asked.

'I suppose I know what you mean, Ada. Yes, it is quite true, and best for all parties; so we need not say anything more about it.'

'You are looking wonderfully well, Dorothy,' Clara, the younger of the two girls, remarked, to change the subject, which, she saw, was not to be discussed. 'It is quite refreshing to see you. We are feeling quite washed out. Talk about the season! I felt quite fresh when I left town to what I do now; we have scarcely known what it is to be cool for the last month, and there has been no sleeping at night, half the time, because of the mosquitos. It is nice meeting Captain Armstrong and Mr. Fitzwarren here, isn't it?'

Dorothy said 'Yes,' but she did not feel at all sure about it. Captain Armstrong, who was in the Blues, had been among her most persistent admirers at the beginning of the season, and she had refused him a month before her engagement to Lord Halliburn. Doubtless, he also would have heard of her engagement being off, and might renew his attentions. He was a very popular man, and she was conscious that she liked him, and had said no, if not less decidedly, at least after more hesitation and doubt than she had done to any of her previous admirers. She felt sure that she should give the same answer if he ever repeated the question, but she did not want it repeated, and she wished that they had not met again, just at this time.

The awkwardness of the rejection had long since passed, they had met and danced together a score of times since. She had said when she rejected him, 'Let us be friends, Captain Armstrong; I like you very much, though I don't want to marry you;' and they had been friends, and had met and chatted just as if that interview had not taken place. The only allusion he had ever made to it had been when they met for the first time after her engagement had been announced, and he had said, 'So Halliburn is to be the lucky man, Miss Hawtrey. I don't think it quite fair that he should have all the good things of life,' and she had replied, 'There are good things for us all, Captain Armstrong, if we do but look for them, and not, like children, set our minds on what we can't get.' 'I think I would rather see you marry him than most people, Miss Hawtrey, perhaps because he is altogether unlike myself.'

She had made no answer at the time, but had thought afterwards of what he had said. Yes, the two men were very unlike and there was, no doubt, something in what Captain Armstrong had said. She thought that if she loved a man she could bear better to see him marry a woman altogether unlike herself in every respect than one who resembled her closely, though perhaps she could hardly explain to herself why this should be so.

They were a merry party on board the steamer going down the lake, and the new comers took rooms at the same hotel as the Hawtreys.

'Well, what do you mean to do, Armstrong?' Fitzwarren asked, as they strolled out to smoke a cigar by the lake after the rest of the party had gone to bed. 'You know what I mean. You told me the other day about your affair with Miss Hawtrey.'

'I should not have said anything about it,' the other returned, 'if I had had any idea that her engagement with Halliburn would come to nothing. We had been talking over that business of hers, and I expressed my opinion pretty strongly as to Halliburn's behaviour to her in public and said that I wondered she stood it. Then getting heated I was ass enough to say that had I been in his position, I should have behaved in a different sort of way, and generally expressed my contempt for him. Then you asked why hadn't I put myself in his position, and I told you it was no fault of mine, for that I had tried and failed, when you made some uncomplimentary remarks as to her taste, and we nearly had a row.

'You ask me what I am going to do. Of course, if we had not heard that news when we got to Milan I should have gone this afternoon, directly we arrived here, to take my place in the first diligence that started, no matter where. Now I shall stay and try my luck again. It is quite evident by her manner that she never really cared for the fellow, and that this breaking off of the engagement is a great relief to her. I never saw her in higher spirits, and I am sure there was nothing forced about them. I am sure she would not have accepted him unless she thought she liked him; she is not the sort of girl to marry for position alone, though I dare say if it had not been for the other business she would have married him, and would have believed all her life that he was a very fine fellow. Well, you see, he came very badly out of it, and showed himself to her in his true light as a selfish, cold-hearted, miserable little prig, and, you see, directly her eyes were opened she threw him over. So it seems to me that there is a chance.'

'One could not have met her again under more favourable circumstances. One gets ten times the opportunities travelling about together that one does in a London season. However, I think my chance is worth very little. She said honestly that she liked me very much before, and I could see it really pained her to refuse me. I don't think it was Halliburn who stood in the way, although he was attentive at that time.'

'I should have thought that would have been all in your favour if she acknowledged that she liked you very much, and was cut up at refusing you. Why should she not like you better when she sees

more of you?'

'Because, Fitzwarren, it was not the right sort of liking. We were, if I may so express it, chums; and I am afraid we shall never get beyond that on her side. You see, a woman wants something ideal. Now there is nothing ideal about me. I suppose I may say I am a decent, pleasant sort of fellow, but there are no what you may call possibilities about me. Now Halliburn, you see, was full of possibilities. He had the reputation of being somehow a superior sort of young man—and there is no doubt he is clever in his way—he will probably some day be in the Cabinet, and the idea of one's husband being a ruler of men is fascinating to the female mind. I suppose there was no woman ever married a curate who had not a private belief that he would some day be an archbishop. Now there is not a shadow of this sort of thing about me. I may possibly get to command the regiment some day, and then when I have held the command for the usual time I shall be shelved, and shall, I suppose, retire gracefully to my estate in Yorkshire. I suppose I am good enough for the ruck of girls, but I feel sure that I am not up to Dorothy Hawtrey's ideal, and that though this may end by our being greater friends than before, I doubt whether there is much chance of anything else coming of it.'

'It is no use your running yourself down in that way, Armstrong. When a man stands six foot two and is one of the best-looking fellows in London, and one of the most popular men, and is not only a captain of the Blues, but has a fine estate down in Yorkshire, he ought to have a fair chance with almost any girl.'

'Even accepting all you say as gospel, Fitzwarren, it comes to the same thing. It might succeed with most women, as you say, but I don't think it will with her. It may make her like me, but I don't think it will make her love me. I don't think she is a bit worldly, and I know by what she let drop one day when we were chatting together, when we got rather confidential at the beginning of the season, that she had got the idea in her head that a woman ought to respect her husband, and look up to him, and had in fact formed a distinct notion of the sort of man she should choose; and I felt at the time, though there was nothing whatever personal in our talk, I was the very last sort of fellow she would choose for her husband. Well, I shall try again; I have won more than one steeplechase after a horse going down with me at a bad fence. This is the same sort of thing after all; it is of no use mounting and going on again when you see another fellow sailing away ahead, and close to the winning post, but if he has fallen too, and nothing seems to have a better chance than you have, a man who gives up the race because he has had an awkward purler is no better than a cur.'

'As it does not make much difference to me which way we go, Armstrong, I am willing enough to keep with you for a bit, and see how things go; but I don't suppose I shall be able to stand it long, and I shall reserve to myself the right of striking off on my own account, or joining someone else if I find your society insupportable.'

'That is all right, old fellow; our arrangement was to travel together. Of course, if I give up travelling and take to loitering about, you are free to do what you like, and I am the last man to wish you to alter your plans because I have changed my mind. As a rule, I think it is always wise to steer clear of people one knows when one is travelling, and to be free to do exactly as one likes, which one never can if one gets mixed up with a party. I have always been dead against that. They want to see things you don't want to see, they want to stay in towns and to potter about picture galleries and churches, while you want to go right away up a hill——'

'That is not the worst of it, Armstrong, it is the danger.'

'The danger? What do you mean?'

'The danger of going too far. A flirtation means nothing in town, but it is apt to become a very serious matter when you are travelling about together. A row in a boat on an evening like this, or, as you say, going about to churches and picture galleries, when you are dead certain to get separated from the rest of the party, or a climb through a pine forest—these things are all full of peril, and you are liable to find yourself saying things that there is no getting out of, and there you are—engaged to perhaps the last girl that you would, had you calmly and patiently thought the matter out, have gone in for.'

Captain Armstrong laughed.

'Ah, it is all very well for you to laugh. In the first place you have been what is called a general flirt for years, and would not be suspected of serious intentions, unless you went very far indeed; and in the second place you could afford to marry a girl without a penny if you had any inclination to do so. It is a different thing altogether with fellows like myself, who have no choice between remaining single and marrying a wife with some money. There are some luxuries I absolutely cannot afford, and among them I may reckon travelling about in a party in which are some tocherless damsels—for instance the Fortescues, who, I daresay, will for the next ten days or a fortnight travel with the Hawtreys. They are nice, unaffected girls, pretty and pleasant, but they have three elder brothers. I could not afford one of them. My line in life is clearly chalked out. Not for me is the gilded heiress; her friends will look after her too sharply for that. I have pictured to myself that in another eight or ten years I may be able to secure the affections of the relict of some respectable man who has left her with a snug jointure. She will not be too young, but just approaching nearly enough to middle age to begin to fear being laid on the shelf. Then in the comfortable home that she will provide for me I can journey pleasantly and contentedly down the vale of life.'

Captain Armstrong burst into a loud laugh. 'You will never do it, Fitzwarren, never. There is a vein of romance in your composition that will be too much for you. It is always young men who fancy they are prudent who end by falling victims to some nice girl without a penny. You may take all the precautions you like, walk as circumspectly as you will, but when the time comes you will succumb without a struggle. However, do not let me lead you into the net of the fowler; keep away from the snare as long as you can; when your fate comes upon you you will be captured, and I doubt whether you will make as much as a struggle.'

'We shall see, Armstrong; at present you serve as a terrible example. Well, I suppose we may as well turn in.'

There was a great consultation after breakfast the next morning. Mr. Hawtrey had already marked out his own line of travel and had arranged for a carriage by which they would travel by easy stages through Brienz, Interlaken, Thun, Freyburg, and then on to Lausanne. They would stay for a week by the Lake of Geneva and then take another carriage to Martigny. Beyond that nothing was at present settled, but they would make Martigny their head quarters for some little time. The Fortescues had no particular plan and were quite ready to fall into that of their friends, though, as they had as yet seen nothing of Lucerne, and intended to make some excursions from there, they said that they must stop there for a few days, but would join the others at Martigny.

The girls indeed would gladly have gone forward at once, being really fond of Dorothy, and thinking that it would be nice to travel together, but their mother overruled this.

'No, no, my dears, we must see what there is to be seen, and it would be a great pity to hurry away at once. We shall all meet again at Martigny, and may, perhaps, have a fortnight there together. Besides, there are inconveniences in two parties travelling together. One may happen to have faster horses than the other, and be kept waiting for their meals until the other arrives; then they don't always want to stop at the same places, or for the same time. Whoever gets in first may be able to find accommodation at an inn, while the second one may find it full. Don't you think so, Mr. Singleton?'

'Yes, I quite agree with you. Two parties are apt to be a tie upon each other. I think that your plan that we should all meet at Martigny is the wisest.'

'What are your plans, Captain Armstrong?'

'Beyond the fact that we have a month to wander about before we are due in London we have no particular plans. We, of course, stick to diligence routes; bachelors do not indulge in the luxury of posting, and, indeed, I greatly prefer the banquette of a diligence to a carriage—you get a better view, you meet other people, and learn more of the country. We intend to do a little climbing—I don't mean high peaks, I have no ambition that way whatever, but some of the passes and glaciers. I was at Martigny last year; it is, perhaps, the best central position for the mountains, and I think it is very likely that we shall be there while you are.'

'I hope you will,' Mr. Hawtrey said cordially. 'These three young ladies will be only too glad of two stalwart guides. As far as carriages can go, or even donkeys, we elders can accompany them, but when it comes to scrambling about on glaciers, or doing anything like climbing, we are getting past that.'

'Nonsense, father,' Dorothy exclaimed. 'Why, you are often out for eight or ten hours over the turnip fields with a gun, you know; you could walk four times as far as I could.'

'Not twice as far, Dorothy. I have known you walk fifteen miles more than once, and I certainly should not care about walking thirty. But that has nothing to do with climbing, which is a question of weight and wind. You have only half my weight to carry. I am sure that after dancing through a London season your lungs ought to be in perfect order. However, I dare say I shall be able to go with you if your views are not too ambitious; but the mania for climbing always seems to seize young people when they get among mountains, though for my part I prefer the view in a valley to one on the top of a hill. At any rate we shall be glad to see you both, Captain Armstrong, at Martigny, whether we requisition your services as guides or not. I am sorry, Dorothy, the Deans are not coming our way. He told me yesterday they were going to Zurich, and then by Constance into Bavaria.'

'I am sorry, too, father; I like them so much, and it would have been very pleasant indeed if they had been with us.'

CHAPTER XII

During the voyage Captain Hampton saw but little of Jacob. Each day he went to the rope across the deck marking the division between the cabin and the steerage passengers, and the boy at once came running up to him. His report always was that he was getting on 'fust rate,' while each day his wonder at the amount of water increased.

'I would not have believed if I hadn't seen it that there could be so much water, Captain. I can't think where it all comes from. I heard some of them say it was tremendous deep—ten times as deep as that monument with the chap on the top of it in Trafalgar Square. Why, it must have

rained for years and years to have got such a lot of water here as this. And it tastes bad. I had a wash in a bucket on deck this morning, and some of the water got in my mouth and it wur as nasty as could be—awful it wur. What can make it like that? Why the water in the Thames looks ten times as dirty, but it don't taste particular nasty for all that.'

'I will tell you about it some day, Jacob; it is too long to go into now. You remind me of it some evening, when we are at a lonely inn, with nothing to do. How do you get on at night?'

'I sleeps all right, sir; it is awful hot down there in them bunks, as they call 'em, one above another, just like a threepenny lodging-house where I used to sleep sometimes when I had had good luck. The first night or two was bad, there was no mistake about it. Most of 'em was awful ill, and made noises enough to frighten one. I could not think what made them so; it seemed to me as if someone must have put pison in the food, and I kept on expecting I was going to be took bad too; but a young chap tells me in the morning as most people is so the first day they goes to sea. If they wur to drink that water I could understand it, but it is all right what they gives us; and there are some of them as grumbles at the food, but I calls it just bang up. How much more of this water is there, sir?'

'About five more days' steaming, Jacob; it is a twelve-days' voyage from Liverpool to New York. I suppose some day they will get to do it in six, for they keep on building faster and faster steamers.'

'We are going wonderful fast now,' the boy said; 'a chap's cap as was sitting up in the end there blew off yesterday, and I ran to keep alongside with it, but it went a lot faster than I could run. I shall be glad when it is over, Captain; not as I ain't jolly, for I never was so jolly before, but I ain't doing nothing for you here, and I wants to be at work for you somehow. If they would let me wait on you, and put stuff on those white shoes, I should not so much mind.'

'I am very well waited on, Jacob, and if you were to try to wait on me at table while the vessel is rolling, you would be pretty sure to spill a plate of soup down my neck, or something of that sort. You amuse yourself in your own way, and don't worry about me; when there is anything to do I know you will do it.'

'I find you won't land till to-morrow, Jacob,' Captain Hampton said, as the vessel neared the wharf. 'Here is the name of the hotel where I shall be, in case by any chance I should miss you. They say you will probably come ashore at nine o'clock in the morning.'

'Why can't we all land at once, sir?'

'It is late now, Jacob, and it is as much as they will be able to do to get through the cabin passengers' baggage before dark; indeed it is probable they will only examine the light luggage.'

'What do they want to examine it for, sir? What business have they with your luggage?'

'They always do it when you go into a foreign country. They do it in England too, when you come in from abroad; everything has to be opened. There are some things that pay duty going into a country, and they want to see that you have got none of them in your boxes; for, if you have, you must pay for them.'

'Then must I open my box if they ask me?'

'You must, Jacob.'

'And let them rummage my things about?'

'If they want to, Jacob; but I don't suppose they search the steerage baggage much; they will probably ask you who you are, and where you are going, and you must tell them that you are my servant, and that I am at the Metropolitan Hotel. But I am pretty sure to be here to see you through.'

However, at half-past eight, as Captain Hampton went to the door of the hotel with the intention of taking a vehicle down to the wharf, he saw Jacob coming along carrying his little portmanteau.

'Why, Jacob, I was just starting to the wharf. They told me that you were not to land till nine.'

'They said so last night, Captain, but they began just about seven. I heard there was another ship come in and they wanted to get us out of the way. I was one of the fust ashore, and it didn't take many minutes afore I was out of the shed where they looks at the things. I says to the first chap I meets, "Where can I take a 'bus to the Metropolitan Hotel?" "You won't get no 'bus here," says he. "How far is it?" "Better than two miles," he says. That settled it, and I started off to walk. I ought to have been here sooner, but some one I asked the way of put me wrong, I suppose, and a box like this feels wonderful heavier the second mile than it does the first.'

An arrangement had already been made for Jacob's board and lodging, and a messenger boy showed him up to his little room at the top of the house, and then took him down to a room where the few white servants in the hotel had their meals. In half an hour he returned to the hall which served as smoking-room and general meeting-place. Captain Hampton had already had a talk with the clerk.

'I have not seen a young woman like that,' the latter said positively, when the photograph was produced, 'but then if the man had registered and written her name and his she might not have come up to the desk. If you go up to the entrance of the dining-room and ask the negro who takes

the hats there, he will tell you for certain. He has a wonderful head, that chap has. Sometimes there are as many as three hundred come in to dinner between five and seven. He takes their hats and puts them on the pegs and racks, and as they come out he will give every man his own hat and never make a mistake. I never saw such a chap for remembering faces.'

The negro replied unhesitatingly, on seeing the photograph, that no such lady had taken any meals at the hotel.

'De ladies don't come into my department, sah, but I notice them as they goes in and out, and if that young lady had been here I should have noticed her for sartin.' Captain Hampton returned to the clerk in the hall, who, as he happened for the moment to be disengaged, was not averse to a talk. 'The darkey has not seen her.'

'Then you may be sure she hasn't been here. Yes, I reckon that is about the list of the hotels most of the passengers by the steamers go to,' he said, as he glanced down a list of names Captain Hampton had got a fellow passenger to draw up. 'I will put down two or three others; they are not first-class, but they are a good deal used by people to whom a dollar a day more or less makes a difference. And so you say they have been doing some swindling across the water. She don't look that sort either from her photograph, but they get the things up so one can never tell. I see you haven't got any German hotels; and if, as you say, you think they came by the line from Hamburg, they might have gone to one of them.'

'I should not think it likely they spoke German,' Captain Hampton said.

'Oh, that makes no odds. The waiters all talk English, and like enough on the voyage they would make friends with some Germans who have been here before, and they would recommend them one of their own people.'

'That is probable; and they would be likely to go there too,' Captain Hampton agreed, 'because anyone coming over to search for them would be less likely to search in such places than in houses like yours.'

'Then, again, you see, they might have gone straight through without going into an hotel at all. That would be the safest way, because then there would be no trace left of them.'

'But I suppose not many people do that.'

'Oh, yes, they do—lots of them. A man saves his hotel bills if he goes straight to the train, and there is only one move; but, of course, that is only when a man has quite made up his mind where he is going. As a rule, when a Britisher comes here he waits a few days and asks questions, and tries to find out about things, unless he is going somewhere straight to a friend. Is that boy looking for you? he has been standing there staring at you for the last five minutes.'

'Oh, yes, that is my servant. Will you give me the address of the Central Police Station?'

The clerk wrote the address on a piece of paper and handed it to him.

'I don't think you will get much good from them,' he said. 'When people want to hunt a man up here they generally go to an agency. They are a way ahead of the regular police, and have got some smart fellows among them, I can tell you.'

'Thank you. I should prefer carrying out the matter myself if I can. If not I will certainly go to an agency.'

'There is one advantage in going to the police first,' the man said. 'You will find at a good many hotels the people will have nothing to say to you if you go by yourself. It is no business of theirs whether the people who stay at their hotels are swindlers or not, and they ain't going to meddle in it; but if you can get the police to give you a sharp officer to go round with you it will be a different thing altogether.'

'Yes, that is what I thought myself, and why I am going to the police in the first place.'

Turning from the desk he joined Jacob.

'You have had your breakfast?' he asked.

'I just have had a breakfast, Captain; I never seed such a lot of things—and scrumptious, too; I only wish I could have eaten twice as much.'

'I am going out now, Jacob, and as I shall be calling at several places, you had better go your own way. Remember this street is Broadway; it is the principal street here, so if you do by any chance lose yourself any one can tell you the way.'

'What time am I to be here again, Captain?'

'Did you ask what time dinner was, Jacob?'

'The black man who brought the things to me said it was two o'clock, but I shan't never be able to eat again so soon.'

'Oh, yes, you will, Jacob. Take a good long walk and you will soon get your appetite back again.'

On stating his business at the Central Police Station, he was shown into the room of the chief, a

quiet but keen-faced man, dressed in plain clothes. He presented to him the letter from Scotland Yard.

'I shall be happy to help you, Captain Hampton, if I can,' he said, after glancing through it. 'If you had known for certain what steamer they came over by, we should no doubt be able to lay hold of them in the course of a few hours, if they are still in the city.'

'I think the probabilities are greatly in favour of their having come by the "Bremen," which sailed from Hamburg on July 20 and got here, as I saw, on August 4. If they did not come by that I think it likely they sailed from some English port two or three days later. My first object, of course, is to find the hotel at which they put up.'

'I will send one of my men round with you,' and the chief touched a bell. 'Is Mr. Tricher in? If so, ask him to come here.'

A young man entered the room two minutes later.

'Mr. Tricher, this gentleman has brought us a letter from Scotland Yard; he is in search of two swindlers who have made off with a good deal of money. His name is Captain Hampton; he does not belong to the British force but is a friend of some of the parties who have been swindled, and has made it his business to find these people. They are believed to have come out in the "Bremen," which arrived here on August 4; but, if not, they may have come by a boat from an English port within a few days of that date. Of course they may have come to Boston or Halifax, or one of the Southern ports. Our first step is to inquire at all the hotels here; will you please to go with him and give him any assistance you can? If you are unsuccessful in your search, Captain Hampton, I shall be glad if you will come in again and talk the matter over with me. I have all the dates of the arrivals of the steamers from the other side, which may help you in deciding at which port you had better continue your search.'

Captain Hampton's guide proved to be a pleasant and chatty young fellow. 'Your first visit here, Captain Hampton?' he asked, as they issued out on the street.

'Yes, it is the first time I have crossed the Atlantic. I have not had much chance of coming before, for I have been out with my regiment in India for the last six years.'

'I suppose it is a big business this, as you have taken the trouble to come out about it.'

'No; in point of money it is not a very large amount. A thousand pounds in money and about two thousand pounds worth of diamonds. I am interested in the matter chiefly because suspicion has fallen upon a lady of my acquaintance, between whom and this woman there is an extraordinary likeness: so great a one that I myself was once deceived by it. The woman herself knows of it, for she personated my friend, and in her name obtained the jewels and money; so you see it is a matter of extreme importance to get her back to England.'

'I can quite understand that. I suppose you have a likeness of her?'

'Yes; at least, a likeness of the lady, which will be quite sufficient to enable anyone to identify the woman at once.'

He handed Dorothy's likeness to the detective.

'There ought to be no difficulty in identifying that,' he said, after examining it closely. 'No one who has seen her will be likely to forget it in a hurry; and what is the man like?'

'He is old enough to be her father, and no doubt passes as being so. He is a clean-shaved man—at least he was when I last saw him. He is a betting man of the lowest type, but has had the education of a gentleman, and when well dressed and got up would no doubt pass as one anywhere. This is the list of hotels I obtained as being those they would be most likely to go to. You see there are some German ones included, as, if they came out in the "Bremen," they might have been directed by Germans returning here to go to one of their hotels, and would have done so, as they would be less likely to meet English people and attract attention.'

'Yes, that is a good idea. However, we will try the others first. Nineteen out of twenty cabin passengers who land here and don't go straight on, put up at one or other of the principal places.'

Hotel after hotel was visited, until they arrived at the end of the list. The detective did the talking; he was well known to all the clerks.

'I generally am put on hotel thief business,' he said, as his companion remarked on his acquaintance with all the houses they visited; 'no doubt that is why the chief sent me with you. Now we will try these German houses. You may take it for granted that they have not been at any of the others. If none of the clerks or waiters recognise that photograph, it is because she wasn't there. You see they all said "No" right off when they saw it. If it had been an ordinary face, they would have thought it over, but they did not want half a minute to say they had never seen her.'

At the first two German houses they went to they received the usual answer.

'Now I have rather hopes of this next place,' the detective said; 'it is a quiet sort of house, and used by a good class of Germans—rich men who have been over to Europe, and are waiting here for a day or two before they go West again. If the man was asking, as he would be likely to do, for a quiet hotel, and said that he did not mind paying for comfort, a German who knew the ropes would probably send him here. This is the house.'

He went up to the clerk's desk.

'Good morning, Mr. Muller. How goes on business?'

'Pretty brisk, Mr. Tricher. What can I do for you, this morning? You are on business, too, I suppose.'

'Yes. The chief asked me to come round with this gentleman, Captain Hampton, from England. He wants to find out about a man and a woman who are believed to have come across on the "Bremen," which arrived here on August 4. I think it likely enough that they may have been recommended to your house. Will you turn to August 4?'

The clerk turned over the leaves of the register.

'Had you an English lady and gentleman, father and daughter, arrive on that day?'

'I had. Mr. and Miss White. The man was clean shaven, about forty-five years old.'

'This is the portrait of his daughter.'

'That is all right,' the clerk said. 'She was just as good-looking a girl as ever I saw.'

Captain Hampton uttered an exclamation of satisfaction. Here then was the first absolute proof that his theory was correct, and that there really existed a double of Dorothy, and the evidence of this clerk would in itself go far to disprove the charge against her.

'How long did they stay here?' the detective asked.

The clerk turned to the ledger. 'Two days. They left on the evening of the sixth. They were charged the full day.'

'How did they go?'

'By carriage. Here is the charge—a dollar and a half.'

'Which station did they go to?'

'Ah, that I cannot tell you. We have two carriages and they are both out now, but I can find out this evening. Anything else?'

'Yes; I want to know if they made any inquiries about trains.'

'I don't know that they inquired, but the man spent a whole morning going through the train books and looking through the tables hanging up there. I wondered what in thunder he could be wanting to spend such a time over them, when a couple of minutes would have shown him the train time to any place he wanted to go to. I expect he had not made up his mind where to go. I reckon that was it. I saw him come in with half a dozen books under his arm the morning after they got here.'

'Well, we can do nothing till we hear what station they were taken to. I will look in again this evening.'

'Do you mean to say they were bad ones, Mr. Tricher?'

The detective nodded.

'Well, well, one never knows what to believe. I don't know about the man, but that gal I should never have thought could have been bad.'

'Please look at the photograph again,' Captain Hampton said. 'Examine it closely; is it what you would call a very good likeness?'

'It is a good likeness,' the man said. 'I should have known it if I had seen it in a shop window anywhere; but photographs are never quite like—men's may be, but I have never seen a woman's that was the real thing. They always smooth out their faces somehow, and put on a sort of company expression. This is as like her as two peas, and yet it isn't quite like, if you can understand it. That has got a pretty, innocent sort of expression. The girl's face was harder than that; it was just as pretty, but somehow it looked older, as if she had had some sort of disappointment, and had had a bad time of it. This one looks like the face of a thoroughly happy girl. The other didn't, you know. I said to myself that she had made up her mind to marry some chap her father didn't like, and that he had brought her over here to get her out of his way. You see, she was an unusual sort of woman. I don't know that I ever saw a much prettier one—and one naturally reckoned her up a bit. She only went out once while they were here, and did not seem to have much interest in the city.'

'Well, I think we have been pretty lucky, Captain Hampton,' the detective said when he went out.

'Wonderfully lucky. I am more thankful than I can express; the evidence of that man alone would go a long way towards clearing my friend, for it would at any rate prove that just after these robberies were committed, and at the exact time at which a thief would reach here from England, a woman precisely like her arrived here with a man answering to the description of the one believed to be her accomplice.'

'That would be a great thing certainly; at any rate, if I were you, Captain Hampton, I would get

an affidavit, made by Muller and one or two of the waiters, to the effect that a man of whom they would give a description, and the original of a portrait that would of course be marked for identification, arrived at the hotel on August 4, having come by the steamer "Bremen" from Hamburg. There is nothing like getting an affidavit when you can, and the waiters are to hand now; there is no saying where they might be three months hence. I don't say that Muller is likely to leave, but he is bright, and might get a better offer any day from one of the big hotels at St. Louis or Cincinnati, or any other place where there are many Germans.'

'I will certainly do so, and send it across to England at once.'

Arranging with the detective to call for him at the Metropolitan at seven o'clock that evening, Captain Hampton returned to the hotel. It had been a splendid morning's work. Even if all further search was unsuccessful, enough had been done to establish at least a strong case in favour of the contention that the person who called upon the jeweller and Mr. Singleton was not Dorothy Hawtrey. The interview he himself had witnessed, which, had he been compelled to give evidence, would have been in itself almost fatal to her, was now strongly in her favour, for it showed the connecting link between the person who had taken the jewels and this man who was now proved to be passing as her father in the States. It was no longer Dorothy Hawtrey buying off the man who had been persecuting her, but Truscott's partner in the crime informing him of the success of her operations.

Jacob was standing at the door of the hotel when he arrived there. He had long since been made acquainted with the object for which a search was being made for the betting man Marvel, and the woman whose likeness he had been shown. He was greatly delighted at learning that a trace had been obtained of him, and eager to set to work to follow it up.

'It will be bang up, Captain, if we find them here while all them perlice at home is running after them everywhere.'

'Well, I did not think of it in that light, and I don't much care whether they are run down by us or by any one else, so long as they are caught at last, but it is a long way between hearing of them here and catching them. You must remember that this country is twenty times as large as England, and we have really nothing to go upon. We don't know what the man's intentions are. If he intended to go in for swindling, I should think he would have done better on the Continent than here. There are not many very large towns where he could as a stranger expect to make much money, and it would be easier to trace him here than in Europe, where the distances are so much shorter that one can get out of any country in a few hours. If he intends, as I should think most likely, only to stop over here for a short time so as to be out of the way, and then go back and begin the same thing over again, he might take lodgings here or anywhere else.

'He may know some one who has come over here and has gone in for farming, and may be going to stay with him for a time. There is no saying, in fact, what he may be going to do. I do not suppose that he has the slightest fear that the share he and this woman have played has been discovered, and his motive in coming away was chiefly to ensure Miss Hawtrey's disgrace, and he was anxious that there should be no chance whatever of any one who knew her meeting this woman and discovering that there was some one about who was so strikingly like Miss Hawtrey as to be able to pass for her. My best hope is that we shall get some clue this evening from the man who drove them away from the hotel.'

This hope was realised. On reaching the hotel with the detective the clerk at once sent for the driver. 'He remembers the parties well enough, but I don't know that you will find his news altogether satisfactory. You have got a crafty bird to deal with. Here is the man, he had better tell you himself. Now, Mike, this is the gentleman who wants to know about those people I was speaking to you about.'

'I mind them well enough, sor—a gintleman with as pretty a little girl as I've seen since I left ould Ireland. I drove them down to the wharf and saw the baggage carried on board the steamer.'

'And what steamer was it, Mike?' the detective asked.

'The steamer for New Orleans, of course; that was where they told me to take them. She had got her steam up when we got there, and a nice-looking crowd there was going on board.'

'Would the steamer touch anywhere else on its way?' Captain Hampton asked.

'It might put in at Mobile; some do and some don't,' the detective replied, 'but as we know the day she sailed there will be no difficulty at finding that out at the office.'

'That was the lady, I suppose,' Captain Hampton said, showing the photograph to the driver.

'That's her, sor. I would swear to her anywhere.'

'Well, here is a couple of dollars for you now; I shall want to see you again to-morrow.'

'We shall be getting some affidavits out,' the detective said to the clerk. 'It is important to us to be able to prove that they have been here, even if we never succeed in catching them. It will be a simple thing, merely a statement signed before a justice of the peace to the effect that you make oath that a man of the appearance and description set down and a young woman passing as his daughter, and whose photograph, which will of course be marked and verified, you recognise as being hers without any possibility of doubt, arrived at this hotel on August 4, and left on August

6, being driven from here and seen on board a steamer starting for New Orleans. I shall be glad of the signatures of yourself and as many of the waiters as attended upon them at their meals and can recognise the portrait, also of the chambermaid. We shall have a separate affidavit drawn out for the driver.'

'Very well. Can you leave the photograph with me? I will give it to the head waiter and tell him to show it to the others; as they were here two days and took all their meals here I should say most of the crowd would recognise her. Look here, you had better bring a justice round here to swear them, for it would be difficult to let a dozen of them all go at once.'

'I will manage that. Well, can you spare a couple of minutes to come round into the bar and have a drink?'

The clerk thought he could manage it, and drinks were taken in due course.

'Now what is my best way of getting down to New Orleans?' Captain Hampton asked, as they left the hotel.

'Steamer,' the detective said; 'the railway is not fairly through yet, and it will take pretty nearly as long as if you go by boat, and be a deal more uncomfortable.'

'How often do the boats go?'

'Once or twice a week, sometimes more. There are considerable people travelling down there now. A good many of the folk going to California go that way; they either strike across from there or go up the river by steamer and then make across the plains; it saves a long land journey. But I will tell you about it when I see you in the morning. I will go round the first thing and find out whether that boat that sailed on the 6th put in anywhere, and also what her name was; also whether they took their berths under the name of White or changed them again; then I will see when the next boat goes. I will bring the man before whom they can take an affidavit round here with me—I know two or three I can lay my hands on any time—and then we will go together to the hotel.'

By twelve o'clock next day the business was finished, and the affidavits sworn in duplicate by thirteen witnesses, in addition to that of the driver.

When all was done, Captain Hampton asked the detective as to how much he was indebted to him.

'Nothing at all, sir. My services were placed at your disposal by the chief, and it is all in the way of business. I am very glad to have been of assistance to you.'

'You have been of immense assistance, indeed, Mr. Tricher, and I feel deeply obliged to you. I should never have got on by myself in the same way; it was entirely owing to the clerk at the hotel knowing you that he so readily gave me the information I required, and interested himself in the matter. Well, will you come round and lunch with me at the hotel at two o'clock? We shall go on board the steamer this evening. I am going round now to thank your chief.'

'I shall be happy to lunch with you, and, by the way, you might as well ask the chief to give you a line to the chief at New Orleans. You might find it very useful there; it is a pretty lively place, and if this man happens to have any pals there, you may find it mighty useful to have the aid of the police.'

'Thank you very much for the suggestion, which I will certainly follow.'

On saying good-bye to the detective, Captain Hampton, with much pressure, succeeded in inducing him to accept, as a remembrance, a handsome meerschaum that he had the evening before admired.

Upon the voyage down, Captain Hampton was much struck at the difference between the passengers on board the 'Enterprise,' and those with whom he was associated on his passage across the Atlantic. There were among them a sprinkling of Southern gentlemen, a few travellers and Northern manufacturers, but the majority were men who were bound to the far west, some to Texas only, but California was the destination of the greater part. These again were sharply divided into two sections, the one composed of hardy-looking men, the sons of Eastern farmers, or British emigrants who were going out with the fixed intention of making their fortune at the goldfields.

Few of the other section were, he thought, likely to get so far. They were simply rough characters who were more likely to remain at New Orleans or some of the river towns than to undertake a long and perilous journey. Whatever might be their nominal vocation, he set them down as being thieves, gambling-house bullies, or ruffians ready to turn their hand to any scoundrelism that presented itself. The real working men soon came to know each other, and being bound by a common object kept aloof from the others, and generally sat in little groups discussing the journey before them and the best methods of proceeding.

Some were in favour of ascending the Missouri to Omaha, others of going up the Arkansas and striking across by the Santa Fé route. All had evidently studied the newspapers diligently, and had almost by heart the narratives of travel that had appeared there, and before the end of the voyage several parties had been made up of men who agreed to journey together for mutual aid and protection.

In the saloon gambling went on all day. As night came on, voices were raised in anger, and fierce quarrels took place, which were only prevented from going further by the captain's prompt intervention, and by his declaration that any man who drew pistol or bowie knife should be put in irons for the rest of the voyage.

Captain Hampton was heartily glad when the vessel entered the Mississippi. He had associated principally with two or three of the Southern gentlemen, and had kept as far as possible aloof from the rowdy portion of the passengers. This, however, he had been unable to do altogether. He himself was an object of general curiosity. He was a Britisher; he was not bound for the West; he was not thinking of taking up land; he was unconnected with any commercial house. His explanation that he was travelling for pleasure and intended to go up the two great rivers of the continent, was considered altogether unsatisfactory, and one after another most of his fellow passengers endeavoured, by a series of searching questions, to get at the facts of the case. Jacob, on the other hand, enjoyed the voyage greatly; unconsciously to himself he was a student of human nature, and this was a phase entirely new to him.

'It seems to me, Captain,' he said to his master one evening, 'that most of this 'ere gang ought to be in Newgate. Why, to hear what they say of themselves, there is scarce one of them that hasn't killed one or two men in his time. I have been a-listening to some of that black-bearded chap's stories, and if all that he says is true, he has killed over twenty; I counted them up careful. I can't make out how it is that a chap like that is going about free; why, he would have been hung a dozen times if he had been at home. What is the good of the perlice if they lets a chap like that go on as he likes?'

'You may be sure that the greater part of his stories are lies, Jacob, though some of them may be true. New Orleans is perhaps as rough a city as any of its size in the world, and as you go farther West, life becomes still more unsafe. In so vast a country the law is powerless, and men settle their disputes in their own way. Almost every one carries arms, and shooting affrays are of common occurrence, and as long as what is considered fair play is preserved, no one thinks of interfering. A man who is killed is buried, and the one who killed him goes his way unconcernedly; so, though a good many of these stories you hear are lies, there may be more truth in some of them than you would think.'

'They have been a-pumping me, lots of them has,' Jacob said, 'and trying to find out what you are doing out here. I have stuffed them up nicely; I have told them as you had been out in India, and had killed thousands upon thousands of lions, and tigers, and elephants.'

'What was the use of telling lies, Jacob?' Captain Hampton asked angrily.

'Well, sir, I don't suppose as they believe it all, because I don't believe their stories; but it was, I thought, just as well as they should think you was a great fighter, and could shoot wonderful straight. I know by what they said that some of them was half inclined to get up a quarrel with you. "'Cause," as they said, "you was stuck up, and thought yourself better than other people;" and it seemed to me as it was best they should think as you wasn't a good man to quarrel with. "Bless you," says I, over and over again, "there ain't nothing stuck up about my master; only I know as he hates getting into trouble, 'cause he don't like having to kill a man and so he keeps hisself to hisself;" and then I pitches it in strong about killing Indians, and that sort of thing, and I do think, Captain, as it has kept them a bit quiet.'

Captain Hampton laughed.

'Well, perhaps it may have done, Jacob; these fellows seldom interfere with a man unless they think it safe to do so. Still, I would much rather in future you did not invent any stories about me. Always stick to the truth, lad; lying never pays in the long run.'

CHAPTER XIII

Ten days later the party were re-united at Martigny. The Fortescues had been there two days, having travelled faster than the Hawtreys had done. Captain Armstrong and Mr. Fitzwarren only turned up the next day; they had learnt at Lucerne the inn at which the Hawtreys intended to stay, and went straight there. The others were all absent on an excursion to the Col de la Forclaz, and did not return until late in the afternoon. Captain Armstrong and Mr. Fitzwarren were standing on the steps of the hotel when the three girls clattered up on donkeys, the elders having been left a quarter of a mile behind.

'How are you both?' Ada Fortescue, who had won the race by a length, said, as they came down the steps. 'No, thank you, Captain Armstrong, I can slip off without any assistance. We were talking of you this morning at breakfast, and wondering when you were likely to turn up.'

They stood talking at the door of the hotel until the others arrived.

'Which way have you come?' Mr. Hawtrey asked, after they had shaken hands.

'We went over the Brunig Pass to Interlaken; we stopped there a day or two and came from Thun over the Simmenthal to Aigle; we stayed there four days, and a day at St. Maurice, and got in here half an hour after you had started, and have since been for a stroll among the pines.'

'We were over at St. Maurice the day before yesterday.'

'It is splendid up here,' Ada Fortescue put in; 'we have been grumbling ever since we came because we did not come on here at once instead of spending those four days at Lucerne. It was all very lovely, but it was so hot one really could not enjoy it as one ought to have done. Up here it is so deliciously cool, at least except in the middle of the day, that one feels up to anything. I wish you could persuade papa to let us go up one of the mountains; not a difficult one, of course. At present mamma won't hear of it; though Mr. Hawtrey said he would go with us and Dorothy. I don't think papa would mind,' she added confidentially.

Captain Armstrong smiled. Mr. Fortescue was really but a cipher in the family. He accompanied his wife and daughters, and was very useful in looking after the luggage and paying bills, but his wife was the real manager of the party. She was not one of those women who assert their predominance over their husbands; upon the contrary, she made a point of consulting him on everything, but as his opinions were always in accord with hers, this was little more than a form. She herself, among her intimates, frequently bewailed her husband's disinclination to take a leading part in anything.

'It is a great disadvantage to the girls, for it compels me to put myself much more forward than I like. It is always bad for a mother to have to do so; it gets her the name of being a managing woman, and there is nothing men are more shy of.' And yet in spite of Mrs. Fortescue's disclaimer, there were people who believed that if Mr. Fortescue had had a chance there would have been no occasion for his wife to take matters so entirely in hand as she did. Within an hour of meeting Captain Armstrong and Mr. Fitzwarren, she had discussed the matter with her husband.

'I don't know what to think of these men coming here just as we have arrived. It must mean one thing or the other.'

Mr. Fortescue remarked that no doubt it did.

'Captain Armstrong is of course an excellent match,' she said. 'The question is, has he come here on his own account or on that of Mr. Fitzwarren? If on his own account, it must be in order to see more of one of our girls, or of Dorothy Hawtrey. On the other hand, Mr. Fitzwarren cannot be considered at all an eligible person; of course he is in society, and all that sort of thing, and is very well connected, but that won't keep up a household. It would not do at all, and I shall warn Ada and Clara that they are not to think of flirting with him, and that if I see any signs of them doing so we shall at once move away.'

'He is a very pleasant young man,' Mr. Fortescue said. 'I believe he has a good position in the Foreign Office, and is private secretary to Lord Wolverhouse.'

'Yes, that is all very well,' Mrs. Fortescue said, sharply, 'and I dare say it is a very good position for a clerk in a foreign office, but, as I said, it won't do to keep up an establishment, so I shall keep my eyes open.'

This Mrs. Fortescue did for the next four days, and the results were so far satisfactory that she assured herself that Mr. Fitzwarren had no design upon either of her daughters. He always made one of the party on their excursions, but divided his attentions equally between the three girls, and there was nothing in his manner that could excite the smallest suspicion, even in her mind, that he viewed one with a greater degree of preference than the other. Captain Armstrong appeared equally general in his attentions, and even Dorothy, who had felt at first a certain uneasiness when they joined, thought no more of the matter. He happened to be there when they were, and it was natural that he should attach himself to her party, and she soon ceased to feel at all shy with him or to think of him in any other light than as a pleasant companion in their rambles.

For the first week Mrs. Fortescue always formed one of the party, but as the walks extended and they went higher and higher up the hill-side she was glad, as soon as she felt that her suspicions of Mr. Fitzwarren's attentions were unfounded, to let them go under their father's escort. Mr. Singleton was the only person who complained.

'I wonder how long those two men are going to stay here,' he said to Mr. Hawtrey one day.

'I have not heard them say anything about it. I shall be sorry when they go, for they are both pleasant, and it makes it very much more agreeable for the girls to have them to go about with. Of course, when we take the carriage we all ride together, but I am sure the young people enjoy walking much more; they are capital climbers, and I can tell you they pretty nearly tire me out sometimes.'

'I don't care how soon they go, Hawtrey. You know what my hopes are about Dorothy, and I feel pretty confident that Armstrong has altogether different views on the matter. I have nothing to say against him personally; I admit that he is a downright good fellow. Every one knows he has a good estate, so I have nothing to say against him, except that I see he is doing his best to upset my special plans.'

'I have not seen anything of it at all. I did not notice on our walks that he was more with her than with the others. I imagine that it is only fancy on your part.'

'You do not suppose he would be wasting his time in rambling about here with three girls unless

he had some sort of object. It is one of the three, and I have not the least doubt that it is Dorothy.'

'I don't fancy so, for—quite between ourselves, Singleton—I can tell you that she refused him some months since.'

'Umph,' Mr. Singleton grunted, 'that must have been just before she became engaged to Halliburn. Now he is out of the way again, and a better opportunity for love-making than Armstrong has got he could hardly desire.'

'I don't see that I can do anything in the matter, Singleton; even supposing that your suspicions are correct.'

'No, I don't suppose you can,' the other said irritably. 'If we were to go away he would come after us. If he means to ask the question he will ask it. And the worst of it is that he is such a good fellow, so unobjectionable in every way. But it is hard that while the other is spending his time in looking out for evidence that will completely clear Dorothy from these abominable charges, this man should be cutting in and making all the running here.'

'I don't think Dorothy suspects anything of the sort, Singleton.'

'No, I don't suppose she does; but a girl can't be thrown with a pleasant man day after day like this without getting to like him. I am sure she does not know it herself—she is too frank and natural with him; still when the time comes and he asks her the question again it will come upon her how much she does like him, and the contrast between him and Halliburn will be all in his favour. We might move to Chamounix. Pretend you are tired of this place, and see whether all the others will go too.'

'We may as well do that anyhow,' Mr. Hawtrey agreed. 'We have done pretty well all the walks and drives near here. It will be a change, anyhow.' And accordingly at breakfast next morning Mr. Hawtrey said, 'I think we have pretty well done this neighbourhood; it will be a change to move on to Chamounix. We could stay there for a week and then go on to Geneva.'

'I think that would be a very good plan,' Mr. Singleton put in. 'I own I am getting rather tired of this valley. It is all very well for you young people who can climb about among the hills, but I think I know the exterior of every house in the place, and have made the acquaintance of almost every man, woman, and child in it.'

Mr. Fortescue at once assented.

'It makes no difference to me,' Captain Armstrong said, carelessly, 'but I have been thinking for the last day or two that there would be more to be seen at Chamounix. I have rather an idea of climbing Mont Blanc. Fitzwarren finds that time is running short, and has made up his mind to turn his face homewards.'

After some farther talk it was arranged that the carriages should be ordered for the following morning. There was much regret expressed at Mr. Fitzwarren's departure, or as the girls called it, his desertion, but his determination was not to be shaken. He had talked it over with Armstrong on the previous evening when the latter had urged him to stay a week longer.

'I cannot afford it, my dear fellow,' he said. 'It is pleasant, very pleasant, but it is too dangerous a pleasure to be indulged in. However strict a man's principles may be, he's but human. Another week of this might be fatal to me. I cannot afford to marry Clara Fortescue, even if she would have me and her mother were willing, which, by the way, I am perfectly sure she would not be. The way she played duenna the first few days, would have been amusing if it had not been annoying. It was almost heroic. Whenever I happened to be a few yards ahead or a few yards behind with either of her girls, she would be certain to range alongside in the course of two or three minutes, and though naturally she did not express her feelings in words there was no possible mistaking her manner. She was the watch-dog, I was the wolf; and she was prepared to do battle to save her lambs from the devourer. At that time I had no idea of devouring, and indeed I have no idea now; nevertheless I am beginning to feel that the repast would not be an unpleasant one. Against the ordinary temptations that occur in ball-rooms and conservatories, at fêtes, and even country houses, I am proof, but this daily companionship, wandering, and picnicking is beyond me. My armour is giving way, and I feel that flight is the prudent course before I am too severely wounded.'

The next morning, therefore, he took his place on the diligence, and half-an-hour later two carriages started up the valley with the rest of the party. They had sent on a letter the previous day to secure rooms, and were comfortably established there late in the afternoon.

'The dinner-bell will ring in five minutes, Dorothy,' Mr. Hawtrey said, tapping at his daughter's door.

Dorothy was ready, and went down with him to the drawing-room. As they entered, she caught sight of Ada Fortescue's face, which wore a puzzled and disturbed look, and she gave what seemed to Dorothy a warning shake of the head. She moved across the room towards her chair to inquire what she meant. A gentleman stepped aside to make way for her. She looked up, and as their eyes met each gave a slight start, for it was Lord Halliburn who stood before her.

It was an awkward moment, but, as usual, the woman was the first to recover her presence of mind.

'How do you do, Lord Halliburn?' she said, cordially, holding out her hand. 'Who would have thought of our running against each other here?'

'Certainly I did not, Miss Hawtrey. I heard that you left town a fortnight before I did, but, though I had no particular reason for doing so, I supposed you had gone down to Lincolnshire. When did you arrive here?'

'Only half an hour ago; when did you come in?'

'Yesterday. I came up from Geneva.'

'We came the other way,' Mr. Hawtrey said. He had only just noticed whom Dorothy was speaking to, and had at once come up to her assistance. The three stood chatting together for a time.

'Terribly awkward—most unfortunate, is it not?' Mrs. Fortescue remarked to Mr. Singleton. 'It quite gave me a shock when I saw him come into the room just now.'

'I don't think it matters much, Mrs. Fortescue; there is no reason in the world why they should not meet, and they might just as well do so here as in London.'

'Do you think there is any chance of its coming on again?' the lady asked.

'Not the slightest in the world,' he replied curtly; then he rose from his seat and went across to the little group, who were directly afterwards joined by Ada Fortescue and her father.

As the party stood laughing and chatting together, no one unacquainted with the circumstances would have guessed that the meeting had been so embarrassing to two of the number.

'Are you wandering about by yourself, Halliburn, or are you with a party?' Mr. Hawtrey asked.

'Ulleswater and Dick Trafford are with me,' he replied. 'I suppose you have been all travelling together.'

'Yes, we first met at Lucerne; then we came on, and the Fortescues joined us at Martigny. Captain Armstrong and Fitzwarren were there too, so it made a pleasant party. Fitzwarren left us this morning; he was off home again.'

At dinner the two parties were at opposite ends of the long table.

'Deuced awkward for you, Halliburn,' Lord Ulleswater said.

'Oh, I don't know. I don't mind if she doesn't.'

'I should say we had better move on, anyhow, Halliburn. If it gets known that you are here together it is sure to be reported the affair is on again.'

'I certainly shan't run away. If I had known she was coming I should not have come here, but now we have met and spoken I don't see there will be anything gained by my leaving; besides, it would look as if I had done something to be ashamed of if I were to go directly they came.'

'I think perhaps you are right. She behaved very pluckily, I think. Clara Fortescue had just whispered to me she was here. I was coming across to warn you when she came in and I watched the meeting. I must say she pulled herself together wonderfully. It was an awkward moment for her, meeting you here so suddenly, with a dozen people who knew all about it looking on. I see Armstrong is sitting there with them as if he belonged to the party; he and the elder of those Fortescue girls seem to be on rather confidential terms.'

'That is Armstrong's way,' Lord Halliburn said; 'he means nothing, and by this time I should say that most of the girls know that he means nothing. I can't make out why he doesn't marry.'

Ada Fortescue at any rate understood that Captain Armstrong's manner at the present moment meant nothing; she had from the first detected that Dorothy Hawtrey was the attraction that kept him with the party, but she had said no word when her mother had frequently expressed her surprise at his prolonged stay at Martigny, and had cautiously endeavoured to learn her opinion on the subject. Ada's silence was due partly to a feeling of loyalty towards Dorothy, partly because she shrewdly conjectured that their own stay there was not unconnected with an idea in her mother's mind that something might come of it, and that did Mrs. Fortescue believe Dorothy to be the attraction, she would lose no time in leaving for England. Captain Armstrong said no word regarding the meeting with Lord Halliburn until she began the subject.

'Did you see the meeting, Captain Armstrong? I was on thorns. The Hawtreys are not on the same side of the hotel as we are, but if I had known which her room was, I should have made some excuse to slip away and warn her; however, it did not matter; she behaved beautifully, didn't she?'

Captain Armstrong nodded. 'It is a nuisance his turning up here,' he said; 'but I don't think she cares. Do you, Miss Fortescue?'

'No, I don't think she does. If she had done so, I don't think she could have been so cool and collected all at once. I am sure I couldn't if I had been in her place. She met him just as she might have met any intimate acquaintance.'

'If he has got any common sense,' Captain Armstrong growled, 'he will be off the first thing to-morrow morning.'

Ada was silent.

'Don't you think so?' he urged.

'Well it all depends. I know nothing about why the match was broken off, beyond that paragraph in the paper that said it was her doing, and Dorothy has never alluded to it when we have been together. It depends, I should think, whether he cared very much for her. I suppose he did. It seems to me that everyone must love Dorothy Hawtrey. If so he may think it worth trying whether he cannot bring it on again.'

Captain Armstrong muttered something between his lips that she did not catch.

'I am almost sure you are swearing, Captain Armstrong, and that is very bad manners. Still I don't say that I shouldn't swear if I were a man and all this happened, so I forgive you.'

'We have had such a pleasant time,' he said ruefully, 'and if this fellow is going to stay here I can see it is all going to be spoilt.'

'I don't see why it should be spoilt. At any rate I am sure that if Dorothy broke off the match, she is not the sort of girl to make it up again. It must be an awful thing to break off an engagement when everyone is aware of it, and you know it will set everyone talking. I don't think I could ever bring myself to do it. I think Dorothy has put it quite aside; I have seen so much of her in the last fortnight, and if there had been anything on her mind I should have noticed it.'

'She coloured up when they met.'

'Of course she coloured up. You don't suppose, Captain Armstrong, a girl can suddenly meet a man she has been engaged to and has been fond of—for of course she was fond of him—and who has been acting as lover to her for weeks, and all that sort of thing, without the colour coming into her cheeks. It did not last a moment either. It just came and went. I am sure if it had been me, even if I had ceased to care for him, my cheeks would have flared up, and I should have been hot and uncomfortable for hours afterwards.'

'I should not think he was ever very lover-like,' Captain Armstrong said, savagely; 'I don't think he has got it in him.'

'I don't know,' Ada said, demurely. 'I have never been engaged, Captain Armstrong; so I can't say what men do under such circumstances. I believe—I suppose that they do take what novelists call a chaste salute sometimes. Now, if you swear like that, Captain Armstrong, I shall sit between papa and mamma at the next meal. It is downright scandalous!'

'I really beg your pardon, Miss Fortescue,' Captain Armstrong said, penitently, 'but there are certain provocations under which even the mildest of men may be excused for breaking down.'

'I do not see where the provocation comes in,' she said; 'we were merely discussing the conduct of engaged couples in general, and of Lord Halliburn in particular.'

'I would rather not discuss the matter at all. I have nothing whatever to say against him; he may be an excellent fellow for anything I know, but at the present moment it is distinctly unfortunate that he has turned up here, and I hope he will have the common sense to see it himself, and to start the first thing in the morning.'

But this Lord Halliburn did not do; he and his two friends started early for the Mer de Glace, while the Hawtreys' party went off on mules in another direction. After dinner the men met in the balcony and smoked their cigars together, the only absentee being Captain Armstrong, who went for a walk by himself. On the following day the Hawtreys determined to visit the Mer de Glace. Mr. Singleton and Mrs. Fortescue declined to form part of the expedition; the others took two guides with them, as the ice was said to be in bad condition. They started at six in the morning, and made a considerable portion of the ascent on mules. When they reached the edge of the glacier, the guides, who had been consulting together as they led the way, said that they should not advise them going far, for the weather looked bad. Mont Blanc was wreathed in clouds, and the other peaks were also hidden.

'What do you expect, Giuseppe?' Mr. Hawtrey asked. 'There is no wind, and the clouds do not look any lower than they did an hour ago.'

'The storms here are very sudden,' the guide replied, 'and when they do sweep down they come with terrible violence, and Conrad and I both think there may be snow. With these ladies it would not be safe to venture far on the ice.'

'Well, we will only go as far as you think it safe. It would be a pity to have had this climb for nothing.'

'All must keep together,' the guide said; 'let there be no straying. The snow, over some of the crevasses, is very thin and treacherous.'

On they went for some distance, admiring the ice pinnacles, leaning over crevasses, and peering down into the depths where the deep blue of the ice walls shaded off into blackness. The guides went ahead, sounding carefully the snow before them for a few inches, the first precursor of

coming change, had fallen two days before. Suddenly one of the guides uttered an exclamation.

'See,' he said, 'the clouds are coming down the mountains. We have not a moment to lose; it will be on us now before we are off the glacier.'

The sun was still shining brightly, and the parties, as they turned, glanced somewhat incredulously up the mountain.

'By Jove, it is coming down,' Captain Armstrong exclaimed. 'It is more like an avalanche of snow than clouds.'

A minute later there was a faint moaning sound, which grew louder and louder.

'Stand close together and take a firm footing,' the guide exclaimed. 'The storm will be on us in a minute. Look after the ladies, messieurs!'

The warning was scarcely out of his lips when there was an icy blast. It lasted but a second or two, and it was succeeded by a dead calm. Then a mighty wind struck them with such violence that they were nearly swept from their feet, while particles of ice, pricking like needles, forced them to close their eyes, and hold down their heads before the blast. The sun disappeared, and at the same moment they were enveloped in a dense mist. Clara Fortescue had clung to her father's arm, and Ada, who was with Captain Armstrong a few paces in the rear, hurried forward towards them, but the storm struck them before they reached them. Unprepared for the sudden shock, Ada would have been swept before it had not her companion clasped his arm around her. 'You must just fancy that we are waltzing,' he shouted in her ear. 'Cling tight to me; this can't last long.' And with great difficulty he dragged her along until they reached the others.

'That is better,' Mr. Fortescue said, as they arranged the shawls to cover the girls' heads. 'We will take care of them, Armstrong, if you will ask the guides how long this is likely to last.'

The guides were but two or three paces away, with alpenstocks firmly planted in the ice and their heads bent down to meet the force of the gale. They were talking together when Captain Armstrong joined them.

'Is this likely to last?' he asked in French.

'It may last for twenty-four hours,' the guide said.

'Then we must be moving; the ladies could not stand this cold an hour.'

'It is no easy matter,' the guide said, 'when one cannot see three paces in front of one. Still we must try; as you say it would be death to the ladies to stop here, and indeed for all of us. We have only one rope with us; we did not expect this when we started. It is not long enough for all. I will be tied at one end, Giuseppe will go ahead and lead the way, the three ladies and one of the gentlemen will be tied to the rope behind me, the other two had better walk between the ladies and hold the rope.'

'I will give them instructions. I have been up some of the mountains.'

The guide fastened the rope round the girls and Mr. Fortescue. 'Now, you must all understand,' Captain Armstrong said, 'if one goes through, those in front must stick their alpenstocks in the ice and throw their whole weight on the rope forward, those behind must do the same with their alpenstocks, but must stick their heels in the snow and pull backwards on the rope.'

Ada Fortescue was placed next to the guide, and was followed by Dorothy, whose father took hold of the rope a yard or two in front of her, while Captain Armstrong stationed himself between her and Clara, behind whom came her father. Then they began to move forward in the teeth of the gale. Giuseppe went ahead, feeling his way cautiously. The mist was so thick that he could not see the ground he trod on. Talking was impossible, for it was difficult to breathe in face of the wind and fine snow. It was slow work, and in five minutes Captain Armstrong passed forward and joined the guide in front.

'The wind is more on our right hand,' he shouted; 'do you think we are keeping our course?'

'The wind is no guide,' the man replied. 'It comes down sometimes one gorge, sometimes another; we may have it all round the compass.'

In 1850 mountaineering was almost in its infancy. The ascent of Mont Blanc was considered a great feat, and as yet no woman had undertaken it. The ice-fields and peaks were still almost unknown, and the guides had not, as now, an intimate acquaintance with every foot of the mountains. The danger of being lost in a fog or storm was, therefore, infinitely greater than at present.

Several times Giuseppe was doubtful as to the true course, and the party halted while he made short casts in various directions. The girls' strength became rapidly exhausted; the icy wind seemed to deaden all their energies. Mr. Fortescue had moved up alongside his youngest daughter to help her along. Mr. Hawtrey had his arm round Dorothy, and Captain Armstrong was assisting Ada.

Several times the whole party stopped and stood with their backs to the wind to recover their breath. At last Giuseppe gave a shout, and the others were soon beside him. He was standing under the shelter of some rocks which projected through the glacier.

'I know where I am now,' he said. 'We have not gone far from our course; another ten minutes and we shall be at the edge of the glacier.'

This was welcome news to the men, but to the girls it seemed that it would be impossible to struggle even for ten minutes further. All had sunk down close together in the shelter.

'You must not stop here,' Mr. Hawtrey said; 'you can have two or three minutes to recover your breath, but you must keep moving or you will be frozen to death.'

Is it necessary to be roped any further, Giuseppe?' Captain Armstrong asked.

'Not necessary, monsieur, but it is better to continue so; it keeps all together, and were any to lag behind it would be certain death, for our shouts could not be heard any distance away in this gale.'

Clara was unable to rise when the guide said they must no longer delay.

'I must carry her,' her father said.

'I will carry her, monsieur; I am accustomed to carry burdens. If you will lift her on to my back I can fasten the shawl round me so that she cannot fall. If another gives way, Conrad will take her; if the third, then two of you together must help her. That will do; let us go forward.'

Five minutes later Ada Fortescue sank down, in spite of the assistance Captain Armstrong was giving her. Conrad at once unroped her and took her on his back.

'Now, Mr. Hawtrey,' Captain Armstrong said, 'if you put your arm round your daughter on one side and I on the other we can pretty well carry her along.'

It was soon necessary to carry her altogether.

'I will take her feet,' Mr. Fortescue, who was beside them, said; 'we shall get along capitally like that. Nevertheless, the ten minutes seemed to the three men to be a long half-hour, and it was with a feeling of the deepest satisfaction that they saw a rocky barrier in front of them, and left the frozen plain they had been traversing.

'We are not out of the wood yet, Mr. Hawtrey said, 'nor shall we be till we get down among the trees, and I confess that I am feeling rather done myself.'

'It is awkward walking like this, Mr. Hawtrey, when one can scarcely see where one is putting one's foot down. If you will let me I will carry Miss Hawtrey in the same way the guides are doing; her weight will be nothing if I get her well up on my back. We shall get on ever so much faster that way.'

There was a feeble protest from Dorothy, who, although utterly exhausted was not insensible; it passed unheeded.

'Are you sure you can do it, Armstrong?'

'Quite certain, if you and Fortescue will lift her up; that is it, the weight is nothing now to what it was on the arms.'

The guides had been standing impatiently by while this colloquy was going on. They started as soon as they saw Captain Armstrong had his burden fairly arranged.

'Keep close behind me, monsieur,' Conrad said; 'if you follow quite close, you will see whether I make a step down or up.'

They descended rapidly. From time to time the guides paused and asked if all were together, and as soon as the reply was given pushed on again. Powerful man as he was, it taxed Captain Armstrong's strength to the utmost to keep up with the guides, who strode on rapidly ahead, as if their weights were nothing to them. The perspiration streamed from his face—less from the weight than from anxiety lest he should fall, and several times he only saved himself by means of his alpenstock. Behind him he could hear the panting breath of the two elder men, as they hurried along stumbling and slipping. At last the gloom became denser, the roar of wind increased, and the guides came to a standstill.

'We must halt here,' Giuseppe said; 'we are in the wood. We will rest for a little while, and see if we can find a shelter and light a fire; if not we must go on again. There is a break in the ground somewhere about here. I must look for it.'

Mr. Fortescue and his friend lifted Clara from his back and he hurried away. In a few minutes he returned.

'It is close by,' he said; 'we shall do there.'

He led the way, and in a minute they stood at the edge of a little ravine some fifteen feet deep running through the wood. The girls were carefully carried down to the bottom. The change in the temperature, now they were sheltered from the wind, was very great. All three girls were conscious, the motion and the heat of the guides' bodies having revived both the Fortescues; none of them were, however, able to stand.

'Huddle as close together as you can, girls; the guides are going to try and light a fire, and we

shall soon have you comfortable.'

'Oh, by the way, I have a flask in my pocket with some brandy in it,' Mr. Fortescue said. 'I had forgotten all about it until now.'

'Thank God for that,' Mr. Hawtrey said; 'it is worth fifty times its weight in gold. Now take a good sip of it, girls, it will do you a world of good.'

As soon as they were free of their burdens the guides, accompanied by Captain Armstrong, had hurried away, and the former were soon engaged in chopping off strips of bark from the pines, while the latter collected sticks. A pile was soon heaped up close to where the girls were sitting, a match struck, and in two or three minutes a bright fire was blazing.

CHAPTER XIV

Two men were sitting together in an inner room in a saloon in New Orleans.

'I was never more surprised than when you came in yesterday, Bob; regular floored I was. It was only a few days ago I was thinking over that rig we were in together. We made a good bit out of that.'

'Yes, we didn't do badly. I have wished sometimes since that I had been as deep in it as you were, and had bolted and cleared out altogether.'

'Yes, I made most out of it; but then you see I ran most risk by a long way. You might have got a year or two for being mixed up in it, but what with nobbling the horse and what with having to pretty near choke the stable-boy, I should have got fourteen years safe. You could have been with me in that if you had been game, instead of only taking the part of getting round the girl, and persuading her to get the stable boy to slip out to see her for five minutes. If the fools had played their part better we should have got off without my having to meddle with him, but she made such a poor story of it that he suspected something was up and came back again and just met me as I was dropping from the window of the loft. He knew me by sight, and there was nothing to do but to bolt, while as you had been swelling it with those false moustaches no one twigged you from the girl's description, and you were able to spend your money at home.'

'Well, it did not do me much good. It went after the rest quick enough.'

'You knew where to find me from Laxey, I suppose? I know he is a pal of yours.'

'Yes, we work together sometimes. We knew each other years and years ago, when we both had money to spend, and spent it and more besides. He had more than I had. He came into a biggish fortune when he came of age, but ran through it in a couple of years. Then he had a bit of luck on the turf, and more luck still they used to say at cards at the clubs he belonged to, till he was one day kicked out of one of them, and that did for him altogether, and he came down to the three-card dodge and games of that sort. Yes, he was wonderfully clever at cards; could do almost anything with them. I have seen him bet a company all round that he cut a king three times following, let them shuffle them as much as they liked, and he never touched the cards till he cut, and I never saw him miss it though there were a score of men round looking at his fingers.'

'Aye, I have seen him do that trick, and nobody was ever able to make out how he did it. He could make the cards do 'most anything. I have written to him half a dozen times within the last few years, telling him what an opening there was out here for a chap with such talents as he has got; but I told him straight it was of no use his coming unless he was ready to play with pistols as well as with cards, and I expect that is what has kept him away. I fancy it was, from what he wrote. Laxey's weak point was that he never had nerve—if it had not been for that, he could have made money anywhere.'

'Well, he gave me your address. It suited my book to be out of England for a few months, and when I had got across the water I said to myself, "I will go down and see Joe Murdoch at New Orleans." I am not as handy with the cards as Laxey, and I don't know who is, but I have worked the three-card trick, and many an evening when Laxey and I have been together, in my room or his, we spent an hour or two over the cards, and he has put me up to some of his tricks, and I have worked at them when I have had nothing else to do and could not sleep, till I have come to do some of them pretty near as well as he does. I don't mean to say that I thought of going into that line when I came down here, but I said to myself, "There is Joe Murdoch; we have played more than one game together, and I can trust him and I think he can trust me. He has been out here six years, and I expect he must know the ropes and can give me some good advice, whether we go in for anything together or not."'

'That is so, Warbles. We can run straight together, or if we don't run together perhaps I can put you on to a line of country where you may make good running for yourself. You left England suddenly, I suppose?'

The other nodded.

'Turf business?'

'No; I suppose they would call it money under false pretences. I only ran dark; it was a girl I have got here with me that did the trick.'

'Brought a girl over with you, Warbles? Well, I should not have thought you would have bothered yourself with a girl out here.'

'Well, no, I don't suppose I should if it hadn't been that I expected to make her useful. She goes as my daughter, and she looks on me as an old friend of her father's.'

'Is that so?' the other asked doubtfully.

'That is so, Joe. The girl is straight—as straight as a line. I met her—never mind how I met her—but I saw she was a sharp girl and would be a good-looking one, and it struck me that such a girl could be made very useful. I had her taught a bit and trained, and I fancy she could pass anywhere as a lady. Well, you know when a respectable gentleman of my age with an uncommon pretty daughter arrives at a big hotel, say at Scarborough or Brighton, and the girl is clever, you can see for yourself that there is money to be made in lots of ways. Young men make the acquaintance of the gentleman for the sake of the girl. They will come up to his rooms and, after a little supper, they may take a hand at écarté. Then you see a young girl can get round a young flat with some pitiful story or other, and get a loan from him to meet temporary difficulties. Then when the time gets near for leaving, she may take a fancy to a few things from jewellers and have them sent to choose from. Altogether there is no end of money to be made if the game is played well.'

'Yes, I see that. But your coming over here shows that the game can be cut short.'

'No, that is the game I am going to play when I go back. We worked in a different direction last time and brought it off. I think we might have stopped safely enough, but I had particular reasons for wanting to get here out of the way, so I tell you I ran off the track and came over here. Do you think that game could be played here?'

'Not much,' the other replied. 'At some of the summer resorts it might be done, but it could not last long. There ain't enough big towns and places to work in; besides, at our hotels there ain't the same chance of getting to know people that there is at home, or in Paris, or in those places. People sit down to a little table to themselves to their meals, and there is no sort of general meeting-place. You would find it very hard to work it. Got some money, I suppose?'

'About five hundred pounds, Joe.'

The other smoked in silence for two or three minutes.

'Twenty-five hundred dollars,' he said at last, 'is a tidy sum, but it would not go far here. Besides, if you are thinking of doing anything with the cards you would have to move about. It wouldn't do to bide too long anywhere. They are up to most tricks, I can tell you, and they would think here no more of shooting a man they had a suspicion of playing false than you would of eating your dinner. Stores are paying well here, because there is a crowd of people going through to the West, and most of them lay in their stock for the journey here, but twenty-five hundred dollars would go no way towards a store. If I were to sell out, I could with what I could get for this place and what I have got by me put as much more in. Still, five thousand dollars would be no use for a store that would make anything of a show. I have thought a good deal about going West myself.'

'West?' the other repeated doubtfully.

'Yes, to California; there is big money to be made out there; I don't mean in digging for gold. In a place like that it don't want a deal of capital. A big tent and a few casks of spirits and a stock of cheap wines and some tables and benches is about all; but that would be too much for me by the time I had made the journey across. With your money and mine I don't know that we mightn't manage it, and if we could it ought to pay big money. I could run the saloon, you could work the card rig in a room behind, and if the girl is as good-looking as you say she is, she would fetch them in crowds if she looked after the bar. There are no end of mining camps, I hear, and the miners just chuck their gold about, and one could move off from one to another when we found the game playing out.'

'It sounds a good thing,' Warbles said, 'but it is a long journey, isn't it?'

'Well, yes, it's a long journey, there's no denying that, but there are hundreds of people starting every week. Most of them go by the Southern route, but I am told it is a much better way to go up the river by steamer to a place called Omaha, which is growing into a big town, and strike across from there.'

'It is not the difficulty but the time I am thinking of. I only intended to stop for a few months.'

'What difference will that make? You want to get money, I suppose? Well, you would get as much in a week there as you would in a month by your scheme, which might be cut short any day, and you might find yourself with your hair cropped and in for five years. Why, from what I have heard, there are men coining money out there at drinking-saloons, and after two or three years of it we might cut it and go home, and keep race-horses of our own if we liked.'

'Well, I will think it over, Joe. It is a biggish thing to decide on, but there ought certainly to be money in it. As you say there is no chance of getting five years, but it seems to me from what I have heard of it there is a goodish chance of a pistol-bullet or a stab from a bowie-knife.'

'I expect all that there is exaggerated; besides the rows are between the men that drink, and not between them and those that sell drink; as to the cards there is no occasion to do any hanky panky with them, unless you see you have got a greenhorn to deal with and the chances are good. The cards pay anyhow: they bring men into the place and they help to sell the drink.'

'Well, I will think it over,' Warbles repeated. 'I am getting tired of doing nothing all day; how I shall get through three or four months of it is more than I can think. Perhaps I might as well do this as anything else. The girl would certainly be useful. To tell you the truth she is pretty difficult to manage, and I am not sure she might not after a time kick over the traces altogether; but I don't think she would mind what we are talking about; I am sure it will be more to her taste than the other. Well, I will come in again in the morning; it is too big a thing to be decided on straight off.'

Warbles went back to his hotel. A girl was standing at the window, looking out upon the river; she turned round as he entered.

'Well, have you settled anything?' she asked. 'I am sick of doing nothing, but just thinking and thinking.'

'Care killed a cat, Linda,' the man said lightly. 'Thinking is a pure waste of time. I have had a long talk with Murdoch and he has put an entirely new idea into my head.'

'An honest idea, of course,' she said scornfully.

'You may scarcely believe me, but you are right, my dear; it is a strictly honest line.'

The girl looked at him intently.

'Well, let us hear what it is,' she said; 'you promised me the other should be the last. I did not believe it, and told you so. I shall find it hard to believe that there is not something crooked about this somewhere.'

'Well, there; isn't it just honest trade?' and he repeated the conversation he had had with Murdoch, omitting, however, all allusions to his skill at cards. Her face brightened as he went on.

'That will do,' she said; 'I should say that will do first-rate. When I was a young 'un I often peeped in at the doors of big public-houses. I used to think the women behind the bars had a fine time of it. I should not think so now—at least, not in a big town—but in places like those you talk of, it would be different altogether. I should like the journey, too; it would be like going with gipsies, which I used to think would be the happiest life in the world. I was afraid when we got out here you would be wanting to do another thing like the last, and I would not have helped you—at any rate, not till we were getting down to our last shilling. But I like the thought of this, and I will do my best for you. I suppose they are a rough wild lot out there, but I think I can take care of myself. But this time, mind, I shall want a share; I am not going to work for years and then be thrown over when it suits you. I will have my share of the profits paid over to me once a week or once a month at the outside, and will put it away where I like. How much are you going to put into this thing?'

'I told him I could manage five hundred, and he said he could do the same, but I doubt whether that will be enough to carry it out properly.'

'Well, you have got two thousand left now. You said you would go halves with me. I don't want that, but give me five hundred and you can tell this man that I have got that money of my own and am ready to put it in with yours, but that I am going to have an even share. I know you are calculating that my good looks will draw, and no doubt they will. I am not a fool, and can see what you are after; and I can see, too, that it won't be an easy game for me to play. These miners, with their pistols and their knives, are not like the young fellows who come into a London bar. They will be in real earnest out there, and it will be a dangerous game to play with them. One has got to be pleasant with everyone and not to give a smile more to one than to another; not to give one the right to think that he has a chance or causes him to believe that another has a better one than he has.'

'I think that is rather too much, Sal,' Mr. Warbles said, doubtfully. 'I have always been kind to you.'

'There is no occasion to have any lying between us,' she broke in. 'Why you took me up and paid for me for years I don't know, and I don't suppose I ever shall know, but, at any rate, I know you well enough to be sure that it was not out of pure kindness. If it had been, would you have put me into the hands of a woman who was always drunk? Would you have left me to be brought up in that court, to grow up a young thief, who might any day have been taken off and hauled before a beak? Do you think I am such a fool as to swallow that? Then came the time when you took me away, I saw you look me over. I saw that you said to yourself, "She will do."

'What I was to do for you I neither knew nor cared. You said you would have me taught—that was enough for me. Then I had three quiet years, and I made the most of them. You told me something that first day about expecting me to be useful to you, and when the time came I carried out your orders. It was only right to do so; you had bought my services. It was a bargain—but don't let us call it anything else. From the first you had an object in saving me from starving or from the workhouse, and I suppose you thought that object was worth spending money on. But certainly the object was not kindness. You were always kind when you came to see me once a

year all the time I was with that woman, and it is for that more than anything else that I am ready to help you and to carry out your orders, but I don't want to be altogether at your mercy, still less at the mercy of the man you are going to take as partner.

'I will work with you but not under you. I don't want to interfere in your plans, and as you would be two to one of course you could outvote me if I did. Still, it will give me a better position if it is known that I am your partner and not your drudge, and I shall know that I cannot be cast off or thrown aside and left alone and friendless, and that I can, if I like, wash my hands of the business.'

'I would not mind agreeing,' Mr. Warbles said, after sitting rubbing his chin thoughtfully for some time. 'I should not mind your having a third of the profits, and I think that would be fair enough seeing that you would put in a third of the capital; and as you rightly suppose, we consider that you would prove a great help to us. But suppose you took it into your head to marry, where should we be then?'

The girl waved her hand impatiently. 'I am not likely to marry,' she said.

'So you think at present, Linda, and so a good many other girls have thought. Still, there it is. I have got to put the matter before Murdoch, and it has got to be put in a business shape. Would you be willing, if we agree with you that as long as you remain with us you take a third share of the profits, in case of your leaving us, either to marry or for any other cause, to forfeit your third of the concern? You see if you weren't to do that your husband, if you had one, might set himself down as a third owner; or, supposing you did not marry, you might get a good offer for your share and sell out, and that would not be fair on us.'

'No, that would not be fair. Yes, I would agree to that. I am to be joint proprietor with you both, and to take my third of the profits to do what I like with, but if I leave you I forfeit all I have in the concern. We will have the agreement made before a lawyer. As far as I am concerned, there shall be two copies made; one I will take with me, the other I shall leave with him, so that if by any chance I lose mine I shall be able to prove my rights. Of course, I have no fear with you, papa; no man would wrong his daughter, but when there is a third person in the matter it is as well that one should look after oneself.'

Mr. Warbles with difficulty repressed an angry ejaculation; however, he was so impressed with the value of his ally that he mastered himself, and said with an attempt at a smile, 'I had no idea you were such a businesslike young woman, Sally.'

'I have always had to take care of myself a good deal,' she said quietly, 'and I mean to do so as long as I can. Now it is time to go down to lunch, I think; then we might go for a drive and have a look at the place. Are you going to see your friend again to-day?'

'No, I told him I must think the matter over, and see whether you liked the idea before I decided one way or the other.'

Joe Murdoch offered no objection whatever when Mr. Warbles informed him of the conditions on which alone Miss Myrtle—for they had adopted another name when booking for New Orleans—consented to join in the venture.

'It is her money, I suppose, that she puts in?' he asked.

'It is her share of the last thing we pulled off.'

'Ah, well, it is hers then. Well, it is only fair that she should have a third. You were quite right in insisting that if she left us she should forfeit all further share in it. I don't like her any the worse for being able to look after her own interests. One wants a long-headed girl for this business; a weak fool, who would be ready to throw herself away on the first good-looking miner with his pockets well filled, would be of no use to us at all. One who would be inclined to flirt right and left might be worse still, for there would be a shooting affair in the place in no time. One wants just what I think she is, by your account of what she said, a cool-headed, clever woman, who has the wit to see that the best game is to steer clear of them all, show no preference to anyone, and to give no one an excuse for being jealous. She is exactly the one we want. I think even better of the thing than I did before, Warbles. The extra five hundred will make all the difference in our outfit; I should say it would take us five hundred to get across, but then we should have the waggon and horses, and they would do to take the tent or the frame and boardings of the house up, to work backwards and forwards to the nearest town for spirits and food, and would pay its expenses by hauling things for storekeepers. I reckon it is a first-rate look-out.'

'Where would you buy the outfit?'

'Well, we can get a waggon in pieces all numbered and ready to put together when we get to Omaha. We shan't want a very heavy one as there are only three of us. We had better buy horses here; there is no saying how much we might have to pay at Omaha; or, what would be better, I can send a letter by a boat that starts this evening to a man I know who has a farm near the last steamboat stopping-place, about a hundred miles this side of Omaha, and give him a commission to buy me four of the strongest horses he can get there, and to drive them to Omaha so as to meet us by next Thursday's boat. There will be nothing to keep us beyond then.'

'No, the sooner we are off the better. I suppose you know pretty well what are the things people take with them?'

'Yes; it is generally about the same thing, flour, bacon, tea and sugar, molasses, and baking-powder. Of course we shall want a few pounds of salt and some pepper and mustard, and a keg of salt butter. That about fills the list. Have you got any firearms?'

'No.'

'You will want a brace of Colts—that's revolvers, you know—and a bowie knife, which is handy for all sorts of things. I have got everything. The first thing to do is to have this agreement made; I can find a man to draw it up.'

'That won't do. The girl said this morning that she should ask the landlord of the hotel for the name of one of the most respectable lawyers in our place, and should go with us when we give our instructions to him.'

'Good,' Murdoch said; 'she must be chock full of good sense. It is clear that there will be no getting over her easily. She is right, you know, quite right; for the man I was thinking of going to might not have taken sufficient care of her copy.' And he winked at his associate.

'That is what she suspected, no doubt,' Mr. Warbles said, in an injured tone. 'After all I have done for her, it is hard to be distrusted.'

'It must be, I should say, Warbles, mightily hard, after, as you say, all you have done for her.'

'She said when I came out she'd get the name and address before I came back, and that I had better bring you with me, so that we could go together at once. You had better tog yourself up a bit.'

'I should think so. You are such a respectable looking swell, Warbles, that I ain't fit to walk down the street with you, let alone to be introduced to a young lady. Well, just look at that paper for a few minutes.'

Mr. Warbles sat down and amused himself until Murdoch's return in watching the young man in charge of the bar who, having been up till four o'clock in the morning, was now languidly wiping down the counter, decanting liquids from one bottle to another, washing glasses, and generally setting things straight. When Murdoch appeared he was dressed, and Mr. Warbles looked at him approvingly.

'This is my English suit,' Murdoch explained. 'I have not put it on ten times since I came over. You see, people here mostly wear either black or white, with waistcoats cut low so as to show a lot of white shirt. I dress their way, of course; as a rule it don't do to look peculiar; besides, there is rather a prejudice against Britishers down here, and it is no use rubbing them down the wrong way. If you dress as other people do, and keep a quiet tongue in your head, you have a good chance of steering clear of rows. Of course you cannot always do that when you are running a saloon, but even here you can do fairly well if you keep your eyes open and act according to character. If it is a great big swaggering sort of bully who gets drunk and kicks up a row, I have pistols always handy behind the bar, and when I jump over with one in each hand I can generally get him out as quiet as a lamb. If I see that it is a regular hard case, a fellow who means downright mischief, I lie low and take no heed, only sending out my man quietly to fetch a constable. As a rule he never finds one, still it makes all the difference. If there is a man shot and an inquest the next morning I am able to prove that I did my best to put a stop to the matter, and so I get off without being blamed; for a New Orleans jury are not fools enough to suppose anyone is going to shove himself between two angry men when their hands go to their pistol pockets.'

When they arrived at the hotel Mr. Warbles asked his companion to stop outside while he fetched the girl down.

Joe Murdoch had been prepared to see a good-looking young woman, but he was completely taken aback by the appearance of the girl who came out with Mr. Warbles. He had been on English racecourses long enough to be able to distinguish a lady when he saw her, and he at once decided that this girl would pass for one in any society. She was well but quietly dressed, had a graceful walk and a good carriage, while her face was exceptionally pretty. 'My eye,' he muttered to himself, 'wherever did Warbles pick her up?'

'This is my old friend, Joe Murdoch, Linda'—for the name of Sally had been dropped as being vulgar and objectionable, from the day her training had begun. 'This is my adopted daughter, Joe.'

'Glad to meet her, I am sure,' Mr. Murdoch said, with a humility altogether uncommon to him. 'I am very glad to think that we are going to travel together, Miss Myrtle.'

'I shall be glad to travel anywhere, Mr. Murdoch. This seems to me a dreary place.'

'Not dreary when you know it; far from that. It is a stirring place, except in the old French quarters, but one wants to know it.'

'We took a drive yesterday,' Linda said; 'and it seems to me that it is the worst smelling and most unhealthy sort of place I was ever in.'

'Well, yes, I can't say much for it in that way, and occasionally we get yellow fever here bad, but I have never had an attack myself. Whose office are we going to, Warbles?'

'I wish you would call me Myrtle,' the latter said irritably; 'there is no good in calling up that old

name here.'

'We are going to Mr. Searle's,' Linda said quietly; 'this is the street I think. I got the directions how to find it at the hotel. He is a respectable lawyer, I am told.'

'Very much so, Miss Myrtle, quite highly so. I believe that he is a very sharp fellow too, and it is not always the two things go together. He was with his father; the old man died two years ago, and now the young one has got it all in his own hands. He does all the best shipping business here.'

On entering they found that Mr. Searle was disengaged, and were at once shown into his office.

CHAPTER XV

'We wish a deed of partnership drawn out between John Myrtle, that is myself, Linda Myrtle, and Joseph Murdoch. Each of the three parties agrees to put in the sum of five hundred pounds, which is to be jointly expended on the journey to California, and on starting and carrying on a saloon or other establishment there, the profits to be divided monthly, each of the three parties becoming absolute possessor of his or her share. In the event of Linda Myrtle marrying, or leaving the partnership for any reason whatever, she is to forfeit all share in the property or effects of the partnership.'

The lawyer listened attentively. 'Do either of the other parties similarly forfeit their share on leaving the partnership?'

'No; but it might be as well to put in a clause that in the event of his doing so the partner remaining has the first option of purchasing his share at a price to be fixed upon by an umpire agreed upon by both.'

'I have a question to ask,' the girl said suddenly. 'Would such a deed as this be rendered useless or invalid if the names of one or more of the parties were not those properly belonging to them?'

The lawyer looked at her in surprise. 'It would certainly be very desirable that the real names should be inserted. This, however, would not be indispensable if the identity of the parties with those named here could be proved; for instance if you were to come here to prove the deed I could testify that you were the lady who signed as Linda Myrtle, and that under that name for example, you registered at the hotel, and were generally known. Did you wish to prove it elsewhere, you would take an affidavit that you were the person designated and known as Linda Myrtle. Did you sign under your real name, whatever it might be, it would be just as difficult for you in California to prove that you were entitled to it, as to that under which you sign. You intend, I suppose, to continue to pass under the name given, and will be generally known by it. Moreover, in case of necessity, you might write to me and forward your likeness, and I could then make an affidavit to the effect that the original of that portrait was the lady who in my presence signed the deed of partnership under the name of Linda Myrtle.'

'We should each wish to have copies of the deed of partnership, and I desire that a fourth copy may be made, and this I shall request you to hold in charge for me, so that in case I should at any time lose or be deprived of my copy, I should, by applying to you, be able to obtain another copy.'

'I will certainly do that, Miss Myrtle, and I think it a very wise precaution on your part. I will have the draft ready this afternoon,' the lawyer said; 'I shall be glad if you will call in at three o'clock to see if it meets your joint views, and if so, I will have the deed—which will be a very short one—copied four times in readiness for the signatures in the morning.'

'What did you want to go on like this for, Linda?' Mr. Warbles grumbled, as he went out into the street. 'Why, the man will suppose that you suspect us of some plot to rob you.'

'No, I don't suspect anything particular, but there is nothing like having things put on a satisfactory footing. I see that it is for our interest that we should act square to each other, and I certainly see no reason whatever why you should wish to get rid of me. Still, no one can say what might happen. After all, I am only ensuring to myself my share of the profits so long as I do my share of the business as well as I can—and I should think from what you have seen of my powers of acting, you can rest well assured that I shall do it very well—but I want to be independent, and I will be so. I don't know anything of this place we are going to, except that the men are rough and quarrelsome, and I want, if after two or three months trial I find the life altogether unbearable to be able to leave, with money enough in my pocket to pay my fare to San Francisco, if not home, and to be able to keep myself until I can find some situation.'

'You are right enough, Miss Linda,' Joe Murdoch broke in, 'and I haven't the least feeling against you for what you have said and done. I like you all the better that you can stand up for yourself, and though I am not much of a fighting man I will promise you I will stand by you out there whatever comes. Any man that says a word to you that he ought not to say I will reckon with him. I ain't a straight man myself and never have been since I was a kid, but, by gosh, I would be cut in pieces rather than see anything happen to a girl that is as straight as you are.'

'Thank you, Joe,' she said, quietly holding out her hand to him. 'I did not know you before, but

now that I do, I feel there is no occasion for me to have that fourth copy made.'

'You have it made, miss; it is best you should have one. I might go under and Bob might get another partner, or he might go under and I might get another partner, and in either case it would save trouble if you have your rights clearly marked out and set down.'

'Let us go down to the wharf, Joe,' his comrade said, changing the conversation. 'It is all as good as settled now, and we may as well begin to get the things. How long will it take us?'

'It won't take more than two hours, any way,' Joe said. 'There are big stores here where we can get every mortal thing we want. We could go by the boat to-night if we wanted to, but we don't want to. In the first place I have got to settle about selling my saloon, and in the second the order for the horses is only going by to-night's boat, and it ain't no manner of use our getting into Omaha before they do. It would cost us twice as much to live in a shanty, where every square foot is occupied by sleepers, than it would to stop comfortably in an hotel here. I shall not be long in getting rid of my place. Two or three of the men who use it have asked me at one time or another what I would take to clear out of it. It is handy for the river, and I do a fairish trade with sailors of an evening. Still, it would take a day or two to arrange it, and it will never do to look as if one was in a hurry. If they thought I wanted to clear out they would not offer half the sum they would if they thought that I did not care one way or the other about making a deal.'

They walked along the wharves looking at the steamers.

'There are plenty of them going up the river,' Murdoch said, 'but Thursday's boat is the first that goes up to Omaha, and that is about as close as we can cut it. It is Monday now, and the day is pretty near half gone; I reckon I shall want all the time for carrying out my deal. I will go now and see one of the chaps I spoke of. At three o'clock we have got to meet at that lawyer's office, and then if you like we will go and get our outfit, and take our passages. I have got more than enough money to pay for my share. If you will take my advice, Miss Linda, you will go back to the hotel and overhaul your things and see what you want for the journey. You will want some good strong plain dresses and serviceable things underneath, for it is a rough business I can tell you. You want a store of all sorts of little things—buttons and such like, needles and thread and all that sort of thing—and plenty of stout shoes that will bear knocking about. You must bear in mind that you won't see a shop for four or five months; but remember the less baggage you take the better, as I have heard that many a waggonload of emigrants going across the plains have had to chuck everything overboard, kit and food and all except a sack of flour, so as to lighten the waggons when the horses broke down. I am not sure, Bob, that it would not be wiser to write for six horses, or better still for two mules for wheelers and four horses. It may cost a bit more, but it will make things more easy and will give us a better chance of getting to the end of our journey with all our kit.'

'All right, Joe; you know more of these things than I do. If you think that six are best, order them. I suppose the tent we shall get out there.'

'Yes, the tent is a mighty heavy thing. I should never think of dragging that with us.'

'I should not have given you credit for being so soft, Murdoch,' Truscott growled, as after seeing the girl into the hotel, they turned away together.

'I dare say not. Softness ain't much in my line, but that girl fetched me altogether. Here she is, right away from England and without a friend in the world, and she speaks out as firm and as brave as if she had twenty men within call ready to help her. If she had been one of the crying sort she would have got no pity from me, but she regular took my breath away when she spoke out like that, and I says to myself, "She has got to be ridden on a snaffle; just touch the curb and she will bolt with you and will break your neck as well as her own." But I meant what I said for all that. She is just the girl for what we want, and if she finds we treat her well and act square by her she will act square by us. She will keep them all at a distance, and keep her head straight all the time; only you will have to humour her. I don't know where you picked her up, but I should wager a dollar to a cent that she is thoroughbred.'

'You would not have said so if you had seen her three years and a half ago, when I picked her out from a slum in London.'

'I might not have said so then, that is likely enough; one can't always tell whether a yearling is going to turn out a good horse, and a good many who think they are clever get sucked in over it; but a man who has an eye to horseflesh can tell whether a three-year-old is well bred or not, and I guess I am not far out with this one. Yes, I am struck over her. It is not often that women, or men either for that matter, get on the soft side of me. You know pretty well that I wasn't afraid of running a bit of risk in the old days, and you may guess that this country doesn't make a baby of one. No, sir, I have seen pistols and knives out pretty often since I came here, and would use them myself if there was any occasion, and I guess that if we ever get into a mess you will find I shall play my part as well as you do; only I want it clearly understood that in this job we are going in for I am ready to go through it whatever comes; but I am fixed in my mind that we are going to act straight to that girl.'

'Who wants not to act straight?' the other said angrily. 'Haven't I brought her all the way out here because I thought she would be useful? Couldn't I have slipped away with all the pot we had made, and left her behind me if I had wanted to? And who is talking about my not acting square with her now?'

'That is right enough, mate; we won't quarrel over it. So that we three all act straight to each other all round I am satisfied.'

They did not get away from New Orleans as soon as they had expected. The various purchases were all made in ample time, but the business of disposing of Murdoch's saloon was not so speedily arranged. He suggested that the other two should go on by the 'Mississippi Belle,' and that he should follow by the next steamer, but Warbles was against this.

'A week won't make much difference one way or the other,' he said. 'It is better that we should keep together. You are more up to the ropes here than I am. I suppose they will change our tickets for those of next week's boat?'

'There will be no difficulty about that; I could change them in five minutes. There are lots of people who could not get berths on her, and have had to take them in the next boat, and they would jump at the chance of going up at once.'

It was not until they had been at New Orleans nearly three weeks that Murdoch's business was finally arranged and everything was ready for a start. Warbles was in no particular hurry; he had been accustomed to do a great deal of aimless loafing about during his career, and found plenty to amuse him, looking at the busy scene by the riverside; but at last all was ready, and their goods were all on board the steamer that was to start on the following morning.

'There is a New York steamer signalled coming up,' Murdoch said, as they stood together smoking on one of the quays. 'She will be in by five o'clock. It is the 'Savannah'; she is a smart boat, and I guess she has made the passage down in four or five days quicker time than you did.'

'I am glad she is in before we start. I dare say she will have papers from England a good week later than any we have got here. It is as well to get the last news while we can. We shan't have the chance for some months again.'

'I don't care for English papers now. I look at them, because sometimes an English skipper or mate comes into my place, and when they find I am a countryman and know something about the turf, they will put a few dollars on some horse or other for the Derby. If the news is expected in before they sail, sometimes they will turn to the English paper and pick out a horse just for the fun of the thing for some other race of which the news ought to be in in a day or two, and put two or three dollars on it. If it was not for that I should never take the trouble to look at them, though I always take them regular in the saloon.'

It was not long before a steamer appeared at a distant turn of the river, and as she came up to the city the two men walked down to the wharf, where she would arrive, and where a crowd of idlers like themselves had already assembled. As she warped alongside, Truscott gave a sudden exclamation and nervously grasped his companion's arm.

'What is up?' the latter asked angrily. 'Confound it, there is no occasion to grip a man like that. I thought for a moment a big dog had got hold of me. What is the matter with you?'

Truscott had pulled his hat far down over his eyes.

'Do you see that man upon the hurricane deck, with his hands in his pockets smoking a cigar?'

'Yes, I see him fast enough; he is an Englishman, one can tell with half an eye. Well, what about him?'

'Take a good look at him so as to know him again, and then let us get out of this and I will tell you.'

Murdoch took another look and then followed his companion out of the crowd.

'Well, you look as if you had had a facer,' he said, when they had moved a hundred yards away. 'I have seen chaps look like that when they have had every penny they own in the world on the favourite and it has not even been placed.'

'I feel something like that, Joe. I believe that fellow is on my track?'

'You do; why, how can that be? How can he have followed you here?'

'That is more than I can say, but it don't much matter if he has followed me.'

'Are you sure it is the man?'

'Quite sure. I am a good hand at faces. One wants to be when one is a bookmaker and don't always find it convenient to pay up. I saw that man at the Oaks; he was talking for some time to a man I knew—the very man who was mixed up in the job I pulled off before leaving England.'

'You mean it was his money you got at?'

'Yes. Well, that fellow you saw there has been after me. Two or three of my pals told me there had been a man asking about me on the racecourses, and one day, it was the only time I went down, one of them pointed him out to me. He got into the train with me at Epsom; he thought I did not see him, but I did. He got into the next compartment, but I slipped him at Vauxhall, and did not see any more of him. I believe that fellow is on my track, though how he has got hold of it is more than I can guess. Anyhow, I cannot believe it is accident that brings him alongside of me again. I should not be surprised if he has got a warrant against the girl and me in his pocket

now.'

'Well, he has brought his pigs to the wrong market if he has,' Murdoch said fiercely; 'we have gone into this affair now, and if anyone thinks he is going to meddle with us he will find he is mistaken. Well, there ain't any time to be lost; if he happens to go to the same hotel you are at the game is up. You had best go straight back, get a carriage and have all your things taken right down to the boat; then if you are smart, you will be in time to get on board the boat that starts in two hours for Baton Rouge. Get off there and be on the look out for our boat as she comes along to-morrow. I shall be up in the bow; if you see me wave my handkerchief you will know it is all right, and you can step right on board; if you don't see me wave, do you and the girl move off at once; get behind one of the stores, and come on by the next boat. I don't think it likely he will be there, mighty unlikely, but it is just as well to settle what to do in case he is. If he should by any chance guess that the Mr. and Miss Myrtle he sees in the hotel books are the pair he is looking for, he would find out that they are bound up the river, and in the morning he might go down to the steamer to see if it is them. He would watch till she went off, and when he found out that you are not among the passengers he would think that he had made a mistake, and go back to the hotel again, and would hunt about in other places before he had made up his mind that you had given him the slip. It is a week before another steamer goes up to Omaha, and we should be a week out on the plains before he got there.'

'I should like to see anyone talking about an arrest out there. However, I don't think you need be afraid of him; I fancy I can arrange about that.'

'You ain't going——'

'Never mind what I am going to do,' the other interrupted. 'I am not going to have our plans broken up, nor the pleasure of our journey spoilt by being hunted as if we were dogs. I don't know who this fellow is, and I don't care; if he chooses to meddle with our affairs, he has got to take the consequences; he is not in London now. There, don't stand here another minute; he may land in half-an-hour, and you have got to be out of the hotel before then. I heard the girl say that the boxes were all packed. Mind, first get the boxes on board, then go to the wharf and get on board the Baton Rouge steamer. Look out for our boat; if you see me wave my white handkerchief it is safe to come on board; if not, slip away and get behind something till we go on again; then come by next boat. If he gets off at any of the landings, going up the river, I shall get off too, and come on board again as you come along.'

Murdoch went back to the landing-place. The passengers were pouring off the steamer with bags and boxes of all kinds. The man he was to watch was still walking quietly up and down the hurricane deck, evidently in no hurry to land until the rush was over. Sometimes he stopped to speak a word or two to a boy who was standing at the rail, watching the others landing.

'I guess that fellow is with him,' Murdoch muttered. 'It may be some boy he has made friends with on the passage. If he has brought him from England it must be because the boy knows Tom and the girl; but if he does he could do no harm if the other was out of the way. You are taking it cool and quiet, my fine fellow. If you guessed that every five minutes you spent there spoilt your chance, you would not take it quite so easily.'

It was a good half-hour before the stream of passengers and porters with baggage had ceased crossing the gangway; then the man and boy left the hurricane deck, and a minute or two later appeared at the gangway, followed by two men with portmanteaux. There was but one vehicle remaining by the wharf. Murdoch knew the driver.

'Mike,' he said, 'here are a couple of dollars for you. If that man just landing tells you to drive him to Planter's Hotel you take him somewhere else. Pretend you misunderstood him. I have my reasons for not wanting him to go there.'

'All right, I will take him to Reardon's; it is at the other end of the town.'

'Come back here and let me know where you put him down,' and Murdoch moved off as the gentleman came up to the carriage.

He watched them drive off, and then took a seat on a baulk of timber till Mike returned.

'He told me to take him to the Crescent City, and it's there I put him down, Mr. Murdoch.'

'All right, Mike; I don't care where he goes so that it isn't to Planter's.' Then he walked away, and after threading several of the worst streets of the town, stopped at a low wine shop. There was no one in but the man behind the bar.

'They tell me that you have sold out, Murdoch, and are going West. Is it true?'

'That is right. I have had enough of this. I am going to try my luck West. Have you got Black Mat with you still?'

'No. You will find him at Luttrell's. You know the place, at the corner of Plantation Street. That is to say, he was there a fortnight ago, if he has not got shot or hung since. Not thinking of taking him with you?'

'No.' Murdoch laughed. 'He is strong enough and would be useful, but he gets so confoundedly sulky if he takes a drop too much. That was why I had to get rid of him. He got into three or four rows, and I had him on my hands each time for over a fortnight, so I thought he had better go.'

'Yes, you told me about it. I found him useful here, especially when I wanted the place cleared; but it would not do, he broke one fellow's shoulder throwing him out, and it was getting me a bad name.'

'Well, good-bye,' Murdoch said. 'I am off by the boat to-morrow. I will look you up if I come back this way, and let you know how I have got on.'

Five minutes later Murdoch turned into Luttrell's. A powerful negro, whose face was disfigured by the scars of several cuts and gashes at once came up to him. 'Waall, boss, how are you?'

'I am all right, Mat. I came to have a word with you.'

'There ain't no one to prevent you. The boss has just gone out. We don't do no business here till late.'

'What I want you for is this, Mat. There is a friend of mine just come from New York. He is going up the River with me, but there is a police chap just come down after him, and, like enough, he will be at the boat to put his hand on his shoulder. I want to arrange that he shan't be there, you understand; I don't want him killed, but I just want him to have a hint that he had better not meddle with other people's business—a hint, you know, strong enough to lay him up for three weeks or a month; and I should not mind paying twenty dollars to the man who gives him the hint.'

'You point him out to me and the job will be done, boss; only I don't sees as I can hit it to exact three weeks or a month. When one is in a bit of a hurry it ain't no easy matter to figure it out just exact.'

'Well, we are not particular to a week; what we want is not to be bothered with him.'

'I will fix that, boss. You can go on board that boat with your mind easy.'

'Of course you can't go now?'

'Well, I could go, if it was downright necessary, but it would be rough on the boss to find no one here when he came back. I expect he will be in in ten minutes. He said if anyone asked for him he would be back in half-an-hour, and it is getting on for that now.'

'I will wait, then; I know Luttrell very well; he will let you go out for a bit with me if I ask him.'

The keeper of the saloon soon returned. 'I can do without him,' he said, when Murdoch told him that he wanted the negro to do a job for him. 'I don't expect it will be a very busy night, and if it is I will call my wife down, and put her behind the bar, while I keep things straightened out.'

Upon arriving at the hotel Captain Hampton dined quietly. Then he went to the clerk's desk, had a talk with him over the people who had been staying there and showed him Dorothy's photograph.

'Nothing like that been here,' the clerk said positively. 'I should have noticed her at once if she had been.'

'I have no reason to suppose that she came here more than to any other hotel,' Hampton said. 'I will go round in the morning and try the others. I suppose there are not a great many where a gentleman with a lady with him would be likely to put up?'

'Not more than six, I should say, at the outside,' the clerk said, and gave the names, which Captain Hampton at once wrote down in a note-book.

'It is just possible that they might not have come here at all, but may have stopped at Mobile, where the steamer touched on her way down; still, I think it much more likely that they have come here.' Then he went upstairs and wrote a chatty letter to Danvers, giving him an account of the voyage.

'I hear there is a steamer leaves to-morrow, and I hope to be able to give you some news before I close this. I am going round the hotels the first thing, and hope, if not to find them, to get some news of them. The latter is most probable. I don't see Truscott could have any motive in stopping here, and I shall expect to find that they only stayed a day or two and then went up the river. I have a strong conviction he means to go to California; but even in that case he may have chosen some other route—have gone down to Panama and crossed the isthmus there, or may have taken steamer to Galveston and started from there by the southern route, though I don't think that is likely, for the Indians are worse on that line than on the other. Anyhow, whichever route they have taken I shall follow. I wrote from New York to the War Office, asking that my leave might be extended for another six months from the end of the year, on very urgent business that compelled me to travel in America. I have sent a private letter to Colonel Eversfield, telling him something of the nature of the work I have in hand, and asking him to back up my request. I have no doubt he can manage it. That ought to give me plenty of time; but if the worst comes to the worst and I find myself pinched I must take ship at San Francisco and get to China, and from there by a P. and O. to India. This will be the last letter you will get, I fancy, for a very long time; though for aught I know there may be means of sending off letters from some of the stations on the plains.'

He addressed an envelope, laid it by the unfinished letter, and then went downstairs. It was dark now, and beckoning to Jacob, who was sitting in the hall, to accompany him, he strolled out through the door. For nearly an hour they wandered about, and at the end of that time came out

on the quays.

CHAPTER XVI

'It is pleasant here, Jacob, after those close streets.'

'It is an awful place for smells, Captain.'

'It is smelly, Jacob. I fancy the town was built on a swamp; I think I have read something about it. Well, there are no smells here; suppose we sit down and look at the river for a bit, the air is fresh and pleasant.'

A minute later a man with naked feet stole up behind them. He was close to them before any sound warned them of his approach. Jacob looked round and uttered a sharp exclamation. Captain Hampton was in the act of springing to his feet when he received a violent blow on the shoulder, and fell face foremost on the ground. With a cry of rage Jacob sprang at his assailant and caught him by the throat. The man shook him off and brought down his hand on the top of his head with such force that he fell insensible. Then he stooped over Captain Hampton, and having turned him over on his back felt in his pockets, but rose with an exclamation of disgust, having only found two or three dollars in them, as Captain Hampton had taken the precaution of laying aside his watch and emptying his pockets of money and papers before leaving his room. Ten minutes later some sailors coming along the wharf came across Jacob, who was just trying to get on to his feet.

'Hello, mate, what is the matter?'

'I dunno,' he replied stupidly.

'Been having a drop too much?'

'No, it ain't that—oh, I remember now. I was there with my master, sitting on that log, when a great nigger attacked us. He stabbed my master, and I suppose he stabbed me; I don't remember much about it except that I got hold of his throat.'

'Where is your master?'

The question completely aroused Jacob's faculties, and he hurried round to the other side of the log.

'Here he is,' he cried. 'Oh, my dear master, are you hurt bad?' and stooping over him he burst out crying.

'That won't do any good, lad,' the sailor said. 'Here, let us have a look at him. He has been stabbed, sure enough, Jack. He is just soaking with blood.'

'Is he dead, Bill?'

The sailor tried to turn the body over, but as he did so there was a faint moan.

'He ain't gone yet, that's clear. Who is he, boy?'

'He is Captain Hampton, an English gentleman. We only got in here this afternoon. He is staying at the Crescent City.'

'Well, we can't let him lie here. You stay here with him, Jack, and we will go off and get some one to carry him.'

In a few minutes the men returned with two constables carrying a stretcher; on this the body was placed, four of the sailors lifted it and carried it to the hotel, and then up to his room, where two surgeons were quickly in attendance. Jacob stood by listening with breathless anxiety to their talk as they examined his master.

'Will he die, sir?' he asked, in a broken voice, as they rose from the examination.

'No, I reckon he hasn't had his call this time, but it has been a close thing. What was he doing when he was struck?'

'He was just getting up, sir, from the log that he was sitting on.'

'Ah, that saved him; another half inch and we could have done nothing for him. You see, he was struck from above; the wound is just behind the shoulderbone, and it has gone right down inside the bladebone, but has missed the lungs altogether—at least, we think so. Do you see that dark mark under the skin below the bone? That is where the point of the knife came to. Of course he has lost a lot of blood, but there is no reason why, if he goes on well, he should not be about again soon. Did he drink?'

'No, sir,' Jacob replied indignantly.

'Well, that is all in his favour; in this climate a man with his blood heated has but a poor chance if he gets hurt. He is English, the clerk told me as I came up?'

'Yes, sir; he is an English captain.'

'Ah, well, he will have a chance of fighting some more battles yet. You are his servant, I hear?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Well, you are not going to lose your master this time; you had better sit up with him to-night. We will get a nurse for him in the morning. I will order some lemonade to be sent up, and will bring round some medicine in half an hour, and sit here for a bit. Doctor Hawthorne will wait until I come back.'

By this time they had finished bandaging the wound.

'Hullo, what is the matter with you?' he exclaimed, as Jacob reeled and would have fallen had he not caught him. 'Here is another patient, Hawthorne. The boy is bleeding from the head somewhere. I thought he looked half stupid.'

They laid him down and examined him.

'He has had a tremendous blow on the head,' the other said. 'It has cut right through the cap and has laid the bone bare. I expect that thick cap saved his life. I wonder what he was struck with.'

They bathed the boy's head with iced water for some time. Presently he opened his eyes.

'Do not move, lad; you have had an awkward blow on the head. You must lie still for a bit, else we shall be having you on our hands too. What did he hit you with?'

'I dunno, sir; he had nothing in his hand but the knife.'

'It wasn't done with a fist,' Doctor Hawthorne said, 'and is certainly not the cut of a knife.'

'I fancy it was done with the handle of the knife,' the other said. 'The negro could have had no motive in killing the boy. I expect he had the knife in his hand, and he struck down on him with the end of the hilt. That would make just the sort of wound this is. You see, it is a little to one side of the centre of the skull, and so glanced off the bone. If it had caught him fairly in the centre it would have staved in the skull to a certainty.' They placed a pillow from the sofa under the boy's head, gave him a little lemonade to drink, and then one of the doctors left, after having aided in placing Captain Hampton on the bed, propped up almost into a sitting position by pillows. Jacob dozed off into a confused sleep. Occasionally he woke up and saw the doctor sitting by his master's bedside, and then relapsed into sleep. At last he started up at the sound of a voice. The sun was gleaming through the window and the doctor was standing speaking to Captain Hampton.

'You have a nasty wound,' he was saying, 'but fortunately it has not touched any vital point. You have been simply insensible from loss of blood. There is every chance of your doing well, but you must not try to move.'

'What is the matter with Jacob?' Captain Hampton said feebly, as the boy appeared at the foot of his bed with a wet towel still bound round his head.

'I am all right, Captain, though I feel queer and my head is aching terribly; but I don't care a bit now you have come round.'

Captain Hampton's eyes turned to the surgeon for an explanation.

'He has had a heavy blow on the head. We have heard nothing from him beyond the fact that he had hold of the throat of the negro who attacked you. The man evidently struck him down, and from the appearance of the wound we gather that he struck him with the haft of the knife. Fortunately it fell rather on the side of his head or it might have killed him; as it is, it has laid the bone bare; we bandaged it up with a cloth soaked in ice water and he will be all right in a day or two.'

'Where am I wounded?' Captain Hampton asked.

The surgeon explained the nature of the wound.

'No doubt it was some negro who had gone down to sleep on the wharf, and seeing you come along with this boy thought he would rob you. Your pockets were turned inside out.'

Captain Hampton did not speak for a minute; then, with a faint smile, he said:

'He did not get much for his pains. I put everything in that drawer and locked it before coming out, and dropped the key into my portmanteau.'

'That is all right,' the surgeon said cheerfully. 'I was afraid you might have lost a good deal of money. We gave notice to the police last night, but it is not likely you will ever hear of the fellow again. Such things are common enough in the streets of New Orleans, and it is not once in a hundred times that the police ever manage to lay a finger on the scoundrels. Had you been in any gambling place, because, in that case, some one may have tracked you?'

Captain Hampton shook his head. 'No; I had only taken a stroll through the town. How long am I likely to be laid up?'

'You must be in bed for a fortnight at least; the wound was made by a bowie knife and is a broad,

deep cut, and the knife penetrated to its whole depth, for there is a bruise each side of the mouth of the wound. If you were to attempt to move earlier than that you might have a great deal of trouble. Now, there is no occasion for me to stay with you any longer. Dr. Hawthorne, who was called in with me, will be here at nine o'clock, and will bring a nurse with him. You must have some one with you; your wound might break out suddenly at any moment. We shall give you a little weak broth; but we must not begin building you up at present; the great thing is to avoid any chance of fever setting in. Your having lost so much blood is all in your favour in that respect. Now lad, I will have a look at your head; yes, you had better keep on applying cloths dipped in ice water to it. I will tell them to send you up a basin of broth when they send some up to your master. You had better not take any solid food to-day.'

At ten o'clock, Captain Hampton, having taken a few spoonfuls of broth from his nurse, fell off into a quiet sleep. Jacob, who had taken off his boots, so as to move about noiselessly, had tidied up the room. He had glanced several times towards the unfinished letter and the addressed envelope on the table, and he now took his shoes in his hand, and went out through the door, put on his shoes again, and proceeded down stairs, having, before he left the room, laid aside his wet cloths and put on his cap.

'When does the post go out for England?' he asked the clerk.

'It is mail day to-day; there is a steamer going direct to England.'

He went back to his master's room, took up a pen, and with infinite labour scrawled a few lines at the bottom of the unfinished letter, making several blots and smudges as he did so. These he dried with blotting-paper, and with much self-disapproval folded the letter, placed it in the envelope, and, going downstairs again, handed it to the clerk to post.

For three or four days Captain Hampton remained in a very weak state; then he began to rally and picked up strength fast. At the end of ten days he was able to walk across the room.

'What has become of the letter I left on the table when I went out with you, Jacob?'

'I saw the envelope was to Mr. Danvers, sir, and you had told me about him. I asked about the post, and they said that it was going out that day, and as you had written before you went out I was sure that you wanted the letter to go by it, so I made a shift to write a line at the bottom to say that you could not finish it because you had got hurt, and then fastened it up and posted it. I hope that was right, sir.'

'You intended well, anyhow, Jacob; but it would have been better, perhaps, if you hadn't done it, as it will only alarm him needlessly.'

'I told him the doctor said you would get round, sir.'

'Ah, well, that is all right. I am glad you sent it, as he would be looking for a letter from me. I suppose you are quite sure that it was a negro who stabbed me?'

'Quite sure, sir. It was dark, but not so dark that I could not see his face.'

'Well, in another three or four days I shall be able to be out, Jacob. If I find that these people were here at the time I landed I shall have no doubt that this business was their work. I knew the man by sight and he may have known me. Someone may have pointed me out to him on the racecourse, as I had been asking about him. Of course it may have been done merely for the sake of plunder, but I think the other is more likely.'

Three days later Captain Hampton was able to go for a ride in a carriage. He went first to the police office.

'We have no news whatever to give you, Captain Hampton,' the superintendent, who had been to see him several times, said as he entered.

'I did not expect you would have any,' he replied. 'I have come to see you about a different business. Here is the letter the head of the police at New York gave me to you. You see I am in search of two people from England. By the aid of the police at New York I traced them and found that they had come on here nearly three weeks before. I followed them, and was wounded a few hours after my arrival here. I am well enough to begin the search again, and shall be very glad if you will send one of your officers with me to visit the hotels.'

The superintendent at once complied with his request, and at the second hotel they visited he discovered that the people he sought had been staying there and had left on the evening of his arrival.

'They were booked on the boat to Omaha,' the clerk said. 'I know they have been getting a lot of things at the stores, as they were going across the plains. The evening before they were to start Mr. Myrtle said they had changed their minds and were going on at once to Baton Rouge. They hurried up, but they were pretty late. They took a carriage from here and the driver told me they only just caught the boat by a minute; the bell was ringing when they got to the quay. You won't catch them now; the 'Arkansas' is a fast boat and I suppose they got on board her at Baton Rouge. There is no boat going now for the next four or five days, so they would have a good three weeks start of you.'

'You don't happen to know where they bought their things?' Captain Hampton asked.

'They got a lot of things at J. B. Nash's stores; a good many came up here, but I expect the heavy part went straight on board.'

'Thank you. I don't think there is anything more to ask you. We will go down to these stores,' he added to the policeman, as he returned to the carriage. 'I may learn something there that may be useful.'

His inquiries showed plainly enough that Truscott really meant to cross the plains and that they were going to travel by waggon. 'What harness did they buy?' he asked.

'For six horses, at least, by what I heard them say; for four horses and two mules. The two men were talking about it, and they wanted bigger collars for the two wheelers because they would be mules.'

'Were there two men, then, as well as a girl?'

'Yes; the three always came together; one of them belonged to this city. I knew his face, though I don't know what his name was. I take it he was a Britisher, though he had been long enough here to lose most of his accent. He seemed rather to boss the show and the other bought the things he fixed on. I allow he was a pretty smart fellow and was pretty well fixed up on prices. We did not get very much out of that deal.'

'What was he like?'

'He was a strong-built sort of chap about forty, I should say, and looked rather a hard sort of cuss. I don't know what his name was; the other called him Joe.'

'Thank you. I daresay I shall be coming in to get an outfit for myself in a day or two. I am thinking of going across the plains, too.'

'Well, I guess we can fix you up with everything you want, squire. But you don't look as if you was fit for a journey across the plains just yet. It ain't child's play; I reckon it wants a pretty strong man to stand the racket.'

'I shall have a fortnight to pick up on board the steamer,' Captain Hampton said. 'I have just had a bout of illness, but I am shaking it off, and it will be at least three weeks before I am at Omaha.'

'We are going for a long journey, Jacob,' he said when he returned to the hotel.

'We have been a pretty goodish long 'un already, Captain.'

'Nothing to what we are going to set out on now, Jacob. We have got a fortnight or three weeks on board a steamer, and then we start across the plains.'

'How long shall we be in crossing them, sir?'

'Four or five months, Jacob.'

'My eye!' the lad exclaimed. 'Them must be something like plains; and what is there the other side of them?'

'There is a country where they find gold, Jacob.'

'What! sovs?' the boy exclaimed.

'The stuff sovereigns are made of.'

'But you ain't going to look for that, sir.'

'No, lad; I am going after these people. They were here that evening when we came in, and as they started in a hurry half-an-hour after we landed, I cannot help thinking they saw me. It seems they had another man with them when they were here, and I expect they came here to join him. I don't know whether he left with them; my own opinion is he did not, but when Truscott saw me he hurried off at once to his hotel and started, leaving the other man to prevent my following them. Probably he started by the boat in the morning after them, believing the negro he had hired had done his work. At any rate I have made up my mind to follow them. I was determined to do so before; but if I hadn't been, this would have decided me. They have got a long start, but we will come up to them sooner or later.'

'I should think so,' the boy said, energetically, 'and pay them out for it too. My eye! won't they be surprised when we drop upon them just as they are picking up gold. But you ain't fit to start yet,' he went on, changing his voice; 'you look very white, sir; I think you have been doing too much, and it won't do for you to start to cross these here plains until you are strong; it will just be a-knocking yourself up, and I don't suppose there ain't no doctors living out there.'

'That there are not, Jacob,' Captain Hampton laughed. 'Well, we shall have three weeks' quiet on board the steamer, and by the time we land I hope I shall be as strong as ever. I will keep quiet for the rest of the day. To-morrow I shall have to see about taking our passage and getting ready for the start. I know nothing about what we shall want yet.'

The next morning Captain Hampton took Jacob with him down to the stores where he had been on the previous afternoon.

'I have made up my mind to go across the plains,' he said; 'now, what do I want? I know

absolutely nothing about it. Clothes I have got of all sorts—I want nothing in that way; I want to travel as light as possible, so as to push on fast.'

'Can you shoot?'

'Yes, I am a good shot, and have a double-barrelled gun and rifle with me.'

'That will help you a good deal; the game has been mostly shot or scared away along the line, but there is some to be had, and, you see, any meat you don't want you can swap for flour and other things with some of the emigrants. As to your pushing on, you might do that sometimes, but not very often. There are Redskins all along the line, and a man travelling by himself would have much trouble in getting through. As a general thing folks go in parties of ten or twelve waggons, often more, and then they are too strong for the Redskins to attack. I do not think you could travel much faster than the ordinary, not even if you had good horses. The bullocks travel slow, but they go a good many hours a day, and camp at night where there is water.'

'If you could ride all the way you might do two days' journey in one sometimes, but you must take some provision along with you. You must take some flour and some bacon, for you can't always reckon on game, and tea and sugar, and little odds and ends. And then there are your clothes; knocking about for four months, and sleeping as you stand, you want at least two suits besides what you have got on. Then there is your ammunition. Altogether, go as light as you can, you have got a lot of things to haul along with you. If you ain't afraid of roughing it I should say you could not do better than take a strong buggy.'

'That is a four-wheeled vehicle, I suppose?'

The man nodded.

'You can have it with springs or without. Springs make it easy, but if you break one you are done.'

'Would it be strong enough to carry, say, six hundred weight?'

'Ay, double that, if need be; but of course the lighter the better. You would want a tarpaulin to cover the things up, and you might make a shift to sleep under it if it is wet.'

'No, we will sleep under the waggon; we will have hooks put along all round the bottom board, and a stout canvas curtain with rings to hang; down to the ground and peg down there.'

'That will make a capital tent; have it to open behind, so that you can sit at the entrance and have a fire outside.'

'Can you get me such a vehicle and make a sail-cloth curtain for me?'

'I can do that,' the man said.

'About how much will it cost for a good hickory waggon without springs, and without any particular finish?'

'You would pay about a hundred and fifty dollars; the tarpaulin to come well over it, and the canvas arrangement, might be forty dollars more, though I cannot tell you exactly. If you say two hundred dollars altogether you won't be far from the mark.'

'Very well, you can do it. How much flour shall I take?'

'Well, seeing that you will do some shooting and swap some of the meat for flour, I should say a hundred and fifty pounds ought to last the two of you fairly well.'

Half an hour was spent in discussing the other items, including a dozen of brandy for emergencies, a small stock of medicines, pickles, sauces, and other items, mounting up to about four hundred pounds in weight. To these were added some twenty pounds of ammunition.

'Allowing fifty pounds for blankets and clothes, we shall be well under five hundred,' Captain Hampton said; 'and we shall get lighter as we go on.'

'When you book your passage you can arrange for the buggy to be taken up,' said the storekeeper. 'You might put all the things in it. We shall put all the small items in boxes, and then lash the tarpaulin well over everything; they will travel safely enough, and you will have no trouble about them till you get to the end of the journey. Now, what about horses? What are you going to do? I reckon you will have to pay a mighty high price if you wait until you get to Omaha.'

'I shall want three horses; a good one for my own riding, and two sturdy animals for the cart—the boy will drive the cart. Could we get them taken up too?'

'You can get anything taken up by paying for it. I don't say as you wouldn't save money, because you would, a good bit, if you were to drop off at some station, a good way from any town, and look round among the farmers and get what you want, and go on by the next boat—but I suppose that would not suit you?'

'Not at all. The great thing is to save time. Do you think that I could pick up three horses to suit me here?'

'You can pick up anything you like here. I will give you the names of half-a-dozen stable-keepers, and if you don't find them all at one place you will at another. But mind, don't give the prices

asked. Seeing you are a stranger they will put on about three times the price they will be ready to take.'

'They are pretty well alike in that respect all over the world,' Captain Hampton laughed. 'I have bought some horses in my time, and I don't think they will take me in much, still I am much obliged to you for your warning. I don't think I should have been prepared to bid them only a third, though I should, I dare say, have tried half.'

'A third is enough to begin with, anyhow,' the man said, 'and I shouldn't rise much on that. You have got five days before you start, so you can take your time; and I should say don't get town horses, but critters fresh from the farms. Town horses get their legs knocked about and can't stand hard work and weather, like those just brought in. I ain't sure you would not do better to take steamer and go twenty or thirty miles up or down the river; you will be more likely to get an honest horse.'

It took Captain Hampton three days before he had purchased three animals to his liking; but when he had done so, he was well content with his bargains, all of which he had picked up at farm houses a few miles from the city. A store of grain sufficient for the passage was sent with them on board the boat, and everything was in perfect readiness on the morning of the day when the steamer was to start up the Mississippi.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME

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