Fingertips

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One of the Sensational Experiences of Diana Marburg, the Oracle of Maddox Street

By L. T. Meade and Robert Eustace

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I was sitting in my drawing-room late one afternoon in the end of a sunny and hot July, when Miss Kate Trevor was announced.

My brother Rupert and I had just been carrying on a discussion as to where we were to spend the holidays. We had come to no decision, and Kate's appearance on the scene was very welcome.

"How nice to catch you at home, Di!" she exclaimed. "How do you do, Mr. Marburg?" she continued, turning to my brother and shaking him heartily by the hand. "I was afraid you had flown like the rest of the world."

"We have neither of us yet made up our minds where to go," he answered. "The Continent does not appeal to us, and we have neither time nor money to visit places further afield."

"Where are you going, Kate?" I asked. "You look as if you needed a holiday too —you are quite thin and pale. Is anything the matter?"

She colored slightly and glanced at Rupert.

"You want me to go away?" he said.

He rose lazily from his chair and left the room.

The moment he had closed the door behind him, Kate turned to me.

"With your usual penetration, Diana," she said, "you see below the surface. There is something the matter, and I think— I do think that if relief does not come soon, I shall lose my senses."

As she spoke, her dark, lovely eyes filled with tears; the color mounted into her

cheeks, leaving them the next instant paler and more wan than ever.

“You look quite ill,” I said. “What can be the matter?”

“I can put the case in a nutshell,” she replied. “My difficulty and my misery are both common enough. I am on the eve of becoming engaged to one man, while with all my heart I love another.”

“You love Captain Cunnyngham,” I said. “I know all about that, remember. I have seen him, and I approve. You, as his wife, will be one of the most envied women in the world.”

As I spoke, I glanced at her with all the admiration I felt for so beautiful a girl. Kate was a friend of mine, but I knew little or nothing about her people or her belongings; but it was only necessary to look into the depths of her soft black eyes to know that through some ancestor she must hail from the sunny south. No other clime could produce such raven locks and such a clear olive complexion. Her little features were straight and perfect in their own way, her lips coral red, her teeth a row of pearls.

Now the piquant little face was quite wan with suffering, and the coral lips drooped with all the pain of indecision.

“You are engaged to Captain Cunnyngham,” I said. “Have you ceased to love him, that you speak of your engagement in such terms?”

“My engagement to Jim is broken off,” she replied. “Not that I love him less; on the contrary, I care more for him than I ever did before; but circumstances are against us both, and even Jim himself has said that we must not think of marriage for the present.”

“Then what about your all but engagement to another man?” I asked.

“*I* am coming to that,” she answered. “It is a long story, Diana, and I can only give you its mere outline. I met six months ago a man well known in London society, of the name of Sir Edward Granville. He fell in love with me and asked me to marry him. I refused, but he would not take my refusal. He asked me again, and I told him that I was engaged to Jim.

“Three months afterwards poor Jim lost a lot of money on the Turf, and on

making inquiries I found that he had done this in Sir Edward Granville's company. He was nearly distracted, and came to me himself and suggested that as far as any tie between us existed, we were to be absolutely free. The poor fellow was quite broken-hearted when he made this proposal. I agreed to it, for there seemed no help for it; but since then I have been sorry that I yielded.

"Immediately after my engagement with Jim was broken off, Sir Edward brought fresh pressure to bear. My mother exercised all her influence to induce me to accept so wealthy a man, and to give her the gratification of knowing that I had made a brilliant match. My father, who has lately been terribly short of money, added his intreaties to my mother's. Still I was firm, although my life for the last six months has been little short of misery.

"A week ago Sir Edward Granville called and asked to see me. I was forced to see him, although I longed to refuse. But to my great relief I found his attitude towards me considerably altered. He said quite frankly that he had been thinking over matters. That he loved me as much as ever, but on his honor as a gentleman he would no longer persecute me. He asked me to trust him.

"I was surprised and grateful, and I said that I would. He then begged for a proof of my trust. He said that he had taken a house on the river at Goring for the season, that he was making up a house party, and that Captain Cunnyngham was to be one of the guests. His special request was that my mother and I should spend a week at Goring.

"I promised. I cannot say whether I was doing right or wrong, but I promised. Mother and I go to Goring on the 1st—that is next Thursday. And, Diana, now for your part in this comedy or tragedy, for Heaven only knows which it will turn out. Sir Edward has sent you a special invitation. It seems that he has met you in the house of a mutual friend. Here is his invitation. You must accept it for my sake."

She tossed a letter into my lap. I opened and read it. It ran as follows:

Dear Miss Marburg,—

Unless you have already made definite plans for your holiday, will you do me the honor of joining my house party at Goring on the 1st?[illegible] Your friend, Miss Trevor, will be there. She is bringing you this note, and I hope will persuade you to come.—Yours truly,

Edward Granville.

“It is very kind of Sir Edward,” I said, “but I scarcely know him. What can he want me for?”

“Never mind what he wants you for, Di. Just remember that I want you—that you may be of the most enormous use to me. Come you must. You dare not leave me alone in my present predicament.”

“I don’t like it,” I said, rising and beginning to pace up and down the room. “I wonder you arranged to go. You don’t consider poor Captain Cunnyngham, when you allow yourself to be made love to by another man in his presence.”

“Sir Edward has promised not to make love. Don’t be nasty and spiteful, Di. Say at once that you will come.”

As she spoke, the beautiful girl put her arms round my neck, and looked into my face with such pleading in her eyes that it was impossible to resist her.

“Of course I’ll come,” I answered. “I like you far too well to leave you in the lurch.”

“I knew you would not fail me,” she exclaimed. “Now I shall be quite happy, and shall be equal to the occasion, whatever it may be.”

A few moments later she left me, having arranged that she and her mother would call for me on Thursday morning and drive me to Waterloo.

When we were alone, I told Rupert where I intended to spend the first few days of my holidays.

“Do as you like of course, Di,” was his answer; “but I wish you were not going.”

“Why?” I asked.

“I would rather my sister did not stay in Sir Edward Granville’s house.”

“What do you mean?” I exclaimed.

“Only this,” he said. “Granville is not the sort of man I care about, though I have

heard nothing definite against him. Go now, however, as you have promised, and tell me when you come back whether my intuitions are correct or not."

Rupert's words gave me a vague sense of uneasiness; yet I was glad I had promised not to desert Kate in this crisis in her affairs.

On the following Thursday, Mrs. Trevor, Kate and I went down to Goring. Our host met us at the station and gave us all a most cordial welcome. As we drove to the house I watched Sir Edward with considerable curiosity. I had met him before, but until now I had no reason to feel any special interest in him. He was a clean-shaven, spare-looking man, with restless grey eyes and a hard mouth. It needed but a glance to show me that his was the character to carry through his own wishes regardless of pain to others.

Almost by second nature, as these thoughts coursed through my brain, I glanced at his hands, which were ungloved. I noticed the long and broad thumb of an iron will—the spatulate fingers of precision and determination. The man who has these characteristics sticks at nothing to obtain his ends. I have seen them in the hands of great generals and also in the hands of great criminals. I looked from the baronet to Kate, who was talking in her liveliest style and looking more sprightly and bewitching than I had ever seen her.

As it was late in the day when we arrived, we were shown at once to our respective rooms in order to dress for dinner. I had brought my maid with me, and sat to rest for a few minutes while she unpacked my things. In less than an hour I went down to one of the big drawing-rooms, where from twenty to thirty guests were assembled. Amongst them I saw Kate, who, in a very simple white dress with a bunch of lilies in her belt, looked fragile and lovely.

She had the gracious bearing and regal appearance of a young queen, and as she turned to talk to a man who stood near I did not wonder at Sir Edward's infatuation. For something had brought the final touch of beauty to those delicate features, and there was an expression in her eyes which only love itself could awaken. The softness joined to the fire, the timidity joined to the strength, were enough to captivate any man, and Sir Edward, not far off, saw this look directed to another man. I watched him although he did not know it, and I saw him clench one of his hands tightly, while his face turned livid.

Jim Cunnyngham was a young guardsman by profession. He was fair and

stalwart and squarely built. I knew him well, having met him before on many occasions; but although at first sight he looked as well and handsome as ever, I soon observed a change in him. Some suspicious crow's feet were beginning to show round his merry blue eyes, his face was thin, and when he was not looking at or talking to Kate, he had the expression of one quite bowed down by care.

I sank into a seat, and my host came up and introduced me to one or two people. Presently he brought Captain Cunnyngham to my side.

"Will you take Miss Marburg in to dinner, Cunnyngham?" he said.

The meal was announced, and we went through the library into the spacious dining-room in a distant wing.

We were scarcely seated before Captain Cunnyngham bent towards me.

"I cannot tell you," he said, "how glad I am that you are here. Have you come with any intention of reading our hands?" "

"I have come for rest, not on business," was my reply.

"All the same, I shall beg of you to have a look at my hand," he said. "Your curious profession interests me."

"But have you any real belief in my art, or do you treat it as an amusing pastime?" I said.

"I cannot say that I absolutely believe in palmistry," he said, "but I have sufficient faith in it to treat it with respect, and also to have recourse to it. A fortnight back I had my character and future told me by one of your craft in London, and am anxious to have an independent opinion to see if the two correspond."

"To whom did you go?" I asked.

"Madame Sylvia, in Chester Street."

"May I ask whether she gave you a good character or the reverse?"

"I am quite willing to answer you," he replied, with a grim laugh; "her

prognostications were the reverse of pleasant. She said, too, that my hands were most extraordinary; she photographed them and had casts taken, and gave me a long written opinion. I went to see her with Sir Edward. He, apparently, has the greatest faith in her."

Sir Edward must have overheard the last words, for he bent towards me from his place at the head of the table.

"I take the deepest interest in palmistry, Miss Marburg," he said, "and if you will honor me by looking at my hand by-and-by I shall be much obliged."

I replied gladly in the affirmative—I was all too anxious to study Sir Edward's palm.

He resumed his conversation with his right hand neighbor, and I turned to Captain Cunnyngham.

"Have any of Madame Sylvia's predictions come to pass?" I asked.

"Yes, I am sorry to say," he replied; "I had a very bad time lately at Goodwood with Sir Edward, and other things have also gone wrong," he added.

"You mean that you have lost money?"

"Yes, far more than I could afford. I owe at the present moment between twenty-five and thirty thousand pounds, and how I am to pay it, Heaven only knows. I backed Sir Edward's horse for the Cup. He told me it was a certainty. I have lost heavily also at ecarte. You don't know, perhaps, that our host is himself a confirmed gambler. But he is one of the lucky ones."

Captain Cunnyngham sighed. After a moment he said again:

"Luck follows his footsteps as certainly as it eludes mine. He has great wealth, and is always adding to his possessions. And the climax of his good luck, Miss Marburg,

"What?" I asked.

"The winning of Kate Trevor."

“You are mistaken,” I said, “he has not won her.”

“Watch her, and tell me that again,” was his answer.

Sir Edward had been obliged to take a married lady into dinner, but he had managed that Kate Trevor should sit on his other side. He was looking at her now as he talked, and she was returning his glance. Bright as stars were her eyes, and her merry laughter reached our ears. Sir Edward was telling her about an ornament of great value which he had in his possession, and I heard him say that he would show it to the entire party after dinner.

When we returned to the drawing-room Kate made her way to my side.

“Now tell me exactly what Jim has been talking to you about,” she said.

“He said that Sir Edward Granville is invariably lucky,” was my answer, “and that amongst all the treasures which fate and fortune have tumbled into his lap, the greatest of all will soon be his.”

She did not affect to misunderstand me— tears filled her eyes.

“Does Jim really think that?” she said.

“I am afraid he does,” I replied.

She was silent, the pretty white hand which lay on her white dress trembled— with a sudden nervous movement she broke off one of the lilies at her belt, and began to pull it to pieces.

“I heard you and Sir Edward talking about a jewel,” I interrupted—“a jewel or an ornament?”

“An ornament,” she said—“a curious thing of great value which Sir Edward has inherited from a gipsy ancestor. He told me that since his great-grandfather married a true Romany the luck of his house has been proverbial. She brought the ornament into the family, and as long as the head of the house holds it he obtains all he wishes in love, war, or business.”

“But if it goes?” I said.

“Then he dies, goes bankrupt, or morally ruined.”

“And does he believe this nonsense?” I queried.

“As much as you believe in the lines on the human hand,” she answered. “But, come, here is Sir Edward, and he has brought the ornament with him,”

Our host now stood in the centre of the great hall and held what looked like a Maltese Cross in his hand. The ornament measured six inches each way, and was a perfect blaze of diamonds and rubies. None of the stones were particularly large, but their number was bewildering.

Sir Edward looked around him, his eyes met mine, and he suddenly to my surprise put the cross into my hand,

“You would like to examine it, Miss Marburg?” he said.

I looked carefully at the glittering and lovely thing.

“What is it worth?” I asked.

“Considerably over thirty thousand pounds,” was his reply.

Then he added, dropping his voice, and speaking as if to me alone, although Miss Trevor and Captain Cunnyngham heard every word he uttered.

“The miracle is that I have kept this cross so long, for it has a very special market value. One big stone is generally safe, for a thief cannot well dispose of it; but if this were stolen it could be easily broken up and the diamonds and rubies, none of them specially large in themselves, could be disposed of separately. Now I will return it to my safe in the library—but pray wait for me, Miss Marburg, for I have a special favor to ask of you.”

He was absent for about two minutes— when he returned he came to my side.

“Will you give us a short s�ance?” he asked. “I beg for this favor at the request of my guests.”

I paused for a moment, then I said quietly:

“I will do so on a special condition—will you allow me to read your hand first of all?”

He colored, and I saw a look of annoyance in his eyes, but his reply came quickly.

“With pleasure. May I conduct you to the library?”

I seated myself in a chair at the head of the room, and one by one those who wished to consult me entered. Sir Edward was the first. His hand bore out all my ideas with regard to his character. There wag obstinacy, which could amount to cruelty; there was a passionate and absorbing selfishness; and, what gave grim significance to those two qualities an overmastering sense of superstition. I mumbled a few words in praise of what small virtues he possessed, and as I saw that he was all too anxious to get the ordeal over, quickly dismissed him.

One by one several of the visitors consulted me, and at last it was Captain Cunnyngham’s turn. I bent over his hand with great interest. There was no question that the good qualities in it largely predominated, but I was disappointed to perceive how a certain weakness of character in his face was repeated in his hand. I gave him as fair an estimate as I could, of his better qualities, and he left me with a smile of satisfaction on his face. Poor fellow![illegible] I pitied him from the bottom of my heart. Beyond doubt he was in Sir Edward’s power, and Sir Edward could be cruel to gain his ends.

On the following morning but one I had an insight into the true motive of this house party. Kate Trevor, Captain Cunnyngham, and I had not been invited to meet together in Sir Edward’s house without a very definite reason.

The morning in question happened to be a glorious one, and I awoke earlier than usual. I determined to get up and have a stroll by the river’s bank before breakfast. Accordingly I rang for my maid, Parker. It was a few moments before she appeared. When she entered the room, her usually placid face was blazing with excitement.

“Oh, miss!” she cried, “such a dreadful thing has happened in the night.”

“What do you mean?” I answered.

“The house has been broken into, miss, and Sir Edward Granville’s diamond and

ruby cross has been stolen."

"Impossible!" I exclaimed. "Why, he keeps it in a safe, which is supposed to be burglar-proof."

"Yes, miss, but the safe was opened in the night and the cross taken. None of the other jewels or plate were touched. For that matter, Sir Edward hadn't much down here. The cross is gone, however, and they say it takes the family luck away with it—Sir Edward is almost off his head."

"How was the theft discovered?"

"The butler thought he heard footsteps early this morning, miss, and he went to arouse Sir Edward, but when they got to the library it was too late, for Sir Edward's desk was broken open, and also the tin box where he keeps the keys of the safe. The safe has been burgled and the thief has escaped."

"Is it known how he got in?"

"That's the strange thing, miss, for neither doors nor windows, as far as we can tell, have been touched. The notion is that someone in the house has done it—but who, is the question. Sir Edward has telegraphed for detectives to Scotland Yard. I never saw a gentleman in such a state. Fit to tear his hair, he is; the local police are with him now."

I hastily dressed and went downstairs.

Several of the guests were standing about in different groups in the hall. Our host was nowhere to be seen. The subject of the robbery was the one topic on everyone's lips.

Who could have done it?□ and how was it done?□ were the problems which riveted the attention of each of us at this moment. Presently a door to our right opened, and Sir Edward, accompanied by a police inspector, joined us.

"My dear friends," he said, "you must not let my loss make you all miserable. Do go out and enjoy yourselves. Breakfast will be ready presently."

"But what steps do you propose to take, Sir Edward?" said an elderly gentleman now coming forward. His name was General Raglan.

“I have sent for detectives from Scotland Yard,” was Sir Edward’s answer. “Until they arrive nothing can really be done.”

“When do you expect them?”

“Probably between nine and ten o’clock.”

“Then,” said General Raglan, glancing round at us all, “I think I speak in the names of everyone present. We should like to be in the house when your detectives arrive—in order to give the police all the help in our power towards the elucidation of this mystery.”

“I am very much obliged to you, General Raglan,” said Sir Edward, a look of relief stealing over his face. “I did not like to ask you, but it will be best for all of us to have the matter properly investigated.”

“That is precisely what I have informed Sir Edward,” said the police inspector, now speaking for the first time.

Shortly before ten o’clock the London detective arrived, and at General Raglan’s suggestion we all assembled in the hall. We stood about there in groups, and I found myself not far from Captain Cunnyngham. His face was pale and he looked strangely nervous. Once he came close to me and glanced at me as if about to say something, but the next instant he turned aside, evidently unable to disclose what troubled him. His depression was remarked by more than one person present, but strange to say Kate Trevor did not seem to notice it.

Kate was in wonderfully good spirits. There were spots of vivid color on her cheeks caused by the excitement of the hour. She laughed and talked merrily, and was eager in her conjectures with regard to the nature of the burglary. I saw Captain Cunnyngham glance at her once or twice in surprise, and I must own that her manner troubled me not a little. But after watching her closely, I came to the conclusion that a great deal of her riotous spirits was put on, and that in reality she felt as strangely nervous as the rest of us.

In about half-an-hour Sir Edward joined us. He walked quickly through the hall, and stood on a raised platform at one end. His face looked hard and white, and I never liked his expression less.

“I am extremely sorry, ladies and gentlemen,” he said, in a loud voice, “that this

most unfortunate affair has happened while you are my guests. It is very kind of you to assemble here to listen to what I have got to say. Inspector Fawcett from Scotland Yard has been with me for the last half hour, and, with the aid of the local police, we have gone most carefully into the matter.

“The inspector and the police have arrived at the unanimous conclusion that the robbery has been effected by some person in the house, or at least by some person in collusion with someone outside. This is abundantly proved by the fact that no windows or doors have been tampered with, that there are no footmarks on the soft grass outside, that there is not the slightest sign of disturbance in any of these directions.

“By a lucky chance Inspector Fawcett has discovered a clue, and this clue he wishes to put to the test at once. Now, ladies and gentlemen, I am put into a most unpleasant predicament. Inspector Fawcett cannot put his clue to the test without your collaboration. But if you refuse to help me I have not a word to say.”

“We will help you,” said General Raglan. “I speak, I am sure, in the names of everyone present?”

“Certainly,” echoed each voice in the hall.

Sir Edward bowed.

“Thank you,” he said; “the matter is of great importance to me, and I should like the clue so miraculously afforded to be brought to its just conclusion.”

“What is the clue?” asked General Raglan.

“I will tell you. Yesterday afternoon a painter came here to varnish a cabinet in which I keep the billiard balls. This cabinet was put into a cupboard in order not to be used until it was dry. To my certain knowledge no one entered the cupboard between the time when the painter returned me the key and the time of the burglary. At three o’clock this morning my butler drew my attention to the cupboard door. I found that the lock had been forced, and the thief, who had previously broken open my desk and also the tin box where I keep the key of the safe, had entered, opened the safe, and removed the diamond pendant. Having committed the theft, he returned the key to the tin box, which he locked, but he was unable to lock the desk or the door of the cupboard, having no keys for the purpose.

“Now, pray listen. By a remarkable chance it has just been discovered that the thief on entering the cupboard, must have bent down to open the safe, and in doing this rested his hand upon one of the knobs of the newly-varnished cabinet, and, the varnish not being dry, an impression of the palm of his hand __ had been left upon it.”

An audible murmur of sensation ran through the group as Sir Edward made this startling disclosure.

“I have had the knob removed,” he continued, “it is now in the possession of Inspector Fawcett. The request I have to make is that each person will in turn go into the library and submit his or her hand to Inspector Fawcett for comparison with the impression on the knob. The same ordeal I shall ask my servants to submit to. I have one thing further to say. Among my guests there is a lady who is specially skilled in the marks of the hand. Miss Marburg, by Inspector Fawcett’s request, I have to ask you if you will kindly give your services in the impending examination?”

“Certainly, Sir Edward,” I replied.

“We will all gladly submit our hands for examination,” said a gentleman present.

The London detective now motioned me to follow him, and the three police officers and I entered the library, and closed the door.

Inspector Fawcett showed me the newly-varnished wooden knob, holding it carefully in his hand as I gazed at it.

The next moment I could have screamed aloud, for the impression of the hand which I looked at I instantly recognised. I knew the markings of the human hand too well to have the least doubt. I was gazing at the reverse impression of the left hand of Captain Cunnyngham, which I had studied so carefully two nights before.

“Do you recognise this impression, Miss Marburg?” said Inspector Fawcett, looking me full in the face.

“I do,” I replied instantly, “but if you proceed with the examination you will quickly discover it for yourself.”

“You will not say anymore?”

“No,” I answered, “nothing more at present.”

He bowed to me, and then proceeded quickly with his examination.

One by one the visitors filed into the library, one by one their hands were compared with the impression of the hand on the knob—they then retired again. At last it was Captain Cunnyngham’s turn. His face was very white, but he entered the room with a firm and steady step. His eyes met mine—something in the expression of my face must have put him on his guard. He looked full at the detective.

“Before you put my hand to the test,” he said, “I wish to tell you that I know absolutely nothing of this matter.”

Detective Fawcett gave him a quick glance, then looked at me, and then went through the usual examination.

“Will you, Miss Marburg,” he said, “give your careful attention?”

We both bent over the Captain’s hand, looking carefully at the lines. One by one they corresponded with those on the wooden knob.

“There is no question, sir, that the lines on the knob and the lines in your hand correspond exactly,” said the detective. “Is not that your opinion, Miss Marburg?”

“I am sorry to say it is,” I answered. “It is not within the bounds of possibility that any other hand could have made the impression which we are now looking at. Line for line, mount for mount, everything precisely corresponds.”

“It is enough evidence for my purpose,” said the detective. “Captain Cunnyngham, it is my painful duty to ask Sir Edward Granville to give you in charge for breaking open this safe and stealing the diamond and ruby pendant.”

Captain Cunnyngham reeled against the wall as the man said these words. It was just as if someone had struck him a physical blow. He did not utter a word, nor attempt to defend himself.

The impression on the knob was horrible in its perfect clearness—the palm of the hand was absolutely distinct.

Inspector Fawcett, who seemed intensely interested, now held the knob in the same position in which it was when on the cabinet, in order to see as far as possible how the thief had held it in order to get the necessary impression. As he did so, the light fell full on the cabinet and I started forward. I saw for the first time something else. This was none other than the clear impression of four fingertips on the varnished surface of the cabinet just beyond the knob. These fingertips revealed the exact minutiae of the skin ridges.

I felt myself turning pale as I noticed them, for I saw that, by leaving these marks of the fingertips, poor Captain Cunnyngham had doubly convicted himself of the crime; as surely, in fact, as if he had confessed it fully. I remembered Professor Gallon's well-known and exhaustive researches on finger-prints, the fact which he has abundantly proved being that no two persons in the world have the same skin ridges, and also that these ridges never alter in the most remote degree, except in growth, from babyhood to old age. The evidential value of these skin ridges is so great that where they are brought into requisition no escape is possible. Beyond doubt, the finger tips on the varnish would settle the matter at once without further discussion, and I felt forced to draw the detective's attention to them.

He smiled grimly.

"That is true," he said. "These marks will of course clinch the matter. They are most important evidence."

"Well," I said, "for my own satisfaction will you kindly allow me to take an impression of Captain Cunnyngham's finger tips and compare them with those marked on the cabinet?"

"There is no objection," was the answer.

In a few moments I had melted a square bar of sealing-wax and taken an impression of the finger tips of Jim Cunnyngham's left hand, the hand in question.

"Give me one moment while I make a cursory examination," I said, and, taking out my lens, I began to focus first one finger tip and then the other, and finally to

examine the impression on the varnish.

The next instant I uttered a cry, and seizing Captain Cunnyngham by the hand, began wringing it in an ecstasy of delight, for I could not find words to express myself coherently at the moment. Both the Captain and Inspector Fawcett must have thought that I had suddenly gone mad.

“Cleared, acquitted, free!” I almost shouted. “The Correspondence of the palm is nothing when we have got this. By what means, or by what hand that impression was made, it is absolutely certain that it is not yours—certain beyond all possibility of doubt —and what is far more important, we have a clue to the identity of the real man, to an absolute certainty, for he has left on that cabinet a sign manual that will differentiate him from every other human being at this moment living on our planet.”

As I uttered these words I looked up. Sir Edward Granville had entered the room. He had evidently been startled by hearing my loud and excited tones.

Inspector Fawcett was now closely comparing the finger prints.

“What is all this excitement about, Inspector?” asked Sir Edward.

“A very queer business, I am afraid, sir. There has been some deep game played somewhere. The impression on this varnish corresponds exactly with this gentleman’s hand as far as the palm goes, but the finger tips don’t fit.”

“The finger tips!” cried the baronet. “What do you mean, Miss Marburg?
What are you all talking about?
There are no lines on the finger tips.”

“Oh, aren’t there, Sir Edward?” I said, trembling with excitement as a fantastic thought flashed through my brain. “Let me show you.” And I held the sealing wax once more in the flame. “Kindly press the top of your middle finger on the wax, Sir Edward, and I will explain it to you.”

“Nonsense!” he cried angrily, drawing back. “What does this mean?
Are you mad, Miss Marburg?
“

“Mad or sane, I should like you to do it. Inspector Fawcett, will you request Sir Edward to give us the impression of one of his finger tips in this wax?”

“You had better do it, Sir Edward. What the young lady says is quite true. It will be on these finger tips that the evidence will turn. They are the important things, and J shall be obliged to get the impression of all the finger tips of the people at present residing in this house.”

Please give us yours first, Sir Edward,” I said, once more warming the wax.

“It is necessary that it should be done, Sir Edward,” said the Inspector. “The lack of correspondence between the impression of the palm and the linger lips on the varnish proves that either Captain Cunnyngham had someone else’s finger tips, or that someone else had Captain Cunnyngham’s palm. Now to counterfeit a palm is comparatively easy by reproduction in India-rubber from a cast—to counterfeit the skin ridges is next door to impossible. The deduction therefore is that someone wished to have Captain Cunnyngham accused of the crime and has counterfeited his palm knowing nothing of the infinitely more important evidential value of finger tips.”

“By the way,” added the man, turning suddenly to Jim Cunnyngham, “have you ever had a cast taken of your hand?”

“About a month ago in London,” was the immediate answer.

“Ah!﷼ by whom?”

“Madame Sylvia of Bond Street.”

The detective turned to Sir Edward.

“You may as well be the first to have your fingers printed, as you are here,” he said.

The baronet instantly obeyed, and as he made the impression on the wax, I saw the three police officers exchange significant glances. They knew quite as well as I did, that they were in the presence of the guilty man.

“Now,” said the detective, “we will proceed with the others.”

He went to the door which led into the hall as he spoke, and asked General Raglan to come forward. A few words were sufficient lo put the General in possession of the new and startling facts which were now before us.

One by one the guests, in a state of great excitement, appeared, and each and all submitted to the new test. Kate Trevor was the last to have the impression of her fingers taken. The detective cleared his throat and looked around him. He asked me to come forward and in silence I looked at the different impressions.

The last of all to be examined was that of Sir Edward Granville, the cores of whose finger tips corresponded exactly ridge by ridge even to the most remote and minute particulars with the impression made on the varnish.

I stood back in silence. The detective and I exchanged one glance.

“Will you explain?” he said to me.

I tried to speak, but no words would come.

“Then I will do it,” he said.

But before he could speak, Sir Edward Granville came forward. He pushed the detective aside and stood facing his guests.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he said, “it is unnecessary for Inspector Fawcett to explain himself. The news you have to learn can be communicated in a few words. You see before you in the person of your host the guilty man. Why I concocted so desperate a scheme, and why at the last moment, by the most unlooked-for fatality, my guilt has been proved beyond a shadow of doubt, is not for me not to explain, nor will it enter into all my motives for this action. You will, doubtless, none of you, wish any longer to be my guests; carriages will therefore be ready to convey you to the railway station in an hour. I have now but one thing to do, and that is to congratulate Miss Marburg on her marvellous detective abilities.”

As he spoke he bowed to me, and turning, without another word, left the library.

Then Sir Edward’s guests found their tongues. What they said, how much they wondered is not for me to say.

But I have the happiness to relate that this story aroused such an interest in the fortunes of Captain Cunnyngham that several members of that strange house party put their heads together, and between them managed to extricate the young guardsman from his difficulties. Early in the following spring I had the

happiness of seeing Kate Trevor united to the man she loved.