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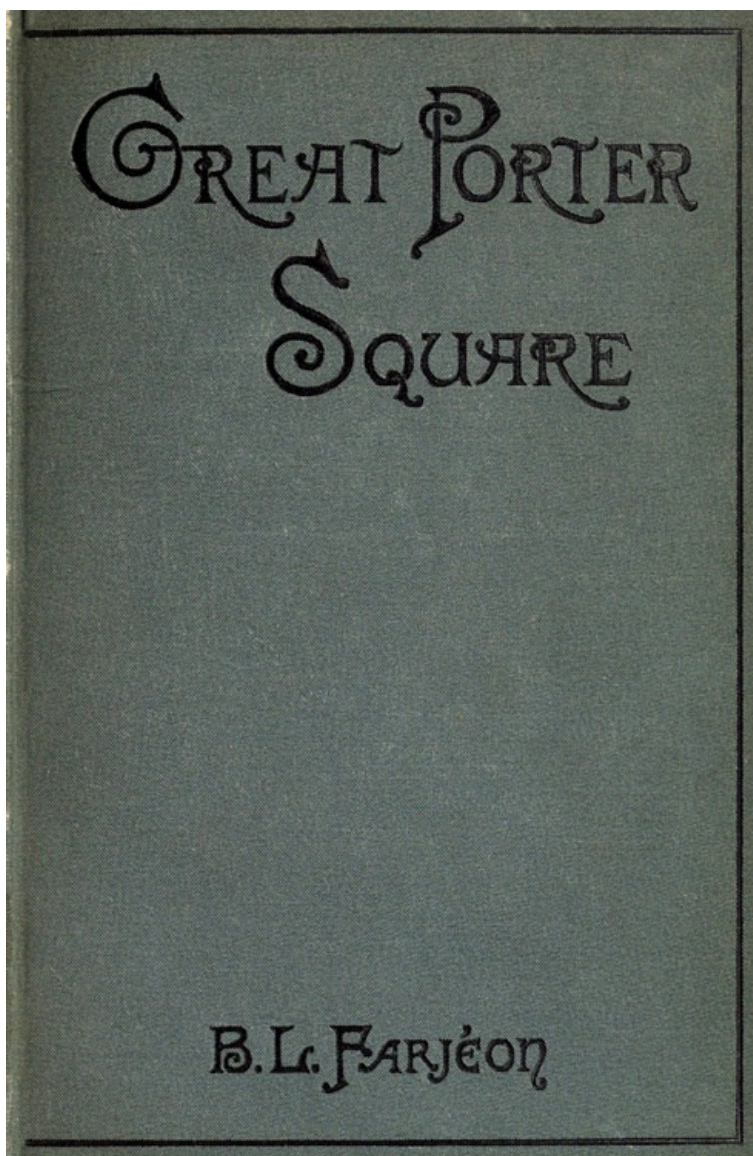
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK GREAT PORTER SQUARE: A MYSTERY. V. 3



GREAT PORTER SQUARE: A MYSTERY.

BY
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Shadows," etc.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOLUME III.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

BECKY GIVES A DESCRIPTION OF AN INTERVIEW BETWEEN HERSELF AND RICHARD MANX.

MY DEAREST LOVE—How, did you like my little messenger, Fanny? Is she not steady, and bright, and clever? When she woke this morning I had an earnest conversation with her, and as far as was necessary I told her my plans and that I wanted her faithful assistance. She cried for joy. The few words she managed to get out convinced me that, child as she is, I could not be better served by a grown-up person. Besides, I want a child to assist me; a grown-up person might spoil my plans. In what way? Patience, my dear, patience. [2]

Mrs. Preedy noticed that I looked tired, and I told her that I had been kept awake all the night with toothache. She expressed great sympathy with me. It is wonderful the position I hold in the house; I am treated more like a lady than a servant. That is because I have lent my mistress forty pounds, and have agreed to pay for little Fanny's board and lodging. Mrs. Preedy threw out a hint about taking me into partnership, if I would invest my fancied legacy into the business.

"We could keep on this house," she said, "and take another on the other side of the Square."

I said it was worth thinking about, but that, of course, I could do nothing until I received the whole amount of the legacy which would be in three weeks' time. So the matter rests; during these three weeks Mrs. Preedy will be very gracious to me, I expect. She said this morning, when I told her about my toothache, [3]

"You had better lay down, my dear."

Actually! "My dear!"

I did lie down, and I had a good rest, so that my keeping up all night did not hurt me. I feel now quite refreshed, although it is night, and eleven o'clock. Mrs. Preedy, as usual, is out gossiping with Mrs. Beale, and I am writing in the kitchen. When she comes home I shall continue my letter in my bedroom. I have much to tell you. Things seem to move on rapidly. I have no doubt that in a very short time something important will come to light.

After sending Fanny to you this morning, I went up to our bedridden lady-lodger, Mrs. Bailey. From her I obtained some significant news. She had passed a bad night; the noise in the next house, as of some one moving about in the room in which your father met his death, had "come again," she said, and had continued for at least a couple of hours. She declared that it did not sound like mice, and that she did not know really what to think. What she *did* know was that she was almost frightened out of her life. I suggested that Fanny should sleep in her room for a night or two, and I told her about the little girl. "It will be company for you," I said. The old lady was delighted at the suggestion, and with the consent of Mrs. Preedy, I made up a bed for Fanny on the floor, close to the wall, and she is sleeping there now. I am satisfied she is asleep, because Richard Manx is not in the house. I have confided in Fanny, and she is so devoted to my service that I am certain, while she is in her bed, no sound can be made in the room adjoining without her hearing it. Her faculties have been sharpened by a life of want, and her nature is a very grateful one. [4]

It was not without reflection that I have taken advantage of the opportunity to change Fanny's bedroom. It will afford me a better excuse for going upstairs more frequently than usual, and thus keeping a watch on the movements of our young man lodger. It will also give Fanny an opportunity of watching him, for I intend employing her in this way, and in watching another person, too. Richard Manx has not seen my little detective yet, nor shall he see her, if it can be prevented. My instructions to Fanny are to keep herself carefully out of his sight; it is part of a plan, as yet half formed, that she should be very familiar with his face, and he not at all familiar with hers. Twice during the day has she seen him, without being seen, and this evening she gave me a description of his personal appearance so faithful as to be really startling. Slight peculiarities in him which had escaped my notice have not escaped Fanny's; she has found out even that he wears a wig, and that he paints his face. This poor little child is going to be invaluable to me. If all goes well with us we must take care of her. Indeed, I have promised as much. [5]

Now let me tell you what else I have done, and what has occurred. In the note you sent back by Fanny this morning, you express anxiety concerning me with reference to Richard Manx. Well, my dear, I intend to take great care of myself, and in the afternoon I went out shopping accompanied by Fanny. I paid a visit, being a woman, to a milliner and dressmaker, and bought some clothes. For myself? No, for Fanny, and with them a waterproof to cover her dress completely, from top to toe. Then I made my way to a wig shop in Bow Street, and bought a wig. For myself? No—again for Fanny. And, after that, where do you think I went? To a gunsmith, of all places in the world. There I bought a revolver—the tiniest, dearest little pistol, which I can hold in the palm of my hand without anyone but myself being the wiser. I learnt how to put in the cartridges. It is very easy. With that in my pocket, I feel almost as safe as if you were by my side. Do not be troubled about this, and do not think I am in any danger. I am perfectly safe, and no harm will befall me. Of course, there is only one person to whom it might happen I would show my pretty little pistol—to Richard Manx. And I am convinced that the merest glimpse of it would be enough for him. You can tell by looking into a man's face and eyes whether he is brave as well as bold, and I am satisfied that Richard Manx is a coward. [6]

I saw him this evening. I have not yet had an opportunity to tell you that he endeavoured to make himself very agreeable to me three days ago, when he met me, as I was returning to Great Porter Square from the post-office. He promised to make me a present of some acid drops, of which he seems to be very fond. He did not keep his word until this evening, when he presented [7]

me with a sweet little packet, which I put into the fire when I was alone. He spoke of his property and his expectations.

"I wish," said he, as he offered me the sweets, "that this paper was filled with diamonds; it would be—a—more agreeable. But I am poor, miserably poor—as yet. It will be one day that I shall be rich—then shall I present myself to you, and offer to you what I better wish."

"Why should you do so?" I asked. "You are a gentleman, although you have no money—"

"Ah, yes," he said, interrupting me, and placing his hand on his heart, "I am a gentleman. I thank you."

"And," I continued, "I am so much beneath you."

"Never," he said, energetically; "I have said to you before, you are a lady. Think you I do not know a lady when she presents herself? It is not station—it is not birth—it is not rank. It is manner. On my honour I say it—you are a lady."

I gave him a sharp look, doubtful for a moment whether he was in earnest; but the false ring in his false voice should of itself have convinced me that he was as insincere as it was possible for any human being to be.

"It is," he said, with a wave of his hand towards the Square, "still excitement. People still come to look and see. What do they expect?"

"I suppose," I said, "it is because of that wonderful account in the newspaper about the poor gentleman who was murdered. Did you read it?"

"Did I read it!" he echoed. "I was the first. It is what you say—wonderful. What think you of the lady with the pretty name—I forget it—remind me of it."

"Lydia," I said.

"Ah, yes, Lydia. It is a pretty name—remarkable." ("Then," thought I, following his words and manner with close attention, "if you think the name so pretty and remarkable, how comes it that you forget it so soon?" But I did not say this aloud.) "What think you of her?"

"I think she is to be pitied," I said; "it was a dreadful story she told the reporter. It is like a romance."

"A romance," he said, "is something that is not true?"

"It *must* be true," I said. "Do you suppose any person—especially a lady, as Mrs. Holdfast is—could possibly say what is not true, in such a position as hers?"

"It is not—a—possible," he replied. "You are right. What say the people? As you say?"

"They can say nothing else. What object could she have to serve in speaking anything but the truth? Her husband is dead; that wicked young man—what was his name?" I asked, serving him in his own coin.

"Frederick," he said, quickly.

"That wicked young man, Frederick, is dead, and she is left alone, a rich widow. Money is very nice. I should like to have as much. I think it would almost console me for the loss of a husband—especially a husband much older than myself."

Forgive me, my dear, for speaking in this way, but to say honestly to a man like Richard Manx what is in one's mind would not be wise.

He smiled at my words.

"It may be," he said, "that Madame Lydia thinks as you. But you would not have been so—what do you call it? indiscreet?—yes, that word will do—you would not have been so indiscreet as to say to a gentleman of the press as much as she said. It was too candid—there was no—a—necessity. Why proclaim it?"

"Why not proclaim it?" I asked, "It may assist justice."

"Assist what?"

"Justice," I replied. "What is that unfortunate lady's first and most earnest desire? To discover the murderer of her husband, and to make him pay the penalty of his crime. It would be mine. I would even go to see the monster hanged."

"It is the proper word. Monster—yes, he is, he must be. But you could never—no never! You are too soft—that is, tender. Who is the monster? If you it were who was wronged, I am he who would find him. But this Madame Lydia, she is to me nothing. What say you? Can you suspect? In this Great Porter Square can anyone suspect? Our amiable lady of No. 118—Mrs. Preedy—even she cannot say. Ah, but it is dark—mysterious. Yet I have a thought—it is here." He tapped his forehead. "Shall I speak it?"

"Yes."

"Bah! Why? It is not to me an interest. But if you wish so much to hear! Ah! well—my thought is this. The son, the wicked young man, Frederick, he is, they say, dead. But if he be not dead? What then? The monster, he—in secret to kill the father he betrayed!"

I turned my face from him, for I felt that it had grown suddenly white. My heart beat violently. Swiftly to my mind rushed the thought of your deadly peril. There came to me, in one clear, convincing flash, what, under other circumstances, would have taken me hours to work out. Think for yourself—consider calmly the circumstantial force of all that has passed—and you will see, as I see, how easy it would be to construct a chain of evidence against you from which it is scarcely possible you could escape.

"You are agitated," said Richard Manx. "You turn from me. Why?"

In an instant I recovered my self-possession. I turned my face to him, and it seemed to me as if I had forced colour into it.

"The thought is so horrible," I said. "That a son should kill his father in cold blood! I cannot bear to contemplate it. What wickedness there is in the world!"

"It is so," said Richard Manx, with a smile, as though we were conversing on a pleasant subject.

“Then what shall a man do? Live well—eat well—drink well—sleep well. There is a reason. The world is wicked. I cannot alter it. You cannot alter it. A lesson comes. Enjoy. Must you go? Must you leave me? I kiss your hand. No? In my fancy, then. Till again, fair Becky, adieu.”

Our conversation was at an end, and I was thankful. I have been particular in my endeavour to show you the man, from his words and manner of speech. Good-night, my dearest. In my own mind I am satisfied that this day has not been wasted. It leads to days more important to you and to your ever devoted.

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CHAPTER XXXII.

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IN WHICH BECKY NARRATES HOW FANNY BECAME ACQUAINTED WITH MRS. LYDIA HOLDFAST.

MY DEAR LOVE,—Again I beg of you, in reply to your expressions of anxiety in the letter Fanny brought to me this morning, not to give yourself unnecessary anxiety about me. You are alarmed at the position in which I have placed myself; you are alarmed because Richard Manx is in the same house with me; you are alarmed because I have bought a revolver. I assure you there is no reason why you should be so distressed. The position in which I have placed myself is, I am more than ever convinced, the only one which will enable me to reach the heart of this mystery. Richard Manx is but one person against many. I, and Mrs. Preedy, and Fanny, and the neighbours, and the policeman, with whom I am on friendly terms, are surely more than a match for him. You are alarmed because I have in my possession a toy pistol. Is not a woman, in an emergency, to be trusted with a weapon? In such circumstances as ours, why should not a woman have as much courage as a man? Why should not a woman undertake a task such as I have undertaken, when her heart is engaged in it, when the honour and safety of the man she loves are engaged in it, when the whole happiness of her life and his is engaged in it? That would be like saying that women are fit for nothing in the world but to wait upon men's actions and to follow them, whichever way they lead. It is not so. In such a crisis as this a woman can do, and do better, what it would be out of the power of a man to accomplish. I would willingly relinquish my task if I thought it could be accomplished without my aid. But it cannot be. You are powerless; there is no one but myself capable and willing to carry it out; and indeed, indeed, I am in no danger! My dear, you underrate our sex. Read this letter carefully, and then confess that your fears are groundless, and that I am doing what is right and best to be done.

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Fanny heard nothing last night. There was no sound in the next house. For a reason. Richard Manx was not in his room, and did not make his appearance until this afternoon. Then I remembered that last week, on the same day, it was the same. There is one night in the week, then, in which he has business elsewhere. I shall take advantage of that discovery.

When Fanny returned with your letter this morning, I prepared for a masterstroke. Its success depended much upon chance, much upon Fanny's shrewdness. I cut her hair short, and fitted the wig I bought yesterday on her head. It is a wig of fair hair, with long curls. She looks lovely in it. When night fell, I dressed her in her new clothes, which were not new, but second-hand; and, covered with the waterproof, there she was, ready for her task.

My desire was that she should manage to become acquainted with Mrs. Lydia Holdfast, and so ingratiate herself with that person as to be able to bring me reports of her movements and proceedings. Having impressed this upon her, I asked her whether she would undertake the task. Her answer was that she would go through fire and water to serve me; that she knew exactly what I wanted, and was going to do it. I was so satisfied with her readiness that it was with a feeling of great confidence I sent her on her mission. I waited for my opportunity, and no one saw her leave the house. Whether what I called my masterstroke will really turn out to be one will be proved in a very short time. Something has already been achieved. Fanny has become acquainted with Mrs. Lydia Holdfast.

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She returned an hour ago, and is now abed in old Mrs. Bailey's room. Exactly at ten o'clock I went into the Square, and found Fanny waiting for me. I whipped off her wig, and brought her home. The nights are dark, and there is little fear of detection; and even in that case I have an amusing story ready, which will easily account for what will look like a harmless freak.

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When she left Great Porter Square, Fanny went at once to the house in which your father lived, and which his widow still inhabits. She waited outside for a long time until at length a lady came out whom, from my description of her, Fanny recognised to be Mrs. Lydia Holdfast. A carriage was at the door, and as Mrs. Holdfast stepped towards it, Fanny pulled her dress. Mrs. Holdfast snatched her dress away impatiently, without speaking, and walked to her carriage, Fanny following her.

“If you please, ma'am,” said Fanny.

“What do you want? What do you want?” cried Mrs. Holdfast.

"I want to speak to you," said Fanny.

"Well, speak!" exclaimed Mrs. Holdfast. "Don't you see I'm in a hurry?"

A coachman stood at the carriage door to wait upon his mistress.

"I want to speak to you alone, please," said Fanny.

"You can't," cried Mrs. Holdfast. "Take this beggar-girl away."

The coachman endeavoured to obey the order, but little Fanny was too quick for him. She slipped between his arms, and again stood by the side of Mrs. Holdfast.

"Ain't you Mrs. Holdfast?" she asked, looking up into the lady's face.

"Yes," was the reply.

"Mrs. Grace Holdfast," said Fanny, as bold as brass. I think it would be difficult to find her equal.

Mrs. Holdfast, as she heard this name, Grace, which Fanny spoke loudly, gave a scream, and seizing Fanny by the arm, hurried back with her into the house. There were servants standing about, but Mrs. Holdfast took no notice of them; she put her hand on Fanny's lips, and dragged her into an empty room. Closing the door, and locking it, she bent down to Fanny and shook her roughly.

Fanny did not speak or scream, but twisted herself as soon as she could from Mrs. Holdfast's grip, and said,

"There! You have made my wig all crooked."

Heaven only knows where this child got her wits from, but if she had been drilled for a month she could not have acted the spirit of her part with greater cleverness. The words I did not teach her; I simply told her what I wanted her to do, and left the rest to herself.

"There!" she cried. "You have made my wig all crooked."

And she ran to the looking-glass and set it straight again. There must have been something in her manner which made Mrs. Holdfast laugh, but as Fanny described it, her laugh was broken off in the middle.

"Come here directly," said Mrs. Holdfast.

Fanny obeyed. Mrs. Holdfast knelt upon the ground, and, holding Fanny's face between her hands, looked long and hard at her.

"I don't know you," she said; and then she coloured up, for she saw that Fanny was returning the earnest gaze.

"If you please, my lady," said Fanny, "I beg your pardon for calling you Grace; my sister said you wouldn't like it, but you were running away, and I couldn't help it."

"Who is your sister?" asked Mrs. Holdfast.

And now imagine Fanny, instead of at once answering the question, fainting dead away. A real swoon? Not a bit of it. A sham, to gain time to study the ground of action.

Mrs. Holdfast, at first, did not appear to know what to do. She allowed Fanny to lie on the ground, and although the child's eyes were nearly quite closed, she declares that not a movement nor an expression of Mrs. Holdfast escaped her. I am entirely inclined to believe every word spoken by Fanny as she related the adventure. She says that Mrs. Holdfast looked at her for a moment, then turned away for a moment, then looked at her again, as though wishing that she was dead. Upon which Fanny gave a sigh, and murmured something about being faint and hungry.

Mrs. Holdfast rang a bell, and going to the door, unlocked it, and spoke to a servant, from whom she received a decanter of wine. She locked the door again, and returning to Fanny, raised the child's head, and put the decanter to her lips. Fanny allowed herself gradually to recover, and presently opened her eyes, and struggled to her feet.

"Now," repeated Mrs. Holdfast, "who is your sister, and what has brought you here?"



CHAPTER XXXIII.

IN WHICH BECKY NARRATES HOW FANNY BECAME ACQUAINTED WITH MRS. LYDIA HOLDFAST.

BY this time Fanny had invented a cunning little story.

"If you please, my lady," she replied, "my sister is an actress, and I've come here to ask you to help me."

"But you don't know me; you've never spoken to me before," said Mrs. Holdfast.

"I've never spoken to you," said Fanny, "but I remember you well. You used to go to the theatre in the country, where Nelly was engaged. That's the reason she sent me to you."

"Is Nelly your sister?"

"Yes, my lady. She was in the front row, and I used to come on in the crowd. I got a shilling a night, and Nelly had a pound a week. We lived near you in Oxford, and often saw you pass. Nelly was always talking of you, and saying how beautiful you were, and what a lady, and how lucky to have such swell friends. She used to wish she was like you, and when you went away she wondered where you had gone to. Well, things got bad, and Nelly and I came to London a month ago; and now she has left me, and I don't know what I am to do."

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"Why didn't your sister take you with her?" asked Mrs. Holdfast.

"She could tell you; I can't, except that she said two's company and three's none. She said yesterday morning, 'I'm off, Dot; I can't stand this any longer. No engagement and no money. You must look after yourself, Dot. I tell you what to do if you're hard up. You go to this address'—(and she gave me the address of your house)—'and ask for Mrs. Holdfast. Don't say Grace Holdfast—she mightn't like it—and say I knew her in Oxford, and ask her to help you. She'll do it. She's got a kind heart, and knows what it is to be unfortunate.' Well, that's all—except that in the afternoon a gentleman came, and asked for Nelly. She goes down to him, and I hear what they say. It ain't much. 'Are you ready?' the gentleman asks. 'Oh, yes,' says Nelly, in a kind of saucy way, 'I'm ready enough.' Then Nelly asked him for some money, and he gave her a sovereign. She runs up to me, whips on her hat, kneels down, kisses me, puts the sovereign in my hand, and says, 'Good-bye, Dot, I can't help leaving you; what's the use of stopping here to starve? Get away from this house as soon as you can, for there's rent owing that I can't pay. Mrs. Holdfast will give you a lift if you want one.' She kisses me quick, over and over again, and runs down stairs, and out of the house. Well, I'm crying and the landlady comes in and asks, sharp, where Nelly has gone, and when I tell her, she flies into a passion, and says there's three weeks' rent owing, besides other money. My hand is shut tight, with the sovereign in it, and the landlady must have seen it through my fingers, for she tries to force them open, but she can't till she digs her knuckles into the back of my hand, when, of course, the sovereign rolls out. 'Oh,' says the landlady, 'your sister's left this on account. All right; I hope she'll pay the rest when she comes back.' She pockets the sovereign, and this morning she turns me out of the house, and tells me she has let the room. So I am obliged to go, and I didn't know what else to do except to come to you."

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I am not in a position to describe the exact effect this story, as related by Fanny, produced upon Mrs. Holdfast. For my part, I was amazed at the child's ingenuity. I doubt whether she could have invented anything that would be likely better to serve our purpose. I am of opinion that Mrs. Holdfast was both amused and frightened, and I think she has some plan in her head with reference to Fanny. At all events, she gave Fanny five shillings, and bade her come again tomorrow, in the evening; and before Fanny left her, she made the child promise not to mention to a soul in the world anything about ever having seen her anywhere else but in London. Fanny promised, and left the house. To come straight home to me? No. The cunning little creature waited outside Mrs. Holdfast's house until the lady came out. She watched her get into her carriage, and when it started she ran ahead of the horses until she was out of breath. Then she called a cab, and paying the man out of her five shillings, told him to follow the carriage. It stopped at the Criterion Theatre, and Fanny, jumping from the cab, saw Mrs. Holdfast enter the theatre.

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That is all I have to tell you to-night. You may be assured that Mrs. Holdfast does not feel any poignant grief at the loss of her husband. Otherwise she would keep from theatres for a little while. The state of widowhood is evidently one which gives her satisfaction. I wonder what the Reporter of the newspaper who wrote the "Romance of Real Life," partly from her own lips, would say, if he saw Mrs. Holdfast laughing in the theatre so shortly after the discovery of the murder of her husband. Because the piece they are playing at the Criterion is taken from the French, and is intended to make you laugh. All the actors and actresses who play in it are comedians, and do their best to create fun. The Reporter would put on his "Considering Cap," as the children's books say. If she had gone to see a tragedy, where she could cry her eyes out, she might have offered some excuse. But a laughable play, the morality of which is not very nice! That is a different pair of shoes. Undoubtedly it is a risk for Mrs. Holdfast to run; but unless I am much mistaken in her, she loves to run risks. She could not live without excitement. Your father's widow, my dear, was not cut out for a nun.

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I feel like a person with a chess board before her, in the middle of a game which, to lose, would ruin her. I shall not lose it. Every hour the position of the pieces is becoming more clear to me, and I am discussing in my mind the advisability of two or three bold moves. But I will wait a little; something of importance will very soon be revealed to me. Good night, my dear. Sleep well. Every moment that passes brings our happiness nearer and nearer.

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[31]

MY DEAR LOVE,—My note written last night was short, because I had scarcely anything to say, and I postponed what I had to tell until to-night. Mrs. Holdfast did not detain Fanny long yesterday. She asked but one question, which, if the little girl had not been prepared to answer, would have removed Fanny from the game, and increased the difficulties of our task. In the story Fanny invented for the mystification of Mrs. Holdfast I saw one great danger. Mrs. Holdfast is not playing alone; there is a master mind behind her. Who that master mind is it was necessary for me to discover, and I have made the discovery. I shall not be surprised if, in the letter I shall write to you to-morrow night I am able to tell you something of the very greatest moment. [32]

Fanny's danger was this: She had told a clever story; had invented a sister, and had furnished a tolerably fair excuse for forcing herself upon a lady of Mrs. Holdfast's position. But she had spoken of herself and her sister living in lodgings in London. If there is one thing Mrs. Holdfast desires at present to avoid it is the slightest chance of anything coming before the public which would tend to prove that she and Grace who destroyed Sydney Campbell are one and the same person. Perhaps the only person who, in an indirect way, is aware of this fact (that is, to Mrs. Holdfast's knowledge) is Fanny. Here was a risk; and between Fanny's first and second visit to Mrs. Holdfast, the suggestion had in some way arisen that the little girl might have been instructed in her part by an unseen enemy. It was necessary, therefore, to test the truth of Fanny's story, and there was only one point which could be seized upon. In what street in London, in what house, did Fanny and her sister live before the sister ran away? This occurred to my sharp mind before it had been suggested to Mrs. Holdfast, and I determined to manufacture evidence. I enlisted Mrs. Preedy on my side. I bought her a new gown, a cloak, and a hat, and I made her a present of them. Then, having entirely won her heart—she told me that she looked upon me as a daughter—I cautiously imparted to her what I wanted her to do for me. It appeared that nothing was easier. For a few shillings a friend of Mrs. Preedy, living half a mile from Great Porter Square, undertook, in case a lady called to ask there, to give certain answers to certain questions about two lodgers, one called Nelly and the other Dot. The lesson was a simple one, and was easily learned. Armed with the address, Fanny went to Mrs. Holdfast, according to appointment. I may inform you that I am placing fuller reliance than ever upon little Fanny, and that I have related to her a great deal of Grace's life in Oxford, which, in case of need, she can turn to useful account. As I anticipated, Mrs. Holdfast asked Fanny in what house she and her sister lived in London. Without hesitation, Fanny gave the address of Mrs. Preedy's friend, and Mrs. Holdfast dismissed her, desiring her to call again on the following day—this morning. I ascertained to-day that Mrs. Holdfast called at the address, and received the answers prepared for her. [33]

I must tell you what Mrs. Preedy said to me during the evening.

"My dear, you are not what you pretend to be."

I gave her a spirited answer, knowing by this time how to manage her.

"You are a clever woman," I replied, looking at her admiringly; "you have guessed my secret; not one in a thousand would have done it. I am *not* a servant-of-all-work, and I came here to be out of the way, let me say, of my young man. Well now, there's no harm in that, is there?" [34]

"Not a bit of harm," she said. "But what is it all about?"

"I can't tell you just now," I said. "You may be certain of one thing. If things go on as they've been going on lately, you will be none the worse off for it. If I don't go into partnership with you, I shall make you a very handsome present, and I shan't ask you for any wages. I have broken a lot of things since I've been here, but I've bought new ones in their place. Mrs. Preedy, you leave everything to me, and I will show you that Becky can be grateful."

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Preedy, "so long as there's no harm done, I don't mind. You're a good sort, and I dare say have seen a lot of trouble. So have I. Women are born to be imposed upon."

"Does our young man lodger pay his rent regularly?" I asked, pretending to know nothing.

"My dear," said Mrs. Preedy, sadly, "since he has lived here I haven't seen the colour of his money."

"Now," I said, smiling, "suppose I pay it for him. Not for his sake—for yours. I'm not sweet on him, though he pretends to be on me. It's a shame that you should be taken in by a foreign gentleman like him—you can't afford it." [35]

I found out how many weeks' rent he owed, and I paid it. I don't think anything is wanting to complete the conquest of my mistress's heart. You see I am spending some of the money you gave me; I couldn't get along without it.

To-day Mrs. Holdfast received Fanny very graciously, called her a nice little thing, said she was growing quite fond of her, and was almost inclined to take her into the house to live with her.

"Oh, how I wish you would!" cried Fanny.

However, it appears that at present Mrs. Holdfast, even if she is in earnest, cannot take Fanny into her house. If it *were* done Fanny would find a way to communicate with me, and tell me all that is going on.

Mrs. Holdfast expressed great curiosity about Fanny's sister, and asked the child whether Nelly did not give her an address to write to. [36]

"O, yes," said Fanny, prepared for any emergency; "Nelly's gone to Paris. She said I might write to her at the post-office there."

What does Mrs. Holdfast do but write a letter to Fanny's sister, and address it to the Poste

Restante, Paris. She did not give the letter to Fanny to post. What is in the letter? Nothing important, perhaps, but written in the endeavour to more completely verify the truth of Fanny's story. Or perhaps Mrs. Holdfast really knew some actresses in the country, and is anxious to ascertain if Nelly is one of her old acquaintances.

Now I will tell you something more important.

"You are a shrewd little thing," said Mrs. Holdfast to Fanny; "I have a good mind, although I can't let you sleep in the house, to take you into my service."

"O, do, ma'am, do!" cried Fanny.

"Well, I'll try you. But mind—you must keep my secrets. Do you know any person in London besides me?"

"Not a blessed soul!" replied Fanny. "And I'll keep your secrets—you try me. O, I don't believe there's a kinder lady in the world than you are!"

"She's an artful one," said Fanny to me, as she gave me the particulars of this conversation, "but I'm an artfuller!"

Mrs. Holdfast is so extraordinarily vain that even this deserted child's praise was agreeable to her.

"Be true to me," said Mrs. Holdfast, "and I'll make a lady of you. Are you fond of babies?"

To which Fanny replied that she doted on them. Mrs. Holdfast rang a bell, and desired the maid who answered it to take Fanny into the nursery.

"I'll come up to you presently," said Mrs. Holdfast.

Fanny went into the nursery, where she saw what she describes as the loveliest baby in the world, all dressed in laces and silks, "more like a beautiful wax doll," said Fanny, "than anything else." It was Mrs. Holdfast's baby, the maid told Fanny, and her mistress doted on it.

"I've seen a good many babies and a good many mothers," said the maid, "but I never saw a mother as fond of a baby as Mrs. Holdfast is of hers."

Fanny's account agrees with the maid's words. When Mrs. Holdfast came into the nursery, and took her baby, and sat in a rocking chair, singing to the child, Fanny said it was very hard to believe that a woman like that could do anything wrong. If Fanny were not truthful and faithful to me, and would rather have her tongue cut out than deceive me, I should receive her version of this wonderful mother's love with a great deal of suspicion. But there can be no doubt of its truth. I remember that the Reporter of the *Evening Moon* spoke of this, and that it won his admiration, as it could not fail to win the admiration of any person who did not know how wicked is the heart that beats in Mrs. Holdfast's bosom. Can you reconcile it with your knowledge of her? I cannot. It does not raise the character of the woman in my eyes; it debases it.

In the nursery Mrs. Holdfast gave Fanny a letter, with instructions to deliver it to the gentleman in person, and to wait for an answer.

My dear, this letter was addressed "Mr. Pelham, 147, Buckingham Palace Road."

Here at once is established the fact of the continuance of the intimacy between Mr. Pelham and Mrs. Holdfast. Is it possible that your father, after you left the country, discovered that his wife was deceiving him, and flew from the shame of her presence? It must be so. What, then, took place between husband and wife, and to whose advantage would it be that he should be made to disappear? I shudder to contemplate the answer. I can find but one; it is horrible to think of.

Fanny received the letter without remark, and went to the address in Buckingham Palace Road. Mr. Pelham was in, and Fanny was desired to walk up-stairs. There, in a handsomely-furnished room, she saw Mr. Pelham, lounging on a sofa, smoking and drinking. "A regular swell," said Fanny. He tore the letter open, and tossed it away passionately, without reading it.

"You haven't taken anything out of it?" he cried to Fanny.

"Oh, no, sir," replied Fanny, "it's just as Mrs. Holdfast gave it to me. I was to wait for an answer."

Fanny says he looked as savage as if he had expected to find the envelope full of money, and didn't find a penny. He drew the letter to him and read it; then rose, and took some paper from a desk, scribbled an answer, which he put carelessly into an envelope and threw over to Fanny, saying, "Give her that!" Fanny states that he is not an agreeable-looking gentleman, and that there is something about him that reminds her of — but here Fanny stopped, and would not finish what she intended to say. She roused my curiosity, but she would not satisfy it.

"Wait a bit," she said. "I've got an idea in my head. If it's a right one I shall astonish you. If it ain't, it would be foolish to speak about it."

I could get nothing more than this out of her, and I let the subject drop, but there is evidently something very weighty on her mind.

She hurried into the street with Mr. Pelham's answer to Mrs. Holdfast's note, and getting into a quiet nook, where she was free from observation, asked a girl to read it to her. Mr. Pelham had scarcely wetted the gum, and the envelope was easily unfastened. Fanny endeavoured to commit the letter to memory, but she failed; the girl who read it to her could not quite make out the words. The letter contained a demand for money, and Mr. Pelham said in it that before the week was out he must have a cheque for five hundred pounds. One remark Fanny perfectly remembered. "If you are going to turn niggardly and stingy," wrote Mr. Pelham, "I shall have to keep the purse myself. Don't forget that the money is as much mine as yours, more mine than yours indeed, and that I could ruin you with one word."

Fanny says that when Mrs. Holdfast read the letter (which she delivered properly fastened) and came to those words—of course Fanny could only guess that—Mrs. Holdfast said aloud:

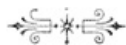
"And yourself, too, Pelham. It would go harder with you than with me."

For a moment—only for a single moment, as I gather from Fanny—Mrs. Holdfast's face grew

haggard, but she became gay again instantly, and began to sing and talk lightly. Can such a nature as hers really feel?

Again, for the second time this week, Richard Manx has not come to his room in Great Porter Square. I make sure of this by putting the chain on the street door after mid-night. I attach importance to the slightest circumstance now, and do not allow anything to escape me. Do not for a moment let your courage and your hopefulness fail you. We have not yet obtained a tangible link to start from, but it appears to me as if events were coming closer; something will come to light presently which will assist in the discovery of your father's murderer. You are never absent from my thoughts; you are for ever in my heart. I am yours till death.

[44]



CHAPTER XXXV.

[45]

FANNY DISCOVERS WHO RICHARD MANX IS.

MY DARLING—What has occurred to-day must be related with calmness, although my mind is in a whirl of excitement. The presentiment I felt last night that we were on the threshold of an important discovery has come true. A discovery *has* been made which neither you nor I could ever have dreamt of, and we have to thank Fanny for it. How wonderfully all the circumstances of life seem to be woven into one another! Little did I think, when I first met the poor, hungry little girl, and was kind to her, that she would repay me as she has repaid me, and that we should owe to her, perhaps, the happiness of our lives. I may be mistaken; I may be speaking more out of my heart than my head, more out of my hopes than my reason. But surely what Fanny has discovered will lead to a discovery of greater moment. It is, as yet, the most important link in the chain. We must consider what is best to be done. At noon, Fanny said to me:

[46]

"I want a holiday; I've got something to do."

She spoke abruptly, and with great earnestness.

"You don't intend to run away from me, Fanny," I said, and immediately repented my words, for Fanny seized my hands, and kissed them, with tears running down her face.

"Run away from you!" she cried. "Never—never—never! How could you think it of me. I would die for you—indeed, indeed I would!"

I quieted her, trying to excuse myself by saying that it was only because she was keeping something secret from me that the words escaped me.

"But I'm doing it for you," she said. "To-night I'll tell you everything."

Now, read how Fanny passed the day. I will relate it as nearly as possible out of her lips.

[47]

"When I went into Mr. Pelham's room, yesterday," she said, "in Buckingham Palace Road, I didn't suspect anything at first. I didn't like his looks, but that was nothing. There are lots of people I don't like the looks of. I remained there while he threw away the letter, and while he drank and smoked. He was drinking wine, and he emptied three glasses one after another. It wasn't till he got up and went to his desk that I noticed something—a twitch of his left shoulder upwards, just as a man does when he shrugs his shoulders. But Mr. Pelham did not shrug his two shoulders, he shrugged one—the left one. I only knew one other man who did with his left shoulder what Mr. Pelham did, and I thought it funny. While he was writing his letter he threw away his cigar, and took a cigarette, and the way he put it into his mouth and rolled it between his lips was just the same as the other man who twitched his shoulder as Mr. Pelham did. Well, as I walked back to Mrs. Holdfast's house, I seemed to see the two men—Mr. Pelham and the other, shrugging their left shoulders, and rolling their cigarettes in their mouths, and what they did was as like as two peas, though they were two different men, though one was poor and the other rich. I couldn't help calling myself a little fool when the idea came to me that they were not different men at all, and I said to myself, 'What do they mean by it? No good, that's certain.' So I made up my mind to do something, and I did it to-day.

[48]

"First, there was Richard Manx. I watched him out of the house. He came down from his garret a little after twelve; I stood in the dark passage, and watched him coming downstairs; he seemed to be out of temper, and he gave the wall a great blow with his hand. I think he would have liked to hear it cry out, so that he might be sure he had hurt it. I thought I shouldn't like him to strike *me* in that way—but I don't suppose he would if any one was looking. He would have hit me as he hit the wall, if he had known what I was up to—that is, if nobody was near.

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"He went out of the house, closing the street door, O, so quietly behind him. Have you noticed how quietly he does everything? He walks like a cat—well, so can other people. I waited a minute after he closed the street door, and then I slipped out after him. I looked all ways, and I saw him just turning out of the Square into Great King Street. I soon turned the corner too, and there I was walking behind him on the other side of the way, with my eyes glued to him. Well, as good as glued. I can walk a long way behind a person, and never lose sight of him, my eyes are so sharp,

and I didn't lose sight of Mr. Richard Manx, as he calls himself. He walked Lambeth way, and I noticed that he was looking about in the funniest manner, as though he was afraid he was being watched. The farther he got from Great Porter Square the more he looked about him; but no one took any notice of him—only me. Well, he went down a street where half the houses were shops and half not, and at the corner of the street was a coffee-shop. There were two doors facing him, one going into the shop where people are served, and the other going into a passage, very narrow and very dark. A little way up this passage was a door, which pushed open. Mr. Manx, after looking about him more than ever, went into the narrow dark passage, and pushed open the door.

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"What I had to do now was to wait until he came out, and to dodge about so that I shouldn't be seen or caught watching for something I didn't know what. It was a hard job, as hard a job as ever I was at, and it was all that I could do to keep people from watching me. I waited an hour, and another hour, and another hour, and Mr. Manx never came out of the coffee shop. I was regularly puzzled, and tired, and bothered. But I didn't know what a little fool I was till after waiting for at least four hours I found out that the coffee shop had two more doors on the side facing the other street; doors just like the others, one going into the shop, and the other into a narrow dark passage. When I found that out I thought that Mr. Manx must have gone in at one door in one street and come out at the other door in the other street, and I was regularly vexed with myself. But that didn't help me, and I walked away from Lambeth towards Buckingham Palace Road. I wanted to see with my own eyes if Mr. Pelham was at home. He was; I saw him stand for a minute at the window of his room on the front floor. Then I set to watching him. I wanted to find out where he was going to, and what he was up to. I suppose it was seven o'clock, and dark, before he came out. He walked till he met a cab, and as he got in I heard him give the direction of Mrs. Holdfast's house. That was enough for me; I followed him there, my feet ready to drop off, I was that tired. But I wasn't going to give up the job. No one came out of Mrs. Holdfast's house till nine o'clock struck; then the street door was opened, and Mr. Pelham walked into the street. He stood still a little, and I thought to myself he is thinking whether he shall take a cab. He didn't take one till he was half-a-mile from Mrs. Holdfast's house. I ran all the way after it. It was a good job for me that the cab was a four-wheeler, and that it went along slow, for running so hard set my heart beating to that extent that I thought it would jump out of my body. I scarcely knew where we were going, the night was that dark, but I knew it was not in the direction of Buckingham Palace Road. Mr. Pelham rode about a mile, then called out to the cabby, and jumped on to the pavement. He paid the man, and the cab drove away, and then Mr. Pelham walked slowly towards Lambeth, looking about him, although the night was so dark, in exactly the same way as Mr. Manx had done when I followed him from Great Porter Square. I had been on my feet all the day, and had walked miles and miles, and I hadn't had a bit of bread in my mouth since breakfast—but when I was certain that Mr. Pelham was walking to Lambeth I didn't feel hungry or tired. I said to myself, 'Fanny, your idea was right; but what does it all mean?' Well, I couldn't settle that; all I had to settle was that the two men who shrugged their left shoulders, and who rolled their cigarettes in their mouths in the way I had noticed, were not two men at all, but the same man, living in one place as a gentleman and an Englishman, and in another as a poor foreigner without a shilling. So I was not at all surprised to see Mr. Pelham, dressed like a swell, stop at the coffee shop at which Mr. Manx had stopped, and push through the dark passage by the door I had not noticed when I was waiting in the street this morning for Mr. Manx, and I wasn't at all surprised that Mr. Pelham didn't come out again. The man who came was the man I wanted, and I followed him home here to Great Porter Square, and he is in the house now." And here Fanny concluded the account of her day's adventures by asking, "Who came in five minutes before I did?"

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[53]

"Richard Manx," I replied.

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"It's all one," said Fanny, triumphantly; "Richard Manx is Mr. Pelham. There's no difference between them, except that one wears a wig, and paints his face, and talks like a foreigner, and that the other lives in a fine house, and drinks wine, and dresses like a gentleman. That was my idea last night. That was what I had to do when I asked you this morning to let me go for the day. There's something in it; I don't know what—that's for you to find out. Are you pleased with me?"

I pressed the faithful child in my arms, and she gave a sigh and fainted. She was so eager to tell me of her discovery, and I was so anxious to hear it, that we both forgot that for fifteen hours not a morsel of food had passed her lips.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

[55]

BECKY AND FANNY ON THE WATCH.

A CUP of hot tea and some bread and butter soon made little Fanny lively again, and when she was quite recovered I questioned her upon many little points, so as to make sure that she was not mistaken. She convinced me. Richard Manx and Mr. Pelham are one and the same man, and Richard Manx's motive for taking lodgings in this house was that he might obtain, in a secret and unsuspected manner, access to the room in which your father was murdered. For what purpose? To destroy every evidence of the crime before the house comes into the possession of a new tenant, who might by chance discover what, up to the present moment, has escaped the eyes of

the police? No—scarcely that, in a direct way. He is not seeking to destroy or discover anything which he *knows* to be in existence; he is searching for a document which he *suspects* your father concealed before he met his death. This is but a reasonable explanation of Richard Manx's presence here. Arguing in the dark, as we are, and without positive knowledge, we must have a tangible foundation on which to build our theories. I am speaking and arguing like a man, am I not, my dear? I wonder at myself as I read over some of the things I have written; but they are a proof that I have thrown aside all that is weak in my nature, and that I have courage and decision to meet any emergency.

[56]

The document which Richard Manx suspects your father to have hidden, and for which he is searching, must, if it really exist, be of the utmost importance. Shall I tell you what Richard Manx believes this document to be? A second Will, which would make a beggar of the woman who betrayed him, and consequently of Mr. Pelham, who, with your father's widow, is enjoying your father's money—*your* money, my dear! I am not mercenary, but next to the clearing of your name and the punishment of your father's murderer, I want you to enjoy what is your own. Selfish mortal that I am, I want you to be happy and rich, and I want to share your happiness and riches.

[57]

If Richard Manx obtains possession of this document, it will be a serious blow to us. Something must be done, and done promptly—and at the same time we must not put Richard Manx on his guard.

Now, pay particular attention to the following little piece of reasoning. Look at the date of the *Evening Moon* in which the public were first made acquainted with the name of the murdered man. And by the side of that date place the significant fact that Mr. Pelham, disguised as Richard Manx, took lodgings here three weeks before that discovery was made. What follows? That Mr. Pelham knew, three weeks before the police became acquainted with the fact, that it was your father who had been murdered. Why, then, should he not have known it on the very night of the murder itself, and why did he keep the knowledge to himself? What was his reason for concealment? A world of dreadful conjecture opens itself to me, and I am almost afraid to put my thoughts on paper. They are not centred alone on Mr. Pelham; Mrs. Holdfast intrudes herself in a way that makes me shudder. My God! Is it possible that there can be such wickedness in the world?

[58]

In the account Mrs. Holdfast gave the Reporter of the *Evening Moon* (I have the paper now before me) from which he wrote his "Romance in Real Life," she says that in her distress at the mysterious absence of her husband, she went to a friend for advice. This friend had interested himself in her case, and had written to America in her behalf, to ascertain particulars of her husband's movements. Her friend it was who, according to her statement, first suggested that her husband might have been robbed and murdered. He sent her to a lawyer, who, during the interview, made a private memorandum which she read. The lawyer said, "We will find your husband for you, dead or alive;" and then he made the memorandum, as a guide for himself: "Look up the murders. How about the murder in Great Porter Square?" From that she proceeds to describe how she went to a number of shops, and bought a number of newspapers containing accounts of the discovery of the murder and of the accusation brought against Antony Cowlrick. Her suspicions were aroused. She gave the lawyer a portrait of her husband, and in a very little time it was ascertained and made public that it was Mr. Holdfast who had been murdered. Read by itself, the Reporter's description is enthralling; those who read for amusement would not stop to inquire as to whether this was likely or that reasonable; they would accept the statement without question, and give their sincere pity to a lady who had been so foully wronged. But, read by the light of what has come to our knowledge, the traces of collusion, deception, clever acting—of guilt perhaps—are as clear as sunlight. Observe that Mrs. Holdfast does not give the name of her friend—who must have been a very close friend indeed to take such an interest in her. I will give you his name—it is Pelham. Nor does she give the name of the lawyer to whom Mr. Pelham sent her. If you sought him and became acquainted with his antecedents, you would find that he was in Mr. Pelham's pay, and that, up to a certain point, he acted in accordance with instructions. I think I have established the fact that Mr. Pelham knew your father was dead long before it was made public. Mrs. Holdfast must also have known. Why did they wait so long before they took steps towards the discovery? To avert any chance of suspicion being directed towards themselves? It is likely enough, and that is also the reason, when you, as Antony Cowlrick, were brought up at the police-court on suspicion of being implicated in the murder, why Mr. Pelham kept carefully out of sight, and therefore had no opportunity of recognising you. In this excess of caution he over-reached himself.

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At length, however, the time arrived when it was imperative the name of the murdered man should be made known, and Mr. Pelham and Mrs. Holdfast acted in concert. Your father's Will, of course, could not be proved in your father's lifetime, so it was necessary that the fact of his death should be established. It was done, and clear sailing was before them, with the exception of one threatening gale which promises to wreck them—the document for which Richard Manx is searching. He has not found it yet, or he would not have struck the wall so viciously as he did this morning when Fanny was watching him. Fate is against him, and is on our side.

Another little point, of which a lawyer would make a mountain. Did it not occur to you as very strange that Mrs. Holdfast so easily obtained from small newspaper shops a quantity of newspapers relating to a murder at least three months old? The shops do not keep a stock of old newspapers on hand: I know that this is so, from personal inquiry.

[62]

Just now there comes to my mind the report in the papers that, during the nine days your father lived in the fatal house next door, he had but one visitor—a lady, who came so closely veiled that no person in the house caught a glimpse of her face? Do you think it possible that this lady was Mrs. Holdfast?

Good night, my dearest. By the morning some plan may occur to me which may help us to the

end. Fanny went to bed an hour ago. Mrs. Preedy is asleep, and all is quiet in the house. What would I give if I could see into the mind of our young man lodger, Richard Manx!

* * * * *

I re-open my letter; I have something to add to it.

No sooner did I lay my head on my pillow than I fell asleep. I think I must have slept over an hour when I was awake by the sound of some one opening my bedroom door. I raised myself in bed, and cried in a loud tone, "Who's there?" [63]

"Hush! Don't make a noise. I've come to tell you something."

It was Fanny who spoke, and she was standing at my bedside.

"Are you frightened, Fanny?" I asked. "Shall I light a candle?"

"No," replied Fanny, "it might wake Mrs. Preedy. I'm not frightened. I've been on the look-out."

I passed my hand over Fanny, and discovered that she was fully dressed; but so that she should not be heard she had taken off her boots.

"On the look-out, Fanny!" I exclaimed. "Why you haven't been in bed! What is the meaning of it?"

"I've been in bed," said Fanny, "but I didn't undress, and I didn't go to sleep. I've been listening. *He's* in the next house."

"Who?" I cried. "Richard Manx!"

And I jumped up, and began to dress myself. Heaven only knows why, for I had no intention of going out of my bedroom. [64]

"Yes, Richard Manx," replied Fanny.

"Have you heard anything?"

"Yes, like some one taking up the floor."

"A loud noise then, Fanny."

"No—everything's being done soft—like a cat moving; but there's a crack sometimes, and a wrench, just the noise that would be made if boards were being taken up."

These words set me all in a fever. Richard Manx was getting desperate, and did not mean to give up his search without examining everything in the room. What if he *should* discover the document he is looking for? It would be he, then, who would hold the winning cards. The thought was torture. It seemed to me as if I were within reach of your happiness, your safety, of the vindication of your honour, and as if they were slipping from me.

"Are you sure it is Richard Manx who is in the next house?" I asked.

"As sure as guns," said Fanny. [65]

"How can you tell? You can't see through the walls."

"No, I wish I could—then I should find out something more. When the noise first came I didn't move for a long while; I waited till Mr. Manx was deep in his little game; then I got up so quietly that Mrs. Bailey didn't stir, and I went out of the room, and upstairs to the garret. The door was shut, and I pushed it softly, and it gave way. I slid downstairs like lightning, for if Mr. Manx had been in the room he would have come to the door at once; then, if he didn't see anyone, he might think it was the wind that had blown the door open. But he didn't come because he wasn't in the room, and the door remained just as I left it. I crept up again, and peeped into the room; it was empty, and there *was* a wind blowing—right over my head. I looked up, and saw a trap-door in the ceiling, open, and just under it two chairs, one on top of the other. That is how Mr. Manx reaches the roof; and he gets down into the next house through another trap-door." [66]

"How do you know that, Fanny?" I asked.

"Why," said the courageous little creature, "You don't suppose I was going not to find that out, do you? I should be a nice one if I hadn't climbed up on the chairs, and lifted myself up on to the roof. I can do that a deal better than Mr. Manx, there's so little of me. I crept along on all-fours, and reached the other trap-door leading to the next house. It was open. I didn't go down because it was dark, and I was frightened of falling. It wasn't that I cared about hurting myself, but it would have brought Mr. Manx up to me, and then all the fat would have been in the fire. So I thought I would come back and tell you. Would you like to come up, and see for yourself?"

I made up my mind to go. Yes, I would convince myself of the fact that it was Richard Manx who haunted the murder-stricken house for his own villainous purposes.

I was soon completely dressed, and, giving Fanny some instructions, in case of danger, I accompanied her upstairs. I held my tiny revolver in my hand, and showed it to Fanny, who expressed great admiration. The child can be conquered by only one kind of fear, that which comes from hunger. She has suffered enough from that frightful torturer, but will never again, I hope. [67]

I went first into Mrs. Bailey's room; the old lady was in a sound sleep. I listened with my ear to the wall. Richard Manx was busy; caution was expressed in his every movement. Once or twice it almost seemed as if I heard his voice in impatient anger. I do not think it was fancy on my part; my senses were exquisitely alert to the slightest sign of this disguised enemy. While I was in Mrs. Bailey's room, Fanny remained in the passage. I found out afterwards that she had armed herself with a small, sharp-pointed knife, which I am convinced she would have used without hesitation in my defence. I with my pistol, and Fanny with her knife, were more than a match for Richard Manx if we came into collision. There is no bravery in the villain; at the first show of danger he would have fled, and Fanny, fleeter of foot than he, would have been after him. I hardly know whether it would be well for us or not that he should fall into the hands of the police, disguised as he is, and made to give an account of his movements. I shall do nothing for the next few hours to precipitate events. They appear to be shaping themselves to our advantage, for up to this moment Richard Manx's search has proved fruitless. [68]

I went upstairs, with Fanny close to me, to the garret. Everything there was as Fanny had described. The room was vacant; two chairs were strapped one on top of the other, affording a firm footing by which a person could climb on to the roof; the trap-door was open. I did not hesitate to search the room. In my detective capacity, proceedings I should ordinarily have blushed to take I now deem fair, but I found nothing in the place to help me or to endanger the liberty of Richard Manx. In a corner of the garret was a common trunk, locked; I tried to open it, but could not. I should have liked to find a portrait of Mrs. Holdfast—a womanly wish, which would never have occurred to you. I was about to mount the chairs to the roof when Fanny pulled my dress. Her quick ears, quicker even than mine, had caught a sound. We retreated noiselessly, closed the garret door and sat at the foot of the stairs, listening for Richard Manx's return. I wished to ascertain by the evidence of my own senses that he had not met with success in his search. If he had found any document he would have stopped up to read it before he retired to rest. Rest! Can such a conscience as this man must possess allow him ever to rest?

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Presently we heard him pull the trap-door in the roof over him; we heard him descend from the chairs, and place them in their proper positions; we saw the light of his candle through a chink in the garret door; he moved about stealthily for a few moments; and then he extinguished his light.

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This was sufficient for me; we were and are still on equal ground with respect to any document your father may have concealed before his death. For some hours all is safe; in the day time Richard Manx dare not enter the empty house. I have nothing more at present to say. Good-night, dear love.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

[71]

NO. 119 GREAT PORTER SQUARE IS LET TO A NEW TENANT.

TO the closed shutters of No. 119 Great Porter Square was attached a board, on which were painted the words, "This House to Let on reasonable terms, or the Lease to be sold. Apply to Mr. Stapleton, House Agent, Great Andrew Street, Bloomsbury." The board had grown disconsolate-looking and disreputable, as though it was a partner in the disgrace which had fallen upon the tenement.

At the time the notice "To Let" was attached to the shutters, the agent had no hope whatever of letting the house. "There isn't a chance of anybody taking it," he said, "for at least three months." The three months passed, and no probable tenant had made his appearance. "There's nothing for it but patience," he then said. "Would *you* live in the house?" asked his wife, when he was dilating upon the folly of people allowing such a chance to escape them. "Not for untold gold!" he replied. "Well then!" she exclaimed; winding up the argument thus, as is the way with women.

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He was much astonished, therefore, upon returning to his office from his mid-day chop, to find a gentleman waiting to see him, who, closing the door of the little private room in which he transacted special business, asked him if No. 119 Great Porter Square was still to let.

"Yes," said Mr. Stapleton; "the board's up; you can see it as you pass the house."

"I have not passed through Great Porter Square for a long time," said the gentleman, "and I was not aware that a board was up. I was directed to come to you by a friend, who told me you were the agent."

"Do you wish to take the house?" asked Mr. Stapleton, looking with some suspicion upon his prospective client.

"I should have no objection," said the gentleman, "if I can have it on my own terms——"

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"On any terms," interrupted Mr. Stapleton, a little too eagerly, and adding, in correction of his over-haste, "that is, for a certain time—after which, of course, we expect a fair rent. The prejudice against the place *must* wear away one time or another."

"But the murder remains," observed the gentleman, sadly; "time will not wear that away."

"True," said Mr. Stapleton, coughing; "nothing can wear that away. But I refer to the sentiment, the feeling, the prejudice."

"You interrupted me just now," said the gentleman, coming back to the practical. "I was about to say that I should have no objection to take the house if I can have it on my own terms and conditions. By 'terms' I don't mean money. I have no doubt we shall agree upon the question of rent."

"We will put the house in repair for you," said Mr. Stapleton; "you can choose your own paper, and we will give it three good coatings of paint outside. In fact, anything you can suggest we shall be most happy to consider."

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"I have nothing to suggest," said the gentleman, "and I do not propose to put you to the expense of a shilling for repairs. I will take the house just as it is, if my conditions are complied with."

Mr. Stapleton looked gravely at his visitor, and said, as he rubbed his chin:

"I don't think we could let the house for the purposes of exhibition."

"Good God!" cried the gentleman, "I should hope not. It would be making a trade of murder!"

"My sentiments exactly," acquiesced Mr. Stapleton, "only you express them so much more forcibly." At the same time, he began to regard the gentleman as a very queer customer indeed, and to wonder why he was so long in coming to the point. Had he been aware of the gentleman's

inward agitation and anxiety, and of what depended upon the result of this application, his wonder would have been lessened, and he might have raised the rent instead of lowering it.

"May I ask what are your conditions?"

"The first and most important," replied the gentleman, "is secrecy. I wish no one to know that I have taken the house; I wish no one to know that it is let. The board will remain up; the house will remain as it is. All that I shall require of you is the key of the street-door. These conditions complied with, I will pay you six months' rent in advance, and I will make myself responsible for another six months. It is more than probable—nay, it is almost certain—that before three months are over I shall hand you back the key, with the rent for the additional six months. As a matter of bargain, it is not a bad one for you."

"I admit it," said Mr. Stapleton; "what I have to consider, on the other hand, is whether it is a good thing for the house."

"Do you think you can do better?"

"I do not think I could; yours is the first application I have had since the murder was committed. You shudder, sir! It is enough to make one. If I had not been an agent for the estate, nothing would have induced me to undertake the letting of such a house. What am I to say in case another person, seeing the board still up, applies to me for the particulars?"

"Say that, although the board remains, you have decided not to let the house for two or three months. No one can compel you to let it."

"Certainly not—certainly not," said Mr. Stapleton. "You will excuse my remarking that there is something very mysterious in all this, and that you appear singularly anxious to take the house."

"Your remark is a natural one. There *is* something mysterious in it, and I *am* most anxious to become your tenant."

"You are candid enough in that respect, I must say. Will you favour me with your name and references?—you have references, of course; they are indispensable."

"I have references, with which you will be satisfied. But I cannot give them to you, nor can I disclose my name, until you say the house is mine, on my conditions—to which I must add another: that my name is not entered on your books for your clerks to comment upon and prattle about. If you agree, and my references are satisfactory, the matter can be concluded at once. If they are not satisfactory, I cannot expect you to accept me as a tenant. It will be a grief to me, but I shall be compelled to submit, and must seek another mode of carrying out my designs."

So much was Mr. Stapleton's curiosity excited that he consented to the proposed arrangement.

"Now for the references," he said.

"I will take you to them," responded the gentleman. "I am most earnestly desirous that the affair be concluded immediately. Charge me what you please for your loss of time in accompanying me, and believe that if it be in my power to show my gratitude to you by-and-bye, I shall not miss the opportunity."

Unusual as was this mode of conducting his business, Mr. Stapleton consented, and accompanied the gentleman to a house in the most fashionable part of London, where he obtained a recommendation in every way satisfactory, and then to a common locality, where a private detective, known to him by name, vouched for the respectability of his proposed tenant.

"Is this a police affair, then?" he asked of the detective.

"Perhaps it is and perhaps it isn't," replied the detective. "What you've got to do with it is to take your rent, and keep your mouth shut."

"A wink's as good as a nod," said Mr. Stapleton, and departed with his tenant to his office, where the preliminaries were completed, and the rent paid to him. He whistled softly when he heard the name of the tenant, which was given to him in confidence, but he took the detective's advice, and kept his mouth shut—except to his wife, upon his return home; but even to her he would impart nothing more than that he had that day transacted the strangest piece of business in his experience.

Long before this strange piece of business was concluded, Becky had received the following reply to her letter:

"MY DARLING,—Your news is most important, and little Fanny has earned my undying gratitude. As for yourself, I am at a loss what to say. The evidences of indomitable spirit you have displayed have filled me with wonder. It is given to me to know, as no other man has ever known, of what a noble woman's love is capable. You would inspire a dying man with hope and courage; but remember, you are a woman, and can only do, under certain circumstances, what it is in a woman's power to do. You have the heart of the bravest man, but you have not his strength. I know the villain Pelham, otherwise Richard Manx, to be a coward, but it is hard to say to what extremes a desperate man, brought to bay, may be driven. False courage may come to him in such a crisis—to last most likely but for a few minutes, or seconds even, but long enough to do a deed which may bring life-long sorrow to a loving heart—to my loving heart, which beats for you, as yours beats for me. Such a risk must not be run. You could cope, I believe, better than I could with such a creature as my murdered father's widow, upon whose soul lies the guilt of the death of two noble gentlemen, but you are not the equal of villains like Pelham, who would strike a woman, and tremble in the presence of a man. I feel faint to think of the peril you were in when you and your brave little friend entered Richard Manx's room in the dead of night. You do not realise it; I do, and I must take some step to avert danger from the girl I love, and to bring the murderer of my father to justice. The time for watching is over; the time for action has arrived. It is now for me to take up the thread of evidence which you have woven, and to strengthen it into a chain from which the guilty cannot escape. Time is too precious to waste; not another day, not another hour, must be lost. I agree with you that Pelham has reason to suspect that my dear

father left behind him, and concealed, a document which may re-establish me in my place among men, and supply damning evidence against those who brought him to his death. It is, I see well, the only direct evidence upon which we can rely—for though Pelham, by coming to your house under a disguise, and by his subsequent actions, has laid himself open to the gravest suspicion and to certain disgrace, I doubt whether what could be brought against him would be sufficiently strong to clear up the awful mystery of my father's murder. And that is my first duty—to leave no stone unturned, to work with all my strength and cunning, with all my heart and soul and body, to satisfy the claims of justice. My father's blood calls out to me to devote myself utterly, to risk every danger, to die if need be, in the pursuit and accomplishment of this sacred duty. To bring disgrace upon Pelham is not sufficient—has he not already reached that end in his life and character? Something more than suspicious motive is needed, and I will not rest till he is hunted down, and his guilt brought home to him. Again and again I implore you to leave him now entirely to me. Go up to his room no more, or you may mar the steps I have already taken, and am about to take. I have told you that, when I was living in my dear father's house, I had in my employ a detective who tracked the shameless woman to an appointment with Pelham, and through whose instrumentality I hoped to open my father's eyes to the true character of the wife who was disgracing him. You know how she worked upon my father's deep love for her, and frustrated my just design. The use of the detective was, and is, revolting to me, but there was (and to a certain extent is) no other way of obtaining evidence. This detective, with men under him, is again in my employ. It was he who brought my Statement to you when I lately returned from Liverpool. Mr. Pelham, in his own proper person, and in the disguise he has assumed, is now under strict surveillance; and the partner of his guilt, my father's widow, is also being watched. Not a movement outside their houses will escape notice; nor shall they escape, in their own persons, if they make the attempt. I think something of the kind is meditated, for Mrs. Holdfast—it maddens me to think that I must call her by the name which I hope you will one day bear—is converting into money all my father's property, and she is not doing this without a motive. Let her beware! The sword is hanging over her head, and may fall at any moment. I can imagine no greater misery for this woman than to be thrust upon the world in a state of poverty. For even if she could be proved guilty of nothing but love's treachery as regards my father, I shall have no pity for her. She has tasted the pleasures of wealth, and it would poison all her after-life to be deprived of it. I write bitterly, and I do not attempt to disguise my feelings. The face of this woman—fair, alas! but that is one of the mockeries of nature—as it rises before me, seems almost to blight the sweet beauty which lies in innocence, truth and purity. Forgive me for my bitterness; I have suffered much; had it not been for you I should have lost all faith in goodness. How much I owe you!

“It does not surprise me to learn, through Fanny's reading of the letter which Mr. Pelham gave her to deliver to Mrs. Holdfast, that Pelham and she are at variance upon monetary matters. Such natures as theirs are of necessity grasping and avaricious, and although they are bound to each other by the closest and most dangerous ties, there cannot possibly be harmony between them; experience has made each suspicious of the other, and has shown them, through the mirror of their own souls, how little of truth and honesty they can expect from each other. Had my father died a natural death, I should have been content to leave them to their own punishment—bitterer than any enemy could have made it for them.

“By to-night's train a messenger leaves for Paris; to-morrow morning he will receive at the Poste Restante the letter Mrs. Holdfast wrote to Fanny's imaginary sister, Nelly. There may be nothing in it, but I have caught the inspiration of your own bold spirit; not a chance must be lost sight of. The messenger will open and read the letter in Paris, and, if necessary, he will reply to it and post his reply there. This, in any event, will avert suspicion from your brave little Fanny—God bless her!—in case she and Mrs. Holdfast should meet again.

“You will readily understand that the expenses of all these proceedings are more than I could meet, in my present position, unless I had at my back a rich and generous friend. I have that friend in Adolph, who knows everything; I have concealed nothing from him; his indignation against our enemies, and his sympathy for ourselves, are unbounded. He has supplied me with ample means, not caring, he says, whether the money is ever repaid. After all, my dear, there is more light than shadow in the world.

“With my dearest love, for ever yours,
“FREDERICK.”



AN hour before midnight of the day on which No. 119 Great Porter Square was let to a new tenant, a man dressed in plain clothes walked leisurely round the Square in a quiet and secretly-watchful manner. Rain was falling, and there were but few persons about, but, although the man spoke to none, he appeared to take an interest in all, scrutinising them closely with keen, observant eyes. Between him and the policemen he met in his circuitous wanderings a kind of freemasonry evidently existed. Once or twice he asked, under his breath, without stopping:

"All right?"

And received in answer the same words, spoken rapidly and in a low tone:

"All right!"

No other words were exchanged.

As the church bells chimed eleven, Richard Manx entered Mrs. Preedy's house, No. 118, letting himself in with his latch-key. He passed the man who was walking round the Square, but took no notice of him. As he stood at the street door, searching in his pocket for his latch-key, the man passed the house, and did not even raise his eyes to Richard Manx's face. The presumption was that they were utterly indifferent to each other; but presumptive evidence is as often wrong as right, and between the actions of these two men, strangers to each other, existed a strong link which boded ill to one of them. At a quarter past eleven Mrs. Preedy, somewhat later than her wont, bustled out of her house for her nightly gossip with Mrs. Beale. By this time the rain was coming down faster, and when Mrs. Preedy disappeared, Great Porter Square may be said to have been deserted, with the exception of the one man who had been walking there for an hour, and the policeman sauntering at the corner. The man now paused before Mrs. Preedy's house, and knocked softly at the door. Becky's sharp ears caught the sound, soft as it was, and she ascended from the basement, and inquired who was there. The answer was:

"A friend."

Becky opened the door, and peered out, but it was too dark for her to recognise the man's face.

"It's all right, Miss," said the man, "I've been here before. I brought a packet and a letter to you from Mr. Frederick. He sent me here now."

"How am I to know that?" asked Becky.

The man smiled in approval, and handed Becky an envelope addressed to herself. She retreated into the passage, and while the man remained upon the doorstep, she opened the envelope and stooped down. There was a candle on the floor which she had brought up from the kitchen, and by its light she read the few words written on the note paper.

"The man who gives you this is the detective I mentioned in my letter this morning. Trust him and attend to his instructions.—FREDERICK."

Becky returned to the detective and said:

"I know you now. What do you want me to do?"

"Is there any chance of Richard Manx hearing us?" asked the detective.

Becky, placing her fingers to her lips went to the basement stairs and called:

"Fanny!"

The child appeared immediately, and Becky whispered in her ear for a few moments. Fanny nodded, and crept softly upstairs in the direction of the garret occupied by Richard Manx.

"We are safe," said Becky to the detective. "Richard Manx cannot hear what we say. Fanny is keeping watch on him."

"Fanny's a clever little thing," said the detective admiringly; "I'd like a daughter with her wits. Now, Miss, keep in your mind what I am going to tell you—not that there's any need for me to say that. You are working for Mr. Frederick, as I am, and others with me. A watch is going to be set outside this house—and if it's done as well as the watch you've kept inside the house, we shan't have any reason to grumble. In what room does the old bedridden lady, Mrs. Bailey sleep?"

"In the first floor back," replied Becky.

"Is the first floor front open? Can you get into the room?"

"Yes, I have the key."

"That's the room, isn't it?" said the detective, stepping back and looking up. "There's a balcony before the window."

"Yes."

"Does the window open easily?"

"I don't know; I have never tried."

"Would you oblige me by stepping upstairs and trying now? And it will save trouble if you leave the window open. Be as quiet as you can, so as not to alarm Richard Manx. I'll keep outside the street door while you're gone."

Becky went softly into the kitchen for the key of the first floor front, and then went upstairs and opened the door. She might have been a shadow, she glided about so noiselessly. The window was not easy to open, but she succeeded in raising the sash almost without a sound.

"It is done," she said, as she stood before the detective once more.

"I'd like to have another daughter," said he, in a tone of approval, "with wits as sharp as yours. I believe Mr. Frederick was right when he told me there was not your equal. Now, something's going to be done that will take about a quarter-of-an-hour to do, and we want to be sure during that quarter-of-an-hour that Richard Manx is not up to any of his little games. You understand me—we want to be sure that he is in his garret, smoking his pipe, or saying his prayers, or reading a good book. You and Fanny between you can do that part of the business for us—I leave you to manage how. I wouldn't presume to dictate to *you*. If ever you've a mind to give lessons in *my*

way of business, you may count on me as a pupil."

"We can do what you ask," said Becky; "but how are we to let you know?"

"There's the window of the first floor front open. If Richard Manx is safe in his room, let fly a bit of newspaper out of the window—I shall see it, and know what it means. If there's danger—if at any time within a quarter-of-an-hour of the newspaper flying out of the window, Richard Manx is up to any of his games, such as going out of his room through the ceiling instead of through the door, or prowling about the roof when he ought to be in bed—throw one of these little balls of red worsted out of the window. That will be a danger signal, and we shall know what to do."

"May I ask you one question?"

"A dozen if you like—but I won't promise to answer them."

"I think you may answer this one. Is the gentleman who employs you taking an active part in what is going to be done?"

"He is, Miss."

"Then he is near here!" exclaimed Becky. She could not restrain herself from looking this way and that through the darkness, but she saw nothing but shadows. Not a human being except the man beside her was visible to her sight. "O, if I could see him only for a moment!" she murmured softly, but not so softly that the detective did not hear the words.

"Best not, Miss," he said; "I've known the finest schemes upset just in the same way. There's only one thing to be thought of—when that's done, the time is all before you."

"You are right, I feel," said Becky, with a sigh. "I'll go in now, and do what you want."

The detective stepped on to the pavement, and when the street door was closed, stationed himself by the railings of the parody of a garden which occupied the centre of the Square. He kept his eyes fixed on the first floor window until he saw fluttering from it a piece of newspaper. His professional instinct caused him to pick this piece of paper from the ground, so that it should not fall into the hands of an enemy; then he took from his pocket a pocket-handkerchief and waved it in the air. During his conversation with Becky, and up to this moment, his movements had not been disturbed, and no man or woman had appeared in the Square; but now, in answer to his signal, a man made his way towards him.

"All's well," said the detective; "get in as quickly as you can."

The man did not reply; accompanied by the detective, he walked up to the house in which the murder had been committed, and inserted the key in the street door. The lock was rusty, and he could not turn the key.

"I thought of that," said the detective; "take the key out, sir."

Producing a small bottle of oil and a feather, he oiled the wards of the lock, without allowing his attention to be distracted from his observation of the first floor windows of Mrs. Preedy's house; he then rubbed a little oil into the wards of the key, and putting it in, turned the lock. The door of No. 119 was open to receive the new tenant.

"A word, sir," said the detective; "there's no danger at present. Nothing can come within fifty yards of us without my being warned of it. Are you quite determined to pass these two nights in the house alone?"

"I am quite determined—this night and to-morrow night, and as many more as may be necessary."

"I've got a man handy—a man you can trust, sir."

"I require no one."

"Very good, sir. Don't forget the whistle if you require help. There'll be no danger in the day; it's the night you'll have to be careful of. At one o'clock in the morning you'll find the basket lowered into the area."

"That is well; but you had best remain on the spot for a few moments till I see if I can get into the area."

He went into the deserted house, and shut himself in. Before he took a step inwards he sat on the floor, and pulled off his boots, and with these in his hands rose, and groped towards the basement stairs. Downstairs he crept in his stocking feet, and, after listening for a moment or two, obtained a light from a noiseless match, and lighted the lamp in a policeman's lantern. By its aid he found his way through a small door, which he opened with difficulty, into the area. He looked up, and was instantly accosted by the detective.

"There is no difficulty in the way," he said. "Good night."

"Good night, sir."

Thus it was that Frederick Holdfast, the new tenant, took possession of the house in which his father had been foully murdered.

Silently he re-entered the kitchen, closing behind him the door which led into the area. The place was damp and cold, but his agitation was so intense that he was oblivious of personal discomfort. Even when the rats ran over his stocking feet he was not startled. He had brought a bundle in with him, which he placed upon the table and unpacked. It contained food and wine, but not sufficient for the time he intended to remain in the house. This was to be supplied to him in the basket which the detective promised to lower into the area in a couple of hours. In his breast pocket was a revolver, which he examined carefully. So cautious was he in his proceedings that, before he unpacked his food and examined his revolver, he blocked the stairs which led from the kitchen to the ground floor by chairs, the removing or scattering of which would have warned him that he was not the only person in the house.

Presently he nerved himself to undertake a task which sent thrills of horror through his veins, which brought tears of anguish to his eyes, and sighs of pity and grief to his lips. He opened the door of the servant's bedroom, a cupboard as small as that which Becky occupied in the next

house; he tracked with his eyes the direction which a mortally-wounded man would take from the kitchen door to the door of this miserable bedroom. He followed the track, examining it with agonised care, and knelt down before the stains of blood which marked the spot upon which his murdered father had fallen in his death agony. Time had not worn away the stains, and Frederick's suffering and sympathy made them clearer to his sight than they could possibly have been to the sight of any other living being. For a long time he remained kneeling by this fatal, palpable, indelible shadow—remained as if in prayer, and overpowering self-communing. And, indeed, during the time he so knelt, with this shadow of his father's body in his eyes, and weighing as an actual weight upon his heart, causing him to breathe thickly and in short hurried gasps, dim pictures of his childhood passed before him, in every one of which his father appeared in an affectionate and loving guise. And all the while these sweeter presentments were visible to his inner sight, his father dead, with the blood oozing from his fatal wounds, lay before him with horrible distinctness. When he rose, and moved a few paces off, not only the shadow but the very outlines of a physical form seemed to be lying at his feet. The dying face was raised to his, the dim eyes looked into his, the limbs trembled, the overcharged breast heaved; and when, after closing his eyes and opening them again, he compelled himself, because of the actual duty before him, to believe that it was but the trick of a sympathetic imagination, he could not rid himself of the fancy that his father's spirit was hovering over him, and would never leave him until his task was accomplished.

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He tracked the fatal stains out of the kitchen, and up the stairs to the passage to the street door, and noted the stains upon the balustrade, to which his father had clung as he staggered to his death. As he stood in the passage he fancied he heard a stifled movement in one of the rooms above. Hastily he shut out the light of his lamp, and stood in deep darkness, listening for a repetition of the sound. It did not reach him, but as he leant forward, with his head inclined, and his hand upon his revolver, the church clock proclaimed the hour of midnight. Clear, strong and deep, and fraught with unspeakable solemnity, the bell tolled the hour which marks the tragedy and the sorrow of life. Shadows and pictures of sad experiences, and of pathetic and tragic events, which were not in any way connected with him, crowded upon his mind. It appeared as if the records of years were brought before him in every fresh tolling of the bell, and when the echo of the last peal died away, a weight which had grown well nigh intolerable was lifted from his soul. Then, his thoughts recurring to the sound which he had fancied he heard in the room above, he mentally asked himself whether the murderer had paused to listen to the tolling of the midnight hour, and whether any premonition of the fate in store for him had dawned upon his guilty mind?

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For awhile nothing further disturbed him. Lying upon the stairs for fully five minutes, he convinced himself that as yet no other human being but himself was in the house. Turning the light of his lantern on again, he continued his examination of his father's last movements up the stairs to the first floor. No need for him to doubt which was the room his father had occupied. The stains of blood led him to the very door, and here again he shut out the light of his lamp, and listened and looked before he ventured to place his hand upon the handle. Silence reigned; no glimmer of light was observable through the chinks and crevices of the door. Still in darkness, he turned the handle and entered the room. He had disturbed no one; he was alone.

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Cautiously he let in the light, but not to its full capacity. An amazing sight greeted him.

None of the furniture in the house had been removed, and everything his father had used during his fatal tenancy was in the room. The piano, the table at which he sat and wrote, the chairs, the bed, were there—but not in the condition in which they had been left. A demon of destruction appeared to have been at work. The bed was ripped open, the paper had been stripped from the walls, the coverings of the chairs were torn off, and the chairs themselves broken to pieces, the table was turned on end, the interior of the piano had been ransacked, the very keys were wrenched away—in the desperate attempt to discover some hidden thing, some hidden document upon which life and death might hang. More than this. The carpet had been taken up, and a few of the boards of the floor had been wrenched away, and the dust beneath searched amongst. But this was recent work; the greater part of the room was still boarded over.

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Frederick Holdfast had no intention himself of immediately commencing a search; he knew that it would be dangerous. For a certainty Richard Manx intended to continue it without delay, and was only waiting for a favourable opportunity to leave his attic. This thought induced Frederick to consider in what way he could best watch the villain's movements, without being himself detected. To do this in the room itself was impossible. There was no chance by the window; it could be done only from the ceiling or from the adjoining room. To effect an opening in the ceiling in so short a time as he had at his disposal was impracticable, and even could it be done, there were dangerous chances of detection. After a little reflection, he decided that it could be best done from the adjoining room, and the moment this was decided upon he saw that Richard Manx had to some extent assisted him. The laths which separated the rooms were fragile, the plaster was thinly spread; many of the laths in the dividing wall had been laid bare by the stripping of the paper. He stood up on the bed, and without an appreciable effort, thrust his finger between the laths, and through the wall paper of the adjoining apartment, choosing that part of the wall which would afford him a favourable point of espionage. Alighting from the bed, he carefully obliterated the marks of footsteps on the clothes, and then left the room for the one adjoining. The door was unlocked, and the key was in the inside. More from the locality than from the aperture, so securely small had he made it, he saw at once that it was practicable, and he ascertained by moving the table close to the wall, that a safe footing was afforded for his watch. This contented him, and for a time he rested.

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There were still no signs of Richard Manx. One o'clock had struck, and remembering that at that hour the basket of food was to be lowered into the area, he hastened downstairs, and arrived

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just in time to receive it.

"Everything is quiet here," said the detective, in a hoarse whisper. "Is our friend at work?" meaning by "our friend," Richard Manx.

"No," replied Frederick.

"Ah, he will be presently," said the detective; "he doesn't commence till he thinks everybody's asleep, and Mrs. Preedy has only been home for about ten minutes. She's as fond of a gossip as a cat is of mice. She's had an extra glass, I think. Are you quite comfortable, sir?" [106]

"Quite," said Frederick, and put an end to the conversation by wishing the detective good night.

"He's a plucky one," mused the detective, as he resumed his watch; "but he's working for a prize worth winning."

The food in the basket was sufficient for one man's wants for nearly a week, and Frederick, partaking of a little, went softly upstairs to the drawing room. He took the precaution of locking the door, and, mounting the table, waited for events.

He had not long to wait. At half-past one Richard Manx entered the room in which Mr. Holdfast had been murdered.

Frederick did not instantly recognise him, his disguise was so perfect, but when he removed his wig, the watcher saw his enemy, Pelham, before him.

The wronged and persecuted man had schooled himself well. Though his heart beat furiously and his blood grew hot, he suffered no sound to escape him. He had fully made up his mind, in the event of Richard Manx discovering a document, to steal upon him unawares, and wrest it from him. He did not doubt his power to do as much; in physical strength he was the match of three such men as Pelham. His chief anxiety, in the event of anything being discovered, was that it should not be destroyed. [107]

Richard Manx used no precaution in the method of entering the room, except that he placed his candle upon the floor in such a way that its reflection could not reach the window, which opened at the back of the house. This lack of precaution was in itself a sufficient proof that his search had been long continued, and was a proof also that he considered himself safe in the deserted house.

He was evidently in a discontented mood; he looked around the room sullenly and savagely, but in this expression Frederick detected a certain helplessness and fear which denoted that he was ill at ease. That he was growing tired of his task was clear, for he resumed it with an impatience and a want of system which might have prevented its successful accomplishment, even if he were on the threshold of discovery. Frederick, from his point of observation, had an uninterrupted view of his proceedings. He had brought with him a quantity of tools, and by the aid of these he set to work removing the flooring boards, with but little noise, one after another, searching eagerly in the rubbish beneath. With no success, however. Every now and then, as though tired of this part of his search, he rose, and examined the furniture in the room, suspicious that some hiding place might have escaped him. He muttered as he worked, but for a time his mutterings did not reach Frederick's ears. After more than an hour's labour, he took from a cupboard a bottle of spirits and a glass, and helped himself liberally. Then, dirty and begrimed as he was, and with beads of perspiration on his face, he sat down and consulted a pocket book, in which he added up a number of figures. "Five hundred," he said in a low tone, "seven-fifty, eight hundred, a thousand, twelve hundred, fourteen hundred and twenty." He came to the end of his reckoning, and glared at the figures as at a mortal enemy. Then from the same pocket-book he took out a packet of bank notes, and counted them over till he reached the total, fourteen hundred and twenty. Frederick held the true key to these proceedings. The sum of fourteen hundred and twenty pounds represented the whole of Mr. Pelham's wealth, the payment and reward of a life of villainy, and perhaps of blood. [108]

"It must be somewhere," muttered the man, replacing the book in his pocket; "he wrote every day he was here. It was proved at the inquest. What has he done with his infernal scribble? If it is found by a stranger, and we are in the country, it will be death to us. Devil! devil! devil!" and he struck at the table in his passion, and then, alarmed at the sound, glared round with a terror-stricken face, with the air of a criminal overtaken by justice. [109]

His fears allayed, he worked on again at the boards of the floor, making but slow progress. Three o'clock struck, and still he continued his work, and still was watched by the son of the murdered man. Half-past three—four—half-past four; and Richard Manx rose from his knees, and gave up his task for the night. Many times during his search had he drank from the bottle of spirits, but what he drank appeared to affect him only through his tongue, which became more loquacious and less guarded. Once more he counted his bank-notes, grudgingly, greedily, and muttered: [110]

"She shall give me five hundred to-day—this very morning; that will make nineteen hundred and twenty—say eighteen hundred clear, to break the bank at Monaco. If she likes to come with me, she can. I am sick of this game; there's too much to lose. To-morrow night shall be my last night here. I have searched every inch of this cursed room, and I throw it up. It is a slave's work, not a gentleman's." He certainly looked as little like a gentleman as any human being could, and his words proclaimed the utter villainy of his nature. "There's too much danger in it," he continued. "If the police were to take it in their heads to make another examination of this house, or if that weak idiot, Frederick Holdfast, were to turn up, I should find myself in the hole. And *she* should, too; I'd make her suffer with me. A nice reward for all my scheming in America! Well, it kept them apart—I can count that to my credit. But for me, the old dotard and Frederick must have met. I owed him one for the part he played in the Sydney Campbell affair in Oxford—I owed him one, and I have paid it. And if I had him here, I'd serve him as I served—" He did not [111]

conclude his sentence; a sudden terror seized him, and he shook like a man in an ague. "I could have sworn I heard a voice," he muttered. "Hush!" For a few moments he did not move; his feet were transfixed to the ground. By a strong effort he recovered himself, and a ghastly smile disfigured his face. "To-morrow night shall be the last," he said! "I swear it! I'll commence to enjoy my life again. This is not the only country in the world." And, shading the light of his candle with his hand, he left the room.

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Frederick Holdfast did not move from his post till he had given Richard Manx ample time to reach his garret in the next house. Then he descended with difficulty, for his limbs were cramped. As he stepped from the table to the ground his foot slipped, and the table overbalanced, fell with a crash on its side. He congratulated himself upon his forethought in waiting till Richard Manx was out of hearing, but not knowing what might be the consequences of the noise—for it might have disturbed the inmates of either, or of both, the adjoining houses—he unlocked the door, and made his way as quickly as he could, consistent with necessary caution, to the basement, where in the course of another hour he sought a little rest, with his revolver firmly clenched in his hand.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

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MRS. HOLDFAST INSISTS UPON BECOMING AN ACTIVE PARTNER.

THE following night—the night which Mr. Pelham had sworn should be the last of his search, and the last upon which he would continue his disguise as Richard Manx—this accomplished villain carried out his intention of coming home to his garret in Mrs. Preedy's house much earlier than usual. In fact, it was not more than half-past eight as he turned one of the streets which branched into Great Porter Square. He was in good spirits, despite that the night was as wretched and gloomy as the most despondent mortal could maliciously—out of hatred for his species—have desired. All day long the rain had continued without intermission; the thoroughfares were in a deplorable condition of mud and slush, and those persons whose avocations did not compel them to be out in the streets, gladly availed themselves of the comforts of a fireside at home. These are not the occasions, especially in a city so crowded and selfish as London, when people are in the mood to be amiable and obliging, and it was therefore the more remarkable that Richard Manx, by no means a gracious being as a rule, should have walked to his lodgings in a glad and pleasant frame of mind. The fact was, good fortune had smiled upon him. He had had a long interview with Mrs. Holdfast, who on this very day had come into possession of a large sum of money, realised from certain of her late husband's securities—shares in railway companies which had been delivered to her, as his sole heir and executrix. It was, indeed, no less a sum than twelve thousand pounds, and of this she had, in compliance with Mr. Pelham's urgent demands, given him a cheque for fifteen hundred pounds, the exact sum, as he declared, necessary to clear himself from pressing debts and liabilities. This cheque he had forthwith converted into Bank of England notes, and they were safe in his pocket, with his other savings, with which he intended to make a large fortune at Monaco. Mrs. Holdfast had also consented to sell off her London house, and accompany him on a tour of pleasure. She, as well as he, was tired of the humdrum days; she sighed for excitement and adventure; the pleasure grounds of Europe were open to her, and now that she was a widow, and still young and beautiful, and now that the terrible anxieties of the past twelve months were at an end, she determined to enjoy her life as such a pretty woman should. There was another reason why she wished to get away from London, and indeed from England altogether, for a while. Since little Fanny had accosted her by the name of Grace, she did not feel herself safe. There was danger in the mere utterance of the name, and there was security in absence from spots in which other persons, more cunning than a simple child like Fanny, might by some chance recognise her. She thought it would be as well to take the child with her; Fanny was a bright, clever little creature, and might prove useful, and if she got tired of her, it would be easy to lose her on the Continent, or place her in a situation where her babbling, if she were inclined to babble, could do no harm.

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Mr. Pelham had visited her at noon in a spirit the reverse of that in which he left her. She had been most amiable and vivacious, and fell in joyfully with his plans, when he had expected her to be obstinate and ill-tempered, and inclined to thwart him. Then, he had intended to ask her for a cheque for five hundred pounds, and improving the opportunity, had obtained fifteen hundred. No wonder that he sang a little song to himself as he turned into Great Porter Square. Had a beggar solicited charity from him he might have obtained a small piece of silver, but it is the misfortune of human affairs that fitting opposites are rarely brought into fortunate conjunction, and the beggar not being forthcoming, Richard Manx's charitable spell had no opportunity of airing itself. He was within a few doors of his lodging-house when a woman, who had walked quickly after him, and was out of breath with the exertion, laid her hand on his arm, and wished him good evening.

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MRS. HOLDFAST INSISTS UPON BECOMING AN ACTIVE PARTNER—(CONTINUED).

RICHARD MANX, as a man of gallantry, was generally ready for any adventure with the fair sex which offered itself, but on the present occasion, despite his disposition to be amiable, he shrank within himself at being thus suddenly accosted. The intrusion of an unexpected voice—which at the moment he did not recognise—upon his thoughts awoke him to a sense of danger. He therefore walked on without replying, shaking the woman's hand from his arm; but was almost immediately brought to a standstill by the sound of the woman's steps hurrying after him.

She wore a cloak, with a hood to it, which was thrown over her head; in her haste the hood fell back, and her fair face, no longer hidden, shone out from masses of light hair, in the disorder of which was a certain picturesqueness which heightened the effect of her beauty. As her hood fell back, Richard Manx turned and recognised her.

It was Mrs. Holdfast, the widow of the murdered man.

He uttered an exclamation of alarm, and with a frightened look around, pulled the hood over her head to hide her face.

"You mad woman!" he exclaimed; "do you want to ruin us? What brings you here?" Then a sudden thought drove all the blood from his face. "Has anything happened?" he asked, in a whisper.

She laughed at his agitation. "Nothing has happened," she replied, "except that I am worn out with sameness."

"Then what in the devil's name brings you here?" he asked again.

"For shame, Pelham," she said, lightly, "to be so rude to a lady! What brings me here? I have told you. I am worn out with sameness. Sitting down with nothing to do, without excitement, in a house as dull and quiet as a doll's cradle, doesn't suit me. I was not cut out for that sort of life!"

"You could have waited a little," he grumbled, somewhat reconciled to find that they were not being observed; "you were sure of another sort of life presently."

"I'll have it, thought I to myself, without waiting," she said, recklessly, "and I feel better already. Running away from my doll's cradle without preparation, with an idea in my head I am going to carry out, has put new life into me. My blood isn't creeping through my veins; it is dancing, and I am alive once more. Really now I feel as if I should like to waltz with you round the Square!"

"Are you quite mad?" he cried, holding her still by force, but unable to refrain from admiration of her wild flow of spirits. "We have but a few hours to wait. Can't you content yourself for a little while? What is this insane idea of yours which you are going to carry out!"

"To spend the evening with you, my dear," she replied gaily.

"Where?"

"In Great Porter Square. Where else?"

While this conversation was proceeding, he had led her in an opposite direction from the house in which he lodged, and they were now on the other side of the Square.

"Now I am sure you are mad," he said. "Do you know what I have to do to-night?"

"No," she replied, "and I am curious to know."

"I keep it to myself; but you will hear of it, and when you do you will laugh. Shall I leave behind me a danger hanging over my head—and yours? A secret that one day may be discovered, and bring ruin and death to me—and you? No, no; they make a mistake in the mettle of Dick Pelham if they think he is going to leave a trap-door open for himself to fall into."

"I should fall also, Pelham!" she said half-questioningly.

"Why, yes; you would come down with me. It couldn't be helped, I fear. I have a kind of dog-in-the-manger feeling for you. If I can't have you myself, I'll not leave you to another man."

"It *can't* be helped, I suppose," she said, shrugging her shoulders; "but it doesn't matter to me so long as I am enjoying myself."

"Very well, then," said he, in a decided tone; "go home now, and get your trinkets and dresses in order, for by to-day week we'll be out of this dull hole. We'll live where the sun shines for the future. Hurry now, and off with you. I have a serious night's work before me."

"I will help you in it," she said, in a tone as decided as his own. "It isn't a bit of use bullying, Pelham. I've made up my mind. I haven't seen your room in No. 118, and I intend to see it. I have a right to, haven't I? The wonder is I have kept away so long; and this is the last night I shall have the chance. I was curious before, but I'm a thousand times more curious now, and if you were to talk all night you wouldn't put me off. You are going to do something bold—all the better; I'll be there to see, and I dare say I can be of assistance to you. We are in partnership, and I insist upon being an active partner. How do I know but that you have been deceiving me all this while?"

"In what way?" he demanded fiercely.

"I will make sure," she said, "that you haven't a pretty girl hidden in that garret of yours, and that you don't want to run away with her instead of me?"

"Jealous!" he cried, with a gratified laugh; "after telling me a dozen times lately that you hated the sight of me!"

"That's a woman's privilege. If you don't understand us by this time, it is too late for you to begin to learn. Pelham, I am coming up with you."

"You are determined?"

"As ever a woman was in this world. If you run from me now, and enter the house without me, I'll follow you, and knock at the door, and inquire for Mr. Richard Manx; and if they ask me who I am, I'll say I am *Mrs. Richard Manx*."

"I believe you would," he said, looking down into her face, and not knowing whether to feel angry or pleased.

"I would, as truly as I am a woman."

"There's no help for it, then," he said; "but I don't know how to get you into the house without being observed."

"Nothing easier. All the time we've been talking I haven't seen half-a-dozen people. Choose a moment when nobody's about; open the door quickly, and I'll slip in like an eel. Before you shut the door, I'll be at the top of the house."

"Let me warn you once more; there is danger."

"All the better; there's excitement in danger."

"And if I don't find what I've been hunting for these weeks past, I intend to carry out a desperate design, which if successful—and it must be; I'll make it so—will place us in a position of perfect safety."

"Bravo, Pelham; I never thought you had so much pluck. I will help you in everything you have to do. Now let us get into the house. I am drenched through. You can make a fire, I suppose."

He cautioned and instructed her how to proceed, and they walked to No. 118, he leading, and she but a step or two behind. Seeing no person near, he opened the door with one turn of the key, and she glided rapidly past him, and was on the stairs, and really nearly at the top of the house, feeling her way along the balustrades, before he was up the first flight. Safely within the miserable room he had hired, he turned the key, and lighted a candle; then, pointing to wood and coals, he motioned her to make a fire. The stove was so small she could not help laughing at it, but he whispered to her savagely to stop her merriment, and not to utter a sound that could be heard outside the room. The fire lighted, she sat before it, and dried her clothes as well as she could, while he busied himself about the room. Then he sat down by her side, and explained his plans. As long as suspicion could be averted from them, and as long as they were sure that no document written by Mr. Holdfast between the date of his taking lodgings in No. 119 Great Porter Square, and the date of his death, could be produced against them—so long were they safe. Suspicion was averted from them, as they believed, and they had every reason to believe that the murder would take its place, nay, had already taken its place, upon the list of monstrous crimes, the mystery of which would never be brought to light. Their only danger, then, lay in the probable discovery of the supposed document for which Pelham, as Richard Manx, had so long been searching. From what had been made known by the press and the police of Mr. Holdfast's movements after his taking up his residence in No. 119, and from what they themselves knew, it was almost impossible that such a document, if it had existence, could have been taken out of the house. Pelham had sought for it unsuccessfully. What then, remained to be done for safety? To set fire to the house in which it was hidden, to burn it to the ground, and thus blot out from existence all knowledge of their crime.

This was Pelham's desperate plan, and this deed it was he intended to perpetrate to-night. For a few hours longer he would search the room in which Mr. Holdfast was murdered, and then, everything being prepared to prevent failure, he would fire the house, and in the confusion make his escape, and disappear for ever from the neighbourhood. Mrs. Holdfast's unexpected appearance on the scene complicated matters—the chief difficulty being how to get her away, during the confusion produced by the fire, without being observed. But when, unwillingly, he had given an enforced consent to her wild whim of keeping in his company on this eventful night, he had thought of a way to overcome the difficulty. In her woman's dress, and with her attractive face, he could scarcely hope that she would escape observation; but he had in his room a spare suit of his own clothes, in which she could disguise herself, and with her face and hands blackened, and her hair securely fastened and hidden beneath a soft felt wideawake hat which hung in his garret, he had no fear that she would be discovered.

She entered into his plans with eagerness, and the adventure in which she was engaged imparted a heightened colour to her face and a deeper brilliancy to her eyes. As she leant towards the fire, with the reflection of its ruddy glow in her features, an uninformed man, gazing at her only for a moment, would have carried away with him a picture of beauty and innocence so enduring that his thoughts would often have wandered to it.

"Here are your clothes," said Pelham; "when we are ready I will mount to the roof, and wait till you are dressed. Then I will come and assist you up. I have two or three journeys to make to the next house before we re-commence the search. See what I have here."

He unlocked the box in the corner which Becky had vainly tried to open, and took from it a tin can filled with pitch, two small cans of inflammable oil, and a packet of gunpowder.

"These will make the old place blaze," he said, laughing. "It will be a good job done if all Great Porter Square is burnt down. The landlady of this house ought to pay me a per-centage upon her insurance. The fire will be the making of her."

"When do we begin?" asked Grace.

"Sooner than usual," he replied. "At about half-past ten. The night is so bad that the Square will be pretty well deserted; and there is no one in this house to disturb us."

He did not neglect the precaution of going to the door occasionally and listening, but he saw and heard nothing to alarm him. Exactly at half-past ten he bade Grace dress as quickly as possible in the suit of his clothes, and to disguise herself to the best of her ability. Her own woman's dress she was to tie up in a bundle and bring with her into the next house. He mounted

to the roof, and she handed him the cans and the packet which were to ensure the destruction of No. 119. Then she proceeded to disguise herself.

It was a task exactly to her taste. She took the greatest pleasure in making herself look as much as possible like a young man, and as she gazed at herself in the broken bit of looking-glass fastened to the wall, she said aloud,

"Upon my word, Gracie, you make a very pretty boy!"

She wore a great many trinkets, which she wrapped in paper, and put into her pockets, but the novelty of her disguise, and the inconvenient space in which she effected it, caused her to drop two of these, a ring and an earring, and although she searched the floor carefully, she could not find them. Her hair she twisted into a tight knot at the top of her head, and the wideawake completely covered it. Richard Manx made his appearance at the trap-door above, and asked if she was ready. She answered that she was, and he assisted her up, lifting her, indeed, almost bodily from the chairs upon which she stood.

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"What a little lump of weakness you are!" he exclaimed. "You can't weigh above a hundred pounds."

Carefully he led her over the roof, and down the trap-door, into the next house. Standing in the dark with him in the garret of this tenement, he felt that she trembled.

"If you are going to show the white feather," he whispered, "you had better turn back. There is time even now."

Little did she imagine how much hung upon the opportunity offered her. She refused it, saying that she had experienced a slight chill, and that she would go on; so he led her, white-faced now and shaking in every limb, down the stairs to the room in which her husband had been murdered.

Its appearance, while it bewildered, afforded her relief. Had it been in order, as she had seen it when her husband had occupied it, she could not have controlled her agitation; but it was so torn up, the work of destruction had been so wanton, that she could scarcely recognise it as the same room.

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"Have you any brandy, Pelham?" she asked, careful, as he had directed her, not to raise her voice.

He had a bottle with him, and he gave her some in a glass, upon which her courage returned, and she shook her head defiantly, as much as to say, "Who cares?"

"I haven't been idle, you see," said Pelham, pointing around. "Amuse yourself while I do what is necessary."

What was "necessary" was the villainous work of scattering the gunpowder about, disposing of the pitch, and pouring the oil upon the walls and flooring of the passage. At the conclusion of this part of his scheme there was still a great deal of inflammable material left, and these he placed aside, the pitch and the oil in the tins, and the gunpowder, loose, in its paper packet, in the room in which he was at work.

"Are you sure there is no one but ourselves in the house?" asked Grace.

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"Listen for yourself," replied Pelham. "If you like you can go downstairs and look. I'll ensure you against anything but ghosts and fire."

She shuddered, and, to divert her thoughts, endeavoured to take a practical interest in the search for the hidden document. It was difficult, in the state of the room, to move about, and she soon grew wearied. She threw herself upon the bed, and longed impatiently for the time when the crowning touch would be given to the wicked work in which she had insisted upon becoming an active partner.



CHAPTER XLI.

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FREDERICK HOLDFAST MAKES THE DISCOVERY.

FREDERICK HOLDFAST slept until late in the morning. Awaking, he looked at his watch, which marked the hour of eleven. He did not begrudge the time spent in sleep. It had refreshed and strengthened him, and he knew it would not be prudent on his part to work during the day in any room in which he would run the risk of being observed by the neighbours. He had not been disturbed; when he awoke his revolver was in his hand, and perfect stillness reigned throughout the house.

In his state of mind inaction was a torture to him, and he could not content himself with sitting idly down. Imprisoned as it were, while daylight lasted, to the basement, into the rooms in which passers-by in the Square above could not peer, he resolved to examine carefully every inch of the floor and walls in the kitchen and passage. The shutters of the area-windows were closed, and darkness prevailed. His lantern, therefore, served him in as good stead by day as it had done by

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night; he trimmed the lamp carefully, and prepared for what he had no hope would be anything but a fruitless task. He only undertook it, indeed, for the purpose of occupying the time during which he was shut out from the upper part of the house, to the windows in which there were no shutters. It comforted him to think that his dear girl was within a short distance of him; a few inches of wall separated them, and they were thinking of each other, praying for each other.

He commenced in the passage, tracking the marks of his father's dying steps upon the floor, and of his hands upon the walls. Inclined as he was to the closest examination, his attention was arrested by a slight scratch upon the wall, which he found repeated, both above and below, wherever his father had rested his hand for support in his descent to the kitchen. The scratch was very slight, and was not to be found upon any part of the wall which the dying man had not touched with his hand. The fading stains within which these scratches were observable appeared to have been made by a clenched hand; the marks of the knuckles could be traced. The inference Frederick Holdfast drew from these signs was that his father had a distinct motive in keeping his hand closed, and that the hand held something he wanted to deposit in safe keeping before life left his poor wounded body. It was for this reason, then, Frederick argued, following out the train of thought, as much as for any other, that the mortally-wounded man had, in his death-agony, made his way to the kitchen, where he believed the servant was asleep. In her hands he would place the treasure his clenched hand guarded, and, that supreme effort accomplished, he would then be content to die, comforted by the thought that he left behind him a clue by which the innocent might be saved and the guilty punished. What was this treasure which had been so carefully guarded by a man who had but a few moments to live? He had been unable to place it in the safe possession of a friend to justice. Had it been found by one whose interest it was to conceal it, or had it escaped all eyes, to be discovered by the son he had unwittingly wronged? This last surmise was scarcely needed by Frederick to prompt him to search in every unlikely nook and cranny in the passage and stairs; but when he raised the light to the kitchen door, and saw there the fatal hand-mark, and with it the almost imperceptible scratch repeated, he knew that he had wasted his time, and that whatever it was his father had held in his hand he had carried into the kitchen with him. To this room, therefore, he confined his search, and after being occupied in it for hours—until, indeed, he heard the church clock strike five—was about to give it up in despair, when his eyes fell upon what looked like a small piece of metal, firmly imbedded in a crevice of the floor. It had evidently been trodden into the crevice by heavy boots, and it was with difficulty Frederick dug it out. It proved to be a key, small enough for a drawer in a desk.

Frederick immediately went into the passage to ascertain whether he was right in his idea that the scratches had been produced by this key, and holding it between his knuckles, as his father might have done, and placing his hand upon the wall, he was satisfied of its probability. It was not strange that an object so small had escaped the notice of the police or the people in the house. As the dying man fell to the ground, the key may have been struck out of his hand by the shock, and being at some distance from the body, had been trodden down into the crevice by the policeman's feet. After that, nothing but such a minute examination as Frederick had carried out could have brought it to light.

Quick as his eager thought would allow him, Frederick followed his train of argument in logical sequence. It was this key which his father wished to place in the servant's hands before he died; it was this key which was to unravel the mystery of his life and death in No. 119 Great Porter Square. The drawer of the desk which the key would unlock contained the record which would make all things clear. It had been in the house; the furniture had not been removed; it was still in the house. But not in the room occupied by his father. If it were there, Pelham would have been certain to have found it. In that room every lock had been forced, every scrap of paper examined. No!—The document had been placed in another room for safety. The murdered man, acquainted with the character of the persons who had brought disgrace upon him, had taken the precaution to secure his written thoughts and wishes from their prying eyes. Mr. Pelham was working on a wrong scent; his labour had been thrown away. Frederick knew, from the inquiries of the detective in his employ, that the adjoining room to that his father had occupied—the room from which he had, on the previous night, watched the proceedings of his father's murderer (for upon that point now Frederick was morally convinced)—had, during the last four days of his father's tenancy, been vacant. What more likely than that this very room contained a drawer which the key would fit?

He trembled with eagerness, feeling that he was on the brink of discovery, and the shock of these mental revelations, which a few minutes would see verified, was so great that a faintness stole over his senses. Then he remembered that he had partaken of but little food during the day. He knew not what was before him in the night to come; he needed all his strength.

He sat down resolutely, curbing his impatience, and ate and drank his fill. When he had finished his meal, he felt that he had acted well and with prudence. He was ready now for any emergency, equal to any effort.

It was by this time dark, and he could move into the upper part of the house with comparative safety. All day long the rain had been plashing into the area with a dismal sound; the dreariness of the weather and the dreariness of the house would have daunted any man who had not a serious purpose to sustain him. Frederick had held no further communication with the detective; during the day it was impracticable. But it had been arranged between them that when night came, the detective, if he had anything of importance to communicate, should drop a letter into the area, of course at such time and in such a way as should afford no chance of detection. Before going upstairs with his precious key, Frederick cautiously opened the door which led into the area, and saw that a small packet of brown paper had been dropped during the day. He picked it up and opened it; there was a stone inside, and round the stone a sheet of note paper, on which was written, in the detective's handwriting:

"Mrs. H. has received to-day a large sum of money. Her friend, Mr. P., was with her for nearly two hours. Upon leaving her house he drove to the City and cashed a cheque for fifteen hundred pounds. He was in high spirits. There is something in the wind; it looks as if they are making preparations to flit. Mrs. H. is getting together as much ready money as she can lay her hands on. I have no doubt she and Mr. P. have arranged to-day to go away together. Nothing further to say on that head. Your young lady friend in No. 118, Becky, is quite safe, but she looks anxious. On your account, I guess. Her little friend, Fanny, is a brick. We shall be on the watch all night in the Square. If you are in want of help, use your whistle."

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Not being in want of help at present, Frederick destroyed the letter, and went upstairs to the first floor. Opening the door of the room his father had occupied, he saw that no person had entered it during the day; everything was as Pelham had left it early in the morning. Frederick, by the light of his lantern, looked around for drawer or desk. A chest of drawers was there, unlocked and empty; a desk also, which had been broken open, and which the key he had found would not fit. As he left the room he saw, lying in a corner of the wall, a large key. It was the key of his father's room. He put it in the lock, and it turned easily.

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"Pelham would be astonished to-night," he thought, "if, when he came, he found the door locked against him. But that would be putting him on his guard. I will open the trap for him instead of closing it. Murderer! Your hour is approaching!"

He unlocked the door, and put the key in his pocket, with no distinct intention, but with an idea that it might in some way prove useful. When in his thought the unspoken words came to his mind, "I will open the trap for him instead of closing it," he had not the dimmest comprehension of their awful significance, or of the fearful manner in which they were to be verified.

He entered the adjoining room in which he had kept his long and painful watch on the previous night. In the room was a sideboard, and to this he first directed his attention. The key he had found in the kitchen was too small for either of the sideboards, and as they were locked, he forced them open. There was nothing inside but some mouldy biscuits and a couple of old-fashioned decanters, with dregs of wine in them. He felt about for secret drawers, but found none. A cupboard next attracted his attention, and he searched it carefully. It contained plates and wine glasses, a shell box and a shell caddy, with views of Margate on them. Both were open, and he discovered nothing on the shelves which was likely to bring his search to a successful issue. Before proceeding further he thought—in case Pelham should take it into his head to commence his work early on this which he declared should be his last night in No. 119—it would be well to replace the table which had fallen over when he stepped from it. He raised it carefully and replaced it on its carved feet. It was a round table of Spanish mahogany, and was a contrast to the other furniture in the room, being old-fashioned and of ancient make. As he raised it, one of the lower surfaces upon which he placed his hand shifted slightly, and the thought flashed through his mind that there might be a drawer beneath. He stooped and looked upward, and saw that his impression was a correct one. A drawer was there, evidently intended as a secret drawer; it was locked. With trembling hands he tried the key. It fitted the lock, turned, and the drawer was open—and there, beneath his eyes, were some sheets of folio paper, upon which he recognised his dead father's handwriting.

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He drew forth the sheets and rapidly scanned them. They were in the form of a diary, and contained the record of his father's last days, or perhaps his last hours. Tears filled his eyes as he gazed at the beloved memorial of a dear one, from whose heart he had been torn by the foulest treachery. He dashed the tears away. No time now for grief; a sterner duty than that of mourning for the dead was before him. In his hands he held the vindication of his good name, and, he hoped, the means of bringing the guilty to punishment. He must to work at once, and read the words the dead had written for him. He went down to the kitchen, and, setting the door open so that no sound made in the house should escape his ears, commenced the perusal of his murdered father's diary.

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CHAPTER XLII.

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MR. HOLDFAST'S DIARY.

TUESDAY, *1st July*.—I am once more in London, after a long absence and much wandering in America, where I sought in vain for my dear son, Frederick, the son I wronged and thrust from my house. Bitterly have I repented of my error, and bitterly am I punished for it.

Almost at the last moment, in New York, a hope of success was held out to me. Returning to my hotel there from New Orleans, in which city, from information conveyed to me in a letter from a stranger, I hoped to find Frederick, I was informed that a gentleman had called to see me. The

description given to me of this gentleman—who, the manager of the hotel informed me, appeared to be in by no means prosperous circumstances—left no doubt in my mind that it was my son. He had, then, received the letters I sent to him, directed to the New York Post-office, and had at once sought me out. Unhappy chance that caused me to be absent when he called! I must have been a thousand miles away at the time, following a false scent supplied by a stranger. It has occurred to me within these last few days, during my voyage home, that an enemy may have been at work in America to prevent a meeting between me and my son. There is no meanness, no wickedness, no baseness, to which the wretched woman who calls me husband, and her paramour, would not stoop. And for the cunning necessary to keep me and my son apart from each other, have I not had sufficient proof that they are capable of it? Strange that the suspicion did not occur to me in America! Now that—perhaps too late—it presents itself, it comes upon me with singular force. The letter, written to me by a stranger, which drove me so far from New York on a fruitless errand, was not the only one I received conveying to me, gratuitously, information which retarded instead of assisting me in my purpose. They were all in different handwriting, it is true, but may they not have been written by one man? Even were it otherwise, there is as little difficulty in New York as there is in London in obtaining agents to assist in the carrying out of any villainous design. But now my mind is set upon this suspicion of systematic deceit, I am of the opinion that but one enemy was engaged in it, and that that enemy is the scoundrel Pelham, my wretched wife's accomplice. If it be so, he must have followed me to America, and watched my movements, cunningly misdirecting them when he deemed it necessary. Working against such an enemy is working in the dark. It is my unhappy fate that, alone, I have not the courage to publicly proclaim my disgrace. I should die under the shame of it. With my son by my side I might be able, were no other way open for a settlement, to nerve myself to any effort he might advise. Without him I am powerless, and indeed, were a public exposure forced upon me—were I certain that by no other possible means could I rid myself of this infamous woman—my son's evidence would be necessary to complete the case against her. But before this terrible necessity is made clear to me, every means must be adopted to settle the unhappy affair in a private manner. Never again could I hold up my head and meet the gaze of my fellow-man were I to hear my name and the shameful secrets of my home shouted out in the streets by hawkers of public news. My life would be blasted indeed were I to see my dishonour publicly proclaimed in the newspaper bills that are displayed at every railway station in the kingdom. Ah, then the son who renounced my name, driven to it by my folly, my incredulousness, my injustice, might deem himself fortunate that he had done so before it was dragged into the gutters, and covered with ignominy!

I waited impatiently in my New York hotel for my son to make a second call, but to my great disappointment he did not again appear. My letters, which he must have received, were brief, but they explained my anxiety to see him and to be reconciled with him. He could not have followed me to New Orleans, for I had taken the precaution so to arrange my route as not to afford any stranger a clue to my destination. In this I was actuated by my overpowering desire to keep my family affairs from public gaze—a more difficult matter in America, where the newspaper interviewer appears to be ubiquitous, than it is in any other country in the world. On the twelfth day of my last stay in the hotel, exactly three weeks ago, I received news which determined me to return immediately to England. The news was startling and overwhelming, and added another shame to that which was already weighing me down. My wife had given birth to a child. This child is not mine. Imperative, therefore, was the necessity of bringing the shameful matter to an end without delay. I took passage to Liverpool in the "Germanic," and before I left New York I placed in the hands of the manager of the hotel a letter for my son, to be given to him privately, in case he should call. The letter contained bank notes for £200 and a sight draft for £500, payable to bearer, and was to the effect that Frederick was to follow me home by the earliest possible opportunity. I instructed him in the letter to take his passage to Liverpool, and on his arrival there to inquire at the post office for a letter, which I intended should enable him to come to me at once. It is because these proceedings have, up to the present time, not led to a successful result, and because of the suspicion that has obtained a firm hold in my mind of some cunning underhand plotting to prevent my son from meeting me, that I think it best to keep a record of what has been done and of what is likely to take place.

The "Germanic" made a rapid passage, and on the day of my arrival in Liverpool I wrote and sent to the post-office a letter for my son, telling him to come to the Adelphi Hotel, where I awaited him. I remained in Liverpool six days, in the hope of seeing my son, and my hope has not been fulfilled. Then I came on to London, travelling by a night train. Determining that my presence in the City shall be known only to my son and my wife, at least for a few days, which time I shall employ in the endeavour to come to a private arrangement with the woman who has dishonoured me, I looked about for a lodging in a neighbourhood where it is likely the movements of a stranger may not be subjected to curious inquiry. Within half-a-mile from the railway terminus is Great Porter Square, quiet and retired; it appears to be the very locality I desire. The houses in this quiet square are mostly lodging-houses, the landlords and landladies of which are more anxious about their rent than about the characters of their tenants. In such a neighbourhood men and women are doubtless in the habit of coming and going, of appearing and disappearing, without exciting curiosity. Cards of rooms to let were in a great many windows, and I selected a house, No. 119, and found, upon inquiry, that I could have a bed-room on the first-floor, or one on the second. I took the bedroom on the first-floor, which is at the back of the house, and the landlady informed me that by the end of the week I could have the adjoining room, the windows of which front the Square, as the present occupant had given notice to leave. But the back room will probably suit my purpose for a while. I avoided giving the landlady my name by paying her a month's rent in advance, with which she appears perfectly satisfied.

The moment I took possession of my room I wrote two letters, one to my son at the Liverpool

post-office, the other to my wife. In my letter to Frederick I simply said that I am to be found for a few days at No. 119, Great Porter Square, and I desired him to hasten to me at once, without communicating with any person. I have in my previous letters impressed upon him the importance of secrecy. My letter to my wife also contained my address. I told her that I have arrived in London and that I am willing to come to an arrangement with her which will no doubt satisfy her, and which will keep our affairs from scandal-mongers. I requested her to call upon me at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning. Until that hour, therefore, I have nothing to do. The time will hang heavily, and my only relief is in this diary.

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I cannot read; I cannot sleep. Not alone the shamefulness of my position, but the injustice I inflicted upon my son, weighs upon my spirits. If he were with me all would be as well with me as it is possible to be. If he were here, and I could ask his forgiveness, and thus absolve him from the solemn oath I compelled him to take, I should feel strong once more, and equal to the awful crisis. In spirit now, my son, I ask your forgiveness most humbly. The sufferings I inflicted upon you are, I well know—for certain qualities in my nature are implanted in yours—irremediable; but all that a repentant father can do I will do. Forgive me, Frederick, for my blindness. I have wronged not only you, but the memory of your dear mother. It appears to me as if my mad act in allying myself with a creature so base has cast even upon her pure soul a shadow of dishonour.

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Wednesday, 2nd July.—She has been here, and is gone. Our interview was a long one, and I apply myself now to a description of what passed between us, setting down simply that which is important to the momentous issue before me. It is the only way in which I can relieve the tedium of the dull, weary hours I am condemned to pass alone.

She came into the room, closely veiled, and stood with her back against the closed door. She was calm and self-possessed. I trembled so that I could scarcely stand.

"Who am I?" she asked.

I heard the question with amazement, not at the words, but at the joyous tone in which it was asked. I did not answer, and she threw up her veil, and looked at me with eyes and face sparkling with animation and delight. It was as though she was playing a part in a masquerade. Never had I seen her look so well. No trace of anxiety or disquietude was observable in her. She was the very picture of joyous health and beauty, an embodiment of apparent innocence and peace of mind. But in my eyes she was no longer beautiful; I saw her soul through the mask she presents to the world, and I knew that it was corrupt and vile.

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She advanced to me with her arms stretched forward to embrace me, but I motioned her back sternly, and she stood still and looked at me with a smile on her lips.

"What!" she exclaimed. "After this long absence, to refuse to kiss me! Ah, you are trying me, I see. You have not the heart to say you do not love me!"

I pointed to the door, and said:

"It will be best for both of us that our interview shall not be interrupted. In such houses as this the servants have an awkward habit of sometimes opening the doors unawares."

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She took the hint, and locked the door.

"Now, my dear," she said, removing her hat and cloak, "we are quite alone—quite, quite alone! You see I am not afraid of you. I thought you were only playing with my feelings when you refused to embrace me. What, you will not kiss me even now? You have indeed grown cold and hard-hearted. You were not so once, in the sweet days, not so long ago, of our first acquaintanceship. And how old you have grown—quite haggard! My dear, gentlemen should not run away from their wives. This should be a lesson to you. I hope it will be—with all my heart I hope it will be; indeed, indeed I do! Oh, how I have suffered while you have been away! And never to send me a letter—not a single line to relieve my anxiety. It was cruel of you—too, too cruel! I have had the most horrible dreams of you. I dreamt you were ill, and I could not get to you—that you were in danger, and I could not help you—that you were dead, without as much as saying good-bye to your fond, faithful wife! It was horrible, horrible! Really, my dear, it would be a proper punishment if I refused ever to speak another word to you."

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"Have you done with your trifling?" I asked.

"Trifling!" she cried. "You have been absent from me and your home for months, without sending me one message of affection, and now that you return to London suddenly, and take up your lodging in a mean house like this, and I am pouring my heart out at your feet, you call it trifling! Take care, my dear—you may try my patience too far!"

"You may try mine too far," I retorted. "Cast aside, if it is possible, your false airs and affectations, and let us talk as business people in a business way."

"It is for business, then," she said, still smiling in my face, "and not for love, you summoned me here?"

"There is no question of love between us," I replied, and was about to proceed when she interrupted me.

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"You will force me to be as cold and hard-hearted as yourself. The last time we were together—alone, as we are now—yes, alone, for you dared not, you dare not, speak in the presence of a third party as you spoke to me then!—you brought against me a number of false accusations, and vowed that you would never live with me again. If I had been a man I would have killed you—do you hear? I would have killed you, and the words you addressed to me should have been the last you would ever have spoken. But you took advantage of my weakness, and you insulted me as no woman in the world was ever insulted. Is it to insult me again that you have sent for me now to meet you here alone?"

It pleased me that she should adopt this tone. I could cope with her better when she showed me her true nature. "It is not of the past that I wish to speak," I said, calmly, "it is of the future."

"But the past must be spoken of," she rejoined vehemently, "and shall be."

"If you are determined, it must be so. You will find me very forbearing. My only wish is to put an end to this miserable business for once and for ever!"

"To put an end to *me*, perhaps," she cried, thrusting her face close to mine in contemptuous defiance, "for once and for ever!"

"At all events," I said, "so far as my own life is concerned. I wish to shut you out from my life from this time forth."

"How do you propose to do that?" she asked.

"By paying you for it," I replied, shortly.

"You will have to bid high."

"I am prepared to bid high."

"There is not only the question of living," she said, with a dark look, "there is the question of a woman's feelings to be considered. You brought against me a charge of unfaithfulness—you accused me of being a vile woman, of low character and low morals. Do you still believe it?"

"I still believe it," I replied.

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"How brutally manly it is of you to be so plain and concise! I can thank you, at least, for your frankness, liar as you are! You accused me of trumping up a designing untrue story of my life when I first met you, for the purpose of winning your sympathy. Do you still believe it?"

"I still believe it."

"How can I thank you? I know how I could repay you if I were a man. It is fortunate for you that I am not. You accused me of setting a snare for your son, who knew the true particulars of my life, you said, and who wished to remove the shame I had brought upon your name. My memory is not bad, is it? Do you still believe all this?"

"I still believe it!"

I think if she could have stabbed or poisoned me, and caused me to die at that moment, she would not have spared me.

"Of course," she said, "you have seen your son."

"To my grief," I replied, "I have not. I should be happier if I could see him and ask his forgiveness for the injustice I have done him."

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"The injustice you have done him through me?"

"Yes, through you."

"It is curious, too, that you have not met him," she said, and I noticed that she was secretly watching my face as she spoke: "you are such a good business man, and you went to America and remained there so long in the hope of finding him."

"How do you know that?" I inquired. "How do you know, indeed, that I have been in America all the time I have been absent from England?"

My questions warned her that she had made a mistake.

"People will talk," she said; "you don't suppose that I have kept my mouth closed, or that other persons have kept theirs, for months, because you took it into your head to run away from me. Upon my word, I was advised by friends to go to a magistrate, and lay the case before him."

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"You are as good in business matters as I am; in some matters better. You followed your own advice instead of the advice of others, and you did not go to a magistrate. I know your reason."

"What was my reason?"

"That you, like myself, have no wish to drag our private affairs before the public. Once in the courts you will find it difficult to escape them; to lay your life and character bare to official gaze would not suit you. No, I know how far I am compromised, and I know how far you will go."

"You think you know."

"I am sure I know."

All at once she changed her tone. "I am bound to give way to you," she said, with an assumption of humility, "for you are my husband. I have no wish to irritate you, or to unsettle your mind more than it is already unsettled. There are women who, for less than you have said, for less than you have done, would have put you into a private madhouse. The delusions you have been under are very serious to me, but I will bear them as long as I can. If I were to tell any official, any doctor, that, returning home after a long absence, you never once inquired for your child, born during your absence, it would be a sufficient proof of your insanity."

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"I heard in New York that you had a child," I said, "and it brought me home earlier than I had intended."

"Kind, thoughtful husband," she murmured, vindictively.

"I would have avoided the subject," I said; "I would avoid it now. Shameless woman! Not upon the head of an innocent child, of whom I am not the father, do I desire to visit the sin of the mother. It would have become you better—if any suggestion that is good and modest in woman could occur to you—to have omitted all mention of your child. Listen now to me with your best attention. In the course I am adopting I am prompted by but one desire—to avoid the shame which publicity would bring upon me. For that reason have I kept my return home a secret from every person but yourself with whom I am acquainted in London; for that reason I have taken this lodging in an obscure locality, so that I may confer the more privately with you, and endeavour to bring you to a true sense of your position. Publicity will bring shame to me; it will bring beggary to you—absolute beggary. Let that fact sink into your mind; ponder well over it; and while you think of it let this declaration which I am about to make have its due weight. If you drive me to the extremity of forcing you into a public court, and the case be decided against you, as it must, no persuasion or entreaty shall induce me to assist you to the value of a shilling in your future. You will have to depend absolutely upon yourself and your vile associate for your means of living."

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You compel me to hold out this threat, which, under other circumstances, I should deem unmanly and inhuman."

"It *is* unmanly and inhuman," she said. "Why do you hold out such a threat?" [167]

"Because, as I have said, it is the only means I can adopt to bring you to a proper understanding of your position. Shame you could bear, for you have already borne it, and it has not touched your fatal beauty." Her vain nature could not but be gratified at this admission, and she bestowed upon me a radiant smile. "But poverty, if I have the slightest knowledge of your character, you could not bear. It would be the bitterest punishment with which you could be visited."

"I can almost imagine," she said, with a keen glance at me, "that you have been taking a lesson out of your son's book. You tell me you have not seen him. Is it the truth?"

"It is the truth. I am dealing plainly and honestly with you."

"You are a true Christian," she said, with a sneer; "good for evil—and such good for such evil! Yet there is something unchristianlike in your threat, too. You would thrust me into the streets?" [168]

"As you made me thrust my son. As heaven is my judge, I would do it, in the cause of justice!"

"That is one side of your mind; there is another. Suppose I plead guilty; suppose I fall upon my knees before you and confess my sin. My sin! My sins! For they are so many—O, so many!" She said this with a theatrical air, and then spoke in a soberer tone. "That is a proper mode of confession for such a woman as you believe me to be. But without trying to impose upon you, suppose I admit, without any attempt at romance or deceit—for those acts are played out now, are they not? and we come to a winding-up of the plot—suppose I am wicked, and guilty of every charge you bring against me. What would you require me to do?"

"First to leave my house, taking with you all that belongs to you—your trinkets, dresses, and ornaments—to leave my house, and never enter it again as long as you live."

"But if I died, I might haunt you," she said, with a laugh, "though I assure you I have no intention of dying for a good many years yet. And then?" [169]

"To renounce my name—adopt any other you please, it matters not to me, but mine you shall no longer bear."

"Really," she said, "the similarity between your conditions and those of your son is very wonderful. It is hardly possible to believe you have not been conspiring—but of course it would not become me to doubt the word of so honourable a gentleman. And then?"

"To leave the country for good."

"Another coincidence. I was almost inclined myself to suggest it to you. And in payment of these sacrifices, what do you offer?"

"An income of twelve hundred pounds a year, secured, to be paid regularly and faithfully to you so long as you do not violate the conditions of the agreement."

"Secured by deed?"

"Yes, in the manner most agreeable to you. Do you consent?" [170]

"What!" she exclaimed. "In a moment! No, indeed, I must have time to ponder, to let the facts sink into my mind, as you said. It is not only *your* life, *your* honour, and *your* welfare that are concerned. It affects me more than it does you, for I am young, and have a long life before me; you are old, and will soon be in your grave. I hope you have no intention of cheating the law, and marrying again. I can stand a great deal, but not that. I am a jealous woman, and really loved you for a few days. You loved me, too, or you lied to me most wickedly. Is there any other woman you wish to serve as you have served me?"

"If I were free, I should never marry again."

"My dear," she said, in her lightest tone, "it is a wise resolve. Only the young should marry. When I am as old as you I shall enter a convent, and repent, and become good. Till then, I must continue to be wicked. How long do you give me to decide between the two things you have offered me?" [171]

"What time do you require?"

"To-day is Wednesday. Two days—that will be Friday. But Friday is such an unlucky day, and I am so unfortunate! On Saturday—shall it be Saturday? Will you give me till then? Have pity on me! You will not refuse me so short a time as three days, in which I am to decide my fate?"

The words, written down, bear an entirely different construction from that in which she employed them. Her voice was a voice of mockery, and upon her lips was the same pleasant smile with which, I have no doubt, she would have killed me where I stood had it been in her power.

"Let it be Saturday," I said.

"I will come then," she said sweetly, "and see once more the gentleman I swore to love, honour, and obey. Thank you, so much! Will you not kiss me, even now? Will you not as much as shake hands with me? Cruel! If I had known you better, when you begged me to be your wife, I should have hesitated; I should not have trusted my future to the hands of such a man. I had my doubts; I said, 'He is too old, he cannot understand a young heart like mine.' Ah, if I had listened to the voice of prudence! But when was a woman in love prudent? I may arrange my hair at your looking glass, may I not? I am your wife, although you hate me. Thank you once more. What a pretty glass—and what a sweet room! I could live here with you for ever, if you loved and cared to have me. But it can never be, can it? You have found me out. O, how dreadful it is to be found out! Worse for a woman than for a man—a thousand, thousand times worse! My hair has grown longer since I last saw you—don't you think so? And thicker. Feel it. No? How miserable you are! Did you ever really love me, I wonder? If I were a man, and loved a woman as pretty as I am—you can't deny that I *am* pretty; when I walk through the streets with my veil up, nine men out of ten stop and turn to look at me; that's why I wear my veil down. A married woman! They should be ashamed of themselves. But what can a pretty woman do? What was I saying? O, I remember. If I

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were a man, and loved a woman as good-looking as I am, I would go through fire and water for her. I would, indeed! What a woman wants is love, devotion—perfect devotion—and liberty to do whatever she likes. That is all. Else what does a woman marry for? To be a slave? You say you will never marry again. Nor will I—you shall not outdo me in generosity. I may love, but I will never marry—never, never! You men are either fools or something worse—and women, too, are fools when they sell themselves for money, as I did, and tie themselves to creatures who can't appreciate them. I don't mean you, my dear. No—you are too soft, and yielding, and honourable. More women would be happy if there were more men in the world like you. See how happy you have made me—see what you have brought me to!"

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She sank upon a chair, and covered her face with her hands, and I saw tears stealing between her fingers—but I saw, also, that she was watching my face all the while to note the effect her words had upon me. I did not interrupt her in her speech. I stood quietly observing her, and wondering within myself whether there were many women like her, and whether other men were suffering as I was suffering. All the while she was talking she was arranging her hair, and displaying it to the best advantage. Heaven knows how old she is, but as she stood before me, turning occasionally, looking at me through the masses of fair hair which fell around her face, she did not appear to be more than eighteen. Her beauty, her appeals, the tender modulations of her voice, produced no other effect upon me than that of wonder and disgust. I did not allow this feeling to be seen; the stake at issue was too momentous for me, by a sign, to jeopardise the end I was working for. Presently she rose, and completed the arrangements of her hair, which she had purposely prolonged. Then, before putting on her hat and cloak, she asked me for a glass of wine. I had none, and I gave her a glass of water; she tasted it, and threw the rest away, saying:

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"My dear, you should drink wine. It is good for old men; it is nourishing."

Still I did not speak, and as if to compel me, she asked,

"Do they not know your name in this house?"

"They do not," I replied.

"Do you intend them to know it?"

"I intend them not to know it. You can, of course, frustrate my intention if you will."

"I do not wish. I thought you desired to keep it secret, and therefore, when I knocked at the door and it was opened, I did not ask for you by name, I simply asked if a gentleman was in who had taken a lodging here yesterday. The servant answered that he was, and directed me to your room. She did not even see my face. You see how I am endeavouring to fall in with all your wishes—anticipating them, even. But I love a mystery dearly. Good day, my dear. Till Saturday. I will be here, punctually at twelve. Shall I kiss baby for you? No? You are incorrigible."

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And with nods and pleasant smiles she left me, pulling her veil close over her face.



CHAPTER XLIII.

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MR. HOLDFAST'S DIARY.

THURSDAY, *3rd July*.—No news of my son. I see by this morning's papers that another vessel has arrived at Liverpool from New York. It left four days after the "Germanic," so that, up to that time, Frederick could not have called at the hotel for the letter and money waiting there for him. I am growing seriously uneasy. He could not have mistaken my desire for a reconciliation. What can have become of him? He was in poor circumstances. Was he absolutely in want? If he is dead, his death lies at my door. A heavy lot is mine. I shall never again know peace of mind until I and Frederick clasp hands once more in love and friendship.

Perhaps the secret enemy in New York who worked against me—watching my movements and in some mysterious way becoming acquainted with every step I took—was working also against my son, watching him and misdirecting him, as I was misdirected. It is not an unlikely supposition. As I was sent in one direction in search of him, he may have been sent in another in search of me. Thus have we been kept apart from each other. It is certain that, shortly after he called at my hotel, he must have left New York. My hope is, that nothing worse than poverty has befallen him. I am appalled at the thought that he may have been made to disappear, and may never more be heard of. It has been the fate of many a poor fellow in that fevered city. I pray to God that my fears may not prove true.

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The people in this house are very quiet. They do not appear to entertain the slightest curiosity concerning me. I walk in and out as few times as possible, and I have not met one of the lodgers face to face. A man might live here for years in perfect obscurity, and die and be buried without being recognised, if he pleased. There is no lonelier city in the world than London.

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What is my wife doing? Taking counsel of her accomplice, Pelham, and debating with him

whether she shall accept the terms I have offered her. She *must* accept them; she has no alternative but the alternative of poverty and exposure. A life of pleasure is before her; it is all she lives for, and the income she will receive from me will secure it. But should she refuse? No, she will not refuse. With such a cool, calculating villain as Pelham to counsel her, the risk of a public exposure is small.

Friday, 4th July.—The quietest of days. Since Wednesday I have not exchanged a word with a human being. No one takes the slightest notice of me as I walk in and out. Still no news of my son. To-morrow my wife will be here, and there will be an end to my state of inaction.

Saturday, 5th July.—The second interview with my wife has terminated. She could have had no intention of putting me on my guard, but she has done so, and on Monday I shall take a step which will prevent injustice being done to my son, in case he is alive.

My wife came into my room, as on the last occasion, closely veiled, and with spirits as animated.

"My love," she said, removing her hat and cloak, and throwing them on the bed, "not a soul saw me. The servant girl, with her face as black as coal, opened the door, and asked what I wanted. 'The gentleman on the first floor,' I said, and pushed past her. And do you know I took the precaution to disguise my voice. She wouldn't recognise me if she heard me speak in my natural voice. I did this for your sake, my dear—you are so anxious for secrecy. Am I not considerate? I don't mind being seen and known, for I have nothing to conceal, but I must obey you. And how have you been all this time? Well, I hope. How foolish you are to remain cooped up in this miserable house when you have a comfortable home waiting for you! I have expected you—upon my word I have; and your room is ready for you, with a nice fire always burning, and your slippers, placed right and left, just by your arm-chair. O, I know what a wife's duty is. Let me prevail upon you. Come home with me now. I will not reproach you—indeed I will not. I will be just as faithful and loving as I have ever been."

She paused for my answer.

"You are wasting time," I said. "You know well that I shall never again enter my house while you are there!"

"My dear," she said, tapping my arm lightly with a pearl fan I had given her, "you cannot entirely deceive me. I have been thinking a great deal. It is my belief you are a Don Juan. I had my suspicions when you first made love to me—an old gentleman like you falling in love with a girl like me, because I have a pretty face, and bright eyes, and a lovely mouth. You were fond of kissing it once—O, you men, you men! Will artless women ever be a match for you? I am afraid never, you speak so softly, and promise so much. Yes, I have been thinking a great deal, and I know all about it now. I know why you have been absent so long; I know why you come unexpectedly to London, and hide yourself as you are doing; I know why you will not enter your house while I am there."

She paused again, and half sullenly, half gaily, gave me to understand that she expected me to challenge her knowledge.

"It is of no interest to me," I said, "but it may bring us nearer to our real business if I ask you for information on these points."

"Why," she said, with an impudent laugh, "there is another lady in the case, of course, who is to step into my shoes. It is useless denying it. Old men are not to be trusted. Come, my dear, make a clean breast of it. I won't scold you more than I can help. It is quite natural, though. I have my feelings as a woman, and I warn your new fancy to keep out of my path. You must have been a sad rake when you were young—almost as bad as your son, who made love to me in the most shameful manner; to me, his second mother."

I scorned to pursue the subject. Wilful, wicked, sinful and cunning, as she was, I felt that to a certain extent it would be as well to let her have her way with her tongue.

"When you have fully relieved your mind," I said coldly, "I am ready to enter into the business matter which brings us together."

But she had not yet done.

"Fie!" she exclaimed. "Business—business—business! How often are you going to use that word? Is love a business, then? You can tell me, for you must have had hundreds of sad adventures. I have had very few as yet, but there is time for plenty more. My dear, I positively refuse to enter into our special little affair until you assure me there is no other lady in the case."

Compelled to reply, I said, "There is none."

She mocked me with a deep sigh, saying, "You have taken a weight off my heart," and then in a brisk tone, "And now, my dear, we will go into matters." She drew her chair close to the table, and produced a dainty little pocket-book, in which she consulted some slips of paper, a few of them covered with figures. "You offer me," she said, "twelve hundred pounds a year, upon conditions which will cover me with disgrace, and make people point at me. Is that correct?"

"Not quite," I replied. "You have omitted that you are to live out of England in any name you choose except the name of Holdfast. Your new acquaintances will know nothing of your past life."

"It will be a miracle if it is hidden from them," she said, betraying a method in her speech which proved that she had carefully rehearsed what she came prepared to say. "I do not intend to live in a desert. If I am driven by your cruelty from the country I love, and where, with money, a lady may enjoy all the pleasures of life, I shall live on the Continent, in France, Italy, Germany, where I please, but certainly where I can best enjoy myself. English people travel everywhere, and I shall be sure to drop across old acquaintances, or, at least, people who know me at sight. My face is too pretty to be forgotten. Perhaps you will admit that I cannot lose myself entirely,

and that Lydia Holdfast, by whatever name she goes, will always be Lydia Holdfast in the eyes of casual or close acquaintances."

"I shall not relate my troubles to any one," I observed, as yet ignorant of her intention in adopting this line of argument, "nor need you, if you choose to preserve silence."

"Have you not already spoken of what has occurred?" she asked, with a keen glance at me. "Have you not already selected confidants to whom you have poured out false stories of your wrongs?"

"No man or woman in the world possesses my confidence. My griefs are sacred."

"How poetical! But although we shall not talk, other people will. Men and women are so charitable! They don't like scandal, and it hurts them so much to rob even the most innocent woman of her character! No, no, my love; I know the world better than to believe that. Not that I have ever taken away a character, man or woman's, but then everybody is not like me, artless, and simple, and inexperienced!" (No words of mine can convey an idea of the impudent manner in which she thus lauded herself, knowing the while and knowing that I knew, that she was speaking in mockery. If she desired to irritate me by this exhibition of effrontery, she failed. I preserved my composure throughout the entire scene. She continued:) "So, my character would be completely taken away, and ladies with whom I should wish to be on friendly terms would turn their backs upon me. I should be thrown into the company of women who would not be admitted into a decent house, and of men whose only aim would be to pass their time agreeably and play upon my feelings. My dear, I am fond of good society; I doat upon it; and it breaks my heart to think that respectability would shrug its respectable shoulders at me. It is right that I should put it plainly to you, is it not?"

"Go on," I said, "you have more to say, and have come prepared."

"Oh, yes, I am prepared, you see. I am obliged to consult my notes, my poor little head is so weak. You remember how I used to suffer with it, and how often you bathed it for me. Gold would not have been too good for me to eat then, would it? A look would bring you at my feet; you could not do enough for me; and now, I daresay, you would like to give me a dose of poison. What courage I must have to shut myself in here with you alone, where nobody knows either of us, and where you might murder me, and run away without fear of discovery! It is the courage of innocence, my dear. Where did I leave off just now? O, about my being deprived of respectable society, and thrust into the company of blackguards. And for this, and for giving up my beautiful home and position and forfeiting my good name, you offer me twelve hundred pounds a year. And you, worth millions!"

"You mistake. My business is broken up, and I am not so rich as you suppose."

"You are a miser, my dear. You are worth at least ten thousand a year. I do not forget what you told me when you honoured me with your love and confidence. At least ten thousand, and I am to accept twelve hundred. My darling husband, it is not enough. Wherever I live I shall require an establishment. I have your daughter to bring up—the darlindest little thing you ever saw! You shall not see her now if I can prevent it—casting shame upon her, as you have done, before she has learnt to say Mama! I will do my duty by her—a mother's duty, and a father's duty as well, and I will bring her up to hate you. If you live long enough you shall be made to feel it. And now, when she cannot speak for herself, I am to stand like a tame cat, and see her robbed! She is to be made a beggar. Such a beautiful girl as she will have to go in rags, because the father who disowns her is a mean, stingy monster. I hope I do not offend you, my dear, but the truth is the truth, and had best be spoken. Yes, she will be beautiful—but beauty and beggary— Well, we know what becomes of that partnership. She shall not be compelled to sell herself, as I did, to an old money-bag, with no heart, and you shall not cheat her and me of what is due to us. No, my dear, I stand up for my child, as every mother should."

"Tell me," I said, "in as few words as possible, what it is you want."

"I shall use," she replied, "as many words as I please. You would like to rob me of my tongue as well as of my rights. What is it I want? An establishment—money to provide a suitable home for your discarded child."

"How much money."

"Three thousand pounds—not less."

"You shall have it; in addition to the annuity I have offered you."

"How generous you are! What a pity you were not a young man when you met me first! We might really have got on very well together for a few years, until you were tired of me or I was of you. Three thousand pounds will be little enough to furnish with, but I must manage. Then there's the house; and living abroad is so expensive. It is like going into exile—the same as those dear French refugees. It will cost at least three thousand a year; I can't see how it is to be done for less. And to wait every quarter for the cheque to pay servants, and butchers, and bakers, and dressmakers. No, my dear, it would be too harassing—it would be the death of me. So I have consulted a friend—a lady friend—you don't believe me? You think it's a gentleman friend. Well, my dear, I shall not quarrel with you on that point. Say a gentleman friend, then; I'm not particular. He has advised me not to place any dependence on a man who has treated me as you have done. He is right. I will not place dependence on you. I will not take your word, and I will not be satisfied with a paper drawn up by a lawyer of your choosing. Lawyers are rogues; they will do anything for money, and you are rich enough to buy them. No, my darling husband, it must be a sum of money down, and then we will say good bye, and agree never to kiss and be friends. It would be as if we had never known each other."

Desirous to ascertain how far her cupidity had led her, or rather the extent of the demand her associate Pelham had instructed her to make, I pressed her to be quite explicit. With some show of timidity—for the stake she was playing for was enormous—she wrote upon a leaf in her pocket-

book the sum for which she would agree to release me. It was fifty thousand pounds. I tore the leaf in two and threw it into the fireplace, with the simple word, "Impossible."

"Why impossible?" she asked, biting her lips, with a wicked look at me.

"It is more than half my fortune," I replied.

"I am entitled to more than half," she retorted. "I shall have your child to educate and provide for, and a woman's expenses are larger than a man's. Dress, amusements, nurses, governesses—there are a thousand things to pay for which you would never dream of. What I ask for is really moderate. You are lucky you have not to deal with some women; they would not let you off so easily. Let me persuade you, my dear. Put an end to all this worry, give me a cheque, and let us say good-bye to each other."

"I shall put an end to it, if you compel me," I said, firmly, "in the manner I have determined upon, in the event of your refusal to listen to reason. In right and justice you are not entitled to a shilling; your shameful life should properly meet its just punishment, and would, at the hands of a man less weak—I will not say less merciful—than I. The terms I have offered you are foolishly liberal, but I will adhere to them, and am ready to bind myself to them, unless you drive me to another course. I will give you the three thousand pounds you ask for to set up and furnish a house, and I shall require proof that the money is so expended. But as for any other large sum of money down, as you express it, in lieu of the annuity I offer you, or any increase of that annuity, receive from me the distinct assurance that under no possible circumstances shall I consent to it. If I could find plainer and stronger words to impress this upon you, I would do so, but I think you understand me. The friend who is advising you is advising you to your injury, and is mistaken in me. There is a point beyond which it is dangerous to drive me, and if I once turn, you will find yourself a beggar."

"You are growing bold, my love," she said.

"You are mistaken again," I said. "If I were bold, I should order you immediately from this room. If I were bold, I should set the lawyers at work without an hour's delay. But recrimination is useless, and can lead to no good result. Why do you conduct yourself like an actress when we two are alone, and there are no witnesses to be misled or deceived? We know each other. No argument could convince you that I am anything but a weak, old man, who in an unhappy moment entrusted his honour to one who brought shame and misery to his heart and home, or could convince me that you are a good and virtuous woman. Why, then, should we prolong this interview? I made you a most generous offer. You asked me for three days to consider it, and now you come, and for some purpose—not a wise one, I judge—introduce propositions to which you can never induce me to agree."

"I am fighting for my rights," she said sullenly, and I knew that I had made an impression upon her. "You have ruined my life; I might have married a richer man than you. Why did you spoil my chances? It would be a million times better for me if you were dead, for then your property would all be mine, instead of the miserable allowance you offer me."

She suddenly paused, conscious that she had made a mistake. It is likely that she was apprised of her error by an expression in my face produced by her words, for it is a fact that up to this moment I had forgotten that I had made a Will by which everything I possessed was left to her, solely and unconditionally. I had made this Will in haste, after I had broken with my son, who at that time was my heir. It was a proof of my confidence in the woman who betrayed me—one of those foolish acts of which angry men are often guilty, done in haste, to be repented of in leisure unless timefully atoned for. Thank God there is time to repair this error!

I gave no expression to my thoughts; it was necessary to be careful in the presence of such a woman as my wife. But so anxious was she to assure herself of the exact position in which she stood that she over-reached herself in her cunning.

"Have you made another Will?" she asked.

"No," I replied. "There is time before me; I am not yet quite broken-down."

She breathed more freely, and said meekly, "Yes, there is time before you in which you can dispossess me and my child. When this dreadful dispute is over, I shall have no further claim upon you. Are you really determined not to be a little more generous to me? Will you not give me fifteen hundred a year?"

I was not to be deceived by her mock humility; heaven only knows what was hidden beneath it.

"I am not to be moved," I said, "and there must be an end at once to prevarication. Your answer must be 'yes,' or 'no,' and it must be given quickly."

"To-day?" she asked.

"If not to-day, at least within the next three or four days," I replied. "I will no longer be kept in a state of suspense."

She looked at me with a sad expression, which might have deceived another man.

"On Wednesday, then," she said, "at two o'clock, I will give you my final answer. It must be 'Yes,' of course, for you are strong and I am weak, but I will wait till then. I am bound to consult my friend before I commit myself."

All her gaiety appeared to have deserted her. In silence she put on her hat and shawl, and bade me good morning, saying she would come at two o'clock on Wednesday.

I mistrust her; I will delay no longer. On Monday I will draw out another Will, making my son my heir, and in case of his not being alive—which God forbid!—leaving my money to charitable purposes.

It is a relief to reflect that my anxiety regarding my wife will soon be at an end. She cannot but consent to my proposal, and then I shall be free from her for ever. Would to God I had never seen her!

Sunday, 6th July.—This has been truly a Sabbath Day, a day of prayer, to me, and has been passed in contemplation of my past life, and in supplications for the future. If a man could but see the consequences of his errors before he was committed to them, how much misery to himself, how much injustice to others, would be avoided! It is almost incredible that, blessed in the memory of a wife with a pure heart and mind, I should have been led into a second marriage with such a woman as Lydia Wilson. The fault was more mine than hers. She had led a life of shame and duplicity, and it was not to be expected that the simple forming of an acquaintanceship with me would change her character. I should have been wiser, or at least more prudent. I ought certainly to have made an inquiry into the truth or falsehood of the story she told me, or I might have considered that the union of a man of my age with a woman of hers could not be a happy one. It is too late now to repent of an act which has brought its own just and bitter punishment. The only reparation I can make is to endeavour to repair the evil consequences which have ensued. The one aim of my life, after the settlement with my wife is accomplished, will be to find my son. I will advertise for him in the English and American newspapers, and this surely will bring me news of him. But it may not be necessary; he may be with me any time this week. If a father's prayers could bring him to my side he would be here at this moment.

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Monday, 7th July.—I have been employed during a great part of the day in preparing and writing a new Will. Not wishing to consult a lawyer and so to make known my presence in London, and fearful also of delay, I purchased at a stationer's shop, at some distance from Great Porter Square, printed forms of Wills from which I drew out a testamentary disposition of my property. This task occupied me until four o'clock in the afternoon, and the next task was to obtain witnesses to my signature. These could have been obtained in the house, but if I had attempted it I should have destroyed my incognito. I went to the shop of the stationer of whom I purchased the printed forms, and I returned them to him, and made some small purchases, to the amount of a couple of sovereigns. I then asked the shopkeeper whether he would have any objection to witnessing my signature to a Will, and to allowing an assistant who was serving in the shop also to witness it. He consented, and I signed without giving him a clear opportunity of distinguishing my name; the names of the witnesses followed, and the Will was complete. In payment of the service rendered to me I left in the man's shop the goods I had bought and paid for; I had no use for them.

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The Will is before me now, and I have read it carefully over. Everything appears to be stated in proper legal form, and I have no doubt that it sets my last Will completely aside. What I have done myself without the aid of lawyers has been simply a measure of precaution for the next few days. Wednesday, I hope, will be the last day of my enforced retirement.

Wednesday, 8th July.—It is now four o'clock. My wife entered my room at one o'clock, an hour before that appointed for our meeting. I did not hear her step on the stairs or in the passage, and not expecting her I was looking over the Will I made yesterday and the pages of the diary I have kept since I became a lodger in this house. As she entered, suddenly and unexpectedly, I threw a newspaper over my writing, not wishing to excite her suspicions or to arouse her curiosity; but, as I soon discovered, I was not successful. She was in her usual gay mood, and came in with smiles and bright looks.

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"Well, my dear," she said, "here I am, punctual to the minute."

"You are an hour too early," I replied, "our appointment was for two o'clock."

"One o'clock, my dear," she said, correcting me.

"It is immaterial," I said, "and if it bring our business to a speedier conclusion, the mistake of an hour will be agreeable to me."

She nodded pleasantly, and, as in our previous interviews, took off her hat and mantle, and placed them aside.

"You have been busy," she said, pointing to the newspaper which covered my papers. "Are you writing a book?" I did not answer her, and she continued, still preserving her light tone. "Make me your heroine, my love, but do not be too hard to me. Say something good of me if you can. You may say that, after all, I showed my good sense, and agreed to your proposals."

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"Am I to accept this as an acquiescence in the arrangement I have proposed?"

"Yes, my dear; I have grown sensible. I give in to all your terms. I will go away from England, and will never, never return. I will give up the name of Holdfast; I will even forget the name of Lydia, and will go out into the world a new woman. A better one, I hope. There is but one thing I insist upon. Now that I have made up my mind, and that nothing can alter it—nothing, my dear; I would not live with you again if you were to entreat me on your knees—I want this business matter settled at once, this very day."

"How can that be done?" I asked.

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"Easily," she replied. "Draw up a paper for me to sign, and another for you to sign. I will take them away with me, and will show them to my lawyer. Yes, my love, I have consulted a lawyer, and he has advised me to agree to all you propose. If he says the papers are properly drawn out, I will come again to-night, at ten o'clock, and will bring my lawyer with me, to see that they are regularly signed. I will keep my agreement, and you will keep yours, and to-morrow morning I will leave your house, and you can go home and take possession. Nobody but ourselves will be the wiser, and your secret and mine will never be known to the world."

"I am no lawyer," I said; "I do not know whether I can draw up the agreement in legal form."

"Try, my love," she said; "you are fond of writing, and have had great experience. You can put anything you please in the paper you wish me to sign. You can make it, if you like, a confession from me that I have been a faithless wife, and that my child is not yours. I will sign it. That will suit you, will it not? And it will give you such a hold upon me that, if I break my word, you can

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release yourself from me, without ever paying me a shilling. That is fair, I am sure, and afterwards, if you are not satisfied with the agreements, your lawyer can draw up others more binding on both of us. I am so sick of you, my love, that nothing else will satisfy me but an immediate break between us. Do I not put myself entirely in your power? If you refuse now, I shall leave you to take any steps against me you choose."

I considered a few moments, and then consented. To go to law, to sue for a divorce, was a matter of months. The plan she proposed was all in my favour, and it would leave me free to recommence immediately the search for my son. I would draw up such a paper as would bind her beyond hope of appeal, and all danger of publicity would be avoided.

"Who is your lawyer?" I asked.

She produced a letter from a lawyer in Buckingham Palace Road replying to certain points she had submitted to him. I was satisfied, and said that I would endeavour to draw up the agreements. [205]

It was a work of time—of quite two hours—and while I was employed over the papers she sat down before the piano in my room, which I had never opened, and played the sweetest melodies with which she was familiar. She betrayed no impatience; only once did she rise from the piano, and disarranged the papers on the table, in pretended search of her handkerchief.

"Quite an author," she remarked as her eyes fell upon the pages of my diary, among which was my new Will.

Nothing of greater importance occurred. The agreements being ready, she read them over slowly, and simply said:

"You have protected yourself, my love."

"I have stated the truth," I replied, "and your signature will verify it."

She remained with me some short time after this, making frivolous remarks, to which I returned but brief answers. Then she left me, on the understanding that she would come to the house at ten o'clock to sign the papers, which she took with her. [206]

On reflection, I think it will be wise even now to be on my guard against her. She saw the pages of my diary, and might have seen the Will. I will put them out of her reach. The room next to this is empty, and the door is unlocked. I will go and see if I can secrete them there.... There is in that room, in an old-fashioned table, an empty drawer which might easily escape observation. There is a small key in the lock. I will deposit these pages at once in the drawer, where they will be safe for a few hours.

My long agony is approaching its end. Impatiently I wait for the night.

CHAPTER XLIV.

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CAGED.

WITH those words the diary ended.

In breathless silence, oblivious for the time of every surrounding circumstance, Frederick Holdfast perused the record of his father's last hours. What followed, after his father had secreted the papers, was clear to his mind. Mrs. Holdfast had kept her appointment at ten o'clock, accompanied by her "lawyer," who could have been no other than the villain Pelham. By a hapless fatality, the house, No. 119 Great Porter Square, had on that night but one inmate—the man who was never to see another rising sun. The landlady and her lodgers were at a wedding feast; the servant was enjoying the glories of the Alhambra, in the company of her sweetheart. Only Mr. Holdfast remained, and thus his murderers were enabled to enter and leave the house without being observed. Most likely he himself opened the street door for them. In the privacy of his room, with no witnesses near, the mask was thrown off by Mrs. Holdfast and her associate, and demands were made upon Mr. Holdfast with which he refused to comply. Whether the purpose of his visitors was murder would never now be known, but murder was accomplished before they departed, and the unhappy man was left by the wretched pair in the agonies of death. It was necessary, thereafter, for their own safety that they should not be seen in the neighbourhood of Great Porter Square, and it would have excited suspicion had they exhibited the slightest interest in the mysterious murder of a man whose body had not been identified. Before leaving their victim they had taken the precaution to empty his pockets of papers, and to remove from the room everything in writing which might have led to the identification of the body. Having made themselves safe, they left the house, and kept out of sight. But some time afterwards Mrs. Holdfast must have recalled, in conversation with Pelham, the memory of the sheets of paper covered with her husband's writing which she had seen upon the table when she had visited him; these pages were not found in his room, and they were then tormented by the idea that the writing was still in existence, and might one day be discovered to criminate and bring their guilt home to them. It became, therefore, vital to their safety that the papers should not fall into other hands, and for the purpose of searching for them and obtaining possession of them, Pelham had disguised himself as Richard Manx, and had taken an attic in No. 118 Great Porter Square, from which room he could gain easy access to the house in which the murder had been committed. [208]

The circumstantial evidence of guilt was complete, but direct evidence, in his father's own [209]

writing, now lay in Frederick Holdfast's hands. What remained to be done was to bring the murderer to the bar of justice.

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Not a moment was to be lost. It was now late in the night, and Pelham was doubtless upstairs, busily engaged in his last search.

Frederick placed the papers carefully in his breast pocket. His honour was established, his name was returned to him, he was absolved from his oath. He could resume his position in the world, and could offer to the woman he loved an honourable position in society. It was she who had led him to this discovery; had it not been for her courage, the wretches would have escaped, and his father's murder remained unavenged.

"I myself," said Frederick, "will deliver the murderer into the hands of justice. Tonight he shall sleep in a felon's cell."

He had no fear. Single-handed he would arrest Pelham; it was but man to man, and he was armed, and his cause was just.

He listened for a moment. It was a wild night, and the rain was pouring down heavily. The detective and his assistants were in the Square, waiting upon his summons. Nothing but the plashing of the rain was to be heard; no other sound fell upon his ears from within or without. The murderer was working warily in the room above; he himself would be as wary. Cunning for cunning, silence for silence, a life for a life.

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"You murderous villain!" murmured Frederick. "Were it not that I dare not stain my soul with a crime, you should not live another hour!"

In his stocking-feet he crept from the kitchen, and stepped noiselessly up-stairs. In his hushed movements was typified the retribution which waits upon the man who sheds the blood of a human being.

As he ascended the stairs which led to the first floor he was made aware, by the sound of a man moving softly in the room in which his father had been murdered, that Pelham was at work. In a few moments Frederick Holdfast was at the door, listening.

Before he turned the handle, he looked through the key-hole to mark the exact spot upon which Pelham stood, so that he might seize him the instant he entered the room. To his surprise he saw two persons in the room—Pelham bending over the floor boards he had torn up, and the form of a man lying on the bed.

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He could not see the face of the recumbent man; the face of Pelham was clearly visible.

It was not, then, man to man. There were two to one. Justice might be defeated were he to risk the unequal encounter. He determined to call in the assistance of the officers in the Square.

But before he left the house, which was being watched from the front and the back, it would be as well to make sure of the murderer and his companion, so that they should have no possible means of escape. He took from his pocket the key of the room, which he had picked up a few hours ago; with a steady hand he inserted it in the lock, and gently turned it, being unable to prevent the sound of a slight click. Then he crept noiselessly down stairs, opened the street door, closed it softly behind him, and stepping into the road, put a whistle to his lips.

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The summons was not instantly obeyed, and he blew the whistle again, and looked anxiously around. The faint sound of another whistle presently answered him, and in two or three minutes the detective was by his side.

"I was at the back of the house, sir," said the detective, in apology, "giving directions to one of my men, Parrock, a sharp fellow. You have discovered something," he added, noting Frederick's agitation.

"I have found my father's diary," said Frederick, speaking rapidly, "and a Will he made two or three days before he was murdered."

"Making you all right, I hope," said the detective.

"Yes—but that is of no consequence. The diary, which I have read, leaves no room to doubt that my father was murdered by his wife's accomplice, Pelham. The evidence is conclusive, and he cannot escape the law, once we have him safe. He must be arrested this moment. He is in my father's room. I would have secured him myself, but he has another man with him, and I did not care to run the chance of two against one."

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"He has a woman with him, you mean," said the detective, "not a man."

"A man, I mean," replied Frederick; "I saw him with my own eyes."

"And I, with *my* own eyes," rejoined the detective, "saw Mrs. Holdfast enter No. 118 this evening, in company of Richard Manx, otherwise Pelham. Attend to me a moment, sir. I see through it all. Mrs. Holdfast accompanied him to-night into the house. Never mind the motive—a woman's motive, say—curiosity, wilfulness, anything will serve. Pelham does not want her company—she forces it on him. What does he do then? He dresses her in a suit of his clothes, so that they may not attract attention when they leave Great Porter Square to-night for good. She is a noticeable woman, sir, and has a style about her which one can't help remarking. The person you saw was Mrs. Holdfast, dressed in man's clothes. They are both, you say, in the room your father occupied?"

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"Yes, and I have locked them in, so that they cannot easily get out of it."

"Did they hear the key turn?" asked the detective, anxiously.

"I was very quiet, and I think they did not hear the movement. If you are right in your conjecture, they have thrown themselves into our hands; their being together in that room is an additional proof of their guilt."

"Undoubtedly. They are trapped. What's that?" cried the detective, suddenly.

"What?" asked Frederick, following the detective's startled glance, which was directed towards the first-floor window of No. 119.

"A flash! There! Another! Do you see it? By God, sir! they have set fire to the house! Ah, here is Parrock," he said, turning to the man who had run quickly to his side. "What news?"

"The house is on fire," said the man, who was out of breath with fast running.

"Any fool can see that. Get to the back of the house instantly. Take another man with you, and arrest every person who attempts to escape." Parrock disappeared. By this time the flames were rushing out of the front window of the first floor. "Fire! Fire!" cried the detective. "The neighbourhood is roused already. Stand close by the street door, sir, and don't let Pelham slip you. He has set fire to the house, and hopes to escape in the confusion. Leave all the rest to me. There is the door of 118 opening, and there is your young lady, sir, safe and sound. I wish you joy. Waste as little time as possible on her. Your first thought must be for your father's murderers."

As Frederick passed to the street door of 119 he caught Blanche's hand, and she accompanied him. He stooped and kissed her.

"Thank God, you are safe," he said. "Our troubles are over. I have found my father's Will and diary. Pelham is the murderer; he is in this house now—hunted down."

"Hark!" cried Blanche, clinging to him. "There is some one else in the house. That is a woman's scream!"

It was a scream of terrible anguish, uttered by a woman in a moment of supreme despair. Every face turned white as that awful cry floated from the burning building.



CHAPTER XLV.

RETRIBUTION.

WHEN Frederick Holdfast turned the key in the lock, Pelham raised his head, and looked in alarm at Mrs. Holdfast. She, also, hearing the sound, slightly raised herself from the bed upon which she was reclining and looked into Pelham's face. Dazed with fear, they remained thus, transfixed, gazing at each other, and did not speak for full a minute. Then Pelham, with his finger on his lips, looked upward to the ceiling, in the supposition that the sound had proceeded from above. For full another minute neither of them moved.

"Did you hear anything?" asked Pelham, in a whisper. "Speak low."

"Yes," she replied, trembling with fear.

"What do you think it was?"

"God knows," said the terrified woman. "You told me no person was in the house."

"Nor has there been," he said, "nor is there, I believe. But there may be rats. We will give up the house to them. What are you staring at, you fool?" he cried, turning swiftly round.

"I thought I saw a shadow moving behind you," she whispered.

"There's nothing here."

"No, it's gone. It was my fancy. Pelham, I am frightened."

"What did you come here for? I advised you to go home, but you had the devil in you, and would have your way. Let us make an end of this. In mischief's name, what's the matter with you now?"

"Hush!" she exclaimed, seizing his hand.

"Well, what is it?" he demanded roughly.

"I heard a whistle outside."

"What of that? Boys whistling in the streets are common enough."

"It was not a boy whistling. It was a shrill sound, as though some one was calling men about him."

"Or calling a cab."

"Hark! there it is again."

These were the two whistles by which Frederick summoned the detective.

"It is not a boy whistling a tune," said Pelham, "nor a summons for a cab. I don't suppose it concerns us, but you have succeeded in putting a stop to my work. I'll do no more. Your dead husband's Will, if he made one, and anything else he wrote, will soon be out of reach of living man. Now for the finishing touches."

He poured the spirit about the room, and saturated some sheets of paper with it, placing them beneath the boards in such a way as to produce an effectual blaze the moment a light was applied to them.

"I am quite an artist," he said, laughing. "In five minutes there will be a conflagration which will spread too rapidly for a fire engine to extinguish until everything on this floor at least is burnt to ashes. Grace, old girl, this is a business that suits me; I was never meant for milk-and-

water work. The house on fire, and we a mile away, and all danger will be over.”

His gleeful tone jarred upon his guilty associate.

“Work in silence,” she said, with a shudder. “Do you forget what was done in this room the last time we were here together?”

“Forget!” he exclaimed. “No, I shall never forget. But it does not trouble me. Every man for himself—it is nature’s law, and he is a fool who allows himself to be trampled on and ruined, when he has the opportunity of putting his enemy out of the way. Well, it is done, and I am going to reap. These last twelve months I have led the life of a dog; now I’ll live like a gentleman. There! everything is ready. Now for escape. Grace, you go first to the top of the house, and wait for me. The moment I set fire to this rubbish, I will join you. We will get back into the next house, where there will be plenty of people to help to save the furniture; we will mix with them, and in the confusion slip off. A kiss, Grace, for luck!”

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They kissed each other, and she went to the door, and turned the handle, but could not open the door. It was fast.

“My God!” she screamed. “We are locked in!”

The full meaning of this flashed instantly upon them.

“Trapped!” cried Pelham, savagely.

He knew well that the game was up, and that nothing short of a miracle would save him. The sound they had heard was the clicking of the lock; the whistles they had heard were a summons to their pursuers. While they had deemed themselves safe, enemies had been watching them. They were caught in their own trap.

Pelham strove to force the door open, but had not sufficient strength.

“I am as weak as a rat,” he muttered hoarsely, “but there is still a chance.”

He tore the sheets from the bed, and in an incredibly short space of time, working like a madman, knotted them together. His design was to escape from the house by the back window, but he could find no hold for his rope within the room. As he looked eagerly around he felt himself seized by Grace.

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“Save me!” she cried, hysterically. “It is there again—the Shadow of the man we murdered!”

He shook her off, and in her terror, she slipped back, and overturned the candlestick, which was on the floor, with a lighted candle in it. The light instantly communicated itself to the spirit and inflammable matter which Pelham had scattered about, and the next moment the room was in a blaze. Vainly did Pelham strive to beat out the fire. Blinded by the smoke, and the flames which presently enveloped them, they staggered and stumbled in their tomb of fire, and then it was that Grace gave utterance to the terrible cry of anguish which drove the blood from the cheeks of the crowd of people surging in Great Porter Square.

CHAPTER XLVI.

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IN WHICH THE “EVENING MOON” GIVES A SEQUEL TO ITS “ROMANCE IN REAL LIFE.”

WE have much pleasure (said the *Evening Moon*, two days after the fire) in presenting our readers with the last act of a drama which, in plot, incident, and extraordinary development of character, equals anything in the way of sensationalism which has ever graced theatrical boards. The opportunity is an agreeable one to us, as it enables us to do justice to a gentleman who has had reason to complain of what has appeared in our columns concerning him. What we have to say resolves itself into something more than the last act of a drama; it is both that and the commencement of a Sequel which, in all human probability, and because of the nature of the persons engaged in it, will have a happier ending than that which has been closed by the burning down of the house, No. 119, Great Porter Square.

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In our yesterday’s issues we gave the full particulars of that fire. No one was injured except the two wretched beings who met their just and awful fate in the grave they had prepared for themselves. They have passed away from this world, but it will be long before the memory of their crime and its involvements will be forgotten. It has been determined to pull down the fatal house in which the murder was committed, and to rebuild it anew. The house next to it, No. 118, occupied by Mrs. Preedy, lodging-house keeper, received some damage from the fire; but Mrs. Preedy is fully insured, and her loss will be a gain to her—a paradox, but strictly accurate, for the murder in the adjoining house had brought hers into disrepute, and her business was languishing. It will revive now that the fire has burnt out the terror of the crime; and the worthy Mrs. Preedy may congratulate herself upon having gained friends in the persons of Mr. Frederick Holdfast and the intrepid, noble-hearted lady who will shortly bear his name.

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In Mrs. Preedy’s house lived an old bedridden lady, Mrs. Bailey, whose life was with some difficulty saved. She herself placed serious obstacles in the way of her preservation, screaming out when they attempted to remove her from her bed. She clung to this household god with such tenacity that there was nothing for it but to humour the old lady, and to remove it with her. As they carried it down stairs, the covering was by an accident ripped, and there rolled out of it between thirty and forty sovereigns, which Mrs. Bailey had hoarded up since the death of her husband, an event which occurred Heaven knows how many years ago. The distress of the old lady was extreme, but the gold was picked up and returned to its owner, minus a few sovereigns,

which somehow had stuck to the fingers of the searchers. She is, however, no loser by the accident, as Mr. Frederick Holdfast made good the deficiency. It is satisfactory to learn that a cherished tradition current in Great Porter Square, that the old lady's mattress was stuffed with gold, was verified by the ripping of the sacking. Mrs. Bailey will no doubt find another safe for her treasure in the future. The bedridden old lady sustained a loss in the burning of a linnet without a note to its voice, and a very old bull-finch, whose cage hung at the foot of her bed—a sacrifice of life, in addition to the more terrible sacrifice of two human beings, which we were almost forgetting to mention.

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In another part of our paper will be found a full report of the proceedings at the inquest upon the bodies of the man and woman, which were found in the back room of No. 119, Great Porter Square. The inquest was held this morning, and a verdict of accidental death by burning was returned. As a rule such inquests are dull, miserable affairs, and there is but little variety in the evidence presented to the coroner and his panel, but in this special case were elements of unexpected romance which raised it far above the ordinary level of a simple death by misadventure.

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Last evening a private note was sent to our office, signed by Frederick Holdfast, requesting as an act of justice, that the Special Reporter who wrote "The Romance of Real Life" from Mrs. Holdfast's account of her career and misfortunes, should attend and take whatever notice of the proceedings he might deem fit and proper. In accordance with the request our Special Reporter attended, and the present report is written by him for our paper. The disclosures which were made at the inquest were as interesting as they were surprising, and our Reporter thanks Mr. Frederick Holdfast for the opportunity afforded him of being present.

At the inquest our Reporter renewed his acquaintance with Mr. Goldberry, solicitor, a gentleman whose name will be remembered as having voluntarily come forward to defend Antony Cowlrick at the Martin Street Police Court, when, upon the barest suspicion, without a tittle of direct evidence, that person was accused by the police of the murder of a man unknown in No. 119, Great Porter Square. Our readers will remember how stoutly, and under what disadvantages, Mr. Goldberry defended the man wrongfully accused of the crime; how he protested against the numerous remands, and lifted up his voice in the cause of justice against Scotland Yard officialism; and how at length, to the manifest chagrin of the police, Antony Cowlrick was discharged from custody. The particulars of the interview which took place in Leicester Square, a few minutes after Antony Cowlrick's departure from the Police Court, between our Reporter, Mr. Goldberry, and the accused man, was fully reported in our columns. In that interview our Reporter lent Antony Cowlrick a sovereign, which was faithfully repaid. We purpose reprinting in a pamphlet that report and the "Romance in Real Life," in addition to what appears in our present issue relating to the case. They are worthy of a record in a more permanent form than the columns of a newspaper.

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"Do you remember," said Mr. Goldberry to our Reporter, referring to that interview, "that Antony Cowlrick said to me that if at any time he should need my services, he would call upon or send for me?"

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"I do," replied our Reporter, "and I remember, also, that Antony Cowlrick asked you if you thought God would allow the guilty to escape, or that He needed the assistance of a lawyer to punish the man who shed another's blood."

"Yes," said Mr. Goldberry, gravely, "he used those words, and in this case they are justified by events. God has punished the murderers without the assistance of a lawyer."

"Why do you recall the name of Antony Cowlrick?" inquired our Reporter.

"Because I am here to represent him. He has not only paid me for my past services—forcing the money upon me—but he has thanked me for them, which, in the bitterness of his heart, he declined to do, although he was not asked, when he was finally discharged."

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"I had a suspicion," remarked our Reporter, "at that time that he was a gentleman; he spoke like one, and had the manner of one. It was chiefly for that reason I took an interest in him."

"No, no," said Mr. Goldberry, jocosely; "you wanted copy. Every man to his trade."

"I could retort with good effect," said our Reporter, good-humouredly, "but I spare you. Will Antony Cowlrick be here this morning?"

"Yes, and others whom you know."

At this moment a lady and a gentleman entered the room in which the inquest was held, and advancing to Mr. Goldberry shook hands with him. The gentleman was Antony Cowlrick, who, after a few words with his lawyer, turned, and offered his hand to our Reporter.

"I must apologise," he said, "for not having kept the half-appointment I made with you on the day you so generously lent me the sovereign in Leicester Square, but I had my reasons, which you will understand when I tell you as much of my story as I think it proper for you to know."

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"I attend here," said our Reporter, "on behalf of my paper, in response to a letter sent to our editor by Mr. Frederick Holdfast."

"I am Frederick Holdfast," said the gentleman. "Antony Cowlrick was an assumed name; I could not use my own when I was falsely accused of the murder of my father."

He turned aside with quivering lips, and our Reporter, holding his grief in respect, did not intrude upon it. The face of the lady who accompanied Frederick Holdfast appeared singularly familiar to our Reporter, and his curiosity was presently appeased by Mr. Goldberry, who informed him that she was the lady who, by the happiest of chances, met Mr. Frederick Holdfast in Leicester Square after his discharge.

"Were she willing to allow herself to be used in such a way," observed the lawyer, "her photograph to-morrow could be sold in thousands all over England. But she does not belong to that class of woman. She is a heroine, in the truest sense of the word. Mrs. Holdfast, who

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supplied you with a Romance in Real Life fit for a novel instead of the columns of a newspaper, would not, in such circumstances as these, have withstood the temptation. But there are women and women."

"I grant you," said our Reporter, "that I was deceived in the character of Mrs. Holdfast. Am I the first who has been beguiled by the soft speeches of a fair woman? And, my dear sir, if you want novels and romances, take my word for it, you cannot do better than go to the columns of a newspaper for them. What has become of Mrs. Holdfast's baby?"

"The child will be cared for," replied Mr. Goldberry, "by Frederick Holdfast, and will be brought up in ignorance of her mother's crimes."

The proceedings at the inquest commenced languidly, but were soon brightened by the extraordinary revelations made by the witnesses. The bodies of the two persons burnt to death were identified, and then evidence was given, in dramatic sequence, in proof that, at the time of their death, the deceased were engaged in unlawful proceedings, and that the male deceased had formed a deliberate plan for setting fire to the house. [234]

Mrs. Preedy, lodging-house keeper, deposed to the letting of a furnished attic to a man who gave the name of Richard Manx, and who spoke like a foreigner. The rent of this attic was three shillings a week, but she had never seen the colour of Richard Manx's money; he "gave out" to her that he was very poor; she had no doubt he was the man who was found dead in the next house; neither had she any doubt that it was he who had spread the report that her house was haunted, and that he did it to ruin her. This witness rambled in her evidence, and caused great laughter by her irrelevant replies to questions.

Mrs. Whittaker, lodging-house keeper in Buckingham Palace Road, deposed to the letting of her first-floor to Mr. Pelham at a rental of three guineas per week. He paid his rent regularly, and she believed him to be a gentleman of considerable means. She recognised the body of the male deceased as Mr. Pelham. [235]

The principal detective employed by Mr. Frederick Holdfast testified that the male body was that of Richard Manx, otherwise Pelham, a notorious blackleg; that he had lodged at No. 118, Great Porter Square as Richard Manx, and in Buckingham Palace Road as Mr. Pelham; that he (the detective) was employed to watch the deceased on suspicion that he was implicated in the murder of Mr. Holdfast, senior; that on the night of the fire he saw a female enter 118, Great Porter Square, in the company of the deceased; and that this female was Mrs. Holdfast, widow of the gentleman who had been murdered some months ago.

A sensation was then caused by the appearance of Mr. Frederick Holdfast as a witness. He recognised the bodies as those of Mr. Pelham and Mrs. Holdfast, his father's second wife. Before his father contracted a second marriage he had an acquaintance with the deceased persons in Oxford. Mr. Pelham was a blackleg, and had been expelled from the company of gentlemen for cheating with dice; and Mrs. Holdfast was a woman not entitled to respect. The witness, in reply to questions put by his lawyer, Mr. Goldberry, said he was the man who, under the name of Antony Cowlrick, had been wrongfully charged at the Martin Street Police-court with the murder of a gentleman, who, it was now known, was his father; and that he had in his possession evidence in his father's handwriting which proved, beyond the possibility of doubt, that his father had been murdered by one or both of the deceased. The other portions of this witness's evidence, relating to his taking possession of the house No. 119 Great Porter Square, and to the watch he set upon Mr. Pelham's movements, are fully detailed in our verbatim report of the inquest, and will be found most startling and dramatic. [236]

Even more dramatic was the evidence of the next witness, Blanche Daffarn, Mr. Frederick Holdfast's *fiancée*, a young lady of great personal attractions. For the purpose of clearing her lover from the dreadful accusation brought against him, she had disguised herself as a servant, and had taken service as a maid-of-all-work with Mrs. Preedy. It was through her instrumentality that Pelham and Richard Manx were discovered to be one and the same person, and had it not been for her courage and devotion there is but little doubt that the guilty ones would have escaped. She gave her evidence with clearness and modesty, and she was frequently interrupted by murmurs of applause, which the Coroner did not attempt to suppress.

It might have been supposed that the climax of interest was reached when the fair witness, towards whom every face in the room was turned in admiration, took her seat; but it was not; a higher point was attained upon the appearance of a little girl, a mere child, whom our Reporter at once recognised as Fanny, a match girl, with whom our readers have already made acquaintance. The brightness, the vivacity, and the adventures of this little waif in connection with the case, no less than her sensibility and gratitude towards her guardian angel, Miss Blanche Daffarn, produced a profound impression. It would be hard to say whether tears or smiles predominated while this intelligent and grateful child stood before the Coroner; both were freely produced by the wonderful touches of nature which gleamed through little Fanny's narrative, which she was allowed to relate almost without interruption from Coroner and jury. It is pleasant to be able to state that Fanny's future is made safe; Mr. Frederick Holdfast and his *fiancée* are her protectors. The child is rescued from the gin shop and the gutter. [237]

The inquest was over, and still the persons in the crowded room lingered for a parting glance at those who had played their parts in the strange and varied drama. The interest in the proceedings had extended beyond the Court, and a large concourse of persons had gathered outside, eager to see the brave young lady and the child, whose names will be mentioned in terms of admiration in every home in the kingdom. Such is the power of the newspaper. To convey to remote distances, into village and city, to the firesides of the poor and the rich, the records of ennobling deeds, and to cause "God bless you little Fanny!" "May you live happy lives, Frederick and Blanche!" to be breathed by the millions whose hearts shall be stirred by this story of love and crime, of cunning which over-reached itself and suffering which blossomed into [238]

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sweetness, the last scenes of which were enacted in a common lodging-house in Great Porter Square.

THE END.

Transcriber's note

Punctuation errors have been corrected silently. Also the following corrections have been made, on page

iv "XLIV" changed to "XLVI" (XLVI.—In which the "Evening Moon" gives a sequel)

12 "be" changed to "he" (in secret to kill the father he betrayed!)

23 "the the" changed to "the" (raised the child's head)

32 "sindirect" changed to "indirect" (in an indirect way)

50 "were" changed to "where" (into the shop where people are served)

84 "Mr." changed to "Mrs." (gave her to deliver to Mrs. Holdfast)

165 "thoughtful" changed to "thoughtful" (Kind, thoughtful husband)

189 "a" changed to "as" (in as few words as possible)

229 "in in" changed to "in" (what appears in our present issue).

Otherwise the original has been preserved, including inconsistent spelling and hyphenation.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK GREAT PORTER SQUARE: A MYSTERY. V. 3

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