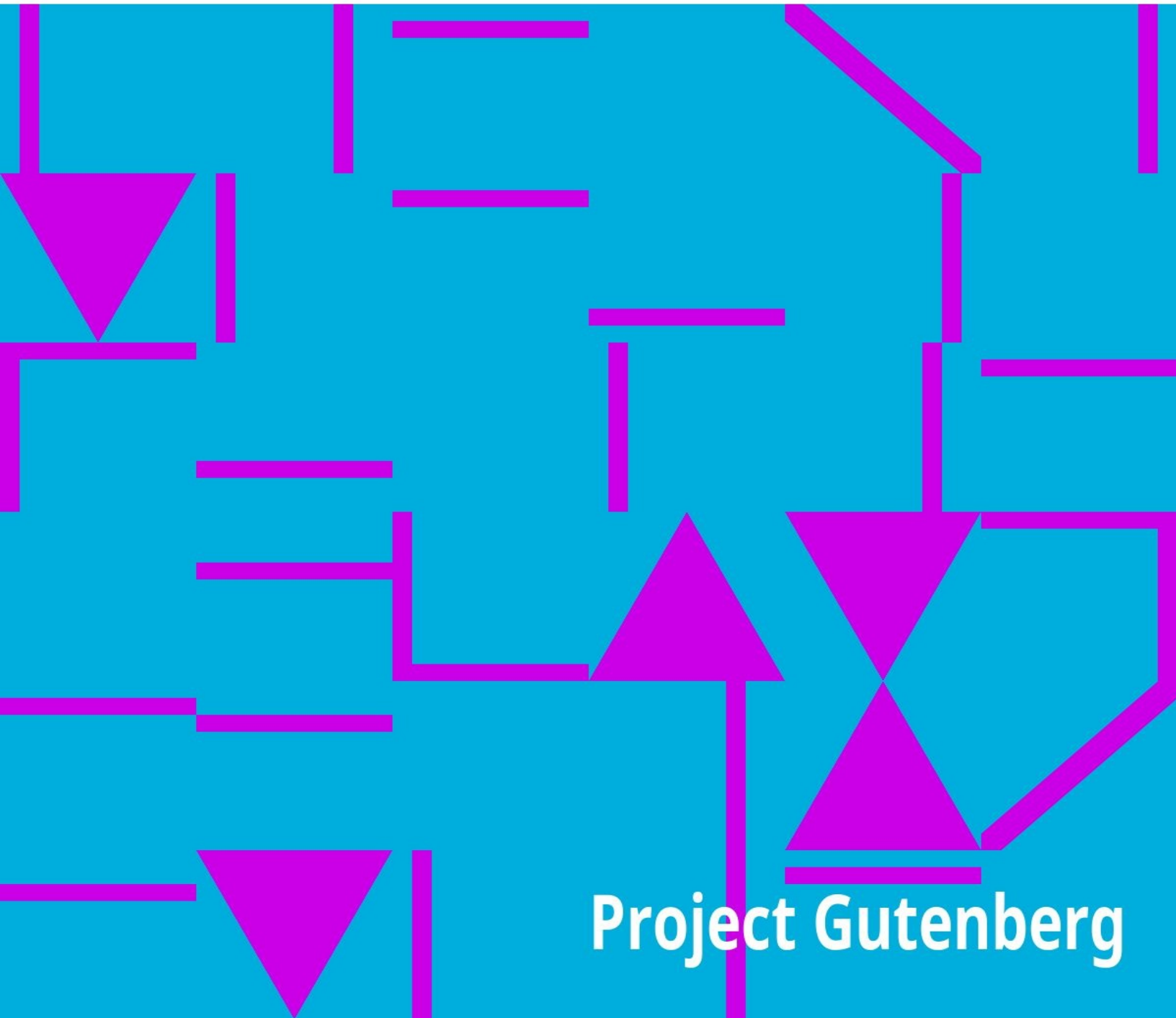
The Mystery of the Clasped Hands

A Novel

Guy Boothby



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THE MYSTERY OF THE CLASPED HANDS

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D. APPLETON AND COMPANY, NEW YORK.

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CLASPED HANDS

A NOVEL

BY

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AUTHOR OF DR. NIKOLA's EXPERIMENT

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MY INDIAN QUEEN, ETC.

NEW YORK

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

1901

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CHAPTER I

"I never knew such a fellow as you are for ferreting out these low, foreign eating-houses," said Godfrey Henderson to his friend, Victor Fensden, as they turned from Oxford Street into one of the narrow thoroughfares in the neighbourhood of Soho. "Why you should take such trouble, and at the same time do your digestion such irreparable injury, I can not imagine. There are any number of places where you can get a chop or steak, free of garlic, in a decent quarter of the Town, to say nothing of being waited upon by a man who *does* look as if he had been brave enough to face the dangers of washing once or twice within five years."

His companion only laughed.

"Go on, my friend, go on," he said, blowing a cloud of cigarette smoke. "You pretend to be a cosmopolitan of cosmopolitans, but you will remain insular to the day of your death. To you, a man who does not happen to be an Englishman must of necessity be dirty, and be possessed of a willingness to sever your jugular within the first few minutes of your acquaintance. With regard to the accusation you bring against me, I am willing to declare, in self-defence, that I like burrowing about among the small restaurants in this quarter, for the simple reason that I meet men who are useful to me in my work, besides affording me food for reflection."

The taller man grunted scornfully.

"Conspirators to a man," he answered. "Nihilists, Anarchists, members of the Mafia, the Camorristi, and the Carbonari. Some day you will enter into an argument with one of them and a knife thrust between your ribs will be the result."

"It may be so," returned Victor Fensden, with a shrug of his narrow shoulders. "Better that, however, than a life of stolid British priggishness. How you manage to paint as you do when you have so little of the romantic in your temperament, is a thing I can not for the life of me understand. That a man who rows, plays football and cricket, and who will walk ten miles to see a wrestling match or a prize fight, should be gifted with such a sense of colour and touch, is as great a mystery to me as the habits of the ichthyosaurus."

And indeed, what Fensden said was certainly true. Godfrey Henderson, one of the most promising of our younger painters, was as unlike the popular notion of an artist as could well be found. He had rowed stroke in his 'Varsity boat, had won for himself a fair amount of fame as a good all-round athlete, and at the same time had painted at least three of the most beautiful pictures—pictures with a subtle touch of poetry in them—that the public had seen for many years. His height was fully six feet one and a half, his shoulders were broad and muscular; he boasted a pleasant and open countenance, such a one in fact as makes one feel instinctively that its owner is to be trusted. Taken altogether, a casual observer would have declared him to be a young country Squire, and few would have guessed that the greater portion of his life was spent standing before an easel, palette and brush in hand.

Victor Fensden, his companion, was of an altogether different stamp. He was at least three inches shorter, was slimly built, and at first glance would appear to possess a highly nervous and delicate constitution. In his dress he also differed from his friend. His taste betrayed a partiality for velvet coats; his ties were usually startling, so far as colour went; he wore his hair longer than is customary, and further adorned his face with a neat little Vandyke beard and mustache. Like Henderson he was also a votary of the brush. His pictures, however, were of the impressionist order—pretty enough in their way, but lacking in form, and a trifle vague as to colouring. On occasions he wrote poetry. There were some who said he was not sincere, that his pictures were milk-and-water affairs, suggestive of the works of greater men, and only intended to advertise himself. If that were so, the success they achieved was comparative. Sad to relate, there were people in London who had not heard the name of Victor Fensden; while the walls of the Academy, which he affected so much to despise, had not so far been honoured by his patronage. "The whole thing," he would say, adopting the language of our American cousins, "is controlled by a Business Ring; the Hanging Committee and the dealers stand in with each other. If you prefer to do bad work deliberately, or at any rate are content to be commonplace, then you're safe for admission. But if you prefer to do something which may, or may not, please the multitude, but which will last longer than Burlington House, or the National Gallery itself, then you must be content to remain outside." After this tirade, regardless of the implied sneer at his work, Godfrey would laugh and turn the matter off by proposing dinner, luncheon, or some other distraction. He knew the value of his own work, and was content to estimate it accordingly.

Having reached the end of the street down which they had been walking, when the conversation already described occurred, they found themselves before the

entrance to a small eating-house. One glance was sufficient to show that it was of the foreign order, so derided by Henderson a few moments ago before. They entered and looked about them. The room was long and narrow, and contained some ten or a dozen small tables, three or four of which were already occupied. Pictures of the German school, apparently painted by the yard, and interspersed with gaudy portraits of King Humbert with his mustache, Victor Emmanuel with his wealth of orders, the latter cheek by jowl with Mr. Garibaldi in his felt hat, decorated the walls. The proprietor, a small, tubby individual, with the blackest of black hair and eyes, and an olive skin that glistened like the marble tops of the tables, came forward to welcome them. At his request they seated themselves and gave their orders.

"What enjoyment you can find in this sort of thing I can not imagine," repeated Henderson, almost irritably, as he looked about him. "If you take a pleasure in macaroni and tomato, and find poetry in garlic and *sauer-kraut*, the divine instinct must be even more highly developed in you than your warmest admirers believe. We might have gone to the club and have had a decent meal there."

"And have had to listen to a lot of supercilious young idiots chattering about what they are pleased to call 'their work,'" the other replied. "No, no, we are better off here. Set your imagination to work, my dear fellow, and try to believe yourself in Florence, with the moonlight streaming down on the Ponte Vecchio; or in Naples, and that you can hear the waves breaking up on the rock under the Castello del Ovo. You might even be listening to *Funiculi-Finicula* for the first time."

"Confound you! I never know whether you are serious or not," replied Godfrey. "Is it a joke you're bringing me here to-night, or have you some definite object in view?"

He looked across the table at his companion as if he were anxious to assure himself upon this point before he said anything further.

"What if I *had* an object?" the other answered. "What if I wanted to do you a good turn, and by asking you to come here to-night were able to help you in your work?"

"In that case," Henderson replied, "I should say that it was very kind of you, but that you have chosen a curious way of showing it. How a low Italian restaurant in Soho can help me in the work I have on hand I can not for the life of me understand. Is it possible for you to be more explicit?"

"If the critics are to be believed you ask too much of me," Fensden returned,

with one of his quiet laughs. "Are they not always declaring that my principal fault lies in my being too vague? Seriously, however, I will confess that I had an object in bringing you here. Have I not heard you grumbling morning, noon, and night, that the model for your new picture is about as difficult to find as, well, shall we say, an honest dealer? Now, I believe that the humble mouse was once able to assist the lion—forgive the implied compliment—in other words, I think I have achieved the impossible. It will take too long to tell you how I managed it, but the fact remains that I have discovered the girl you want, and what is more, she will be here to-night. If, when you have seen her, you come to the conclusion that she will not answer your purpose, then I shall be quite willing to confess that my knowledge of a beautiful woman is only equal to your appreciation of an Italian dinner in a cheap Soho restaurant. I have spoken!"

"And so you have really brought me here to eat this villainous concoction," Henderson answered, contemptuously regarding the mess before him, "in order to show me a face that you think may be useful to me in my work? My dear fellow, you know as well as I do that we think differently upon such matters. What you have repeatedly declared to be the loveliest face you have ever seen, I would not sketch upon a canvas; while another, that haunts me by day and night, does not raise a shadow of enthusiasm in you. I am afraid you have had your trouble in vain. But what abominable stuff this is to be sure! Order some wine, for pity's sake."

A flask of chianti was brought them, and later some goat's milk cheese. Upon the latter, bad as it was, Henderson elected to dine. He had barely finished what was placed before him when an exclamation from his companion caused him to turn his head in the direction of the door. Two women were entering the restaurant at the moment, and were approaching the table at which the young men sat. The elder was a stout and matronly party, dark of eye, swarthy of skin, and gorgeous in her colouring, so much so, indeed, that not the slightest doubt could have existed as to her nationality. She was a daughter of Italy from the top of her head to the soles of her ample feet. Her companion, however, was modelled on altogether different lines. She was tall, graceful, and so beautiful, in a statuesque way, that Henderson felt his heart thrill with pleasure at the sight of her. Here was the very woman he had been so anxious to discover. If he had hunted the Continent of Europe through, he could not have found any one better suited to the requirements of the work he had in hand. Since it was plain that it was she for whom Fensden was waiting, it looked as if their tastes, for once, were likely to be the same.

"What a perfect face!" exclaimed Godfrey, more to himself than to his companion. "At any hazard, I must induce her to sit to me."

Fensden looked at his friend's face, made a note of the admiration he saw there, and smiled to himself.

"What did I tell you?" he inquired with a note of triumph in his voice. "You pooh-poohed the notion that I should ever be able to find you a model. What do you say now?"

"She is perfect," Henderson replied. "Just look at the eyes, the beautiful contour of the face, the shapely neck and the hands! Great Scott! what is a woman of her class doing with such hands? Where did you meet her?"

"In another of my contemptible restaurants," Fensden answered. "Directly I saw her, I said to myself: 'This is the model for Godfrey!' I made inquiries about her, and, finding that she was willing to sit, made an appointment to meet her here this evening."

By this time Godfrey's antagonism had entirely left him. His only desire now was to secure this woman, and, with her assistance, to complete his masterpiece. As soon as the doors of Burlington House were thrown open, that face should look down upon the picture-lovers of England, or he'd never touch a brush again.

The two women, by this time, had seated themselves at another table; and it was almost with a sense of disappointment that Godfrey observed his ideal commence her meal. To watch her filling her pretty mouth to overflowing with steaming macaroni was not a pleasing sight. It was too human and too suggestive of a healthy appetite to harmonize with the poetic framework in which his imagination had already placed her.

When the ladies had finished their meal, the two young men left their own table and crossed the room to that at which they were seated. Fensden said something in Italian, which elicited a beaming smile from the elder lady, and a gesture of approval from her companion. It was not the first time in his life that Godfrey Henderson had had occasion to wish he had taken advantage of the opportunities he had had of acquiring a knowledge of that melodious language.

"The signora declares that there is no occasion for us to speak Italian, since she is an accomplished English scholar," said Fensden, with a sarcastic touch that was not lost upon Henderson.

"The signorina also speaks our villainous tongue as well as if she had been born and bred within the sound of Bow Bells."

At this supposed compliment, the elder lady smiled effusively, while her daughter looked gravely from one man to the other as if she were not quite sure of the value to be placed upon what Fensden had said. Having received permission, the two men seated themselves at the table, and Henderson ordered another flask of wine. Under its influence their acquaintance ripened rapidly. It was not, however, until they had been talking some little time, that the all-important subject was broached.

"And it is Teresina's portrait that your friend would paint, signor?" said the elder lady, turning to Fensden. "And why not? 'Tis a beautiful face, though I, her mother, say it. If the signor will make the—what you call it—'rangements, it shall be as he wishes."

Less than a minute was sufficient to place the matter on a satisfactory basis, and it was thereupon settled that the Signorina Cardi should attend at the studio at a certain hour every week-day until the picture was finished. Matters having been arranged in this eminently friendly fashion, the meeting broke up, and with many bows and compliments on Fensden's and the signora's parts, they bade each other adieu. A few minutes later, the two young men found themselves once more in the street.

"My dear fellow, I don't know how to thank you," said Henderson. "I've been worrying myself more than I can say at not being able to find the face I wanted. I owe you ten thousand apologies."

But Fensden would not hear of such a thing as an apology. His only desire was that the picture should be successful, he said.

"I had no idea that he was so fond of me," Henderson remarked to himself that night when he was alone in his bedroom. "Fancy his hunting through London for a model for me. He is the last man I should have thought would have taken the trouble."

Next morning Teresina entered upon her duties, and Godfrey set to work with more than his usual enthusiasm. The picture was to be his *magnum opus*, the greatest effort he had yet given to the world. The beautiful Italian proved to be a good sitter, and her delight as the picture grew upon the canvas was not to be concealed. Meanwhile Fensden smoked innumerable cigarettes, composed *fin-de-siècle* poems in her honour, and made a number of impressionist studies of her head that his friends declared would eventually astonish artistic London. At last the picture was finished and sent in. Then followed that interval of anxious waiting, so well known to those who have striven for such honours as the

Academy has to bestow. When it was announced that it had passed the first and second rejections great was the rejoicing in the studio.

"It is your face that has done it, Teresina," cried Godfrey. "I knew they wouldn't be able to resist that."

"Nay, nay," said the signora, who was present, "such compliments will turn the child's head. Her face would not be there but for the signor's cleverness. Well do I remember that when Luigi Maffoni painted the portrait of Monsignore——"

No one heeded her, so she continued the narrative in an undertone to the cat on her lap. The day, however, was not destined to end as happily as it had begun. That evening, when they were alone together in the studio, Fensden took Godfrey to task.

"Dear boy," he said, as he helped himself to a cigarette from a box on the table beside him, "I have come to the conclusion that you must go warily. There are rocks ahead, and, from what I see, you are running straight for them."

"What on earth is the matter now?" Godfrey asked, stretching himself out in an easy chair as he spoke. "I know the poise of that head is not quite what it might be, but haven't I promised you that I'll alter it to-morrow? Teresina is the very best model in the world, and as patient as she's beautiful."

"That's exactly what I am complaining of," Victor answered, quietly. "If she were not, I should not bother my head about her. I feel, in a measure, responsible, don't you see? If it hadn't been for me, she would not be here."

The happiness vanished from Godfrey's face as a breath first blurs and then leaves the surface of a razor.

"I am afraid I don't quite grasp the situation," he said. "You surely don't suppose that I am falling in love with Teresina—with my model?"

"I am quite aware that you're not," the other answered. "There is my trouble. If you *were* in love with her, there might be some hope for her. But as it is there is none."

Henderson stared at him in complete surprise.

"Have you gone mad?" he asked.

"No one was ever saner," Fensden replied. "Look here, Godfrey, can't you see the position for yourself? Here is this beautiful Italian girl, whom you engaged through my agency. You take her from beggary, and put her in a position of

comparative luxury. She has sat to you day after day, smiled at your compliments, and—well, to put it bluntly, has had every opportunity and encouragement given her to fall head over ears in love with you. Is it quite fair, do you think, to let it go on?"

Godfrey was completely taken aback.

"Great Scott! You don't mean to say you think I'm such a beast as to encourage her?" he cried. "You know as well as I do that I have behaved toward her only as I have done to all the other models before her. Surely you would wish me to be civil to the girl, and try to make her work as pleasant as possible for her? If you think I've been a blackguard, say so outright!"

"My dear Godfrey, nothing could be further from my thoughts," answered Fensden in his usual quiet voice, that one of his friends once compared to the purring of a cat. "I should be a poor friend, however, if I were to allow you to go on as you are going without an expostulation. Can not you look at it in the same light as I do? Are you so blind that you can not see that this girl is falling every day more deeply in love with you? The love-light gleams in her eyes whenever she looks at you; she sees an implied caress even in the gentle pats you give her drapery, when you arrange it on the stage there; a tender solicitude for her welfare when you tell her to hurry home before it rains. What is the end of it all to be? I suppose you do not intend making her your wife?"

"My wife?" said Godfrey, blankly, as if the idea were too preposterous to have ever occurred to him. "Surely you must be jesting to talk like this?"

"I am not jesting with you, if you are not jesting with her," the other replied. "You must see for yourself that the girl worships the very ground you walk upon. However, there is still time for matters to be put right. She has so far only looked at the affair from her own standpoint; what is more, I do not want her to lose her employment with you, since it means so much to her. What I do want is, that you should take hold of yourself in time and prevent her from being made unhappy while you have the opportunity."

"You may be quite sure that I will do so," Henderson replied, more stiffly than he had yet spoken. "I am more sorry than I can say that this should have occurred. Teresina is a good girl, and I would no more think of causing her pain than I would of striking my own sister. And now I'm off to bed. Good-night."

True to his promise, his behaviour next day, so far as Teresina was concerned, was so different that she regarded him with surprise, quite unable to understand the reason of the change. She thought she must have offended him in some way,

and endeavoured by all the means in her power to win herself back into his good graces. But the more she tried to conciliate him, the further he withdrew into his shell. Victor Fensden, smoking his inevitable cigarette, waited to see what the result would be. There was a certain amount of pathos in the situation, and a close observer might have noticed that the strain was telling upon both of the actors in it, the girl in particular. For the next fortnight or so, the moral temperature of the studio was not as equable as of old. Godfrey, who was of too honest a nature to make a good conspirator, chafed at the part he was being called upon to play, while Teresina, who only knew that she loved, and that her love was not returned, was divided between her affections for the man and a feeling of wounded dignity for herself.

"I wish to goodness I could raise sufficient money to get out of London for six months," said Godfrey, one evening, as they sat together in the studio. "I'd be off like a shot."

Fensden knew why he said this.

"I am sorry I can't help you," he replied. "I am about as badly off as yourself. But surely the great picture sold well?"

"Very well; for me, that is to say," Godfrey replied. "But I had to part with most of it next day."

He did not add that he had sent most of it to his widowed sister, who was very badly off and wanted help to send her boy to college.

A short silence followed; then Fensden said: "If you had money what would you do?"

"Go abroad," said Godfrey quickly. "The strain of this business is more than I can stand. If I had a few hundreds to spare we'd go together and not come back for six months. By that time everything would have settled down to its old normal condition."

How little did he guess that the very thing that seemed so impossible was destined to come to pass!

CHAPTER II

One morning a week or so after the conversation described at the end of the previous chapter, Godfrey Henderson found lying on the table in the studio a long, blue envelope, the writing upon which was of a neat and legal character. He did not own a halfpenny in the world, so what this could mean he was not able to imagine. Animated by a feeling of curiosity he opened the envelope and withdrew the contents. He read the letter through the first time without altogether realizing its meaning; then, with a vague feeling of surprise, he read it again. He had just finished his second perusal of it when Fensden entered the room. He glanced at Godfrey's face, and said, as if in inquiry:

"Anything the matter? You look scared!"

"A most extraordinary thing," returned Godfrey. "You have heard me talk of old Henderson of Detwich?"

"Your father's brother? The old chap who sends you a brace of grouse every season, and asks when you are going to give up being a starving painter and turn your attention to business? What of him?"

"He is dead and buried," answered Godfrey. "This letter is from his lawyer to say that I am his heir, in other words that Detwich passes to me, with fifteen thousand a year on which to keep it up, and that they are awaiting my instructions."

There was a pause which lasted for upward of a quarter of a minute. Then Fensden held out his hand.

"My dear fellow, I am sure I congratulate you most heartily," he said. "I wish you luck with all my heart. The struggling days are over now. For the future you will be able to follow your art as you please. You will also be able to patronize those who are not quite so fortunate. Fifteen thousand a year and a big country place! Whatever will you do with yourself?"

"That is for the Future to decide," Godfrey replied.

That afternoon he paid a visit to the office of the firm of solicitors who had written to him. They corroborated the news contained in their letter, and were both assiduous in their attentions and sincere in their desire to serve him.

Four days later it was arranged that Godfrey and Fensden should start for the Continent. Before doing so, however, the former purchased a neat little gold watch and chain which he presented to Teresina, accompanied by a cheque equivalent to six months' salary, calculated at the rate she had been receiving.

"Don't forget me, Teresina," he said, as he looked round the now dismantled studio. "Let me know how you get on, and remember if ever you want a friend I shall be only too glad to serve you."

At that moment Fensden hailed him from the cab outside, bidding him hurry, or he feared they would miss their train. Godfrey accordingly held out his hand.

"Good-bye," he said, and though he would have given worlds to have prevented it, a lump rose in his throat as he said it, and his voice was so shaky that he felt sure she must notice it.

Then, bidding her give the key to the landlord when she left the studio, he went out into the street, and jumped into a cab, which next moment started off for the station. How was he to know that Teresina was lying in a dead faint upon the studio floor?

When they left England for the Continent Godfrey had only the vaguest notion of what they were going to do after they left Paris. Having spent a fortnight in the French capital they journeyed on to Switzerland, put in a month at Lucerne, three weeks in Rome, and found themselves, in the middle of November, at Luxor, looking upon the rolling waters of the Nile. Their sketch books were surfeited with impressions, and they themselves were filled with a great content. They had both visited the Continent on numerous occasions before, but this was the first time that they had made the acquaintance of the "Land of the Pharaohs." Godfrey was delighted with everything he saw, and already he had the ideas for a dozen new pictures in his head.

"I had no notion that any sunset could be so gorgeous," he said one day, when they sat together watching the ball of fire descend to his rest on the western horizon of the desert. "The colours have not yet been discovered that could possibly do it justice. For the future I shall come out here every year."

"Don't be too sure, my friend," said Fensden. "There was a time when such a thing might have been possible, but circumstances have changed with you. You are no longer the erratic Bohemian artist, remember, but a man with a stake in the country, and a county magnate."

"But what has the county magnate to do with the question at issue?" Godfrey

inquired.

"Everything in the world," retorted his companion. "In virtue of your new position you will have to marry. The future Mrs. Henderson, in all probability, will also have a stake in the country. She will have great ideas, moreover, connected with what she will term the improvement of the land, and, beyond a trip to the Italian lakes at long intervals, will not permit you to leave the country of her forefathers."

"What a strange fellow you are, to be sure!" replied Godfrey. "To hear you talk one would think that the possession of money—and, by Jove, it's a very decent thing to have when you come to consider it—must necessarily relegate a man to the region of the commonplace. Why shouldn't I marry a girl who is fond of travelling?"

"Because, as a rule, Fate ordains otherwise," Fensden replied. "I think I can describe the sort of girl you will marry."

"Then do so, by all means," said Godfrey, "I'll smoke another cigar while you are arranging it."

"In the first place she will be tall. Your idea of the ludicrous would not let you marry a small woman. She will have large hands and feet, and the latter will be heavily shod. That is how in London I always pick out the girls who live in the country. She will be handsome rather than pretty, for the reason that your taste lies in that direction. She will not flirt, because she will be in love with you. She will be an admirable housewife of the solid order, and while I should be prepared to trust to her judgment in the matter of dogs and horses, roots, crops, and the dairy farm, finer susceptibilities she will have none. Do you like the picture?"

"Scarcely," said Henderson; "and yet, when all is said and done a man might do worse."

There was a pause, during which each man knew what the other was thinking about. Godfrey was recalling Teresina's beautiful face, and Fensden knew that he was doing so.

"By the way," said Fensden, very quietly, "I noticed this morning that you received a letter bearing an Italian post-mark. Would it be indiscreet if I inquired your correspondent's name?"

"I don't see why there should be any mystery about it," Henderson replied. "It was from Teresina."

"From Teresina?" said the other, with a look of surprise.

"Yes, from Teresina," his friend answered. "I made her promise before we left home that should she leave England she would let me have her address, and, if she were in need of anything, she would communicate with me. You can see the letter if you like. Here it is."

He took the letter in question from his pocket and handed it to his companion. It consisted of only a few lines and gave the writer's address with the hope that the time might soon come when she would again be allowed to sit to "her kind patron."

Victor, having perused it, handed it back to Godfrey, who replaced it in his pocket without a word.

Two days later they returned by steamer to Cairo, where they took up their abode at the Mena House Hotel. Godfrey preferred it, because it was some distance from the dust of the city, and Fensden because he averred that the sneer on the face of the Sphinx soothed him more than all the luxuries of Cairo. As it was, he sat in the veranda of the hotel and made impressionist sketches of dragomen, camels, and the backsheesh-begging Bedouins of the Pyramids. Godfrey found it impossible to work.

"I am absorbing ideas," he said. "The work will come later on."

In the meantime he played polo in the Ghezireh, shot jackals in the desert, flirted with the charming tourists in the verandas of the hotel, and enjoyed himself immensely in his own fashion. Then one day he received a telegram from England announcing the fact that his mother was seriously ill, and asking him to return without delay.

"I am sincerely sorry," said Fensden, politely. Then he added, regretfully: "I suppose our tour must now, like all good things, come to an end. When do you leave?"

"By to-morrow morning's train," he answered. "I shall pick up the mail boat at Ismailia and travel in her to Naples. If all goes well I shall be in England to-morrow week. But look here, Victor, when you come to think of it there's not the least necessity for you to come, too. It would be no end of a shame to rob you of your holiday. Why should you not go on and finish the tour by yourself? Why not come with me as far as Port Said, and catch the steamer for Jaffa there?"

"It's very good of you, my dear Godfrey," said Fensden, "but——"

"Let there be no 'buts,'" the other returned. "It's all arranged. When you come home you shall describe your adventures to me."

Needless to say, in the end Fensden agreed to the proposal, and next day they accordingly bade each other good-bye on the promenade deck of the mail steamer that was to take Henderson as far as Naples. Fensden was beginning to realize that it was by no means unpleasant to have a rich and generous friend. Poverty was doubtless romantic and artistic, but a well-filled pocket-book meant good hotels and the best of wines and living.

While the boat ploughed her way across the Mediterranean, an idea occurred to Godfrey, and he resolved to act upon it. It was neither more nor less than to utilize what little time was given him in Naples in seeking out Teresina and assuring himself of her comfort in her old home. He had quite convinced himself by this time that any affection he might once have felt for her was now dead and buried. For this reason he saw no possible danger in paying her a visit. "Victor made more of it," he argued, "than the circumstances had really warranted. Had he not said anything about it, there would have been no trouble, and in that case Teresina would still be in London, and sitting to me."

As soon as the vessel was in harbour, he collected his luggage and made his way ashore. A cab conveyed him to an hotel he had patronized before; and when he was safely installed there, and realized that he could not proceed on his journey until the next morning, he resolved to set out in search of Teresina. Producing her letter from his pocket-book he made a note of the address, and then started upon his errand, to discover that the signorina Cardi's home took some little finding. At last, however, he succeeded, only to be informed by an intelligent neighbour that the signora was not at home, while the signorina had gone out some fifteen minutes before. Considerably disappointed, he turned to descend the steps to find himself face to face with Teresina herself as he stepped into the street. She uttered a little exclamation of astonishment and delight at seeing him.

"How is it that you are here, signor?" she inquired, when they had greeted each other. "I did not know that you were in Naples."

"I only arrived this afternoon," he answered. "I am on my way to England."

"To England?" she said, and then uttered a little sigh as if the very name of that country conjured up sad memories. "It is cold and wet in England now; and do you remember how the studio chimney smoked?"

This apparently irrelevant remark caused them both to laugh, but their mirth had not altogether a happy sound.

"I am going to give up the studio," he answered. "I expect that for the future I shall do my work in the country. But you are not looking well, Teresina!"

"I am quite well," she answered, hurriedly. How was he to know that for many weeks past she had been eating her heart out for love of him? If the whole world seemed dark to her now it was because he, her sun, no longer shone upon her.

"And your mother, the signora, how wrong of me not to have inquired after her. I trust she is well?"

"Quite well, signor," she replied. "She often talks of you. She is at Sorrento to-day, but she may be back at any minute. She would have liked to have seen you, signor, to have thanked you for your great goodness to us."

"Nonsense," said Henderson, hurriedly. "It is the other way round. My thanks are due to you. Had it not been for your face, Teresina, my picture would never have been such a success. Do you know that several ladies, great ladies in England, said that they would give anything to be so beautiful? I don't think I shall ever do a better piece of work than that."

He had just said this when he noticed that a young man, tall, slim, and very dark, had approached them unperceived, and was now glaring angrily at him. Teresina had also become aware of his presence, and was visibly affected by it. Whereas only a moment before she had been all sunshine and delight at seeing Henderson once more, now she was quite the reverse.

"Is this man a friend of yours?" Godfrey asked, in English. "He seems to be put out about something."

"It is only Tomasso Dardini," she answered, as if the explanation were sufficient. "He is quick-tempered, but he means no harm."

"Then I wish to goodness he'd go away; he glares as if he would like to eat me. If I may hazard a guess, Teresina, I should say that he is in love with you."

"He is very foolish," she answered, and a flush spread over her face. "Some day, if he is not very careful, he will get into trouble."

"I should not be at all surprised to hear it," Godfrey replied.

Then, turning to the man in question, he signed to him to be off about his business. For a moment the youth seemed inclined to refuse, but presently he thought better of it, and marched off down the street, looking back now and again as if to see whether the Englishman and the girl were still conversing together.

"And now, Teresina, I have a little plan to propose to you," said Godfrey, when the other had turned the corner. "As I told you just now, I am on my way to England, and therefore, shall only be able to spend to-night in Naples. From the announcements I see they are playing 'Faust' at the Opera-House. Why should not you and your mother dine with me, and go there afterward? It would be a pleasant way of spending the evening, and we could talk of old days."

Teresina clapped her hands with delight. In her love of the Opera she was a genuine Neapolitan.

"It would be lovely," she cried. "My mother will come, I feel sure. It is kind of you, signor."

It was thereupon arranged that they should meet at a certain place, dine, and then go on to the Opera together. Having settled this, Henderson returned to his hotel, whiled away the time as best he could, and when the hour arrived, set off to the rendezvous.

Punctual to the moment he put in an appearance at the place. It was a restaurant not unlike that in which he had first met Teresina and her mother. He could not help recalling that memorable evening as he waited on the pavement outside, and his one wish was that Fensden could have been there to have shared the entertainment with him. When the signora and her daughter arrived, it was plain that they regarded the occasion an important one. They were both attired in their best, and, so far as colour went, the signora herself was not unlike a bird of Paradise. Teresina was more soberly clad, but Henderson noticed that a necklace with which he had once presented her, as a memento of a certain piece of extra work she had done for him, encircled her slender throat. As he looked at it, he thought of the day on which he had given it to her, and as the remembrance occurred to him, he wondered whether it was wise on his part to play with fire for a second time. The signora greeted him with southern volubility, and, as soon as he could get in a word, Henderson suggested that they should enter the restaurant. Having done so, they seated themselves at one of the small tables, and he gave his orders. It was a banquet that was destined to be remembered with pleasure by two of the party, and also by a third, for another and less romantic reason.

"And so you are returning to England, signor?" said the signora, when the first pangs of her hunger had been assuaged. Then, remembering the circumstances connected with the latter portion of their stay in London, she added, pathetically: "I think if it were possible, I should not be sorry to return—even though the

winter is so cold and it rains so often."

"If you feel as if you would like to return, why do you not do so?" asked Godfrey, with a quickness that caused Teresina to look up at him in surprise, and then to look down again with equal celerity. "I am sure Teresina could get plenty of employment. I would do all I could to help her. For my own part, I never could understand why you left so quickly."

If he had reflected for a moment, he would probably have been able to arrive at an understanding of the reason that had prompted her departure. He was too modest a man, however, to think of such a thing. Nevertheless, he changed the conversation by making inquiries as to their present life in Naples, and then went on to talk of Fensden, who at that moment, could they have seen him, was fast asleep in a railway carriage, on his way from Jaffa to Jerusalem. The signora had never been partial to the impressionist artist and poet, and she had a vague idea that it was to that gentleman's agency that they owed the flight of the owner, and the consequent cessation of Teresina's employment at the studio. She was too prudent, however, to say anything on that score to Godfrey. She knew the friendship that existed between the two men; and she was also aware that her daughter, who was the possessor of a quick temper, and a tongue that she could use when she liked, would brook no disparagement of either Mr. Henderson or his friend.

"As to returning to England, we must think it over," she said, complacently, when Godfrey had filled her glass with champagne for the fourth or fifth time. "It would make another great change in our affairs, but Teresina is young, and there is nothing for us to do in Naples. I could wish that she should marry, signor, but she will not hear of it. I tell her the time may come when it will be too late. But girls do not listen to their elders nowadays."

Godfrey glanced at Teresina's face to find that it had suddenly become very pale. He hastened to render her assistance without delay by twitting her mother as to the number of sweethearts she herself had had, much to that lady's delight. This crisis having been smoothed over, he paid the bill and they left the restaurant.

Darkness had fallen by this time, a fact which may have accounted for the young man's uncertainty as to whether he did or did not recognise the figure of a man who was watching the doorway from the other side of the street. It certainly looked as if it belonged to Tomasso Dardini; but he said nothing on this point to either of his guests. He would be leaving Naples in the morning, he argued, and no necessity existed for making a fuss about it. If the silly young man were

jealous, the morrow would remove the cause; and after that it would not matter very much whether he were aware of their visit to the Opera or not. With Teresina beside him and the signora on the other side, they entered the theatre and took their seats. The house was crowded, and the Opera itself was received with that critical appreciation so characteristic of the Neapolitan theatre-goer. Whether Godfrey enjoyed it as much as his neighbours is a question that admits of some doubt. He certainly found pleasure in studying the expressions that flitted across Teresina's face as she watched what went on upon the stage; but I scarcely think it went further. When it was over, he escorted them back to their dwelling, and bade them good-bye upon the threshold.

"Good-bye, Teresina," he said. "It may not be very long before we meet in London. Do you remember the little place where I first saw you? I think, when I get back, I must dine there once more, if only for old association's sake."

"Good-bye, signor," she said, giving him her hand after the English fashion. "It was kind of you to think of us, and to give us such pleasure as you have done to-night."

"I have enjoyed it," he replied, and then, bidding her return soon to London, he left her, and made his way down the narrow, evil-smelling street toward the quarter in which his hotel was situated. He was still fifty yards from the corner when a figure emerged from a doorway and hurried quickly after him, keeping on the dark side of the street. Leaving the thoroughfare in which Teresina's house was located, he employed a short cut with which he had become acquainted that afternoon. He had scarcely entered this, however, before he became aware of a light footstep behind him. Turning quickly, he found a man, whom he immediately recognised, within a few feet of him. Muttering something in Italian, he raised his arm, and Godfrey saw that he held a poniard in his hand. With the quickness of a practised athlete, he seized the uplifted wrist with his left hand, while with his right he delivered a blow that took the would-be assassin beneath the chin and sent him sprawling upon his back in the road. Picking up the dagger that the other had let fall, he placed it in his pocket, saying, as he did so: "I will keep this, my friend, as a memento." Then, having made sure that the other had no intention of following him, he continued his walk, little dreaming how strangely that incident was to affect his future life.

CHAPTER III

If I were given my choice of all the charming residences in the county of Midlandshire, I fancy I should decide in favour of Detwich Hall. To my thinking it is, in every respect, an ideal residence. While sufficiently old to have a history (one of the Charleses spent some days in hiding there), it has proved itself capable of being adapted to modern ideas of comfort. The main portion was built, I believe, toward the close of the reign of the Virgin Queen; a wing was added by the owner who occupied it in the time of the early Georges; while the father of the man who had bequeathed the property to Godfrey, was responsible for the stables, and a somewhat obscure wing on the southern front. It was admirably situated in the centre of a park of some three hundred acres, and was approached by a picturesque drive, about half a mile long, which ran for some distance along the banks of an ornamental lake. On this lake, by the way, some of the finest duck shooting in the county is to be obtained. In his boyhood Godfrey had spent many happy days there, little dreaming that some day it would become his own property. Indeed, it is quite certain it would not have done so had his cousin Wilfred not been killed in India in the performance of a piece of desperate heroism that will be remembered as long as a certain native regiment exists. As for Godfrey, the old man had always liked the boy, but had been bitterly disappointed when he had resolved to embark upon an artistic career instead of playing the part of a country gentleman, as so many of his ancestors had done before him. To have proved himself a capable Master of Hounds would have been in the old bachelor's eyes a greater distinction than to have painted the finest picture that ever graced the walls of Burlington House. Yet in his heart he knew the power of the young man, and honoured him for the dogged persistence with which he had fought the uphill fight of a painter's life.

"Well, well, I suppose he'll come out of it all right in the end," he was wont to say to himself when he thought of the matter. "He'll be none the worse for having known a little poverty. I like the boy and he likes me, and, please God, he'll do his best by the dear old place when he comes into it. I should like to see him in it."

This, unfortunately, he was not able to do; but could he have heard the universal expression of approbation so lavishly bestowed upon the young master of Detwich when he had been six months in possession he would have felt that his

generosity had been rewarded. Indeed, there could be no sort of doubt as to Godfrey's popularity. He was received by the county with open arms, and by his tenantry with a quiet appreciation that showed they knew how to value the blood that ran in his veins without making a fuss about it. Owing to the short time that had elapsed since his uncle's death it was necessarily impossible for him to see very much society, but those who partook of his hospitality returned home not only delighted with their host, but also with the quality of their entertainment.

"An acquisition, a decided acquisition," said old Sir Vivian Devereux, the magnate of the district. "His idea of game preservation is excellent, and he is prepared to support the hunt with the utmost liberality. All he wants to make him perfect is a wife."

On hearing this Lady Devereux looked at her lord and her lord looked at her. Between them they had a very shrewd idea that they knew where to look for the future mistress of Detwich Hall. Mistress Margaret, their daughter, called by her friends Molly, who had that season made her bow before her Majesty, said nothing, but maybe that was because she did not think there was anything to be said. She had her own ideas on the subject. She had seen the young squire of Detwich, though he had not been aware of the fact, and, being an unaffected, straightforward English girl, without prudery or conceit of any sort, had come to the conclusion that she liked the look of him. Eligible young men were scarce in the neighbourhood, and if she dreamt dreams of her own who shall blame her? Not I, for one.

Three months had passed since Godfrey had escorted Teresina and her mother to the Opera. The summons which had brought him home so hurriedly had, fortunately, proved to be a false alarm. Though his mother had been seriously ill, there had not been so much danger as they had led him to suppose. A month at Torquay had completely restored her to health, and now she was back at Detwich once more, as hale and hearty an old lady as any to be found in the kingdom. Assisted by her youngest daughter, Kitty, she welcomed the wanderer home with every sign of delight.

Godfrey, unlike so many other people, had the good fortune to be as popular in his own family circle as he was out of it, and he and his youngest sister had been on the best of terms from the days when they had gone bird's-nesting together, until the time when she had assisted him in packing his first picture for the Academy. Since then, however, she had not seen so much of him.

"Kit's no end of a brick," he had been heard to say, "and the fellow who marries

her may consider himself lucky."

It was scarcely to be wondered at, therefore, if Miss Devereux and Kitty, living as they did within two miles of each other, should soon have become intimate. They were in the habit of seeing each other several times a week, a fact which Godfrey, from a distance, had felt somewhat inclined to resent.

"When I get home I shall find this girl continually in the house," he said to himself; and when he *did* arrive and the many charming qualities of her friend had been explained to him he did not feel any the more disposed to be cordial.

"I can see what it will be," he said to his sister, "I shall not catch a glimpse of you now."

"Perhaps you won't want to when you meet Molly," was the arch rejoinder. "You have no idea what a pretty girl she is. They say she created a tremendous sensation when she was presented this year. Folks raved about her."

"The bigger duffers they," was the uncompromising reply. "You have one fault, my dear girl. Ever since I have known you your swans have invariably turned out to be geese. I fancy I can realize what Miss Devereux will be like."

"In that case pray describe her," was the saucy rejoinder, and Miss Kitty made a very pretty losing hazard (they were playing billiards at the time), after which she failed to score and chalked her cue.

Now it seems scarcely fair to say so, but Godfrey, being taken at a disadvantage, fell back on what can be only considered by all honest people a mean device. In describing Miss Devereux he used the almost identical terms used by Fensden when he had attempted to draw a picture of his friend's future wife.

"You are quite at sea," said Miss Kitty, patting her dainty shoe with the end of her cue as she spoke. "Some day, if you are not very careful, I will tell Miss Devereux what you have said about her. She would never forgive you the large feet and thick boots."

"As you are strong be merciful," said Godfrey, potting the red into the right-hand pocket and going into the left himself. "I don't mind admitting without prejudice that I am getting anxious to see this paragon. When do you think she will next honour you with her society?"

"On Friday," Kitty replied. "We have taken up wood-carving together, and she is coming to see some patterns I bought in town last week."

"In that case we will defer consideration of her merits and demerits—for I

suppose she has some—until then," Godfrey replied, and then once more going into the pocket off the red he announced the game as standing at one hundred to ninety-five.

On the following afternoon he had occasion to drive to the market town. It was a bright, clear day, with a promise of frost in the air, and as his dog-cart rolled along the high road, drawn by a tandem team he had purchased the previous week, he felt as well satisfied with himself and his position in the world as it was possible for a young man to be. His business transacted in the town he turned his horses' heads homeward once more. The handsome animals, knowing that they were on their way to their stables, stepped out bravely, and many an approving glance was thrown at the good-looking young squire of Detwich by folk upon the road. He had completed upward of half his journey when he became aware that a young lady, who had appeared from a by-road, was making her way in the same direction as himself.

"Whoever she is she certainly sits her horse well," he said to himself, as he watched her swinging along at a slow canter on the soft side of the road. "I wonder who she can be?"

As soon as the turf gave place to hard metal she pulled her hack up and proceeded at a walk. This very soon brought Godfrey alongside, and as he passed he managed to steal a glance at a very pretty face and as neat a figure as he ever remembered to have seen.

"I wonder who she can be?" he repeated. And as he continued his drive he meditated on the subject.

On the Friday following he was unexpectedly called to town. His solicitors desired an interview with him respecting the purchase of a farm, and he had no option but to comply with their request. As luck would have it, however, he was able to return by a somewhat earlier train than he expected, and was just in time to hear from his butler that afternoon tea had been carried into the drawing-room.

"Are there any visitors?" he inquired.

"Miss Devereux, sir," said the man; "she came to lunch."

"I had forgotten that she was to be here to-day," he said to himself as he crossed the hall in the direction of the drawing-room. "I wonder what she will be like?"

As every one who has visited Detwich is aware, the drawing-room is an exceedingly handsome room. It is long and lofty, if possible a little *too* long for

cosiness. This fault, if fault it be, is amply atoned for, however, by a capitally constructed ingle-nook, in which it was the custom for the ladies to take afternoon tea. Godfrey strolled across the floor to this charming contrivance, little guessing what was in store for him. A lady was sitting with her back to him holding a cup of tea in her hand.

"I don't think you have met Miss Devereux, Godfrey," said his sister.

"I have not yet had that pleasure," he replied. Then to himself he added: "Good gracious! It's the fair equestrienne." Then aloud: "I've heard a good deal of you from Kitty, Miss Devereux."

"And I of you," she answered. "You seem to have been everywhere, and to have seen everything. Doubtless you find this part of the world very dull."

"Not at all," he answered. "I am extremely fond of the country, and particularly of that about here."

If the truth were told I fancy he had never thought much about it until that moment. For the future, however, under a certain magic influence, he was to view it with very different eyes.

"In spite of what some people say," he continued, "I consider English country scenery charming."

"And yet it must be very beautiful abroad. Kitty read me one or two of your letters, and from the description you gave of the various places you had visited, I gathered that you thought nothing could be so beautiful on earth."

"No doubt they are very beautiful," he answered. "But for my part give me the old-world peace of England. There is certainly nothing like that to be found elsewhere. I would rather stand on the hill yonder and look down the valley in summer-time, than gaze upon the Rhine at Heidelberg, or Naples harbour at daybreak, or visit ancient Philæ by moonlight."

What further heresies this young man would have pledged himself to in his enthusiasm I can not say. Fortunately for him, however, the vicar and his wife were announced at that moment, and a distraction was thus caused. Until that moment Miss Kitty had been regarding him with steadfast eyes. Clever beyond all other men, as she considered her brother, she had never seen him come out of his shell like this before. Hitherto he had been rather given to pooh-poohing the country, and had once been known even to assert that "London and Paris were the only two places in which it was possible for a civilized man to live." What was the reason of this sudden change?

The vicar was a tall man with a pompous air, who looked forward some day to being a bishop, and had already assumed the appearance and manners of one. His wife, on the other hand, was small, and of a somewhat peevish disposition. It was currently reported that the husband and wife spent the greater portion of their time in squabbling, while it was certain that they contradicted each other in public with an openness and frequency that at times was apt to be a little embarrassing.

"Possibly I may have been wrong," said the vicar, when he had seated himself and had taken a cup of tea from his hostess's hands, "but did I not hear you extolling the beauties of a country life as I entered the room, Mr. Henderson?"

He put the question as if it were one of world-wide importance, which, answered carelessly, might involve great international complications. Then, without waiting for an answer, he continued: "For my part, while admitting that a country life is possessed of many charms, with which the Metropolis can not compare, I must go on to say that there is a breadth, if I may so express it, in London life that is quite lacking outside."

His wife saw her opportunity, and, as was her habit, was quick to take advantage of it.

"You have never had any experience of London life, William, so how can you possibly tell?" she said, sharply.

"My dear, I venture to say that it is a generally admitted fact," her husband replied.

"Generally admitted facts are as often as not rubbish," retorted the lady with some asperity. "What I say is, let a man do his duty wherever he is, and make the best of what he's got, without grumbling."

There was an unmistakable innuendo in this speech, and for a moment an awkward silence ensued.

"I hear you have built a new conservatory, Mr. Henderson?" said Miss Devereux, as if to change the subject.

"It is just completed," said Godfrey. "Would you care to see it?"

A general desire to inspect this new wonder having been expressed, Godfrey led the way from the room, contriving, when all had passed out, to take up his position beside their youngest visitor.

"Will you take pity upon a stranger in the land?" he said, "and give me some

information?"

"What can I tell you?" she asked.

He glanced at the vicar and his wife, who were some little distance in front.

"Do they always squabble like this?" he inquired.

"Yes, invariably," she replied. "We are used to it, but strangers are apt to find it embarrassing. I really believe the habit of squabbling has grown upon them until they have become so accustomed to it that they do not notice it. By the way, Mr. Henderson, there is one question of vital importance I must decide with you. Are you going to hunt?"

As a matter of fact Godfrey had made up his mind to do so occasionally, but now, remembering that Miss Devereux possessed the reputation of a second Diana, he spoke as if it were the hunting that had mainly induced him to live in Midlandshire. He registered a vow that he would purchase a stud immediately, and that he would look upon missing a run as a sin that could only be expurgated by religiously attending the next.

By this time they had reached the new conservatory, which adjoined the studio Godfrey had built for himself. It was a handsome building, and gave a distinction to that side of the house which it certainly had lacked before.

"Admirable, admirable," said the vicar, complacently. "It reminds me of the palm-house at Kew."

"It is twenty years since you were at Kew, William; how can you possibly remember what the palm-house is like?" retorted his wife.

"My dear, I have always been noted for the excellence of my memory," the vicar replied. "I assure you I have the most vivid recollection of the house in question."

"You mislaid your spectacles this morning, and if I hadn't seen you put them in your pocket you would never have thought of looking for them there," said his wife, to whom this fact appeared to be relative to the matter at issue.

From the conservatory to the studio was a natural transition, and the latest work upon the easel was duly inspected and admired.

"I remember your picture in the Academy last year, Mr. Henderson," said Miss Devereux. "I can assure you that it brought the tears into my eyes."

"It is very kind of you to say so," he said, feeling that no compliment that had

ever been paid him was so much worth having.

Then a luminous idea occurred to him.

"I wonder if, some day, you would let me paint you a little picture?" he asked, almost timidly.

"I really could not think of such a thing," his companion replied. "Your time is too valuable to be wasted in that way."

"I shall paint one, nevertheless," he replied. "In return, perhaps, you will instruct me in the ways of the Midlandshire hunt?"

"I shall be delighted," she answered. "You must make Kitty come too."

Godfrey promised to do so, but for once in his life he was ungallant enough to think that he could dispense with his sister's society. Presently Miss Devereux's cart was announced and Kitty and Godfrey accompanied her to the front door. She kissed Kitty and then held out her hand to Godfrey.

"Good-bye, Mr. Henderson," she said. "Remember that the hounds meet at Spinkley Grove on Thursday, at eleven o'clock, when you will be permitted an opportunity of making the acquaintance of the Master and the Hunt."

"I shall be there without fail," he answered, as he helped her into the cart and arranged her rug for her. She thereupon nodded to the groom, who left the ponies' heads and jumped on to the step behind as the cart passed him, with an adroitness that was the outcome of long practice. A moment later the vehicle had turned the corner of the drive and was lost to view.

"Well?" said Kitty as they turned to go in.

"Well," Godfrey replied.

"You like her?"

"Very much indeed," he answered, and as they passed down the hall together he made an important decision to himself. "Provided she will have me," he said, "I think I have found my wife."

CHAPTER IV

More than a month had elapsed since Godfrey had made his début as a recognised member of the Midlandshire Hunt. It is also necessary to state that during that period he had seen a good deal of pretty Miss Molly Devereux, who, faithful to the promise she had given him, had shown him a large amount of the country, with the fences, hedges, and ditches thereof. She was also the person who was mainly responsible for the large sum of money he had spent on horseflesh during that time. As a matter of fact, this impressionable young man was head over ears in love, and to prove it, he neglected his work, imperilled his neck, and, as his mother remarked, ran an almost daily risk of coming to an early grave through waiting about on the outskirts of damp coverts, to say nothing of the long, wet rides home on wintry evenings.

"I can not understand why you do it," said the old lady, who, by the way, was not nearly so obtuse as she pretended to be. "When you first came home from abroad, you declared that the hunting would never possess sufficient attraction to take you out on a damp day. Now you are never happy unless you are in the saddle."

"It's a good healthy exercise, mother," said Kitty, with the suspicion of a twinkle in her eyes. "Besides, Godfrey has taken such a liking to Sir George Penistone, the Master, that he is never happy when he is parted from him."

Now if there was one person in the country for whom Godfrey entertained a profound distaste, it was for the gentleman in question. Sir George was known to have been desperately in love with Miss Devereux ever since he had left the 'Varsity; but, while he was plucky enough in the saddle, and would ride his horse at anything that an animal could be expected to jump, and at a good many that it could not, he had never been able to screw up his courage sufficiently to broach the subject to her. Finding that he had a rival in the field, however, had given him a fillip, and, in consequence, relations between the two young men were as strained as it was possible for them to be, and yet to allow them to remain on speaking terms. Whether the young lady herself was aware of this is more than I can say; if she were she gave no sign of it, but treated them both with the same impartiality. Certain other ladies of the hunt vowed that she was a heartless flirt, and that she was playing one man off against the other. Such uncharitable sentiments, however, could only be expected from people who would have acted

in the same fashion had they been placed in a similar position.

It has been said by a well-known writer, who, for all we know to the contrary, was a crusty old bachelor, and therefore well qualified to speak upon the matter, "that the very uncertainty of love is one of its greatest charms." I fancy that Godfrey Henderson, at that particular time, would not have agreed with the sage in question. The uncertainty of knowing whether he was loved or not, was making a different man of him. In days that seemed as far removed from the present as if a gulf of centuries lay between, he had been a happy-go-lucky, easy-going fellow, taking the world as he found it, and never allowing himself to be much troubled by anything. Now, however, he had grown preternaturally solemn, was much given to silent communings with himself, and only brightened up when he was in the presence of the person who was the object of his adoration. Naturally this could not continue for long.

"I'll speak to her the very first opportunity I get," he said to himself; "and if she won't have me, I'll cut the whole show and go abroad. I could pick up Fensden in Dresden, and we'll go off to Japan together."

But when he was given a favourable opportunity of speaking, he found he was unable to bring his courage to the sticking-point, and for the next day or two he called himself by a variety of names that, had they been addressed to him by any one else, he would have considered most objectionable. Regarded dispassionately, in the silent watches of the night, it seemed a small thing to do. He had only to get her alone, to take her hand, if he could manage to obtain possession of it, and then to make his passion known, and ask her to be his wife. Any one could do that, and he had the best of reasons, when he looked round the circle of his married acquaintances, for knowing that it had been carried out successfully on numerous occasions before. Yet when it became necessary to put it into practice he discovered that it demanded a heroism to which the charge of the Light Brigade and the storming of the Redan were as nothing.

"I see that the hounds meet at Churley cross roads on Monday," said his sister, one morning at breakfast. "Molly wants me to go, but I fear it will be impossible. I suppose it is not necessary to ask if you will be there?"

"I suppose I shall," Godfrey replied, as if he had not thought very much about the matter.

In his heart, however, he knew that it would require an extraordinary force to keep him away. On Friday he did not go, for the reason that he had incidentally learned that a certain lady would be in town at her dressmaker's. The same day

he discovered that his old friend and schoolfellow, James Bradford, to wit, had returned from America, en route to the Continent, and the inference was that if they did not lunch together, they would be scarcely likely to meet again for some considerable time. What, therefore, was more fitting than that he should catch the 10.18 train at Detwich, and set off for the Metropolis? His mother and sister said nothing, except to wish him a pleasant journey. When they were alone together afterward, however, Mrs. Henderson turned to her daughter.

"Poor boy," she said, "I never thought he would take it as seriously as he is doing. I have never seen a harder case."

To which her daughter replied somewhat enigmatically:

"I wish I knew what she intends doing."

Despite the eagerness Godfrey had shown to renew his acquaintance with his friend, Mr. James Bradford, he did not appear to derive such a vast amount of satisfaction from their meeting as the trouble he had taken to bring it about would have implied.

"I never saw such a change in a man in my life," said Mr. James Bradford afterward, when Godfrey had left the club. "He fidgeted about all the time we were at lunch, and examined his watch at least twice in every five minutes. Coming into money doesn't appear to agree with him. It's a pity, for he used to be such a good chap."

On leaving Pall Mall Godfrey took a cab to Bond Street, and for upward of an hour paced religiously up and down that fashionable thoroughfare. Then, taking another cab, he drove to Euston, where he spent at least three-quarters of an hour inspecting the various trains that passed in and out of the station, pottering about the bookstalls, and glaring at the travellers who approached him. As every one is aware who lives in the neighbourhood, there is only one good train in the afternoon that stops at Detwich, hence his reason for going to the station at that hour. As the time approached for that train to leave, he grew more and more nervous, and when the train itself at length backed into the station to take up its passengers, his anxiety became almost pitiable to watch. Placing himself near the bookstall, he scrutinized every passenger who approached him. At last he became aware of two figures, who were making their way leisurely along the platform in search of an empty carriage. One was Lady Devereux, tall, gray-haired, and eminently dignified; her companion there is no need to describe. It struck Godfrey, as he watched her, that never in his life had he seen so pretty a face or figure. Nerving himself to carry out the operation he had in mind, he

strolled down the platform, then turning, walked back along the train, glancing into the various carriages as he passed, until he reached that in which the two ladies were seated. Then, as if he were more than surprised at seeing them, he lifted his hat.

"How do you do, Lady Devereux?" he said. "This is an altogether unexpected meeting!" Then, having saluted the younger lady, he inquired whether they would permit him to travel down with them.

"Do so, by all means," Lady Devereux replied. "Molly and I have been obliged to put up with each other's company since the early morning. But how is it that you are not hunting to-day, Mr. Henderson?"

"An old friend has just returned from America," Godfrey remarked, "and he invited me to lunch with him. Otherwise I should have been out, of course."

Whether Miss Molly believed this statement or not I can not say, but I do not think it probable. One thing was plain; on this particular occasion she had made up her mind not to be gracious to the poor young man, and when he endeavoured to draw her into conversation, she answered him shortly, and then retired into the seclusion of her newspaper.

Why she should have treated him so it is impossible to say, but there could be no sort of doubt that she was offended at something. In consequence the poor fellow was about as miserable a specimen of the human race as could have been found in England that day. When Detwich was reached, he saw the two ladies to their carriage, and bade them good-bye. Then, mounting to the box of his own dog-cart, he sent the horse flying down the street at a pace that, had he not been well known, would in all probability have secured him an interview with a magistrate.

"And what sort of journey did you have?" inquired his mother, as she gave him a cup of tea on his arrival at the house.

"Very pleasant," he answered, though his looks belied his assertion.

"And would you care, as you said the other day, to go back to live in London?" asked mischievous Miss Kitty.

"I think London is one of the most detestable places on earth," he replied, stirring his tea as though he were sweeping the Metropolis into the sea.

"And did you see any one you knew while you were in town?" inquired his mother.

"A lot of people I don't care a scrap about," he answered.

Feeling that he was not in a fit humour for society, he took himself off to his studio, where he threw himself into an easy chair, and lit the largest pipe in his possession. This he smoked as savagely as if it were responsible for his troubles. By the time the dressing-bell rang, he was more than ever determined to set off for Japan. So strong, however, was the chain which bound him, that, on second thoughts, he came to the conclusion that he would postpone his departure until after the meet at the Churley cross roads on the following Monday. In consequence he spent a miserable Saturday, and it was not until he came out of church on Sunday morning that he was anything like his old self. All through the service he had been paying a greater amount of attention to a neat little toque, and the back of a very shapely head, a few seats in front of him, than was altogether proper in a place of worship. According to custom, the two families united in the porch.

"Good-morning, Mr. Henderson," said Molly, as they shook hands, and then, after they had passed outside and the usual commonplaces had been exchanged, she continued: "What do you think of the state of the weather?"

There was more in her speech than met the eye. What she really meant was: "Do you think we shall be able to hunt to-morrow? If so, I am prepared to be kind to you once more."

Godfrey replied that there had been signs of frost early in the morning, but he rejoiced to see that they were going off.

"We shall see you to-morrow, I suppose?" she said, as they passed through the lych-gate out into the high road.

"Of course," he answered. "Provided old Benbow doesn't break his neck in the meantime, I shall be there."

"I am so glad," she answered, and then, as though she felt that she had said too much, she devoted her conversation during the rest of the walk to Kitty, leaving Godfrey to discuss parish affairs with her father.

She had said enough, however, in that short time to transport Godfrey into the seventh heaven of delight; and I venture to think that if any one had been foolish enough to suggest a trip to Japan to him at that moment, it would have been at the peril of his or her life.

I must leave you to imagine with what attention he studied the appearance of the sky during the next eighteen hours. The barometer in the hall was tapped with a regularity that was sufficient to disorganize its internal economy forever and a

day. Before he retired to rest, he took careful stock of the heavens, and was relieved to find that there was no sign of frost in the air. Next morning he was up betimes, took his tub with the air of a man from whom great things are expected, and made a heartier breakfast than he had done for some weeks past. He looked a handsome figure in pink as his mother was careful to inform him.

The distance to Churley cross roads from the Hall is little more than a mile, so that the half-hour he had allowed himself to get there, enabled him to jog along without hurrying his horse. It was what might be described as a perfect hunting morning. A slight mist hung in places upon the fields; it was, however, being quickly dispersed by the sunshine. A pleasant breeze was driving the clouds across the sky, throwing delightful shadows upon the meadows, and crisping the surface of the river as he passed over the old stone bridge. When he reached the cross roads he had still some ten minutes in hand; but as there were several others as early as himself, this fact did not weigh heavily upon his mind. Meanwhile he kept a sharp eye on the road down which he had come, and when he espied the stout figure of the old baronet on his famous hunter, with his daughter beside him, mounted on a somewhat vicious-looking chestnut, he rode forward to receive them.

"A capital day," said the old gentleman, when they had exchanged the usual salutations. "We could scarcely have a better. Strangely enough, as I was saying to Molly just now, in fifty years I've never known a wet Churley Cross Meet."

"What do you think of my new horse, Mr. Henderson?" inquired his daughter, when the latter had remarked upon the strangeness of the coincidence. "Papa bought him for me on Saturday."

"He must be very nearly thoroughbred," Godfrey replied, not caring to add that he did not altogether like the look of the animal in question. There was a nasty flicker in the horse's eyes, of which, to Godfrey's thinking, he showed a great deal too much white. There could be no denying his make and shape, however. "You'll be showing us a clean pair of heels to-day."

"I'll be bound she will," said the old baronet, upon whom the horse had evidently made a favourable impression. "They tell me he won a decent steeplechase last season; and Seth Warton, of whom I got him, says he is the best he has had in his stable for many a long day. That says something."

"I sincerely hope he may prove to be all you could wish," said Godfrey; and at that moment the Master came forward to bid them good-morning.

"I think we'll try the Spinney first, Sir Vivian," he said. "I hear good reports in

that direction. A new horse, Miss Devereux, and I should say a fast one. Have pity on us all!"

As if to prove that his manners were not so good as his looks, the animal in question made as if he would rear, and for a moment Godfrey's heart seemed to stand still.

"I don't like the look of him," he said to himself. "Heaven send he does her no mischief."

But he was not permitted much time to think of such a thing, for the Master had given the signal, and already a general move was being made in the direction of the Spinney. Godfrey settled himself down by Miss Devereux's side, leaving the old gentleman free to discuss the prospects of the day with the local doctor, a sportsman of some celebrity in the neighbourhood.

"Miss Devereux," said Godfrey, as they approached the wood, "at the risk of offending you, I must say that I don't altogether care about the look of that horse. I should say, from his appearance, handsome as it is, that he possesses more than a touch of temper. I do hope you will be careful what you do with him to-day."

"You needn't be afraid," she answered, as she flashed a sharp glance at him. "I think we understand each other perfectly. He hasn't been with hounds for some time, and he's naturally a little excited. It will wear off, however, before the day is done."

"I sincerely hope it may," Godfrey continued. "In the meantime I can not help wishing that we could exchange mounts."

"You think that you could manage him better than I?" she said. "If that is a challenge we will see. Now, let us watch what goes on, for I want to be well away."

At that moment three blasts of the horn were heard from the right, and, before Godfrey could have counted twenty, the hounds were out of cover and streaming away in the direction of the village—only to change their course after the first quarter of a mile.

"It looks as if we were in for a fast thing," said Miss Devereux; and the words had scarcely left her lips when the chestnut gave a violent plunge in the air and was off at a racing pace.

"If he goes on like that, the brute will pull her arms out, if he doesn't do anything worse," Godfrey muttered to himself.

But so far the girl had got him well in hand. Sitting back in the saddle, she let him have his head, taking a gradual pull at him as they neared the first hedge. Whatever his other faults may have been, he was certainly a jumper, for he cleared the obstacle in unmistakable style. As she had said a few moments before, there could be no doubt that they were in for a fast thing. The hounds were racing as if their one desire was to run Master Reynard to earth before he could get into the next field. Godfrey's own horse, to use a phrase that his mother could never understand, "was going strong," but he could not live in the same county with the chestnut. In spite of Miss Devereux's undoubted skill in the saddle, the horse was gradually becoming the master. At the third fence, an ugly-looking post and rail, with a bad approach, he took off too soon, giving his rider the chance of an extremely nasty fall. She saved the situation, however, by a miracle. They had reached the top of the hill, and were descending into the valley on the other side, when Godfrey, whose horse was doing its best, realized that something very serious was the matter ahead. The chestnut had undeniably got out of hand, and, scared by some sheep, was edging toward the left.

"It is just what I expected," he said to himself as he rode along some half-a-dozen lengths behind the other. "She is losing control over him. I must follow at all costs."

Digging his spurs into the horse's side, he endeavoured to race up to the animal in front of him. He was too late, however. The chestnut had got the bit in his teeth, and, swerving to the left, was galloping in the direction of a small wood. Observing this, Godfrey turned his horse's head and made after him. Fortunately, the paddock over which they were galloping was a large one; but the chestnut was going at such a pace that he very soon crossed it. Skirting the wood, he began to descend the hill on the other side. Then he disappeared altogether from view. When Godfrey reached the top of the rise, he scarcely dared to look about him; but when he did so, he saw that the horse had altered his original course, and was making his way again across the angle, as if he desired to reach the line the hounds were still following. In a flash Godfrey realized the situation and took in the fact that the animal was unconsciously making direct for a large chalk pit, and that unless something were done at once to prevent him, nothing could save both horse and rider from a terrible death.

"God help me to save her!" he cried. "God help me to save her!"

CHAPTER V

For a moment after he realized the true state of affairs Godfrey was spellbound with terror. Was it just possible that he would be able to head the horse off from the pit? If he could not, then it would be the end of all things as far as Miss Devereux was concerned. With the cold sweat of terror on his brow he watched the girl he loved racing down the slope on the maddened horse. He saw that she was making a brave fight to bring him to a standstill; but even at that distance he could tell that her effort was in vain. A moment later the animal had once more changed his course and had dashed toward a hedge. He scarcely rose at it; as a natural consequence he struck it, toppled over, and then both horse and rider disappeared together. Fearful at what he might find, Godfrey galloped toward the spot, jumped the gate that separated it from the neighbouring field, and looked about him for what he should see. The horse was lying stretched out upon the ground, and one glance was sufficient to show him that its neck was broken. In the dry ditch below the hedge he could catch a glimpse of a black figure. He sprang from his horse and approached it. Lifting her head he supported her in his arms, and as he did so a little sigh escaped from her lips.

"God be thanked, she is still alive!" he muttered to himself, and then he replaced her head upon the bank.

Taking off his coat he made it into a ball. He placed it beneath her head, and then set off in search of water. When he had procured a little in his hat he returned and bathed her forehead and temples with it. After a while she opened her eyes and looked up at him.

"I feel better now," she answered, in reply to his inquiries. "Where is the horse?"

"Close beside you," he said, and then going to his own animal he took his flask from the holster and filled the little cup with sherry.

"Drink this," he said. "It will do you good."

The wine revived her, and in a few minutes she was so far recovered as to be able to sit up and discuss matters with him.

"I am quite well now," she said. "But how am I to get home? Poor papa! What a state he will be in when he hears! Since my horse is dead I suppose I must try to walk."

"You will do nothing of the kind," Godfrey replied, firmly. "I will lift you into the saddle and you must try and ride my horse. If we can find a village near here, you can remain there until a carriage is sent from the Court to fetch you."

"As I have proved myself incompetent I suppose I must obey you," she answered, with a touch of her old spirit. "But what is to be done with my own poor beast?"

"I will arrange about him when I have attended to your comfort," he said, and then assisted her to rise and lifted her into the saddle. For the first hundred yards or so they walked almost in silence. She was the first to speak.

"Mr. Henderson," she said, looking down at him, "I owe you an apology. I was rude to you the other day, and I laughed at you when you told me this morning that you did not like my new horse. Events have proved that you were right. Will you forgive me?"

"I have nothing to forgive," he answered; "but you can have no idea how nervous I was this morning when I saw how that brute behaved."

"Why should you have bothered yourself about me?" she asked, not, however, with quite her usual confidence.

Here was the very opportunity he had been looking for so long. He felt that he must take possession of it at once.

"Because I love you," he answered. "You must have known that I have been in love with you ever since I first saw you, Molly. Don't you believe me?"

"Yes, I know it," she replied, looking at him with the love-light shining in her own eyes.

"And your answer, Molly? What can you say to me?"

"Only that I love you too," she murmured.

I do not know what my spinster readers will think, but the fact remains that the paddock they were crossing was a large one, some twenty acres in extent. It was almost in the centre of this open space that he proposed to her, and she, brazen creature, at his suggestion, I will admit, stooped from her saddle and permitted him to kiss her where all the world might see.

It was between three and four o'clock that afternoon when Godfrey reached home. He had waited at the little village inn until the carriage, which he had sent for to convey her home, arrived from the Court. Then, when he had promised to

ride over in the morning in order to interview her father, he watched her drive off and had afterward departed himself to his own abode.

"Well, Godfrey, and what sort of a day have you had?" asked Miss Kitty, as they stood in the drawing-room before the fire.

"Splendid," he answered. "I was awfully cut up at one time, but on the whole it has been one of the best days in my life."

"You seem to have enjoyed it. Where did you find?"

"At Churley Spinney," he answered.

"And you killed at——?"

"I'm sure I don't know," was the reply.

"How long did you run?"

"I don't know that either."

"You don't seem to have been very observant. What *do* you know?"

"I only know that I am engaged to Molly Devereux. For the present that seems to me to be quite sufficient."

In a moment her arms were round his neck.

"You dear boy, I can not tell you how thankful I am."

Nor was Mrs. Henderson's pleasure the less sincere.

To say that Godfrey Henderson was a happy man after his acceptance by Miss Molly would be too mild an expression altogether. It is my opinion that for the next few days he could not have been said to be properly responsible for his actions. He behaved like an amiable lunatic, spent the greater part of his time, when he was not with his *fiancée*, planning alterations to a house which was already perfect, and vowed many times a day that he was not nearly good enough for one so angelic. Every one, with the exception of Sir George Penistone, perhaps, was delighted with the match. The worthy old baronet gave his consent immediately almost before it was asked in point of fact, and vowed that the two properties would run splendidly together. A county dinner was given to celebrate the engagement. There were folks who prophesied that the wedding festivities would be on a scale seldom witnessed even by Midlandshire, which as all the world knows, or should know, is the most hospitable county in the three kingdoms. The engagement was to be a very short one, and the happy couple

were to leave directly after the marriage ceremony for the South of France.

"You are quite sure that you are not anxious to change your mind?" said Molly to her lover one evening, when they were riding home from hunting. "Remember, there is still time."

"If it were not so light, and I had not the best of reasons for knowing that old Farmer Giles is behind us, and has his eyes glued upon our backs, I would find a means of making you repent of that speech." Then he added more seriously: "Darling, whatever may happen in the future, whatever troubles may be in store for us, you will always believe that I love you, will you not?"

"Always," she answered. "Happen what may, I shall never doubt that. But what makes you suddenly so solemn?"

"I don't know," he replied. "Somebody walking over my grave, I suppose."

She gave a little cry of pain.

"For pity's sake don't talk like that!" she cried. "You have no idea how it hurts me."

"In that case I will never do so again," he said. "Forgive me and forget that I said it, dear." Then to change the conversation, he added: "I expect this will be our last day's hunting together before we are married. We shall both be too busy to be able to spare the time."

"I have no idea how I am going to get through all I have to do," she said. "I shall practically live in shops for the next month, and I do detest shopping. Mamma, on the other hand, seems to revel in it. I fancy she would like to have a wedding to arrange every month in the year. By the way, Godfrey, have you decided who is going to be your best man?"

"Yes," he replied. "Victor Fensden. He is my oldest friend, and I heard from him only this morning that he will be delighted to officiate in that capacity. He is in Paris just now, but returns to England at the end of the week, when I have invited him to come down here for a few days. I hope you will like him."

"I am certain to like any friend of yours," she replied. "I shall be very interested in Mr. Fensden. I came across a volume of his poems the other day. It was very strangely bound and illustrated in an extraordinary manner by himself."

"That's his own idea. And did you like the poetry?"

"Well, if I must be candid, and I'm sure you won't mind, I must confess that I did

not understand much of it. It seems so confused. Not a bit like Tennyson, or Keats, or Shelley."

"I quite agree with you," said Godfrey. "Fensden is very clever, too clever for me, I'm afraid. One or two literary people rave about his work, I know, but for my part I like less words and a little more human nature. Give me 'Gunga Din,' or the 'Charge of the Light Brigade,' for my money, and anybody else can have all the nymphs and satyrs, and odes to Bacchus and Pan that were ever crammed into the realms of poetry."

Loath as I am to say it, such was the infatuation of this girl that she positively agreed with him. Fate, with that characteristic kindness for which it is celebrated, had been good enough to endow them with minds of similar calibre, which, of course, was very desirable, and just as it should be.

On the Wednesday morning following the conversation I have just described Molly and her mother departed for London, where the former was to be handed over to the tender care of Madame Delamaine and her assistants. They were to be away for three days, returning home on the Friday evening, and, as a little compensation for their absence, it was agreed that Godfrey should meet them in town on the Thursday and take them to a theatre.

Accordingly the morning train conveyed him to the Metropolis. He had the pleasure of the vicar's society on the way up, and the latter, not being restrained by his wife, was able to give him his opinion on matters in general and the immediate stress on politics in particular. In consequence, as Godfrey admitted afterward, he spent two such hours of boredom as he hopes never to experience again. On his arrival in London he drove to his tailors and ordered his wedding garments, going on afterward to a well-known firm of jewellers in Regent Street, from whom he bought a wedding-ring with as much care as he would have given to the purchase of Crown jewels, and a diamond necklace with little more concern than if it had been a pair of gloves. From Regent Street he drove to his club for luncheon. He was late, but that did not matter, for he felt that the morning had been well spent. On entering the dining-room he looked about him for a vacant table. He had chosen one, and was proceeding toward it when a well-known voice behind him said:

"Come and sit here, Godfrey."

He turned round to find himself face to face with no less a person than Victor Fensden.

"My dear old fellow, this is indeed a surprise," he said as he shook hands. "I

thought you were still in Paris. How long have you been in London?"

"I crossed this morning," Victor replied. "I am tired of travelling and want to settle down."

"And you have enjoyed yourself?"

"Fairly well," Victor replied. "I have met a lot of people whom I hope never to see again, and have tasted, I should say, every example of villainous cookery in Europe. I am thinking of bringing out a new guide book, which I shall name 'The Tourist's Vade Mecum'; or, 'Where *not* to go in Europe.'"

Considering that it was to Godfrey's generosity that he owed the long holiday he had been able to take, this was scarcely a grateful speech, but the latter did not comment on it. He was too happy himself and too glad to see his friend once more to take offence. He noticed that in his dress Victor was even more artistic than before. His hair was a shade longer, his tie a trifle larger (he wore it tied in a bow with ends flying loose), and the general tone of his costume a little more pronounced.

"And the future Mrs. Henderson?" he said, airily. "How is she? As you may suppose, I am all anxiety to make her acquaintance."

"You will do so on Saturday," Godfrey replied, "for I presume you are coming down to me then?"

"I shall be delighted," said Fensden. "An English country house will be soothing after the caravansaries I have been domiciled in lately. I never knew how much I detested my brother Briton until I met him in a foreign hotel."

The sneer on his face as he said this was not pretty to watch.

"And now that you are at home once more, I presume you will resume your old habit of searching the slums for foreign eating houses?" said Godfrey, with a laugh. "Do you remember how and where we met Teresina?"

"Perfectly," Victor replied shortly, and then changed the conversation by inquiring how long Godfrey intended remaining in town.

"I go back to-morrow morning," was the other's reply. "And now that I come to think of it, why shouldn't you come down with me? It would be just the thing for you. We shall be very pleased to see you if you care to come."

"Impossible," the other answered. "I have such a lot to do. I could not possibly manage it before Saturday."

"Let it be Saturday then," said Godfrey, with an imperturbable good humour that contrasted very strongly with the other's peevishness. "There's a first-rate train which gets you down in time for afternoon tea. I'll meet you at the station."

When Godfrey had finished his lunch he paid a visit to his saddler and his bootmaker, and then to fill in the time, inspected the stables of a well-known horse-dealer. He would have liked to go round to Eaton Square where Molly and her mother were staying with an old maiden aunt, but he thought better of it, and contented himself by strolling down Bond Street on the off-chance that he might meet them. He was not successful, however, so he returned to his hotel to dress and dine.

At ten minutes to eight he was to be seen standing in the vestibule of the Lyceum, waiting for the ladies to put in an appearance. When their carriage drove up he hastened forward to greet them, and conducted them forthwith to the box he had engaged. Nothing that could tend to their comfort had been omitted by this extravagant young man, and he found his reward in the tender little squeeze Molly gave his hand when he removed her cloak. During the evening he did not concern himself very much with the play; he watched his future wife's pretty face and the expressions that played upon it. As soon as they were married he was determined to paint a life-size portrait of her, which he prophesied to himself would be the best piece of work he had ever accomplished. But even the happiest evenings must come to an end, and this particular one was no exception to the rule. When the curtain fell on the last act, he re-cloaked his two charges, and escorted them downstairs once more. Then, bidding them wait in the vestibule, he himself went out in search of their carriage. When he had placed them in it, he bade them good-night, and came very near being knocked over by a hansom as he watched them disappear in the traffic.

The night was bitterly cold, and snow was falling. Reflecting that it would be wiser not to stand still, he turned up the collar of his coat, and wondered what he should do next. Should he go back to his hotel and to bed, or should he stroll on to his club and see who was there? He eventually decided in favour of the hotel, and accordingly set off along the Strand in the hope that he might presently be able to pick up a cab.

He had reached Exeter Hall, when, with a cry of astonishment, he found himself standing face to face with the one person of all others he had least expected to see in England. It was Teresina!

"Teresina!" he ejaculated, in surprise. "What on earth does this mean? How long

have you been in England?"

"Nearly a month," she answered, looking away as if she desired to avoid his eyes.

"And why did you not let me know that you were coming?" he asked, reproachfully. "You must surely remember that you promised to do so?"

"I did not like to trouble you," she replied, still in the same curiously hard voice. "You were not in London, and I thought you would be too busy to have time to spare for me."

"You know that is not true," he answered. "I should be a mean brute if I did not find time to look after my friends. Where are you living? In the old house?"

She paused for a moment before she replied. He noticed her embarrassment, but did not put the right construction upon it.

"Near the Tottenham Court Road," she said at last. "I don't think you would know the street if I told you."

"And your mother, how is she?"

He saw the look of pain which spread over her face, and noticed that her eyes filled with tears.

"My mother is dead!" she answered, very quietly. "She died in Naples two months ago."

"And you are alone in the world? My poor child! This will never do. You must let me help you if I can."

"No, no!" she cried, this time almost fiercely. "I do not require any help. I can support myself quite well."

"I shall have to be convinced of that before I let you go," he answered. "London is not the sort of place for a young girl to be alone in, particularly when one is a foreigner and poor."

"You were always kind to me," she replied, "but I can not let you do more. Besides you are going to be married. Is that not so?"

"It is quite true," he answered; "but how did you hear of it?"

She looked confused for a moment.

"I can not tell you," she replied. "Perhaps I saw it in the newspapers. You are famous, and they write about you. Now I must be getting home."

An empty cab happened to pass at that moment, and Godfrey hailed it.

"Get in," he said, when the vehicle had drawn up beside the pavement. "I am going to see you home. This is not the hour for you to be alone in the streets."

"No, no," she protested, even more vehemently than before. "I can not let you do this. I can walk quite well. It is not far, and I have often done it."

"Teresina, you must do as I tell you," said Godfrey, firmly. "I insist that you get in and that you give me your address."

She hesitated for a moment before she replied. Then she said:

"No. 16, Burford Street, off the Tottenham Court Road."

Having given the address to the driver, Godfrey took his place beside the girl. He was thankful, indeed, that he had met her, but the circumstances under which he had found her distressed him more than he was able to say. As they drove along he endeavoured to elicit some information from her concerning her present life. She was not communicative, however. That there was some mystery at the back of it all, he could see, and the more he thought of it, the more unhappy he became. Poor little Teresina! He remembered her as she was when she had first sat to him for the picture which had made his name; and as he looked out upon the falling snow and the miserable streets with the dark figures scurrying along the pavement on either hand, and thought of her future, his heart sank within him. He wondered whether he could persuade her to accept a sufficient sum of money from him to enable her to return to her own country and to live in comfort there? He was rich, and after all it was not only his duty but his pleasure to help an old friend. As she seemed so distressed at meeting him, he resolved to say nothing on the subject then, however; nevertheless, he was determined in his own mind that he would write to her on the morrow and make the offer, whether she accepted it or not. At last they came to a part of the Strand which was more brilliantly illuminated than elsewhere. As they came within the circle of the light, Teresina put up her hand to push back her hair, and Godfrey noticed that she wore a wedding-ring upon her third finger. This gave him food for reflection.

"Teresina," he said, "why did you not tell me that you were married? I thought you said you were alone in the world."

"My husband is dead," she answered, with what was almost a note of despair in her voice.

"Your husband dead, and your mother dead too?" he repeated, almost incredulously. "Teresina, my dear child, are you telling me the truth?"

"Why should you doubt me?" she cried. "You have no reason for doing so."

"Because I feel that you are hiding something from me," he said. "Is it any use my imploring you to confide in me? You know that I am your friend, and that I would help you to the best of my ability."

"I know you would," she answered. "You were always a good and kind friend to me. All I ask of you now, however, is to leave me alone. I am unhappy enough as it is. Do not seek to add to my misery."

"Heaven knows I have no desire to do that," said Godfrey. "But if you think I am going to leave you, as you are now, you are much mistaken. If you would only be brave and tell me everything, it might simplify matters."

"Impossible," she cried. "Have I not told you there is nothing to tell? Oh, why did I not go another way home!"

"Because it was to be," he answered. "You were in trouble, Providence sent me to help you. Believe me, that is the explanation."

A few moments later the cab turned from the Tottenham Court Road into a narrower and darker street. Half—way down this dingy thoroughfare it came to a standstill—before a house on the right-hand side. It was by no means a cheerful dwelling, and at that hour it was wrapped in complete darkness. They descended from the cab, and Godfrey, who had no desire that the cabman should overhear his conversation with Teresina, paid him off with a liberal *largesse*, and allowed him to go on his way rejoicing.

"Is it any use my again asking you to tell me your trouble?" he said to the girl beside him, when the vehicle had disappeared and a policeman had passed, after taking a long survey of them.

"Not in the least," she answered. "Please do not ask me."

"In that case, will you make me a promise, Teresina? If you will do so, I will ask no further questions for the present."

"What is it I am to promise?"

"That you will not leave this house without first letting me know whither you are going?"

"I will do that," she answered. "I will let you know when I leave this house."

"Here is my card then. You had better take care of it. A letter or telegram will always find me. And now good-night, my poor girl. Remember, I am your

friend."

"Good-night, and may God bless *you*."

So saying, she disappeared into the house, while he, in his turn, after taking the bearing of the house, in case he should want to find it again, set off in the opposite direction to that by which he had entered the street.

Meanwhile Teresina, choking down her sobs, climbed the stairs to the room she occupied in that ramshackle tenement. Unlocking the door, she entered and started to cross the floor in search of a box of matches she remembered having left upon the chimney-piece. She had not advanced more than three steps, however, before she was seized by the throat from behind, while at the same time a keen-bladed knife was driven, as far as the handle, between her shoulders, only to be withdrawn and thrust in again and again, until she fell with a little gasp upon the floor.

When her assassin had made sure that she was dead, he lit the gas and knelt beside her for a few minutes. Then he rose, placed something in a box upon the table, turned off the gas once more, picked up the box, and went out, relocking the door behind him.

CHAPTER VI

After leaving Teresina, Godfrey made his way back to his hotel. As he strode along he meditated as to what he should do to help her. That the girl was in serious trouble, he had not the least doubt; but since she would not allow him to assist her in any form, what could he do?

He had been through a good deal that day, and by the time he reached his hotel he was quite worn out. The night porter who admitted him noticed his haggard appearance.

"You don't look very well, sir," he said, sympathetically; "is there anything I can do for you?"

"If you could manage to get me a brandy and soda, I should be very much obliged," Godfrey said, as he dropped into one of the seats in the hall.

"I will do so with pleasure, sir," the man replied, and disappeared at once in search of the refreshment, which he very soon brought back. Godfrey drank it off, and then announced his intention of proceeding at once to bed.

"Poor little Teresina!" he said to himself as he wound up his watch; "poor little girl, it seems a shame that she should suffer so!"

Little did he guess that at that moment Teresina's troubles were over, that she would never know sorrow or poverty again.

Next morning he returned to Detwich by an early train. Though he had only been absent from it a little more than twenty-four hours, it seemed to him that he had been away for years.

"You look tired out, Godfrey," said his mother, as they stood together in the hall.

"I did not have a very good night last night," he said, "and I had a hard day's running about yesterday. That is all. You needn't worry about me, mother; I'm as strong as a horse."

He went on to tell his mother of his meeting with Fensden, and informed her that the latter intended coming to stay with them next day.

"That will be very nice," she said. "You will enjoy having him. I shall put him up in the south wing in order that he may be near you. The wall-papers are more

subdued there. I know, of old, how he notices these things."

"I don't think he will bother himself very much about wall-papers," said Godfrey, with a laugh. "He declares that he is so tired of travelling that the quiet of an English country house will brace him up again."

"I have no doubt it will," said the old lady: "I remember when your father took me to Paris for our honeymoon, the mere sound of the French language gave me a headache. I never hear it now without thinking of that time. And now tell me about Molly. Did she enjoy the play you took her to see?"

"Immensely," he replied. "She sent her love to you, and bade me tell you that she would be very pleased to come over to meet Fensden on Saturday. I only hope that she won't be knocked up by all this shopping."

His mother shook her head.

"I don't think you need have any fear on that score," she said. "When a girl is about to be married to the man of her heart, the collection of her *trousseau* becomes a labour of love. She will make a beautiful bride, worthy of my boy. I can't say more than that."

"You shouldn't say so much," said Godfrey. "If your boy were to believe all the compliments you pay him, he would become insufferably conceited. And now I must go round and see how things have been progressing in my absence."

The following morning witnessed Molly's arrival at the Hall. It was the first time she had stayed there since her engagement, and in consequence she was received with rapturous delight by her lover. Though they had only been parted for a day, they seemed to have a hundred things to tell each other. There were, moreover, certain important matters to be discussed connected with the internal arrangements of the house of which she was so soon to be mistress. I believe, so infatuated was the young man that, had she expressed a desire to have the whole fabric pulled down, and rebuilt in another fashion, he would have set about the work at once.

"You are quite sure there is nothing else you would like to have done?" he asked, when they had made the tour of inspection, and were approaching to the drawing-room once more.

"You have done too much already," she replied, looking affectionately at her lover. "I very much doubt if ever there was a girl so spoilt as I. You will have to make up for it by ruling me with a rod of iron afterward."

"God forbid that I should ever do that," he said seriously. "I hope I shall always be an indulgent husband to you."

"Not too indulgent," she said. "For my own sake, you must not be. I don't want to be like a spoilt child."

"You will never be that," he said. "To me you will always be the most——"

"Hush!" she said, holding up her finger in warning. "I think we must make it a rule to avoid every sort of compliment. I have had more than is good for me already."

"I shall find it difficult to obey you, but I will try," he returned. "And now come with me to the studio; I have one thing left to show you."

"What is that?"

"You must wait and see for yourself," he replied, and led the way through the conservatory to the room of which he had spoken. They found the easel covered with a cloth. This he drew aside.

"It is my present to you," he said, referring to the picture he had revealed, "to be hung in your own room."

"Oh, Godfrey, how good of you! What a splendid likeness!"

It was, in fact, a portrait of himself upon which he had been working hard ever since his engagement had been announced. He had intended it as a surprise, and in the pleasure he gave her, he felt that he had been amply repaid for the labour it had cost him.

"I shall treasure it all my life long," she said, and rewarded him in a manner that would have turned many folks green with envy.

"And now," she said, when she had gazed her full upon it, "I want you to show me a photograph of your friend, Mr. Fensden, if you have one. Remember I have no idea what he is like."

"That can very easily be remedied," he said. "I have a photo which was taken in Rome, and a small portrait that I painted myself."

So saying, he crossed the room to his writing-table, and, having opened a drawer, took from it a packet of cabinet photographs. They were, for the most part, likenesses of old friends, and when he had selected one of Victor from the number, he placed it before her.

"So that is Mr. Fensden?" she said, seating herself in what he called his business chair.

For some moments she studied it attentively. Then she replaced it on the writing-table.

"Well, now that you have seen the portrait, what do you think of him?" Godfrey asked, as he turned over some canvases on the other side of the room.

"I scarcely know what to say," she replied, slowly. "It is a refined face, a clever one, if you like; but, if I may be allowed to say what I think, there is something in it, I can not tell what, that I do not care about. I fancy the eyes are set a little too close together." Then she added more quickly: "I hope I have not offended you, dear. I should not have spoken so candidly."

"Why shouldn't you?" he inquired. "Perhaps, now you speak of it, the eyes are a little too close together. But you must wait until you have seen the man himself before you judge him. I assure you he can be a charming companion."

"I gathered as much from his photograph," she answered, taking it up and looking at it again, "At what time does he arrive to-day?"

"In time for afternoon tea," said Godfrey. "I am going to drive in to meet him."

Molly made a little *moue*; with the selfishness of love, she did not approve of Godfrey leaving her, if only for so short a time. And, if the truth be confessed, I fear she was a little jealous of the man who was to be responsible for his absence. It is not always that a sweetheart is any too well disposed toward her lover's bachelor friends. For some reason, Fensden's photograph had prejudiced her against him. She was resolved to be just; but she felt convinced in her own mind that she would never be able to say that she really liked or trusted the man. She did not tell Godfrey this.

In accordance with the arrangements he had made, that afternoon, at about three o'clock, Godfrey drove off to the station to meet his friend. He was looking forward to seeing him, if only that he might show him how great was the difference between the sketch the other had drawn of his future wife that night in the desert, and the reality. I fancy if England had been searched through that day, a happier young man than the master of Detwich would have been difficult to find. Yet, though he could not guess it, the climax of his life was only a few hours' distant.

As he drove along, he thought of Molly and the happiness that was to be his portion in the future. Then his thoughts turned to Teresina. While he had

prospered in the world, she had lost what little happiness she had ever possessed. He determined to discuss her affairs with Fensden on the first available opportunity, when doubtless the latter would be able to suggest a way in which he might assist her. By the time he had arrived at this reflection, he had reached the station, and the groom was standing at the horse's head. Having placed the reins under the patent clip, he descended from the cart and went on to the platform. The station-master saluted him respectfully, and informed him that the train had already been signalled. Indeed, the words had scarcely left that functionary's lips before a whistle was heard in the cutting, and a moment later it came into view. As the train swept past him Godfrey caught a glimpse of the man he had come to meet, gathering together his travelling things, in a first-class carriage.

"How are you, my dear old fellow?" he cried, as he turned the handle of the door. "You don't know how glad I am to see you! I am afraid you have had a cold journey. Let me take some of your things."

Victor graciously permitted the other to assist him with his luggage, and then he himself descended from the carriage. They shook hands and afterward strolled in the direction of the gate. Victor was attired in a magnificent travelling ulster, and a neat deer-stalker's hat. An orange-coloured tie peeped from the opening under his beard, and his hands were as daintily gloved as a lady's. Altogether, as he walked down the platform, he presented as artistic a figure as Detwich had seen for a very long time.

"What have you been doing since I saw you?" Godfrey inquired as they took their places in the dog-cart.

"Repairing the ravages of time and Continental travel," Victor replied, somewhat ambiguously. Then he added politely: "I hope Miss Devereux is well?"

"Very well, indeed," said Godfrey, "and most anxious to see you. She has read your poems and has seen your portrait; all she requires now is to be introduced to the original."

"In that case I fear she will be disappointed," said Victor, with what was almost a sneer in his voice. "Since she is with you, I presume your mother and sister are at the Hall. Do they look forward to the idea of turning out?"

"They are a pair of foolish women who would do anything, or give up anything in order to make me happy," the other replied. "As a matter of fact, I don't know that they altogether mind. They both prefer London, and when they return from their travels, I believe it is their intention to take a flat and settle down

somewhere in the neighbourhood of Kensington."

"While you are assimilating the bucolic virtues. Well, it's a pretty picture, and if I had fifteen thousand a year and a fine estate I might be tempted to do the same. As I haven't the money or the property I remain what I am."

"And that is?"

"A trifler," Victor replied, with unusual bitterness. "One who might have done and who did not—who dropped the substance in an attempt to grasp the shadow."

"Nonsense," said Godfrey, who did not like to hear his friend abuse himself in this fashion. "If you are going to talk like that I shall have to prescribe a long dose of country air."

Then, in an attempt to change the other's thoughts, he talked of their travels together, and of the curious characters they had met, which lasted until they had passed through the lodge gates and were well on their way across the park. Even in the sombreness of winter the place looked very beautiful, and Victor expressed himself delighted with it.

"I had no idea it was so fine," he said, as they swept round the drive and came into view of the house. "I can very well understand your liking for a country life when you possess an estate like this. Your uncle did you a kind action when he made you his heir."

"Nobody is more sensible of that fact than I am," Godfrey replied. "I only wish I could let the old fellow know how grateful I am. I often think that during his lifetime he was disappointed in me because I took to painting instead of becoming a country gentleman. I wonder what he would say if he could see me now? I don't know what you may think, but to my mind there are times when one likes to imagine that the dead are near us."

Victor gave a violent start, followed by a shiver.

"Good Heavens! What an idea!" he cried. Then, dropping back into his old cynical tone, he continued: "I am afraid that if your idea were possible our human affairs would become somewhat complicated. For my own part I am quite content that the matter should stand as it is."

As he finished speaking they drew up before the steps and the two men descended from the cart. The ladies were waiting in the hall to receive them.

"How do you do, Mr. Fensden?" said Mrs. Henderson, coming forward to meet

him. "It is a long time since we have met, and you have been a great traveller in the meantime."

"Thanks to your son," said Victor as he took her hand. "How do you do, Miss Kitty? Events advance too quickly with all of us, but they seem to have taken giant strides with you."

"You mean that when last we met I was still on the other side of that line which is only crossed by a girl when she performs the mysterious operation called 'putting her hair up,'" answered that sharp-tongued young lady.

"Now, Victor," said Godfrey, when Kitty had been annihilated, "let me have the pleasure of introducing you to Miss Devereux."

The couple bowed to each other, and Victor offered her his congratulations.

"And now you must come and have your tea," said Mrs. Henderson, hospitably. "You must need it, I am sure, after your long journey."

"Or perhaps you would prefer something more substantial," put in Godfrey. "I noticed that you shivered as we came up the drive."

"I really think I should," said Victor. "After the warmth of the East our English winters are not to be trifled with."

Godfrey led the way to the dining-room and placed the spirit-stand before his friend.

"I don't think I have ever been so cold in my life before," said Victor, as he poured out an amount of brandy for himself that made Godfrey open his eyes in astonishment, for he had always looked upon the other as an exceedingly temperate man.

"Now, tell me, would you prefer to see your room first?" Godfrey inquired, when the other had tossed off his refreshment, "or shall we join the ladies?"

"Perhaps I had better make myself presentable first," Victor answered, glancing complacently at himself in the mirror above the chimney-piece.

Godfrey accordingly led the way to the room which had been set apart for his friend's use, and to which the latter's luggage had been conveyed. It was a pleasant apartment, looking out on what was called the Ladies' Garden, and thence across the park to a high and wooded hill. Victor went to the window and studied the prospect.

"You have a charming home," he said, with what was almost a sigh; "you are

about to marry a beautiful girl; you have wealth, success, and everything else that can make life worth living, Godfrey. You should be a happy man."

"I am happy," Godfrey replied, "and, please God, I'll do my best to make others so. And that reminds me, Victor, I want to have a talk with you. Do you know that on Thursday night I met Teresina in the Strand?"

Victor had turned from the window, and was brushing his hair at the time. As he heard what Godfrey said, the brush fell from his hand upon the floor. As he picked it up and continued his toilet, he said in surprise:

"Teresina in London? Surely you must have been mistaken. I thought she was still in Naples?"

"She is in London," Godfrey repeated. "I could not have been mistaken, for I spoke to her."

"At what time did you see her?"

"Just about midnight," his friend replied.

"Are you aware that the signora is dead and that Teresina is married?"

"How should I be likely to?" said Victor. "You know that I have not seen her since I bade her good-bye in your studio before we went abroad. And so the pretty model is married? Well, I suppose the proper thing to say is that one hopes that she will be happy."

"But she is not happy, far from it. Her husband as well as her mother is dead."

"I believe there are some wives who would consider that fact to be not altogether a matter for sorrow. But what makes you think that Teresina is unhappy?"

"Because she told me so, though she would not tell me anything further. The poor girl seemed in terrible distress."

"And you gave her money, I suppose?" said Victor. "That is usually the way one soothes trouble of her kind. I hope she was grateful."

"I wish to goodness you wouldn't be so cynical," said Godfrey, almost losing his temper. "I wanted to help her, but she would not let me. Every time I offered my assistance she implored me to leave her. She broke down altogether when we reached her house."

"Then you took her home?" said the other. "Do you think that was wise?"

"Why should I not have done so?"

"Well, you see," said Victor, putting his brushes back into their case, "circumstances have somewhat changed with you. Miss Devereux might not altogether approve."

"Miss Devereux is too good and kind a girl to object to my doing what I could to comfort an old friend in trouble."

"But when that old friend in trouble happens to be an extremely beautiful girl the situation becomes slightly changed. However, don't think that I am endeavouring to interfere. And now shall we go downstairs?"

"But, confound it, Victor, you don't mean to say that you take no more interest in Teresina's fate than this? I thought you liked her as much as I did."

"*Mon cher ami*," said Victor, rearranging his tie before the glass, "that is scarcely fair, either to yourself or to me. Have you forgotten a little discussion we had together, and which eventually resulted in our leaving England for a time? Had you not taken such an interest in Teresina then, I doubt very much whether I should have seen Cairo or Jerusalem, or a lot of other places. But still, my dear fellow, if there is anything I can do to help your old model you may be sure I shall be only too glad to do it."

"I knew you would," said Godfrey, placing his hand affectionately on the other's shoulder. "We must talk it over some time and see what can be done. It will never do to let her go on as she is now."

"You have no idea, I suppose, of the origin of the trouble?"

"Not the least. She would tell me nothing. She tried to make me believe that she had plenty of work, and that she did not stand in need of any assistance. I knew better, however."

"And where is she living?"

"In Burford Street, off the Tottenham Court Road. It is a miserable place, mainly occupied by foreigners. The house is on the right-hand side."

"Very well," said Victor. "When I go back to town I will look her up. It will be hard if we can't arrange something."

Then they descended the stairs together and entered the drawing-room.

"My dear Godfrey, are you aware that you will have one wife in a hundred?" said Kitty, pointing to a table on which some twenty packages of all sizes, shapes, and descriptions were arranged.

"How so?" said Godfrey. "What new virtue have you discovered in her?"

"I have found that she can subordinate curiosity to a sense of duty," said the young lady. "These presents arrived for you just after you left for the station, and yet she would not open them herself or allow me to do so until you returned. I have been consumed with a mad desire to explore them, particularly that foreign-looking box at the end."

"Well, your curiosity shall very soon be satisfied," he said. "But we must begin with the most important-looking packages."

"Let us pray that there are no more Apostle spoons, serviette-rings, or silver sweet-dishes," said Molly. "We have already some two dozen of each."

Package after package was opened in its turn and the contents displayed. As they were for the most part presents to the bridegroom individually, they were mainly of a nature suited to his tastes: hunting flasks, silver sandwich cases, cigar and cigarette holders, and articles of a similar description. At last they came to the curious-looking box to which Kitty had referred. It was oblong in shape, and bore the name of a Vienna firm stamped on the end. It was tied with cord, and the label was addressed in an uneducated handwriting to "Mr. Godfrey Henderson, Detwich Hall, Detwich, Midlandshire."

In his own mind he had no doubt that it emanated from Teresina, who, as he was aware, had been informed as to his approaching marriage. Having untied the cord, he prized the lid, which was nailed down, with a dagger paper-knife, which he took from a table close at hand. An unpleasant odour immediately permeated the room. A folded sheet of newspaper covered the contents, whatever they were, and this Godfrey removed, only to spring back with a cry of horror. In the box, *the fingers tightly interlaced, were two tiny hands*, which had been severed from the body, to which they had once belonged, at the wrist.

CHAPTER VII

It would be impossible to picture, with any hope of success, the horror which accompanied the ghastly discovery described at the end of the previous chapter. Save for the cries of the ladies, who shrank from the box and covered their faces with their hands, and a muttered ejaculation from Godfrey, some seconds elapsed before any one spoke. Fensden was the first to recover his presence of mind. Picking up the sheet of paper which had fallen to the ground, he covered the box with it, thus shutting out all sight of the dreadful things it contained.

"Perhaps it would be as well, ladies, if you were to leave the room," he said. "Godfrey and I must talk this matter over, and consider how we are to act."

"Come, mother," said Kitty, and she led the old lady in a semi-fainting condition from the room, closely followed by Molly.

When the door had closed behind them, Godfrey spoke for the first time.

"Good Heavens, Victor!" he said. "What does this mean? Am I mad or dreaming?"

"I fear it is no dream," replied the other. "Who could have done it? Is it a case of murder, or what? Did you recognise the—the hands?"

Godfrey crossed to the chimney-piece and covered his face. A suspicion, so terrible that he dared not put it into words, was fast taking possession of him.

"Come, come," said Victor, crossing to him, and placing his hands upon his shoulder, "we must look this matter squarely in the face. Be a man, and help me. The upshot may be even more serious than we suppose. Once more I ask you, did you recognise what you saw?"

"I fear so," said Godfrey, very slowly, as if he were trying to force himself to speak. "There was a little scar, the result of a burn, half-an-inch or so above the knuckle of the second finger of the right hand."

He had painted those beautiful hands too often not to remember that scar. Without a word, he crossed to the table in the middle of the room upon which the box stood, surrounded by the cases containing the other wedding presents, and once more removing the lid and the paper, carefully examined what he saw there. No, God help him! there could be no sort of doubt about it; the hands were

those of Teresina Cardi, his model and friend. When he had satisfied himself as to their identity, he closed the box and turned to Fensden once more.

"It is too horrible," he said; "but what does it mean? Why should the murderer have sent the hands to me in this dreadful way?"

"That is what I have been asking myself," Fensden replied. "The man, whoever he was, must have borne you a fiendish grudge to have done such a thing. Is there anything about the box that will afford a clew as to the identity of the sender? Let us look."

He examined the box carefully, but, beyond the printed name of the firm who had originally used it, there was nothing that could serve as a clew. It had come by train from Euston, and had been sent off on the previous evening. That for the present was all there was to know about it.

"Once more, what are we to do?" inquired Fensden.

"Communicate with the police," said Godfrey. "In the meantime, I think I will send a note to my future father-in-law, asking him to come over. I should like to have his help and support in the matter."

"A very proper course," said his companion. "I don't think you could do better. I should send a man away at once."

Accordingly Godfrey went to a writing-table in the corner of the room, and wrote the letter, then rang the bell, and bade the servant who answered it see that the note was despatched without delay. When the man had disappeared, he turned to Fensden once more. "And now," he said, "I think it would be better if we removed the box to the studio."

They did so, by way of the new conservatory, of which mention has been made elsewhere. Then, in something less than an hour, Godfrey's future father-in-law arrived. Godfrey received him in his studio, and introduced Fensden to him as an old friend.

"It is very good of you to come so quickly, Sir Vivian," he said, motioning him to a chair. "I took the liberty of sending for you because I want your advice in a very serious matter. How serious it is you will understand when you have heard what we have to tell you. We have had a terrible experience, and I am not quite sure that I am capable of looking at the matter in a temperate light at present."

"You alarm me, my dear boy," said the old gentleman. "What can have happened? Tell me everything, and let me see if I can help you."

"If I am to do that, I must tell you a story. It will simplify matters, and it won't take very long. As you are aware, before my uncle's death, I might have been described as a struggling artist. I was painting my biggest work at that time, and was most anxious to find a model for the central figure. I had hunted London over, but without success, when Mr. Fensden here happened to discover an Italian model whom he thought might be of use to me. I saw her, and immediately secured her services. In company with her mother, she had been in England for some little time, and was glad to accept my offer of employment. When the picture was finished and hung, I still retained her services, because I liked the girl and found her useful to me in some other work I had on hand. Then my uncle died, and I came into the estate. Mr. Fensden and I immediately agreed to travel, and we accordingly set off together for Egypt and the East, intending to be away about a year. At the same time, it must be borne in mind, the girl and her mother had returned to Italy. While we were at Luxor, I received a letter from her, forwarding me her address in Naples, in case I might desire to communicate with her concerning future work. Some three weeks later my mother was taken ill, and I was telegraphed for to come home at once. I left Port Said in a mail steamer, intending to take the overland express from Naples to England. Having some hours to spend in the latter city, I thought there could be no harm in my discovering the mother and daughter. I did so, we dined together at a small restaurant, and went on to the Opera afterward."

"You did not tell me that," said Fensden, quickly.

"I did not deem it necessary," said Godfrey. "I should have done so when we came to discuss the matter at greater length. But to continue my story. After the Opera I escorted them back to their dwelling, but I did not enter. On my way to my hotel afterward, I was nearly stabbed by a lover of my former model, a man, so she had informed me, who was extremely jealous of any one who spoke to her. Fortunately for me, he did not succeed in his attempt. I knocked him down, and took his dagger from him."

As he said this, he took the small poniard, with which the Italian had attempted his life, from a drawer, and handed it to the old gentleman.

"Next morning I left Naples, to find, on reaching England, that my mother was decidedly better, and I need not have abandoned my tour. Then I met your daughter, fell in love with her, and in due course our engagement was announced. From the moment I said good-bye to her in Naples, until last Thursday night, I had neither seen nor heard anything of or from my former model."

"You saw her on Thursday night?" repeated the old gentleman. "In that case she must have returned to England?"

"Yes," Godfrey replied. "It was after the theatre, and when I had seen Lady Devereux and Molly to their carriage. I was walking down the Strand in search of a cab to take me back to my hotel, when I met her. She recognised me at once, and informed me that her mother was dead, that she had married, she did not say whom, and that her husband was also dead. Though she seemed in great distress, for reasons of her own she would not let me help her. Feeling that she ought not to be in the streets at such an hour, I took a cab and drove her to her home, which was a house in a narrow street leading out of the Tottenham Court Road. I bade her good-bye on the pavement, and having once more vainly endeavoured to induce her to let me help her, walked back to my hotel."

As he said this, he crossed to the table on which the box had been placed, and once more removed the lid and paper.

"A number of wedding presents have arrived to-day," he continued, "and this box came with them. We opened it, and you may see for yourself what it contained."

Sir Vivian approached the table and looked into the box, only to start back with an exclamation of horror. His usually rubicund face turned ashen gray.

"My dear boy, this is more terrible than I supposed!" he gasped. "What does it mean?"

"I am afraid that it means murder," said Godfrey, very quietly. "My poor little Italian friend has been brutally murdered, by whom we have yet to discover. But why these hands of hers should have been sent to me, I can not for the life of me understand."

"Are you sure they are her hands?"

"Quite sure. There can be no doubt about it. Both Fensden and I recognised them at once."

"One thing is certain: the man who committed this dreadful deed must have been jealous of you, and have heard of your kindness to the girl. Is there any one you suspect?"

"I have it," said Fensden, suddenly, before Godfrey could answer. "The man in Naples, the lover who tried to assassinate you. He is the man, or I am much mistaken. We have the best of reasons for knowing that he was in love with her, and that he would not be likely to stop at murder. If he would have killed you,

why should he not have killed her? You told me upstairs, when we were speaking of her distress, that the street was occupied by foreigners; what is more likely, therefore, than that he should have lived there too? Possibly, and very probably, he was her husband."

"But she told me her husband was dead," Godfrey asserted.

"She may have had some reason for saying so," Fensden replied. "There are a hundred theories to account for her words. It is as likely as not that she did not want you to see him. He is a Neapolitan. For all we know to the contrary he may be an Anarchist, and in hiding. She might have been afraid that if you saw him it would lead to his arrest."

"There certainly seems a good deal of probability in Mr. Fensden's theory," said Sir Vivian; "but the best course for you to adopt appears clear to me. You must at once communicate with the police and cause inquiries to be made. I have seen no mention in the papers of a woman's body having been found under such circumstances. The discovery of a body so mutilated would have been certain to have attracted a considerable amount of public attention."

"I think you are right," said Godfrey, after a moment's hesitation. "In the meantime what are we to do with these poor relics?"

"They must be handed over to the police," said Sir Vivian. "It is only through them that we can hope to unravel the mystery. If I were you I should send for the head constable at once and give them into his charge." Then he added kindly: "I can not tell you how sorry I am, Godfrey, for your trouble. It must be a terrible blow to you."

"No one can tell what a blow it is, Sir Vivian," said Godfrey in a husky voice. "A more cruel murder has never stained the annals of crime. The girl was an honest, kindly creature, and that she should have met her death in this manner shocks me inexpressibly. If any reward can secure the arrest of the murderer I will gladly pay it. No effort on my part shall be wanting to bring him to justice."

"You may be sure that he is a cunning fellow," said Fensden, "and that his plans were deeply laid. For my own part, if I were you I should place it in the hands of Scotland Yard and patiently await the result. You may be quite sure that they will do all in their power, and if they can not bring about his arrest, nobody else will be able to do so."

"Even if they do not succeed in capturing him I should not abandon the search," said Godfrey. "Poor little Teresina shall not go unavenged. There must be several

private detectives in London who know their business almost as well as the officials of Scotland Yard. I will find the cleverest of them and put them on the trail without delay. If a promise of a thousand pounds can stimulate him to greater exertions it shall be paid."

"You will be only throwing your money away," said Fensden. "He will be paid by the hour, with expenses, and he will fool you with bogus clews from first to last."

"I must risk that," Godfrey replied.

A message was thereupon despatched to the head of the local constabulary, who very soon put in an appearance at the Hall. He was a little man, with a pompous manner and a great idea of his own importance. It appeared to be his opinion that Detwich was the centre of civilization, and he the custodian of its peace and safety. On his arrival he was shown into the studio, where he found the three gentlemen waiting for him. He saluted Sir Vivian with the deepest servility, Godfrey respectfully, and Victor Fensden good-naturedly, as if the latter, not being a landowner in the district, was not entitled to anything more than a nod.

"We have sent for you, Griffin," said Sir Vivian, "in order to inform you that a serious crime has been committed, not in this neighbourhood, but in London."

"A good many serious crimes happen there every day, Sir Vivian," remarked the official. "May I ask the nature of this particular one?"

"Nothing short of murder!" Sir Vivian replied; "and as Mr. Henderson here has been brought into it we have adopted the course of sending for you at once in order that you may acquaint the proper authorities."

"A very proper proceeding, sir, I have no doubt," said the officer, diving his hand into his pocket and producing a pencil and an enormous pocket-book. "I shall be glad, sir, if you will give me the particulars."

For the third time that afternoon Godfrey told his story, while the officer made notes. By the time the contents of the box were shown to him the man's interest was thoroughly aroused. It had always been his ambition to be mixed up in some big affair, and now his chance had come. That being so, he was resolved to make the most of it.

"There can be no doubt, sir," he said, addressing Sir Vivian, "that it is likely to be a very serious matter. So far as I can understand, the disappearance of the woman has not been noticed, nor has her body been discovered. I will report the facts of the case to Scotland Yard at once, and in the meantime I will take

possession of this box and its contents. So far as I can see at present it doesn't look as if it should be very difficult to lay our hands upon the murderer."

"In that case, I suppose your opinion tallies with ours," said Fensden, who had just started another cigarette. "You suspect the Neapolitan lover."

"I do, sir," the man replied with dignity, as if his suspicions were not things to be treated lightly. "I only wish I had the conducting of this case throughout. But, there, I suppose it will go elsewhere and others will get the credit of the job. There is nothing else you wish to see me about, I suppose, gentlemen?"

"I think not," said Godfrey. "But I should be glad if you would let us know all that goes on. As I have told you, the poor girl was an old friend, and her cruel death is naturally a great blow to me."

"I will let you know as soon as I hear anything," the man replied. "I shall telegraph to Scotland Yard as soon as I get back to the station, and I expect they will be on the move within the hour. Let me see that I have got the name and address right, sir. Teresina Cardi, No. 16, Burford Street, Tottenham Court Road. That is correct, I suppose?"

"Quite correct," said Godfrey. "It is a tall house and there is a lamp-post exactly opposite the door."

These additional facts having been duly noted, the officer was about to withdraw, when the butler entered with the evening papers. He handed them to his master, who made as though he would place them on one side, as being irrelevant to the matter at issue, when Sir Vivian stopped him.

"One moment," he said. "Before you go, Griffin, let us make sure that there is no reference in the evening papers to the crime. Will you look, or shall I?"

In answer Godfrey opened the first paper. It was as well that he did so, for on the middle page was this announcement in large type:

TERRIBLE MURDER OF A GIRL!

REVOLTING DETAILS!

"I thought as much," said the police officer in a tone of bitter disappointment. "Just my luck again. I was in hopes of being able to put them on the scent, but it seems that they have found it out without me. Might I be so bold, sir, as to ask what it says?"

"I will read the account," said Godfrey.

"At an early hour this morning it was reported to the authorities at Scotland Yard that a murder of an unusual nature had been committed in the vicinity of the Tottenham Court Road. The victim is an Italian woman, known as Teresina Cardi, an artist's model, who, it is stated, has been living in the house in Burford Street, in which her body was discovered, for upward of a fortnight. It might be mentioned that the house is let out in flats, the occupants being in the main of foreign nationality. The girl herself was of a reserved disposition, and did not associate with the other tenants of the building. She was last seen alive at seven o'clock on the evening of Thursday, when she was observed descending the stairs dressed for going out. The hour of her return is not known, nor was her absence remarked on Friday. Early on Saturday morning, however, the occupant of a neighbouring room, a German cabinet-maker, named Otto Grunther, noticed a small stream of dark-red fluid under the door. His suspicions being aroused, he informed the owner of the house of what he had seen, who called in the assistance of the policeman on the beat. Together they ascended to the room in question to find that the door was securely locked. Their knocks having elicited no response, a key was obtained and the door opened. On entering the room it was discovered that the woman was lying dead upon the floor between the table and the door. Her throat was cut and she had been stabbed in several places. More horrible still, her hands had been severed at the wrists and were missing. Though the police are naturally reticent as to the matter, we are led to believe that they have not succeeded in finding a clew. Needless to say the revolting crime has caused a great sensation in the neighbourhood."

"Later News.—Up to the moment of going to press, the most diligent inquiries have been made by our own representatives as to the identity of the murdered woman. Teresina Cardi, it would appear, sat as a model for the central figure in Mr. Godfrey Henderson's famous picture 'A Woman of the People,' which attracted so much attention in the Royal Academy Exhibition of last year. She was a Neapolitan by birth, but has spent a considerable time in this country. It has also come to light that on the evening in question she returned home shortly after midnight and was seen talking to a gentleman in evening dress on the pavement in front of the house.

"The police hope very shortly to be able to discover the identity of this mysterious individual, when doubtless further light will be thrown upon the tragedy."

"Good Heavens!" said Godfrey. "They surely don't think that I know anything

more about it than I have said?"

"You must set the matter right without delay," said Sir Vivian. "Does it say when the inquest will be held?"

"On Monday," Godfrey replied, after he had once more consulted the paper.

"Then you had better communicate with the coroner at once, telling him that you are the person referred to, and offering him all the information it is in your power to give. You owe it to yourself, as well as the community at large, to do this at once."

"I will do so to-night," Godfrey replied. "In the meantime, Griffin, you will communicate with Scotland Yard yourself and tell them what we have discovered. The man who murdered her must have seen us together that night, and in the madness of his jealousy have sent the evidence of his crime on to me."

When he had wrapped up the horrible box the police officer took his departure, leaving the others to discuss the matter and to endeavour to come to some understanding about it. At last, when there was nothing further to be said, Godfrey proposed that they should go in search of the ladies. He had scarcely opened the door of the studio, however, when there was the sound of a heavy fall. Turning round, he discovered that Victor Fensden had fallen in a dead faint upon the floor.

CHAPTER VIII

In the previous chapter I described to you how Victor Fensden had fallen in a dead faint just at the moment when the gentlemen were about to go in search of the ladies, in order to reassure them after the terrible shock they had received. Immediately on hearing his friend fall, Godfrey hurried to his assistance, asking Sir Vivian meanwhile to go in search of brandy. The latter had scarcely left the room, however, before Victor opened his eyes.

"My dear old fellow," said Godfrey, "I am indeed thankful to see that you are better. I knew very well that this terrible business had upset you more than you were willing to admit. Never mind, it will all be put right in the end. How do you feel now?"

"Much better," Victor replied. "I can not think what it was that caused me to make such an idiot of myself."

At this moment Sir Vivian returned with a glass of brandy and water. Victor sipped a little.

He had not been feeling well of late, he explained, and this shock, coming on the top of certain other worries, had unmanned him altogether.

"This has been a terrible day," said Godfrey, "and a poor welcome for you to Detwich. Now, perhaps, you would rather rest a little before joining the others."

"I think I should prefer to do so," said Victor, and he accordingly retired to his room, while Sir Vivian and Godfrey went on to explain matters as best they could to the ladies, who were in the dining-room, awaiting their return with such patience as they could command.

"My dear boy," said Mrs. Henderson, hastening forward to greet Godfrey as he entered the room, "you must know how we all feel for you. This has been a terrible experience. Have you been able to arrive at any understanding of it?"

"I think I can," said Godfrey, who dreaded another explanation. "It will be time enough, however, for me to explain later on. It is sufficient at present to say that a terrible murder has been committed in London, and that the assassin, knowing that I had endeavoured to be a good friend to his victim, has played a ghastly practical joke upon me. As you may suppose, the circumstance has upset me

terribly; and when I tell you that you will make me happier if you will spare me further conversation upon the subject for the present, I am sure you will do so."

"I think it would be better," said Sir Vivian. "We have placed the matter in the hands of the police, and I am sure that Griffin will do all that lies in his power to prevent Godfrey from being unduly worried by the affair."

Godfrey felt a small hand steal into his.

"I am so sorry for you," whispered Molly.

The touch of her soft warm hand was infinitely soothing to him. It did him more good than any amount of verbal sympathy.

"But where is Mr. Fensden?" inquired Mrs. Henderson.

"The shock has proved too much for him," Sir Vivian explained. "He informed Godfrey that he would prefer to go to his room to rest for a while. I have never met your friend before, Godfrey, but I should say that he is not very strong."

"I am afraid he is not," the other replied, and the subject dropped.

A quarter of an hour later Sir Vivian announced his intention of returning home, and when his carriage had come round, took Godfrey on one side.

"Keep up a stout heart, my boy," he said. "The man who committed the crime will certainly be captured before very long, and then the poor girl will be avenged."

Then the kindly old gentleman drove away. When he had seen him depart, Godfrey went into the house and made his way upstairs to inquire after Fensden's welfare. Somewhat to his surprise, he found him apparently quite himself once more.

"I can not think what made me behave in that foolish fashion," said Victor, as he rose from the sofa on which he had been lying. "I am not given to fainting fits. Forgive me, old fellow, won't you?"

"There is nothing to forgive," said Godfrey.

As he spoke the dressing gong sounded, and after having asked Fensden whether he would prefer to come down, or to have his meal sent to him, and having received an answer to the first in the affirmative, Godfrey left him, and proceeded along the passage to his own room. When he reached it he passed to the further end and stood before the original sketch of his famous picture, "A Woman of the People." It was only a mere study, roughly worked out; but

whatever else it may have been, it was at least a good likeness of the hapless Teresina.

"And to think that that beautiful face is now cold in death," he said to himself, "and that the brute who murdered her is still at large. God grant that it may be in my power to bring him to justice!"

Before he dressed, he sat down at his writing-table and composed a letter to the coroner, informing him of all he knew of the case, and promising him that he would be present at the inquest in order to give any evidence that might be in his power to supply. It was only when he had finished the letter and sealed it that he felt that he had done a small portion of his duty toward the dead. He also wrote to his solicitor giving him an account of the affair, and telling him that he would call upon him on Monday, prior to the inquest, in order to discuss the matter with him.

Then he rang for his valet and gave instructions that the letters should be posted without fail that evening. Then he began to dress with a heart as heavy as lead. He remembered how much he had been looking forward to this dinner ever since the idea had first occurred to him. In his own mind he had endeavoured to picture the first meal that Victor and his betrothed should take together. He had imagined his friend doing his best to amuse Molly with his half-cynical, half-burlesque conversation, with Kitty chiming in at intervals with her sharp rejoinders, while he and his mother listened in quiet enjoyment of their raillery. How different the meal was likely to prove!

His dressing completed, he descended to the drawing-room, where he had the good fortune to find Molly alone. It was plain that she had been there long enough to read the evening paper, for there was a look of horror upon her face as she came forward to meet her lover.

"Godfrey, darling," she said, "I see by this paper that a terrible murder has been committed in the neighbourhood of the Tottenham Court Road, and that the victim was once your model. I can now understand why it has affected you so much. Those hands were hers, were they not? I see also that it says that some one, a gentleman in evening dress, was seen talking to her about midnight on the pavement outside her house. Do you think that that man had anything to do with the crime?"

"I am quite sure he had not," Godfrey answered. "For the simple reason that that man happened to be myself."

"Yourself? You, Godfrey?" she inquired, looking up at him with startled eyes.

"But that was the night on which we were at the theatre together?"

"Yes, dear, the same night," he answered. "Perhaps it would be better if I were to tell you the whole story."

"Tell me nothing more than you wish," she said. "I am content to trust you in everything. If I did not, my love would scarcely be worth having, would it?"

And then he told her of his association with the unhappy woman; told her of Teresina's sorrow, and of his own desire to assist her. Molly's heart was touched as she listened.

"You were right," she said, "to try and help her, poor girl! If I had known, I would have endeavoured to have done something for her for your sake. Now, unhappily, it is too late. But you must not think too much of it, Godfrey dear. Try to put it away from you, if only for a time."

At this moment Victor Fensden entered the room. It was plain that he had recovered his former spirits. He apologized in an easy fashion for his weakness of the afternoon, and ascribed it to his recent travels, which, he said, had proved too much for his enfeebled constitution.

"I am not like Godfrey, Miss Devereux," he said. "He seems capable of bearing any amount of fatigue, plays cricket and football, tennis and golf, while on a summer's day I sometimes find it impossible even to lift my head."

It was a sad little party that sat down to dinner that evening. Godfrey was in the lowest spirits, and Molly was quiet in consequence. Fensden was accepted, on his own showing, for an invalid, Mrs. Henderson was naturally of a silent disposition, while Kitty, finding that her efforts were unappreciated, lapsed into silence after a time, and thus added to the general gloom. After dinner there were music and polite conversation in the drawing-room until ten o'clock, followed by a retirement to the billiard-room for a game at pool. It did not prove a success, however. No one had any heart for the game, and before the first three lives had been lost it was voted failure, and the cues were accordingly replaced in the rack. The memory of two white hands, tightly clinched in despair, rose continually before every eye, and when, at half-past ten, Mrs. Henderson proposed that they should retire for the night, every one accepted the situation with a feeling that was very near akin to relief.

The next day was scarcely better. For the first time since he had been master of the house Godfrey rose early on a Sunday morning, and, having ordered his dog-cart, drove into the village. It was scarcely seven o'clock when he reached the

police-station to discover that the head constable had not yet risen from his bed. He waited in the small office while the other dressed, finding what consolation he could in a case above the chimney-piece in which several sets of manacles were displayed. The constable in charge was plainly overwhelmed by the squire's presence, and to cover his confusion poked the fire almost continuously. At last, after what seemed like an hour, Griffin put in an appearance, and with many apologies invited Godfrey to accompany him to his own private sanctum where breakfast was being laid.

"It's the first time for many a long day that I have overslept myself, sir," he hastened to remark; "but I have been so thinking of this 'ere case that I did not get to sleep until this morning, and I am mortal sorry, sir, that I should have kept you waiting."

"You have communicated with Scotland Yard, of course?" said Godfrey, after the other had finished his apology.

"I telegraphed to them last night, sir, and forwarded my written report at the same time. The post isn't in yet, sir, but I expect I shall get some instructions when it comes."

He visibly swelled with importance as he made this remark. He felt that in having the Squire of Detwich for his ally he could scarcely fail to be noticed, particularly when the most valuable evidence in the case would be given by the gentleman in question.

Finding that the man had no further news to give him, Godfrey drove sorrowfully home again, feeling that both his early rising and his visit to the village were alike of no avail. All through the service in the little church afterward, despite the fact that Molly worshipped beside him for the first time, he was ill at ease. Victor had excused himself from attending the service on the plea of a bad headache, saying he would go for a walk instead. When they emerged from the sacred edifice afterward Sir Vivian took his place by Godfrey's side.

"You have heard nothing more, I suppose?" he asked. "Griffin promised to communicate with you at once on receipt of any intelligence, did he not?"

"He did," said Godfrey. "But when I saw him at the station this morning there was nothing to tell. In any case I go up to town to-morrow morning, when I shall first call upon my own solicitor, to whom I have already written, and afterward attend the inquest as I have promised. Fensden says he's coming up, too, in order that any evidence he may have to give may be accepted."

"One moment, Godfrey," said the old gentleman, stopping him and allowing the others to go on ahead. "I am going to put a question to you which may probably offend you. But whether it does or does not, it must be asked."

"Anything you ask me, sir, you may be sure will not offend me," said Godfrey. "What is this particular question?"

"I want to know how long you have known your friend?" the old man inquired. "You see I am going to be perfectly candid with you. You may think me absurd when I say so, but I have come to the conclusion that Mr. Fensden does not like you."

"In that case, sir, I am sure you are mistaken," said Godfrey. "Victor and I were at school together, and we have been companions ever since. He may be a little cynical in his humour, and inclined to be affected in his dress and speech, but, believe me, in his inmost heart he is a thoroughly good fellow."

Sir Vivian was silent for a moment.

"If that is so," he went on, "then I am wrong in my conclusions. I must confess, however, that I was not favourably impressed with Mr. Fensden yesterday. I noticed that when he was looking at you and you were not watching him, there was a curious expression upon his face that was either one of malice or something very like it. If I were asked my opinion about this affair I should say that he knew more about it than you and I put together, and more than he either cares, or is going, to tell."

"I can not help disagreeing with you, sir," said Godfrey, warming in defence of his friend. "I happen to know that Victor has not seen Teresina since the day we left England. It was he who induced me to get rid of her because he was afraid that she, being a pretty woman, might possibly induce me to fall in love with her. You see, I am quite candid with you."

"I am glad that you are," the other rejoined. "Nevertheless obstinacy is proverbially an old man's failing, and I still adhere to my opinion concerning the gentleman in question. Whether I am right or wrong time will prove. In the meantime you say that you go up to town to-morrow morning."

"Yes, to-morrow morning, first thing," said Godfrey. "We shall leave Detwich by the 10.18."

"In that case I am going to ask a favour of you," said the other. "Will you allow me to accompany you? Remember that, as you are going to marry my daughter, your interests are, and must be, as my own."

"I shall be only too glad if you will come, sir," said Godfrey, gratefully. "It is a kindness I did not like to ask of you. I am sure it will make Molly happier to know that you are with me, while it will prove to the world, if such a proof is needed, that you believe my interest in this miserable affair to be only what I have stated it to be."

"We all believe that, Godfrey, of course," Sir Vivian replied. "The man who thinks otherwise would be insane. And now we turn off here. It is agreed, therefore, that we meet at the railway station to-morrow morning and go up to town together?"

"With all my heart, sir," Godfrey replied, and then the kindly old gentleman turned off with his wife at the path that led across the fields to the court. When they were out of sight Godfrey informed Molly of her father's decision.

"With father and Mr. Fensden beside you, the newspapers will not dare to hint at anything more."

Then for the first time in his life Godfrey felt a vague distrust of Victor Fensden.

He put the suspicion from him, however, as being not only dishonourable to his friend, but also to himself.

"I have known Victor for a good many years," he muttered, "and I should surely be familiar with his character by this time."

Yet, despite his resolve to think no ill of the man, he felt that the idea was gaining ground with him.

When they reached the house they found Fensden in the drawing-room, comfortably ensconced in a large chair before a roaring fire. He had changed his mind, he asserted, and had not gone for a walk after all. He certainly did not look well. His face was paler than usual, while he was hollow-eyed, as if from want of sleep. As the party, radiant after their walk through the sharp air, entered the room, he looked up at them.

"How nice it must be to be so energetic," he said, languidly. "Godfrey looks disgustingly fit, and more like the ideal country squire than ever. You should paint your own portrait in that capacity."

This time there was no mistaking the sneer. It may have been the thoughts that had occupied his brain as he walked home, but even *he* could not help coming to the conclusion that the man he had known for so long, whom he had trusted so implicitly, and for whom he had done so much, was no longer well disposed

toward himself. He said nothing, however, for Victor was not only his guest, but he had troubles enough of his own just then to look after, without adding to the number. Molly had noticed it also, and commented on it when she and her lover were alone together.

"Never mind, dear," said Godfrey. "It doesn't matter very much if he has taken a dislike to me. I think the truth of the matter is he is not quite himself. Though he will not show it, I have an idea he is as much cut up by this terrible business as I am myself. He is very highly strung, and the shock has doubtless proved too much for his nerves. You won't see very much more of him, for he will bring his visit to a close to-morrow morning, as he has decided to go abroad again immediately after the inquest."

"But I thought he was tired of travelling, and that he had stated his desire never to see a foreign hotel again?"

"I thought so too, but it appears we were mistaken. However, do not let us talk about him just now. Can you realize, dearest, that in ten days' time we are to be married?"

"I am beginning to realize it," she answered. "But this terrible affair has thrown such a shadow over our happiness for the last twenty-four hours that I have thought of little else."

"The shadow will soon pass," he answered. "Then we will go to the sunny South and try to forget all about it."

In his own heart he knew that this was likely to be easier said than done. Ever since he had seen it on that memorable Thursday night, Teresina's piteous face had been before him, and now with the recollection of what had followed so close upon their interview to deepen the impression, it was more than likely that some time would elapse before he would be able to forget it.

That night, when he went to bed, he found it difficult to get to sleep. It was as if the events of the morrow were casting their shadows before, and when he did sleep he was assailed with the most villainous dreams. He saw himself in a garret room with Teresina kneeling before him holding up her hands in piteous entreaty; then he saw her lying dead upon the floor, her glassy eyes looking up at him as if in mute reproach. A moment later he was sitting up in bed staring at Victor Fensden, who was standing beside him, holding a candle in his hand, and with a look upon his face that showed he was almost beside himself with terror.

"Good Heavens, man, what is the matter?" cried Godfrey, for the other's face

frightened him. It was as white as paper, while in his eyes there shone a light that was scarcely that of reason.

"Let me stay with you, let me stay with you!" he cried. "If I am left alone I don't know what I shall do. I have had such dreams to-night that I dare not even close my eyes. For God's sake give me brandy! I must have something to bring back my courage. Look, look! Can't you see, man, how badly I need it?"

Needless to say, Godfrey saw this. Accordingly bidding him remain where he was, he went off to procure some. When he returned he found Victor seated on the settee at the foot of the bed. Apparently he had recovered his self-command.

"I am afraid you must think me an awful fool, Godfrey," he said. "But I have really had a deuce of a fright. You don't know what awful dreams I had. I could not have stayed alone in that room another minute."

It must indeed have been a fright, for Godfrey noticed that, though he pretended to have recovered, he was still trembling.

"Well, I am glad to see that you are feeling better," he said. "Drink some of this, it will make a new man of you."

"If it could do that I'd drink a hogshead," he said bitterly. "If there's one man in this world of whose society I am heartily sick, it is Victor Fensden. Now I'll go back to my own room. Forgive me for disturbing you, won't you, but I could not help myself."

So saying, he took up his candle once more and returned to his own room, leaving Godfrey to put what construction he thought best upon the incident.

"I am beginning to think that poor Victor is not quite right in his head," said the latter to himself as he blew out his candle and composed himself for slumber once more.

CHAPTER IX

The first train that left Detwich for London next morning had for its passengers Sir Vivian Devereux, Godfrey Henderson, and Victor Fensden. Inspector Griffin was also travelling by it, not a little elated by the importance of his errand. On reaching Euston, after promising to meet them at the inquest, Fensden drove off to his club, while Sir Vivian and Godfrey made their way to Lincoln's Inn Fields, where they were to have an interview with Mr. Cornelius Bensleigh, of the firm of Bensleigh and Bensleigh, solicitors. That gentleman had already received a letter from Godfrey, written on the Saturday night, giving him an outline of the affair, and acquainting him of the part the latter had played in the mystery.

"I am afraid this will be calculated to put you to a considerable amount of inconvenience, Mr. Henderson," said the lawyer, after they had discussed the matter for a few moments. "From what I can gather, you were the last person to see the poor woman alive, and as Sir Vivian Devereux says, for that reason we must be particularly careful that no breath of scandal attaches itself to your name. Now, as cases like this are somewhat foreign to our experience, I have made up my mind, always, of course, with your permission, that I will introduce you to a gentleman who makes them his particular study. Of course, should you desire it, I will put precedent on one side, and do all I can for you; but, if you will be guided by me, you will place your case in the hands of Mr. Codey, the gentleman to whom I refer, and whose name is doubtless familiar to you. His office is not far from here, and if you will accompany me, I shall be only too pleased to escort you to it, and to introduce you to him."

This course having been agreed upon, they accompanied him to the office of the lawyer in question, and, after a few moments' delay, were conducted to his presence. He looked more like a trainer of racehorses than a criminal lawyer. He was the possessor of a sharp, keen face, a pair of restless eyes, a clean-shaven mouth and chin, while the whiskers on his cheeks were clipped to a nicety. The elderly lawyer introduced Sir Vivian and Godfrey to him, and explained the nature of their visit.

"Ah, the Burford Street murder," said Mr. Codey, as soon as he heard the name of the case. "I was wondering how long it would be before I was drawn into it. And so, Mr. Henderson, you have the misfortune to be connected with it? As a matter of fact, I suppose you are the gentleman in evening dress who was seen

speaking to the girl on the pavement outside the house."

"I am; but how do you know it?" Godfrey asked, in considerable surprise.

"I merely guessed it," said the lawyer. "I see from the papers that the deceased was once your model. Now you come to me for help. I simply put two and two together, with the result aforesaid. Perhaps you will be kind enough to tell me all you know about it. Be very sure you keep nothing back; after that I shall know how to act."

Thus encouraged, Godfrey set to work, and told the tale with which by this time my readers are so familiar. The lawyer listened patiently, made a few notes on a sheet of paper as the story progressed, and when he had finished asked one or two more or less pertinent questions.

"You say that you returned to your hotel immediately after your interview with the deceased?"

"Immediately," Godfrey answered.

"Did you take a cab?"

"No," said Godfrey; "it was a cold night, and I thought the walk would do me good."

"But you drove to the house in a cab?"

"I did, and dismissed it at once."

"That was unfortunate. Do you think the driver would know you again?"

"I should think it very probable," said Godfrey.

"You were standing under the lamp-post, of course, when you paid him, with the light shining full upon your face?"

"I suppose so, as the lamp is exactly opposite the door; but I did not think of that."

"No; but, you see, I must think of these things," said the lawyer. "And when you returned to your hotel?"

"I called for a brandy and soda, and, having drunk it, went to bed."

When he had learned all he desired to know, it was arranged that Mr. Codey should attend the coroner's court, and watch the case on Godfrey's behalf; after which they left the office. On reaching the club where Sir Vivian and Godfrey had elected to lunch, they found that the murder was the one absorbing topic of

the day. This was more than Godfrey had bargained for; for, when it was remembered that the deceased woman had been his model, he was cross-questioned concerning her on every hand. So unbearable did this at last become, that he proposed to Sir Vivian that they should take a stroll in the park until it should be time for them to set off to the business of the afternoon.

When they reached the building in which the inquest was to be held, they discovered that a large crowd had collected; indeed, it was only with difficulty, and after they had explained their errand, that they could gain admittance to the building. Fensden was awaiting them there, still looking pale and worried; also Mr. Codey, the lawyer, appearing even keener than he had done at his office.

"Public curiosity is a strange thing," said the latter, as he looked round the packed court. "Probably not more than five persons now in this room ever saw the dead girl, and yet they crowd here as though their lives depended upon their not losing a word of what is said about her."

At this moment an official came forward, and said something to Godfrey in a low voice. The latter immediately followed him from the room. When he returned he was very white, and he seemed visibly upset.

Then the coroner entered, a portly, dignified gentleman, and took his seat, after which the proceedings were opened in due form.

The landlord of the house, in which the deceased had resided, was the first witness called. He deposed as to the name she was known by in the house, stated that she was supposed to be an artist's model, and that, to the best of his belief, she had been a quiet and respectable girl. At any rate, her rent had invariably been paid on the day on which it had become due. He had identified the body as being that of his lodger. During the time she had been with him he had never known her to receive a visitor; as a matter of fact, she had kept to herself; scarcely speaking to any one save when she returned their salutations on the stairs. He was not aware that she had received a letter, and, as far as he knew, she had not a friend in London.

The next witness was the German cabinet-maker, who had been the first to discover the murder. He gave evidence through the medium of an interpreter, and described how he had seen the congealed blood under the door and the suspicions it had given rise to. In answer to a question put by a superintendent of police, who represented the commissioner, he stated that he had never spoken to the deceased, for the reason that he knew no English or Italian, and she was not acquainted with German. He had heard her go out on the night in question, and

return shortly after midnight, but whether she was accompanied by any one he could not say. He also deposed to the position of the body when they opened the door, and to the mysterious fact that the hands were missing.

The next witness was the police-constable on the beat, who had been called in by the landlord. He gave evidence as to the opening of the door, and the discovery then made. He was followed by the doctor, who had made the post-mortem examination, and who described the nature and situation of the various wounds, and the conclusions he had drawn therefrom. Then came the first sensation of the afternoon, when the well-known artist, Godfrey Henderson, was called. In answer to the various questions put to him, he deposed that he had known the deceased for upward of a year; that he had employed her for the model of his picture, "A Woman of the People," and had always found her a quiet and eminently respectable girl. He had been compelled to dismiss her, not because he had any fault to find with her, but because he was going abroad. This was not the last he had heard of her, for, while on the Nile at Luxor, he had received a letter from her, informing him of her address, in view of any future work he might have for her. At Naples he had again met her, when he was on his way back to England, and had taken her to the Opera in her mother's company. On the night of the murder, he had again met her in the Strand, quite by accident, when, finding that she was in serious trouble, he had offered to help her. She would not accept his assistance, however. Noticing that she was in a most unhappy state, and not liking to leave her alone in the streets, he had called a cab and escorted her to her abode in Burford Street. He did not enter the building, however, but bade her good-bye in the street, after which he returned to his hotel. He was unable to assign any motive for the crime, and added that the only person he could have believed would have committed it, was a man named Dardini, an Italian, who was in love with the girl, and who had attempted his (the witness's) life in Naples, on the night of the visit to the Opera. Whether the man was in England he was unable to say. Whether she had been in want of money at the time of his last seeing her, he also was unable to say. She had declared that she was in work, that was all he knew of the matter.

"On hearing that she was married, did you not inquire the name of her husband?" asked the coroner.

"I did," Godfrey replied, "but she refused to tell me."

"Did not that strike you as being singular?"

"No," Godfrey replied. "When she informed me that he was dead, I did not press

the matter."

"You are quite sure, I suppose, that she was not married when you met her at Naples?"

"I feel convinced that she was not; but I could not say so on my oath."

"And when you opened the box, which you say was sent you at your country residence, were you not shocked at the discovery you made?"

"Naturally I was!"

"And what conclusions did you come to?"

"I gathered from it that my old friend had been murdered."

"What caused you to recognise her hands?"

"A certain mark above the knuckle of the second finger, the result, I should say, of a burn."

At this point, Mr. Codey, who had already informed the coroner that he was appearing on behalf of the witness then being examined, asked an important question.

"On making this terrible discovery, what was your immediate action?"

"I sent for my prospective father-in-law, Sir Vivian Devereux, and for the police officer in charge of Detwich. It was at once agreed that we should communicate with the authorities and that I should render them all the assistance in my power."

"Pardon my touching upon such a matter, but I believe you are about to be married, Mr. Henderson?" said the coroner.

"I hope to be married on Thursday next," said Godfrey.

"I do not think I need trouble you any further," the coroner then remarked.

The next witness was a police officer, who informed the Court that inquiries had been made in Naples concerning the man Dardini, with the result that it was discovered that he had been arrested for assault upon a foreigner a fortnight before the deceased's return to England, and that he was still in prison. This effectually disposed of his association with the crime, and added an even greater air of mystery to it than before.

When this witness had stepped down, Mr. Victor Fensden was called. He stated that he was also an artist, and a friend of Mr. Godfrey Henderson. It was he who

had first discovered the deceased, and he had recommended her to his friend for the picture of which she was afterward the principal figure. She had always struck him as being a quiet and respectable girl. When asked why she had received her notice of dismissal, Victor answered that it was because his friend, Mr. Henderson, had suddenly made up his mind to travel.

"I understand you to say *suddenly*," said the superintendent in charge of the case. "Why was it Mr. Henderson suddenly made up his mind to go abroad?"

"I do not know that this question is at all relevant to the case," said Victor, appealing to the coroner. "It was purely a private matter on Mr. Henderson's part."

"But anything that bears on the question at issue can scarcely be irrelevant," said the coroner. "I think it would be better if you would answer the question."

Fensden paused for a moment while the Court waited in suspense.

"I repeat my question," said the superintendent. "Why did the deceased so suddenly lose her employment?"

Once more Victor hesitated. Godfrey looked at him in surprise. Why did he not go on?

"We decided to travel on account of a conversation Mr. Henderson and I had concerning the girl."

"What was that conversation?" inquired the coroner.

Once more Fensden seemed to hesitate.

"Did the conversation refer to the deceased?"

"It did!"

"I gather from your reluctance to answer that you were afraid Mr. Henderson might become attached to her, so you used your friendly influence in order to hurry him away as quickly as possible? Am I right in so supposing?"

Another pause, during which Victor's face was seen to express great emotion.

"That was so."

"You are sure that Mr. Henderson was attached to the deceased?"

"I am sure of it."

"Did you know that Mr. Henderson was aware of the deceased's return to

Naples?"

"I was aware that he was in correspondence with her," said Victor; "but he said nothing to me of his intention to visit her in Naples."

"Had you known this, would you have endeavoured to dissuade him from such a course?"

"I do not know what I should have done; but I should think it very probable that I should have endeavoured to prevent their meeting."

"When did you become aware of the deceased's return to England?"

"When Mr. Henderson informed me of it on my arrival at his house at Detwich Hall."

"You were naturally very much surprised to hear that he had met her, I suppose?"

"Very much," Victor replied.

"Did you say anything to him upon the subject?"

"I warned him against the folly of being drawn into another entanglement with her, particularly when he was to be married in ten days' time."

"You say *another* entanglement with her? Are we, therefore, to understand that there had been an entanglement before?"

Again Victor paused before he replied.

"I withdraw the word 'another,'" he said, hurriedly. "I did not mean it in that sense. I merely suggested to Mr. Henderson that his *fiancée* might not care to know that he had been seen driving through the streets of London after midnight with an Italian girl, who had once been his model."

"Good Heavens!" said Godfrey to himself. "And this is the man whom I have trusted and who has called himself my friend for so many years!"

At this point the coroner, addressing the jury, stated his intention of adjourning the inquiry until the following Wednesday morning at eleven o'clock. He had excellent reasons for keeping it open until then, he said, and these reasons he had communicated to the foreman of the jury, who was completely satisfied. The Court thereupon adjourned, and Godfrey presently found himself in the street with Mr. Codey on one side and Sir Vivian Devereux on the other. Victor Fensden was waiting for them on the pavement, and, as soon as they emerged, he approached them with a face that still bore the traces of violent emotion.

"Godfrey," he began, in a faltering voice, "after what they dragged out of me, I scarcely know what to say to you."

"In any case, I beg that you will not say it," said Godfrey, coldly. "You have said quite enough already." Then, turning to the others, he continued: "Come, gentlemen, let us find a cab. I suppose we had better go back to your office, Mr. Codey?"

"I think it would be better," said that gentleman. "I must have a talk with you upon this matter."

Then, hailing a cab, they entered it, leaving Fensden on the pavement looking after them. Godfrey's face was still very pale. It was impossible for him to be blind to the fact that his kindness to Teresina had been the means of bringing down grave suspicion upon himself. Yet, even with that knowledge before him, he knew that he would not, or could not, have acted otherwise than he had done.

When they reached the lawyer's private office, the door was shut and they sat down to business.

"Well, Mr. Henderson," said Mr. Codey, "what is your opinion now?"

"I think that the public mind is already jumping to the conclusion that I am responsible for the murder," Godfrey answered, without fear or hesitation.

"I am very much afraid that you must accustom yourself to look upon it in that light," the other replied. "The man Fensden's evidence, given in such a manner as he gave it, was unnecessarily damaging."

"He is a black-hearted scoundrel," said the old baronet, wrathfully. "I told you yesterday, Godfrey, that I didn't trust him, and that I felt sure he bore you some ill-will. And yet, do you know, Mr. Codey," he added, turning to the lawyer, "Mr. Henderson has done everything for that man. He has practically kept him for years past, he took him on a tour round Europe only a few months ago, and this is the result. It makes one sick with humanity."

"When you have seen as much of humanity as I have, you will not be surprised at anything," said the lawyer. "The greater the obligation in many cases, the deeper the ingratitude. We are wandering from the point, however. Now I am going to be plain-spoken. Tell me, Mr. Henderson, did you ever, under any sort of circumstance, make love, or suggest love, to the woman who is now deceased?"

"Never," said Godfrey, firmly. "The man who declares that I did, lies."

"Very probable, but that won't prevent his saying it. When you left her in Burford Street, did you meet any one near the house?"

"Not a soul. The street, so far as I could see, was empty."

"I think you said this morning that the night porter let you in at your hotel? Did you make any remark to him respecting the time?"

"Yes, I said to him when he had opened the door, 'I'm afraid I'm rather late,' then, looking at my watch, I added, 'Why, it's half-past twelve!'"

"If he's blessed with a good memory, he will recollect that," said Codey. Then with his usual abruptness, he continued, "Which way did you walk from Burford Street?"

"Through the Tottenham Court Road, along Oxford Street, and down Bond Street."

"A man shall walk it quickly to-morrow morning in order to see how long it will take. If only that hall porter has a good memory, and can be relied upon, this should prove an important point."

"But surely, my good sir," put in Sir Vivian, "you do not for a moment suppose that Mr. Henderson will be accused of having killed this woman?"

"I should not be at all surprised," said the lawyer, quietly. "Let us regard the facts of the case. Some months back, Mr. Henderson employed this girl as his model, and retained her services when he really had no need for them. He was on such familiar terms with her that his friend felt compelled to remonstrate with him. As a result they left England hurriedly, the girl following them to Naples. No, no, Mr. Henderson, I beg that you will be silent. Remember, I am telling the story as I should tell it if I were against you instead of for you. As I have said, the girl left for Naples, and I insinuate that she followed you. It can be proved that she corresponded with you, and that you sent your friend on his way to travel alone; always bearing in mind that he was the man who had persuaded you to give the girl up. You, in the meantime, returned to Naples, in order to visit her again. You may dispute the motive, but you can not deny that you took her out to dinner and to a theatre afterward."

"But her mother was with her," said Godfrey hurriedly, his face flushing angrily at the imputation put upon his action by the other.

"That point is immaterial," the lawyer replied calmly. "It is sufficient for the purposes of the prosecution that you met her there. Then you proceeded to

England, and, after a little while in the country, became engaged to the daughter of Sir Vivian, now present. The Italian girl had also gone to England. Why? To be with you, of course. You, however, see nothing of her. Therefore, she is unhappy. Why? Because you are about to be married."

"But that is only supposition," said Godfrey. "As a matter of fact, she herself was already married."

"To whom? Why not to yourself?"

"Good Heavens, man," said Godfrey, starting from his seat, "you don't surely mean to say that you believe I had married her?"

"I believe nothing," he replied, still with the same coolness. "But you will find that the counsel for the prosecution will consider it more than likely. Let me continue my story. I was saying that she was unhappy because you were about to be married. It is only natural. Then you came up to town, visited the theatre, and afterward, quite by chance, met her in the Strand, at midnight. At midnight, and by chance, mark that! Does that meeting look like an accidental one? Could you convince a jury that it was? I doubt it. However, let us proceed. The girl is in trouble, and you take her home in a hansom. The policeman and the cabman will certainly identify you, and, for the reason that you say the street was empty when you bade her good-bye, no one will be able to swear that you did not go into the house with her. Now, Mr. Henderson, I ask you to look these facts in the face, and tell me, as a thinking man, whether you consider the public is to be blamed if it regards you with suspicion?"

"As you put it, no," said Godfrey. "But it can surely be proved that I had nothing whatsoever to do with it, beyond what I have said."

"Exactly; and that is what we have got to do. But I don't mind telling you candidly that I fancy we shall have our work cut out to do it. You see, we have to remember that, beyond your own evidence, there is absolutely nothing for us to argue upon. The two strongest points in your favour are the facts that you were at Detwich when the box containing the dead woman's hands was sent off at Euston, and that there would not be sufficient time between the moment when the policeman saw you in Burford Street and the time when you arrived at your hotel, for you to have committed the crime. What we have to do is to find the person who despatched the box from London, and to make sure of the hall porter. In the meantime go back to Detwich, and be sure that you don't stir from home until you hear from me."

"One more question, Mr. Codey. I should like you, before we go any further, to tell me honestly whether, in your own heart, you believe me to be innocent or guilty?"

"I believe you to be innocent," said the lawyer; "and you may be sure I shall try to prove it."

CHAPTER X

A more miserable home-coming than Godfrey's, after the events described in the previous chapter, could scarcely be imagined. They had taken a cab from the lawyer's office to Euston Station, and during the drive, neither of them referred in any way to the interview they had just had with Codey. It was not until they were seated in the railway carriage, and the train had started upon its journey, that they broke their silence.

"Sir Vivian," said Godfrey, "I can not express to you my thanks for the kindness which you showed me in standing by me to-day. Believe me, I am very sensible of it."

"You must not speak of it;" said the worthy old gentleman; "and as for the affair itself, it is a piece of ill-luck that might have happened to the best of us. At the same time, I should very much like to have an opportunity of telling that wretched Fensden what I think of him."

"Do not let us talk of him," said Godfrey. "His own feelings must be sufficient punishment for him. There is one thing, however, that I must say to you before we go any further."

"And what is that?"

"It concerns my wedding," Godfrey replied. "I am afraid it will be a terrible blow to poor Molly; but until this charge, which I have no doubt will be brought against me, is disproved, she must not think any more of me."

Sir Vivian stared at him in astonishment.

"Nonsense, my dear lad," said he. "I know that you love my girl, and that she loves you. It is her duty, therefore, to stand by you and to comfort you when you are in trouble. Believe me, she will have no doubt as to your innocence."

"I know that," said Godfrey; "but I do not think it would be fair for me to allow her name to be linked with mine under such painful circumstances."

"It will be linked with it whether you like it or not," was the reply. "If I am prepared to stake my honour on your innocence, you may be very sure that she will stake hers. Molly isn't a fair-weather friend."

"She is the truest and best girl in the world," said Godfrey. "No one knows that better than I."

"Then wait until you have seen her and talked it over with her alone. Put the question to her, and see what she will say. I know her well enough to guess what her answer will be."

"God bless you for your trust in me!" said Godfrey, in a shaky voice. "I fear I have done very little to deserve it."

"It is sufficient that I know you for what you are," the other answered. "I knew your uncle and grandfather before him, and I am as certain that you would not do anything dishonourable as I am of my own name. What we have to do is to put our wits to work and to endeavour to find out, as Codey says, the sender of the box. Then I believe we shall be on the track of the real criminal. It was a very good suggestion on Mr. Bensleigh's part that we should employ that man; we could not have had a better. I never saw such eyes in my life. He seems to look one through and through. I pity Mr. Fensden when he comes to be cross-examined by him."

The old gentleman chuckled over the thought and then lapsed into silence.

When they reached Detwich, they became aware that Griffin had travelled from London by the same train. Godfrey beckoned to him.

"Of course you heard the evidence to-day, Griffin," Godfrey began when the other approached.

"Yes, sir, I did," said the police official, gravely.

"And you must have drawn your own conclusions from it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, Griffin, what I wanted to say to you is that, if I am wanted for anything, I shall not leave the Hall until Wednesday morning; then I shall go up to the inquiry again."

"I will bear the fact in mind, sir," said the man. "But there's one thing I should like to say, if you don't mind."

"What is it? Say it by all means."

"It's this, sir. Whether it's going against my duty or not—and there's nobody here to hear it if it is—whatever verdict they may bring in, I don't believe for a moment that you had any more to do with that poor girl's death than I had. You

will excuse my saying so, I hope, sir?"

"On the contrary, I am very much obliged to you for your good opinion," Godfrey replied, holding out his hand which the other took. "I am afraid that it's going to be a very unpleasant business for me. That can't be helped, however. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir," the man answered.

Then Godfrey joined Sir Vivian and, as had been arranged, they drove off to the Hall together. The moon was rising above the hill as they went through the park, and as Godfrey looked on the peaceful scene around him and thought of the terrible suspicion that was growing in people's minds concerning himself his heart sank within him. If only little Teresina could speak, how easily she could clear up all the dark charges against him! She was dead, however, brutally murdered, and he, the only man who had ever befriended her, was suspected of having caused her death.

"Keep up a stout heart, my lad," said Sir Vivian, as they alighted from the carriage and ascended the steps. "Think of the ladies, and don't make them any more unhappy than you can help."

The door was opened by the ancient butler who had served his uncle before him, and Godfrey entered his home, but how different a man from the young fellow who had left it that morning!

"The ladies are in the drawing-room, sir," said the servant, when he had relieved them of their hats and coats.

They accordingly proceeded thither, one of them at least with a sinking heart.

"We have just been wondering when we should see you," said Kitty.

There was a look of anxiety on Molly's face as she came forward to meet her lover. She placed her hand in his, and they sat down together.

"Well, my dear boy," said Mrs. Henderson, "what have you to tell us? What was the result?"

There was no need for her to say to what she referred. Their minds had been too much occupied with it that day to leave room for any uncertainty upon the point.

"Nothing is decided yet," said Sir Vivian, who took upon himself the part of spokesman. "The inquiry is adjourned until Wednesday."

"That means that you will have to go up again," said Molly. "Why couldn't they

settle it at once?"

Godfrey knew, but he dared not tell her the reason.

"They are searching for more evidence, I fancy," said Sir Vivian. "You must remember that the matter is, at present, shrouded in the greatest mystery. Until that can be cleared up, nothing can be done."

"And Mr. Fensden, where did you leave him?" asked Mrs. Henderson.

"We parted outside the Court," said Godfrey. "I have no idea where he is staying to-night."

Though he tried to speak unconcernedly, Molly felt certain in her own mind that there had been trouble between the two men. She said nothing to him about it, however. She knew that he would tell her in good time.

That night, when Sir Vivian's carriage was announced, Godfrey accompanied him to the front door. Before leaving, the old gentleman took him on one side out of earshot of the servants.

"Keep up your spirits, my dear lad," he said, as he had done so many times before. "Remember that you have many friends and that I am not the least of them. Should anything occur, send for me at once, and I will be with you as fast as horses can bring me. In the meantime do not alarm the ladies more than you can help."

"You may rely upon my not doing so," said Godfrey, and then Sir Vivian entered his carriage and drove away.

Later, when Godfrey bade Molly good-night, she looked up at him with sorrowful eyes.

"I feel sure," she said, "that there is something you are keeping back from me. I beg of you not to do so. You know how I love you, and how earnest is my desire to share both your joys and your sorrows with you. Will you not confide in me and tell me everything?"

"When there is anything worth the hearing, you may be sure I will tell you, dear," he answered, not daring to let her know the truth that night. "In the morning we will talk the whole matter over and you shall give me your advice. And now you must go to bed and try to obtain a good night's rest, for I am sure you did not sleep well last night."

"I did not," she answered. "I was thinking of you all night, for I knew how you

were dreading going up to-day."

He did not tell her that he dreaded going up on Wednesday a great deal more. He preferred to take her in his arms and kiss her, calling her his good angel, swearing that he would love her all his life long, and that even death itself should not separate them. Then he went to his room, prepared to spend what he knew would be a sleepless night, and he was not destined to be wrong. Hour after hour he tumbled and tossed upon his bed, going over the day's proceedings again and again, and speculating with never-ceasing anxiety as to what was to happen in the future. At last, unable to bear it any longer, he rose from his bed and went downstairs to his studio, where he lighted his fire and smoked and read until daylight. Then a cold bath somewhat refreshed him, and, as soon as he had dressed, he set off across the park to the home farm. He was always an early riser, and his presence there at that hour excited no comment. He watched the sleek, soft-eyed cows being milked, saw the handsome cart-horses, of which he had once been so proud, set off upon their day's work, had a quarter of an hour's conversation with his head-keeper at his cottage gate, and then returned home through the plantations to breakfast. It was his mother's habit to read prayers to the household immediately before the meal, and, as he knelt by Molly's side, and listened to the old familiar words, his heart ached when he thought of the misery that any moment might bring upon them.

As the first train from London did not arrive until somewhat late, the morning papers were delivered with the letters, which usually reached the Hall about half-past nine. When they arrived Godfrey selected one, and took it with him to his studio. With a feeling that he had never before experienced when opening a paper, he turned the crisp pages in search of the column which he knew he would find. Then he saw in large type:

THE BURFORD STREET MURDER

EXTRAORDINARY EVIDENCE

There was no need for him to wonder what that evidence was: he knew before he

began to read. The prominence given by the paper to the case was a proof of the excitement the inquiry had aroused in the public mind. At last he forced himself to read. Every word rose before his eyes as vividly as though it had been traced in letters of fire. Set down in cold print, the affair presented a very sinister aspect, so far as he was concerned. Every portion of the evidence seemed to point to himself as being the man who had committed the dastardly deed. He could well imagine what the feeling of independent persons would be who read it, and how readily they would arrive at a conclusion unfavourable to himself. He had just perused it for the second time, when he was startled by a faint tap upon the door.

"Come in," he cried, and in response Molly entered the room.

"I have been looking for you," she said, with the parody of a smile upon her face.

"I should have come in search of you in a few moments," he replied. "The fact is, I have had certain things to do which could not very well be left undone. Will you forgive me, dear?"

"Of course I will," she answered. "It is impossible for you to be always with me, and yet I am selfish enough to grudge you the time you spend upon anything else."

He was quick-witted enough to see that what she said was only an attempt to gain time. She, on her side, knew that he stood in need of comfort, and she had come to give it to him.

"Molly," he said, rising from the chair in which he had been sitting and going toward her, "I feel that I must tell you everything. God knows, this is the crisis of my life, and to whom should I turn in my sorrow, if not to the woman I love, and whom I know loves me? Have you read the account of the inquest in the papers?"

"No," she answered, "I would not read it, lest I should derive a false impression from it. I am quite willing to hear what you have to say about it, and to accept your version as the truth."

"God bless you, dear, for your trust in me!" he replied; "but it is necessary that you should hear what other people have to say upon the matter. Read it carefully, and, when you have finished, tell me what you think about it."

He gave her the paper, and for a moment she stood as if undecided.

"Do you really wish it?" she asked.

"It is better that you should do so, believe me," he said. "In that case, no one can say that I kept anything back from you."

"I will read it," she said, and went toward the window-seat to do so.

While she was reading, he stood before the fire and watched her. He noticed the poise of the beautiful head, the sweet hands holding the paper, on one finger of which sparkled the engagement ring he had given her, and the tiny foot just peeping from beneath the dark green skirt. She was a woman worth fighting all the world for, and, as he reflected how easy it would be for false evidence to separate them, he experienced a fear such as he had never known in his life before.

When she had finished, she crossed the room with the paper in her hand. Deliberately folding it up and laying it upon the table, she went to him, and placed her hands in his. Looking up into his face with trustful eyes, she said:

"I told you yesterday, Godfrey, that I believed in you. I tell you again, that, whatever the world may say with regard to this dreadful affair, it will make no difference in my love. I feel as convinced as I am of anything that, by whatever means, or at whose hand, that poor girl met her death, you were in no sort of way responsible for, or connected with it. You believe me, don't you?"

"I do," he answered, with tears in his eyes. "And I thank God for your trust. Do you know, yesterday I suggested to your father that, situated as we are, it would be better if I were to give you back your freedom until my innocence is proved?"

"I would not take it," she answered, firmly. "When I gave myself to you, it was not to be your bride in fair weather alone; it was to be your partner in the rough seas of life as well as in the smooth. No, come what may, Godfrey, I will not let you give me up. Promise me that you will never mention such a thing again? It hurts me even to think of it."

"Your mind is made up?"

"Quite made up," she answered. "I should not change, even if you were what—(here she shuddered)—what that paper would seem to suggest. No, darling, I am your wife, if not in the law, at least in God's sight."

"I thank you," he answered, earnestly. "The knowledge that you still trust me will be my most precious consolation."

"And now tell me of this Mr. Codey, the lawyer you have employed. Is he a clever man?"

"One of the cleverest in the land, I should say," Godfrey replied. "He has had great experience in these sort of cases, and, if any man can render me assistance, I should say he is that one."

"Oh, how thankful I shall be," she said, "when everything is settled! How little we dreamt, when we were so happy together last week, that within a few days we should be made so miserable! Perhaps, after all, it is only our love being tried in the crucible of trouble. And when it is over, and we have come out of it, we shall know each other's real worth. That is the best way to look at it, I think."

"Quite the best," he answered, and kissed her on the forehead.

Then, adopting a brighter tone, he suggested that they should go for a walk together, in order, if possible, to dispel, for the time being at least, the dark clouds that had settled upon them. It was a clear, bright morning, and as they crossed the park, and mounted the hillside toward the plantation, where the rabbits were playing, and the pheasants, who of late had not received the attention their merits deserved, were strutting about on the open grass land, Godfrey found it difficult to believe that the situation was really as desperate as he imagined. Their walk lasted for upward of two hours; indeed, it was nearly lunch-time before they reached the house once more. When they did, Molly went upstairs to her room to prepare herself for luncheon, while Godfrey made his way to his mother's sitting room, where he found the old lady quietly knitting by the fire.

"Thank goodness you have come in at last, dear!" said Mrs. Henderson. "I have been wanting so much to have a talk with you! Godfrey, I have read the evidence given at the inquest, and it frightens me."

"I am sorry for that, mother," he said, seating himself by her side. "What do you think of it?"

She placed her hand upon his arm, and looked at him with her loving eyes.

"I think my boy is too noble to have done anything of which his mother would have had reason to be ashamed."

Godfrey rose from his chair and walked to the window. These constant proofs of the love in which he was held was unmanning him. He could not trust himself to speak. When his own little world believed in him so implicitly, how could the greater world be so censorious?

When they went into luncheon, Godfrey soon saw that the ancient butler and his subordinate had become aware of the state of affairs. Attentive to his wants as

they always were, on this particular occasion, they were even more so than usual. It was as if they were endeavouring in their own kindly way to show that they too believed in him, and were desirous of proving their sympathy with him. Never before had his own home struck him in the same light. His heart was too full for speech, and, in spite of his sister's well-meant attempt to promote conversation, the meal passed almost in silence.

After luncheon the bailiff sent in word that he should like to speak to him. The man was accordingly admitted to the smoking-room, where he discussed various matters connected with the estate with his master for upward of an hour. Labouring as he was, under the weight of greater emotions, Godfrey found it difficult to pin his attention to the matters at issue, and when the other went his way, after respectfully touching his forelock, for the first time since he had known the old fellow, he heaved a sigh of relief. At half-past four he joined the ladies in the drawing-room for afternoon tea. To add to his pain, another consignment of wedding presents had arrived, and in order that he should not be thought to be unduly nervous about the future, he was compelled to appear delighted with the attentions he had received from his friends.

"That makes the fifth pair of asparagus tongs we have received," said Molly, as she closed the case and placed it with its fellows upon the table. "And what is this? Well, I declare, it's another set of sweet dishes. That brings the number up to twenty-seven!"

At that moment the sound of carriage wheels outside reached them, followed, a few seconds later, by the ringing of the front door-bell.

"Visitors, I suppose," said Kitty. "It may be rude, but I must say that I trust it is not the vicar."

They waited in suspense until Williamson, the butler, entered the room and informed Godfrey that a gentleman had called to see him, and was waiting in the library.

"Who is it?" Godfrey asked. "Did he not give his name?"

"His name is Tompkins, sir," the butler replied. "He said he should be glad if you could spare the time to see him for a few moments."

"I will do so at once," said Godfrey, and, asking the ladies to excuse him, left the room.

On entering the library, he found himself face to face with a middle-aged individual, who at first glance resembled a sporting parson. He was dressed in

black, and carried a black silk hat in his hand.

"What can I do for you?" Godfrey inquired. "I am not aware that I have ever seen you before."

"Very likely not, sir," the man replied. "My name is Tompkins, and I am a Scotland Yard detective. I hold a warrant for your arrest on a charge of wilfully murdering Teresina Cardi in Burford Street on the night of Thursday last. I had better tell you that anything you may say will be used against you."

The blow had fallen at last!

CHAPTER XI

For some moments Godfrey stood looking at the man who had come down from town to arrest him, as if he were stunned. Though he had half expected it, now that the blow had fallen he seemed scarcely able to appreciate his position. At last, with an effort, he recovered his self-possession.

"You may be able to imagine what a very unhappy mistake this is for me," he said to the detective. "But I have no wish to complain to you; you are only doing your duty. Where is it you desire to take me?"

"We must go up to town to-night," said the man, civilly enough. "As you may remember, sir, the adjourned inquest is to be held to-morrow morning, and it will be necessary for you to be present."

"In that case we had better catch the 6.10 train from Detwich. It is an express and gets to Euston at eight. Is your cab waiting, or shall I order one of my own carriages to take us?"

"I told the man to wait," the other replied. "He is a station cabman."

"In that case, if you will allow me, I will tell my servant to put up a few things for me. I suppose I shall be allowed to take them?"

"There is no objection to it."

Godfrey rang the bell, and, when the butler appeared in answer to it, bade him tell his man that he intended going up to London at once, and that he wanted his bag prepared without a moment's delay. Then, with a fine touch of sarcasm, he added: "Tell him also that I shall not require my dress clothes."

The detective smiled grimly. It was a joke he could appreciate; he also liked the other's pluck in being able to jest at such a time.

"That's the thing with these swells," he said to himself. "They never know when they're beaten."

"In the meantime," said Godfrey, "I suppose you will permit me to say good-bye to my family? I will give you my word, if you deem it necessary, that I will make no attempt to escape."

"I will trust you, sir," said the man. "I know it's hard lines on you, and I want to

make it as pleasant for you as I can, provided, of course, you don't get me into hot water."

"I will endeavour not to do that," said Godfrey. "And now I'll go to the drawing-room. If you think it necessary you can wait in the hall."

"No, sir, thank you. I am quite comfortable here," said the man; "but I shouldn't make the interview longer than I could help if I were you. These things are always a bit trying for the ladies. I know it, because I've seen it so often."

Having ordered a glass of brandy and water for him, the man's favourite tipple, and handing him an illustrated paper, Godfrey left him and returned to the drawing-room. He had an agonizing part to play, and he wanted to spare his women folk as much pain as possible. As he entered the room they looked up at him with startled faces.

"What is it, Godfrey? What is it?" asked his mother, while the two girls waited for him to speak.

"It is a man from London who has come down to see me with regard to the murder," Godfrey began, scarcely knowing how to break the news to them. "It appears that the authorities are desirous of seeing me prior to the inquest to-morrow, and so I am going up to-night."

"Godfrey," cried his mother, springing to her feet and running toward him, "I see it all. They have arrested you on a charge of murder! Oh, my boy, my boy, I can not let you go! They shall not take you away."

"It is only a matter of form, mother," he said, soothingly. "On the face of yesterday's evidence, they could do nothing else. All well, I shall be down again to-morrow. It is only a little temporary inconvenience; for my lawyer, who is one of the cleverest men of his profession, feels certain that he can disprove the charge."

"It is monstrous even to suspect you of it," said Kitty. "If they only knew you, they would not dare even to hint at such a thing."

Molly said nothing. But he knew what her thoughts were.

"I must send a note to your father, dear," he said. "He anticipated this and made me promise to communicate with him directly it should come to pass."

He thereupon went to a writing-table in the corner of the room and wrote a hurried note to Sir Vivian, after which he rang the bell and gave orders that it should be taken to the Court without a moment's delay.

"Now," he said, when he had examined his watch and found that it was nearly half-past five, "I must bid you good-bye. Do not be anxious about me. I am proudly conscious of my own innocence, and I feel sure that, by this time to-morrow, the public will be aware of it also."

But his mother was not to be comforted. She clung to him with the tears streaming down her cheeks, as if she could not let him go.

"Mother dear," said Kitty, "you must be brave. Think of Godfrey, and don't send him away more unhappy than he is."

"I will be brave," she said, and drew his face down to hers and kissed him. "Good-bye, my dear boy. May God in His mercy bless you and send you safely back to us!"

When Kitty had kissed him, she drew her mother back into the ingle nook in order that Godfrey and Molly might say good-bye to each other in private.

Then Godfrey took Molly in his arms.

"Good-bye, my own dearest," she said. "I shall pray for you continually. Night and day you will be in my thoughts."

He could not answer her, but kissed her passionately. Then, disengaging himself from her embrace, he left the room.

Returning to the library, he informed the detective that he was at his disposal, at the same time telling him that, if they desired to catch the 6.10 at Detwich, they had no time to lose.

"We had better be going, then," said the man, and leaving the library they proceeded into the hall. Godfrey's bag had already been placed in the cab, and the gray-haired old butler, Williamson, was standing at the foot of the stairs holding the door open.

"Good-bye, Williamson," said Godfrey. "I know that I can safely leave everything in your hands."

"You can, sir," the man replied, simply; and then for the first time in his life he allowed himself to become familiar with his master, and laying his hand on his arm he added, "May God bless you, sir, and send you back to us soon!"

Then the cab rolled away down the drive, and Godfrey's journey to prison had commenced.

For the greater part of the drive into Detwich neither of them spoke. One had too

much upon his mind to be in the humour for conversation, while the other, who was sorry for his prisoner, and who knew a gentleman when he saw one, had no desire to thrust himself upon him in his trouble. As it happened when they reached the station they found that they had some minutes to spare. They accordingly strolled up and down the platform, while they awaited the coming of the express. On its arrival they secured an empty compartment, and settled down for the journey to London. When Euston was reached they took a cab and drove direct to Bow Street, where Godfrey Henderson, of Detwich Hall, Detwich, was formally charged with the wilful murder of Teresina Cardi, artist's model. The usual forms having been complied with, he was placed in a somewhat superior apartment in another portion of the building. Then the key was turned upon him, and for the first time in his life was a prisoner.

Early next morning it was announced that two gentlemen had arrived to see him. They proved to be Sir Vivian Devereux and Mr. Codey, the lawyer.

"My dear lad, this is indeed a sad business," said Sir Vivian, as they shook hands. "I can not tell you how sorry I am for you. But, thank God, we know you to be innocent and are determined to prove it."

They sat down, and the lawyer, who had been looking round the room, which doubtless he had seen on many previous occasions, began to ply him with questions, which Godfrey answered to the best of his ability. When they had withdrawn, he was left to himself until the time arrived for him to set off for the coroner's court. When he did so, it was in a cab with a couple of stout policemen beside him to see that he made no attempt to escape. On reaching it, he found that it was packed to overflowing. Victor Fensden was there, seated in the space reserved for the witnesses, but Sir Vivian noticed that he avoided meeting Godfrey's eyes. With one exception, the proceedings proved comparatively tame. It was only when the hall porter referred to Godfrey's haggard appearance when he returned to the hotel on the Thursday night, that there was anything approaching excitement. He deposed that Mr. Henderson, who had been staying at the hotel, and whom he now recognised as being in Court, returned to the hotel on the night of the murder between a quarter-past and half-past twelve. He, the porter, was immediately struck by his strange appearance. In reply to a question put by a juror, he replied that he looked very much as if he had been upset by something; his face was deadly white, and he had an anxious, what he should call frightened, look in his eyes. At the other's request, he had procured him some brandy, and, as he had had some trouble next morning with the head waiter about it, the fact was the more vividly impressed upon his memory. The

cabman who had driven them from the Strand to Burford Street was next called. In answer to questions put to him, he stated that, when he was hailed by the person now in court, the deceased woman seemed very reluctant to enter the cab. But the other had at last prevailed upon her to do so, and he had driven them to the house in the street in question. He had identified the body, and could swear as to the identity of the person in court. The police-constable, who had passed a few minutes before he bade Teresina good-night, was next examined. He remembered seeing them together, and thought it a strange place for a gentleman to be in at such a time. His attention was drawn to them because the girl was crying, while the gentleman seemed somewhat excited. Feeling that, as he was not appealed to, he had no right to interfere, he passed on down the street. In answer to the coroner's inquiry, he was unable to say whether or not the man entered the house.

Ten minutes later a verdict of wilful murder against Godfrey Henderson was returned, and he was committed for trial on the coroner's warrant.

Instead of returning to Bow Street from the coroner's court, Godfrey was now driven to Holloway Prison, where he was placed in an ordinary cell. His spirits by this time had fallen to as low an ebb as it would be possible for those of a human being to reach. What had he done to deserve this cruel fate? He was not conscious of ever having done any one an injury; he had always done his best to help his fellow-men. Why, therefore, was he brought so low? He thought of Molly, and pictured her feelings when she should hear that he was committed for trial. He could imagine his mother's despair and could almost hear poor, sorrowing Kitty vainly endeavouring to comfort her.

During the afternoon Sir Vivian and Mr. Codey came to see him again. The former was very plainly distressed; the latter, however, regarded matters in a somewhat more stoical light. He had seen the same things so many times before, that he had become in a certain measure hardened to it. In all the cases upon which he had hitherto been engaged, however, he had never had one in which the prisoner was a country gentleman, besides being an artist of considerable repute. "You must not give way, Mr. Henderson," he said, kindly. "There's plenty of time yet for us to prove your innocence. Doubtless, when this is all over and you are free once more, you will regard it as a very unpleasant experience, certainly, but one which might very easily have been worse. Now, with your permission, I will tell you what I have done. In the first place, we must endeavour to find the real murderer. Only a trained hand could do this, so I have engaged a man with whom I have had a great many dealings in the past. He is a private detective of

an unusual kind, and has a knack of securing information which neither the Government men nor the private agents seem to possess. He will be expensive, but I suppose you will have no objection to paying him well for his services, if he is successful, as I trust he will be."

"You may be quite sure I shall have no objection," said Godfrey. "Let him get me out of this scrape, and I'll pay him double, even treble, his usual charges."

"Oh, he won't bleed you as much as that," returned the lawyer. "He is below now, and if you care to see him, I will obtain permission for him to come up."

The necessary authority being forthcoming, Codey presently returned, accompanied by a burly, rosy-cheeked individual, who might very well have been the landlord of a well-to-do country inn or a farmer in a prosperous way of business. A more jovial countenance could scarcely have been discovered, had one searched England through for it. Merely to look at it was to be made to feel happy, while to hear his laugh was to be put in a good humour for the remainder of the day. He was dressed in a suit of tweeds, more than a trifle pronounced as to colour, a knitted blue waistcoat covered his portly, bow-windowed presence, while he wore a spotted blue and white tie, decorated with a large diamond pin. His feet and hands were enormous, and when he laughed—which he did on every available opportunity—his whole figure seemed to quiver like a blanc mange.

"This is Jacob Burrell, Mr. Henderson," said the lawyer, when the door had closed on them. "I have told him that you wish him to take up your case, and he is prepared to do so without delay."

"I am exceedingly obliged to you, Mr. Burrell," said Godfrey. "Mr. Codey has told me of your cleverness. If you can discover who it was who actually murdered the poor girl, you will not only relieve me from a position of considerable danger, but you will lay me under an everlasting obligation to yourself."

"I'll do the best I can, sir," said the man, jovially, rubbing his hands together, as if he regarded the whole affair as a huge joke. "As Mr. Codey may have told you, I have unravelled pretty tangled skeins in my day, and it won't be my fault if I don't do the same here. Now, sir, Mr. Codey, who knows my ways of work, has given me an outline of the case, but if you don't mind, I should like to put a few questions to you on my own account."

"Ask me whatever you please," said Godfrey, "and I will answer to the best of my ability."

Burrell seated himself opposite Godfrey, placed one enormous hand on either knee, and looked the other full in the face.

"Now, sir, in the first place, when you had your old studio in London, before you inherited your present estate, and when you first engaged the girl, can you remember who were your intimate friends? I mean, the friends who were in the habit of dropping into your studio pretty frequently, to smoke their pipes, and perhaps to take a friendly glass?"

Godfrey considered for a moment.

"I had not very many friends in those days," he answered at last. "I was a hard worker, and for that reason didn't encourage men to waste my time. Besides, I was only a struggling artist, and couldn't afford to entertain very much."

"But there must have been some men who came in. Think, sir, and try to recollect. It's an important point."

"Well, of course, there was my friend, Mr. Fensden, who practically lived with me. He used my studio whenever he had anything to do."

"He is the gentleman who gave the damaging evidence against you on Monday, is he not?"

"He is! Then there was a Mr. Bourke, a leader writer on the Daily Record."

"I know Mr. Bourke," said the detective. "We may dismiss him from the case at once."

"Then there was an artist named Halliday, who occasionally dropped in, but he is now in Dresden."

"When did he go?"

"Nearly two months before I went abroad myself," Godfrey answered. "I think I have given you the list of my friends. I can remember no more."

"Now, sir, that box, in which the hands were sent, had you ever seen it before?"

"No," said Godfrey; "I am quite certain I had not."

"When you came home from Egypt, did you make any purchases in Naples?"

"None at all. I was only there one night."

"Now, sir, I am given to understand that your friend, Mr. Fensden, induced you to go abroad for the reason that he feared you were falling in love with your model. On what sort of terms was Mr. Fensden himself with the girl in

question?"

"On very friendly terms," said Godfrey.

"Was he in love with her, do you think?"

"I am certain he was not," Godfrey replied, shaking his head. "I do not think he would ever be in love with anybody."

"And you are quite sure that he saw nothing of the girl from the day he bade her good-bye in your studio, until Monday, when he inspected her dead body in the mortuary?"

"I am sure of it," Godfrey answered.

"And when did he return to England, for I understand he has been abroad until lately?"

"On Thursday morning. I met him at the Mahl Stick Club an hour or two after his return from Paris."

"Now, sir, one other question, and the last. The girl, I understand, told you that she was married, and refused to say to whom. I have had an opportunity of examining the wedding-ring from her finger. Somewhat to my surprise, I found that it was of Austrian make. Now, how does it come about that a girl living in Naples should be married with an Austrian wedding-ring? It was, moreover, an expensive one. What I want to know is, was the young woman ever in Vienna?"

"Never, to the best of my belief," said Godfrey. "At any rate she never told me so."

"Now, sir, there's one point I want to clear up, and when I have done that, I sha'n't be at all certain that I haven't got the key to the whole mystery. Is it only a singular coincidence, do you think, that Teresina Cardi, your old model, wore a wedding-ring of Austrian make, and that the box in which her hands were sent to you the other day should bear the label of a well-known Vienna firm?"

He chuckled and rubbed his hands together, as he put this question to Godfrey.

"It certainly seems singular," said the latter; "but why should not the ring have been purchased in Naples, even if it were of Austrian make?"

"There is not the least reason why it should not, but the coincidence is worth remarking. Now, sir, I shall leave you to think over what I have said. I shall telegraph to Naples and Vienna, and meanwhile endeavour to find out who it was handed the box in at Euston. Allow me to wish you good-day, gentlemen."

They returned his salutations, after which he went away, leaving one little ray of hope behind him.

"A most remarkable man that!" said Codey, appreciatively, when the door was once more closed. "He will follow the trail now like a sleuth-hound. In the meantime, Mr. Henderson, I can not promise you anything very hopeful for to-morrow. I shall apply to the magistrate for a remand in order to give Burrell more time to look about him. I shall keep in touch with him, you may be sure. I have retained Alfred Rolland as counsel for you. He and I have often worked together, and I don't think you could have a better man."

"I place myself in your hands unreservedly," said Godfrey. "Do whatever you think best, and spare no expense. I have others besides myself to think of in this matter."

"You have indeed, poor souls!" said Sir Vivian. "I shall go down to-night, and try to reassure them, and come up again first thing in the morning."

When they left him, half-an-hour later, Godfrey sat himself down on his bed and resigned himself to his own miserable thoughts. What enemy had he who hailed from Vienna? He could think of no one among the circle of his acquaintances who had ever been there. Certainly no one who would be likely to do him such an irreparable wrong. After that he thought of his dear ones at home, and broke down completely. His supper was sent away untouched. He felt as though he could not have swallowed a mouthful, even had his life depended on it. At last he retired to bed, but not to rest. When he rose next morning, he felt older by a dozen years.

"This will never do," he said to himself. "If I go on like this, people will begin to think from my appearance that I am guilty. No, they shall see that I am not afraid to look any man in the face."

Then the door was unlocked, and he was informed that it was time to set off for the magistrate's court.

CHAPTER XII

The preliminary investigation before the magistrate calls for but little comment. The evidence was, with but few exceptions, that which had been given before the coroner on the Monday and Wednesday preceding. If it were remarkable for anything it was for the number of spectators in the Court. The building, in which the coroner's inquiry had been conducted, had been crowded, but the police-court was packed, not with the poorly-clad spectators which one usually meets and associates with that miserable place, but by well-dressed and even aristocratic members of society. When Godfrey recovered from his first feeling of shame at finding himself in such a place and in such a position, and looked about him, he recognised several people whom he had once accounted his friends, but who had now schemed and contrived by every means in their power, to obtain permission to watch, what they thought would amount to his degradation and final extinction. Pulling himself together he gazed boldly around him, and more than one person there told himself or herself that a man who could look at one like that could never be guilty of such a crime as murder. Mr. Rolland, the counsel who had been retained by Codey for the defence, was a tall, handsome man, and of others, little above middle-age. He was the possessor of a bland, suave manner which had the faculty of extracting information from the most unwilling and reluctant witnesses. Near him sat Mr. Codey himself, keen-eyed and on the alert for anything that might tend to his client's advantage. The curiosity of the visitors was not destined, however, to be gratified, for, when certain of the witnesses had been examined, the case was adjourned for a week, and Godfrey returned to Holloway by the way he had come.

How the next seven days passed Godfrey declares he is unable to tell, but at last that weary week came to an end, and once more he stood in the crowded Court. At first glance it looked, if such a thing were possible, as if more people had been squeezed into the building than on the previous occasion. The fashionable world was as well represented as before, while this time there were even more ladies present than had hitherto been the case. The cabman who had driven the pair to Burford Street was examined and repeated his former evidence. He was subjected to a severe cross-examination by Mr. Rolland, but his testimony remained unshaken. The police-constable, who had seen them together outside the house, also repeated his tale. He was quite certain, he assured the Court, that

the woman in question was crying as he passed them. At the same time he was not sure whether or not the prisoner was speaking angrily to her. When he left the witness-box Victor Fensden took his place. He described the life in the studio before Godfrey left England, and repeated the story of the attempt he had made to induce him to break off his relations with the girl. When the prosecution had done with him Mr. Rolland took him in hand and inquired what reason he had for supposing that his client had ever felt any affection for the deceased woman.

"Because he himself told me so," Fensden returned unblushingly. "I pointed out to him the absurdity of such a thing, and was at last successful in inducing him to accompany me abroad."

"You parted where?"

"In Port Said. I went on to Palestine, while he returned to Naples."

"*En route* to England?"

"I believe so."

"On what day did you yourself reach London?"

"On the day of the murder."

"When did you next see the prisoner?"

"He lunched with me at the Mahl Stick Club on the same day."

"That will do," said Mr. Rolland, somewhat to the surprise of the Court. "I have no further questions to ask you."

It was at this point that the great sensation of the day occurred. When Fensden had taken his place once more, Detective-sergeant Gunson was called, and a tall, handsome man, with a short, brown beard entered the box. He stated that his name was Gunson, and that he was a member of the Scotland Yard detective force. Two days previous, accompanied by Detective-sergeant McVickers, he had paid a visit to the prisoner's residence, Detwich Hall, in the county of Midlandshire. They had made a systematic search of the building, with the result that, hidden away behind a bookcase in the studio, they had discovered a long knife of Oriental workmanship and design. The blade was of razor-like sharpness, and was covered with certain dark stains. He found nothing else of an incriminating nature. Detective-sergeant McVickers was next called, who corroborated his companion's evidence.

Dr. Bensford, an analytical chemist and lecturer at the Waterloo Hospital, stated

that he was instructed by the Home Secretary to make an examination of the marks upon the knife in question, now produced, and had arrived at the conclusion that they were the stains of human blood. (Great sensation in Court.)

So overwhelming was the shock to Godfrey, that for a moment he neither heard nor saw anything. A ghastly faintness was stealing over him and the Court swam before his eyes. With a mighty effort, however, he pulled himself together and once more faced the Court. He looked at Sir Vivian and saw that the baronet's face had suddenly become very pale.

"Good Heavens!" he thought to himself, "will he suspect me also?"

The analyst having left the box, Victor Fensden was recalled, and the knife handed to him. He took it in his daintily gloved hand and examined it carefully.

"Have you ever seen that knife before?" asked the prosecution.

Victor hesitated a moment before he replied.

"No," he answered, as if with an effort.

"Think again," said his examiner. "Remember that this is a court of justice, and it behooves you to speak the truth. Where did you see that knife before?"

Once more Victor hesitated. Then in a somewhat louder voice he said:

"In Egypt. In Cairo."

"To whom does it belong?"

"To Mr.—I mean to the prisoner. I was with him when he purchased it."

A greater sensation than ever was produced by this assertion. Godfrey leaned forward on the rail of the dock and scrutinized the witness calmly.

"Your Worship," he said, addressing the magistrate, "with all due respect I should like to be allowed to say that I have never seen that knife in my life before."

The prosecution having finished their case, Mr. Rolland addressed the Bench. He pointed out how entirely improbable it was that a gentleman of Mr. Henderson's character and position would commit a murder of such a cowardly nature. He commented on the fact that it would have been impossible, had he even desired to do such a thing, for him to have committed the crime and have walked from Burford Street to his hotel in Piccadilly in the time counted from the moment he was seen by the police officer to the time of his arrival at his hotel. Moreover, he

asked the magistrate to consider the question as to whether a man who had committed such a dastardly deed would have been likely to send the mutilated remains to himself as a wedding present. It was useless for him, however, to argue, the magistrate had already made up his mind, and Godfrey was therefore not surprised when he found himself committed to stand for his trial at the next Criminal Sessions, to be held in a month's time. Bowing to the magistrate, he left the dock, entered the cab that was waiting for him in the yard, and was driven away to Holloway.

"It was the finding of that knife that did it," said Mr. Codey reproachfully, when he next saw him. "Why on earth didn't you tell me that it was hidden there?"

"Because I did not know it myself," Godfrey replied. "When I told the magistrate that I had never seen it before, it was the truth. I did not buy a knife in Cairo, so how could I have brought one home with me?"

"But who could have placed it behind the bookcase, if you did not?" asked the lawyer.

"That is more than I can say," said Godfrey simply.

"Look here, Mr. Henderson," said Codey sharply, "I have met a good many unsuspicious men in my time, but I don't think I have ever met one so unsuspicious as you are. I have a list of all the people in your house at the moment when that box arrived. Let us run it over. There was your mother, your sister, and your *fiancée*, Miss Devereux. As our friend Burrell would say, they may be dismissed from the case without delay. Your butler and footman are old family servants, as are the housekeeper, the cook, and the head parlour-maid. They may also be dismissed. The remainder of the household would be scarcely likely to possess a knife of that description, so we will dismiss them also. There remains only yourself and Mr. Fensden. You declare you are innocent, and we will presume that you are. Now, Mr. Fensden, by his evidence has placed you where you are. That is certain. You say that he lied as to the fact of your being in love with the woman who is dead, and also when he said that you purchased the knife in Cairo. You say that he came to stay with you on the day that the murder was discovered—why should he not have placed it behind the bookcase, in order that it should be another incriminating point against you?"

"I can not believe that he would do such a thing," said Godfrey. "He would not be so base."

"I am not so sure of it," said the astute lawyer. "What is more, I made a curious discovery to-day. The man in question pretends to be your friend. He gives his

evidence with reluctance. Yet I noticed that when that knife was produced his face betrayed neither surprise nor emotion. Had he had your interests at heart, would he have been so callous? Answer me that! Now you have my reasons for arguing that he knew where the knife was, and also the man who had placed it there."

"The suspicions you suggest are too horrible," said Godfrey, rising and pacing the cell. "What possible reason could he have for doing me such an injury?"

"One never knows. There are some men who hate the man who is supposed to be their best friend, either because he, the friend, has been successful in money-making, in love, or perhaps he presumes him to be happier than himself. You are rich; he is poor. You have been successful in your profession; he has been a failure. His hatred, like hundreds, might have begun with jealousy and have terminated in this. I have known more unlikely things."

"In that case what am I to do?"

"Leave it to me and to Burrell to arrange. If things were not going right, my experience teaches me that that astute gentleman would have shown signs of dissatisfaction before now. He has got his nose on the trail, you may be sure, and if I know anything about him, he will not leave it for a moment."

"But do you think he will be able to prove my innocence?" asked Godfrey.

"All in good time, my dear sir, all in good time," said the lawyer. "With me for your lawyer (pardon the boast), Rolland for your counsel, Dick Horsden and Braithwaite with him, and Burrell for the ferret that is to make the rabbits bolt, you could not be better served. For my own part, I wouldn't mind making you a bet—and as a rule I am not a man who gambles—that the last-named gentleman has already acquired sufficient information to secure your return to Detwich with an unblemished character."

"Then do so by all means," said Godfrey. "I will take it with the greatest pleasure in the world."

"Very well then," answered the lawyer. "I'll tell you what we'll do. I've a junior clerk who has the making of a man in him, but who is in consumption. The doctors tell me that, unless he is sent for a long sea voyage to the other side of the world, he will not live a year. I have promised to send him to the South Seas, and, if you like, this shall be our bet: If you get off scot-free, you pay all his expenses—something like five hundred pounds—and also give him five hundred pounds to go on with. If you don't, then I pay. Will you agree to that?"

"With all the pleasure in the world," Godfrey replied.

"Then it's settled. And now I must be going. Good-bye."

They shook hands, and then the lawyer took his departure, leaving Godfrey happier than he had been for some time past.

The month that separated the magistrate's inquiry from the Sessions at the Old Bailey seemed to Godfrey like an eternity. Day after day crept slowly by, with but little, if anything, to relieve the monotony. He took his daily exercise, kept his cell in spotless order, received visits from the lawyer, who came to report progress, and from Sir Vivian, who brought messages of hope and encouragement from the folk at home.

On one red-letter day he was informed that visitors had arrived to see him, and he was accordingly conducted to the room where he had on several occasions interviewed his lawyer. The warder opened the door and he entered, to be nearly overwhelmed by surprise. Standing by her father's side, at the farther end of the room, and waiting to receive him, was no less a person than Molly herself. She ran forward and threw herself into his arms.

"Molly, Molly," he faltered, "what does this mean? Why are you here? You should not distress yourself like this."

"I could not help it," she answered. "I had to come, I could stay away from you no longer. You do not know how I have suffered. It seems as if a lifetime had elapsed since we parted. At last I managed to persuade papa to bring me up. My poor boy, how ill you look! How you must have suffered!"

"Never mind about that, dear," said Godfrey. "If it all comes right in the end, we can afford to suffer a little. Now tell me of yourself; you don't know how hungry I am for news."

"No, don't let us talk of myself," she answered. "I want to talk about you and your affairs. Do you know that this morning I saw Mr. Codey, your lawyer, for the first time? He was introduced to me by papa."

"And what did he say to you?" Godfrey inquired, with natural interest.

"I am afraid there is not much to tell," said Molly. "When I asked him if he thought we should be able to prove your innocence, he said, 'That's a thing we shall have to see about; but I don't mind going so far as to promise you, that, unless there's anything else that I don't know of, you and Mr. Henderson will eat your Christmas dinner together next year!' I asked him and implored him to tell

me more, but I could not get anything else out of him."

Godfrey felt his heart beat more hopefully. It was something, indeed, to know that Codey took such a bright view of the case. Then Molly went on to give him the latest news of his mother and sister. The old lady, it appeared, was suffering a great deal on her dear boy's account; but she firmly believed that in the end he would be acquitted.

"It makes me so sad to see her," said Molly. "As you may suppose, I spend the greater part of my time there now, and I think we help and comfort each other."

"God bless you for your goodness to them, dear!" replied Godfrey. "I know what it must mean to them to have you with them."

"And now, Molly," said Sir Vivian, rising from his chair, "I am afraid we must go. We were only allowed a short time with you, and we must not exceed it. Good-bye, my boy, and may God bless you! Don't be down-hearted; we'll prove your innocence yet."

"You still believe in me, Sir Vivian?" he asked.

"As firmly as ever," the other answered. "I should not be here if I did not. And now, Molly, you must come along."

Godfrey kissed his sweetheart, and wished her good-bye. When she had left the room, all the sunshine seemed to have gone out of it, and with a heavy heart he went back to the gloom of his prison life again.

CHAPTER XIII

Jacob Burrell sat in his comfortable armchair and took counsel with himself. He was a bachelor, and like many other bachelors was wedded to a hobby, which in some respects was more to him than any wife could possibly have been. In other words he was an enthusiastic philatelist, and his collection of the world's stamps was the envy of every enthusiast who came in contact with them. For Jacob Burrell they possessed another interest that was quite apart from their mere intrinsic value. A very large number of the stamps so carefully pasted in the book had been collected, or had come into his possession, in the performance of his professional duties. A very rare 1¼ schilling blue Hamburg was picked up by the merest chance on the same day that he ran a notorious bank swindler to earth in Berlin; while a certain blue and brown United States, worth upward of thirty pounds, became his property during a memorable trip to America in search of a fraudulent trustee, whose whereabouts the officials of Scotland Yard had not been able to discover. Well-nigh every page had a story of its own to tell, and when Burrell was in the humour, he could, with the book before him, reel off tale after tale, of a description that would be calculated to make the listener's hair stand on end with astonishment. At the present moment he was occupied, as he very well knew, with one of the most knotty problems he had ever tackled in his life. His face wore a puzzled expression. In his right hand he held a large magnifying glass and in his left a Canadian stamp of the year 1852. But whether it was the case he was thinking of or the stamp it would have been difficult to say.

"Genuine or not?" he asked himself. "That's the question. If it's the first, it's worth five pounds of any man's money. If it's a fudge, then it's not the first time I've been had, but I'll take very good care that, so far as the gentleman is concerned who sold it to me, it shall be the last."

He scrutinized it carefully once more through the glass and then shook his head. Having done so he replaced the doubtful article in the envelope whence, he had taken it, slipped the glass back into its chamois-leather case, tied the tape round the handle as deliberately as if all his success in life depended on it, put both book and glass away in a drawer, and then proceeding to the sideboard on the other side of the room, slowly and carefully mixed himself a glass of grog. It was close upon midnight and he felt that the work he had that day completed

entitled him to such refreshment.

"Good Heavens," he muttered as he sipped it, "what fools some men can be!"

What this remark had to do with the stamp in question was not apparent, but his next soliloquy made his meaning somewhat more intelligible.

"If he had wanted to find himself in the dock and to put the rope round his neck he couldn't have gone to work better. He must needs stand talking to the girl in the Strand until she cries, whereupon he calls a cab and drives home with her, gets out of it and takes up a position in the full light of a gas lamp, so that the first policeman who passes may have a look at his face, and recognise him again when the proper time comes. After that he hurries back to his hotel at such a pace that he arrives in a sufficiently agitated condition to stand in need of brandy. Why, it's an almost unbelievable list of absurd coincidences. However, he didn't commit the crime, that's quite certain. I've had a bit of experience in my time, and I don't know that I've ever made a mistake about a human face yet. There's not a trace of guilt in his. To-morrow morning I'll just run round to the scene of the murder and begin my investigations there. Though the Pro's have been over the ground before me, it will be strange if I can not pick up something that has not been noticed by their observant eyes."

A perpetual feud existed between the famous Jacob Burrell and the genuine representatives of the profession. His ways were unorthodox, the latter declared. He did not follow the accustomed routine, and what was worse, when he managed to obtain information it was almost, if not quite, impossible to get him to divulge it for their benefit. Such a man deserved to be set down on every possible opportunity.

True to the arrangement he had made with himself on the previous evening, Burrell immediately after breakfast next morning set out for Burford Street. On reaching No. 16 he ascended the steps and entered the grimy passage, and inquired from a man he found there where the landlord was to be discovered. In reply the individual he interrogated went to the head of a flight of stairs that descended like an abyss into the regions below, and shouted something in German. A few moments later the proprietor of the establishment made his appearance. He was a small sallow individual with small bloodshot eyes, suggestive of an undue partiality for Schnapps, and the sadness of whose face gave one the impression that he cherished a grievance against the whole world. His sleeves were rolled up above the elbows, and he carried a knife in one hand and a potato in the other.

"Vat is dat you vant mit me?" he inquired irritably, as he took stock of the person before him.

"I want you to show me the room in which that Italian girl, Teresina Cardi, was murdered," Burrell replied, without wasting time.

The landlord swore a deep oath in German.

"It is always de murder from morning until night," he answered. "I am sick mit it. Dat murder will be the ruin mit me. Every day der is somebody come and say 'Where is dot room?' Who are you that you ask me that I should to you show it?"

Burrell, to the best of his ability, explained his motive for proffering such a request. This must have been satisfactory, for in the end the landlord consented to conduct him to the room in question. From the day of the murder it had been kept locked, and it must be confessed that since no one would inhabit it, and it did not in consequence return its owner its accustomed rent, he had some measure of excuse for the irritation he displayed in connection with it.

"Dere it is," he said, throwing the door open, "and you can look your full at it. I have scrubbed all dot floor dill my arms ache mit it, but I can not get der blood marks out. Dot stain is just where she was found, boor girl!"

The man pointed, with grizly relish, to a dark stain upon the floor, and then went on to describe the impression the murder and its attendant incidents had produced upon him. To any other man than Burrell, they would probably have been uninteresting to a degree. The latter, however, knowing the importance of little things, allowed him to continue his chatter. At the same time his quick eyes were taking in the character of the room, making his own deductions and drawing his own inferences. At last, when the other had exhausted his powers of description, Burrell took from his pocket his favourite magnifying glass, cased in its covering of chamois leather. Having prepared it for business, he went down on his hands and knees and searched the floor minutely. What he was looking for, or what he hoped to find, he did not know himself, but a life's experience had taught him that clews are often picked up in the most unexpected quarters.

"I've known a man get himself hanged," he had once been heard to remark, "simply because he neglected to put a stitch to a shirt button and had afterward to borrow a needle and thread to do it. I remember another who had the misfortune to receive a sentence of fifteen years for forgery, who would never have been captured, but for a peculiar blend of tobacco, which he would persist in smoking after the doctors had told him it was injurious to his health."

So slow and so careful was his investigation, that the landlord, who preferred more talkative company, very soon tired of watching him. Bidding him lock the door and bring the key downstairs with him when he had finished, he returned to the culinary operations from which he had been summoned. Burrell, however, still remained upon his knees on the floor, searching every crack and crevice with that superb and never-wearying patience that was one of his most remarkable characteristics. It was quite certain, as the landlord had said, that the floor had been most thoroughly and conscientiously scrubbed since the night of the murder. He rose to his feet and brushed his knees.

"Nothing there," he said to himself. "They've destroyed any chance of my finding anything useful."

Walking to the fireplace he made a most careful examination of the grate. Like the floor, it had also been rigorously cleaned. Not a vestige of ash or dust remained in it.

"Polished up to be ready for the newspaper reporters, I suppose," said Burrell sarcastically to himself. "They couldn't have done it better if they had wanted to make sure of the murderer not being caught."

After that he strolled to the window and looked out. The room, as has already been stated elsewhere, was only a garret, and the small window opened upon a slope of tiled roof. Above the eaves and at the bottom of the slope just mentioned, was a narrow lead gutter of the usual description. From the window it was impossible, unless one leaned well out, to look down into the street below.

"Just let me think for a moment," said Burrell to himself, as he stood looking at the roofs of the houses opposite; "the night of the murder was a warm one, and this window would almost certainly be open. I suppose if the people in the houses on the other side of the way had seen or heard anything, they would have been sure to come forward before now. The idea, however, is always worth trying. I've a good mind to make a few inquiries over there later on."

As he said this he gave a little start forward, and leaning out of the window, looked down over the tiles into the gutter below. A small fragment of a well-smoked cigarette could just be descried in it.

"My luck again," he said with a chuckle. "If some reporter or sensation hunter didn't throw it there, which is scarcely likely, I may be on the right track after all. Now who could have been smoking cigarettes up here? First and foremost I'll have a look at it."

On entering, he had placed his walking stick on the table in the middle of the room. He turned to get it, and as he did so he took from his pocket a small housewife. His multitudinous experiences had taught him the advisability of carrying such an article about with him, and on this occasion it promised to prove more than ordinarily useful. From one compartment he selected a long, stout needle which he placed in a hole in the handle of the walking stick. Then returning once more to the window, and leaning well out, he probed for the cigarette lying so snugly five or six feet below him. Twice he was unsuccessful, but the third attempt brought the precious relic to his hand. Taking it to the table, he drew up a chair and sat down to examine it. It was sodden and discoloured, but the rim of the gutter had in a measure protected it, and it still held together. His famous magnifying glass was again brought into action. Once upon a time there had been printing on the paper, but now it was well-nigh undecipherable. As I have already remarked, however, Burrell was a man gifted with rare patience, and after a scrutiny that lasted some minutes, he was able to make out sufficient of the printing to know that the maker's name ended with "olous," while the place in which the cigarette had been manufactured was *Cairo*.

"I wonder," said the detective to himself, "if this is destined to be of any service to me. At first glance it would appear as if my first impression was a wrong one. Mr. Henderson, who is accused of the murder, has lately returned from Cairo. Though, perhaps he never purchased any tobacco there, it would certainly do him no good to have it produced as evidence, that the butt end of a cigarette from that place was found in the gutter outside the window of the murdered woman's room."

After another prolonged inspection of the room, and not until he had quite convinced himself that there was nothing more to be discovered in it, he descended to the lower regions of the house, returned the key to the landlord, and immediately left the building. Crossing the street, he made his way to the house opposite. The caretaker received him, and inquired the nature of his business. He gave his explanation, but a few questions were sufficient to convince him that he must not expect to receive any assistance from that quarter. The rooms, so he discovered, from which it would have been possible to catch any glimpse of what was going on in Teresina's apartment in the opposite house, were tenanted only in the daytime.

"Nothing to be learned there," said Burrell to himself, when he had thanked the man and had left the house. "Now the question to be decided is, what shall I do next?"

He stood upon the pavement meditatively scratching his chin for a few moments. Then he must have made up his mind, for he turned sharply round and walked off in the direction of the Tottenham Court Road. Taking a 'bus there, he made his way on it to Oxford Street, thence, having changed conveyances, he proceeded as far as Regent Street. It was a bright, sunny morning, and the pavements of that fashionable thoroughfare were crowded with pedestrians. As the burly, farmerish-looking man strode along, few, if any, of the people he passed would have believed him to be the great detective whose name had struck a terror, that nothing else could have inspired, into the hearts of so many hardened criminals. When he was a little more than half-way down the street, he turned sharply to his left hand, passed into another and shorter thoroughfare, then turned to his left again, and finally entered another street on his right. He was now in the neighbourhood of quiet-looking houses of the office description. There was nothing about them to indicate that their occupants were the possessors of any great amount of wealth, and yet one could not help feeling, as one looked at them, that there was a substantial, money-making air about them. Having reached a particular doorway, Burrell paused, consulted the names engraved upon the brass plate on the wall outside, and then entered. He found himself in a small hall, from which a narrow flight of linoleum-covered stairs led to the floors above. These stairs he ascended, to presently find himself standing before a door on which the names of Messrs. Morris and Zevenboom were painted. Disregarding the word "Private," which for some inexplicable reason was printed underneath the name of the firm, he turned the handle and entered. A small youth was seated at a table in the centre of the apartment, busily engaged making entries in a large book propped up before him. He looked up on seeing Burrell, and, in an off-hand fashion, inquired his business.

"I want to see Mr. Zevenboom if he's at home," said the latter. "If he is, just tell him, my lad, that I should like to speak to him, will you?"

"That's all very well," said the boy with an assurance beyond his years, "but how am I to do it if I don't know your name? Ain't a thought reader, am I?"

"Tell him Mr. Burrell would like to speak to him," said the detective without any appearance of displeasure at the lad's impertinence. "I fancy he will know who I am, even if you don't!"

"Right you are, I'll be back in a moment."

So saying, the lad disappeared into an inner apartment with an air that seemed to insinuate that if Mr. Zevenboom might be impressed by the stranger, it was

certainly more than he was. His feelings received rather a shock, however, when his employer informed him in a stage whisper that Mr. Burrell "*was the great detective*" and made him show him in at once and not keep him waiting. Jacob was accordingly ushered in, with becoming ceremony, and found himself received by a little man, whose beady black eyes and sharp features proclaimed his nationality more plainly than any words could have done.

"Ah, mein dear friend," said he, "I am glad to see you. It is long since we have met, and you are looking as well as ever you did."

"I am all right, thank you," said Burrell genially. "Thank goodness, in spite of hard work, there's never very much the matter with me."

Before he seated himself the other went to a cupboard at the back of his desk and, having unlocked it, took from it a cigar box, one of a number of others, which he placed upon the table at his guest's elbow.

"Try one of these," he said, "you will smoke nothing better in all Europe. I pledge you the word of Israel Zevenboom to that."

"I can quite believe you," said Burrell, and then mindful of the business that had brought him there, he added, "if there's one man in all London who knows a good cigar I suppose you are that one."

The little man grinned in high appreciation of the compliment.

"Cigars or cigarettes, I tell you, it's all the same to me," he said, spreading his hands apart. "There is no tobacco grown, or upon the market, that I can not put a name to."

"And you are familiar with all the best makers, I suppose?"

The other again spread his hands apart as if such a question was not of sufficient importance to require an answer.

"I know them all," he continued pompously. "And they all know me. Morris and Zevenboom is a firm whose name is famous with them all."

A pause of upward of half a minute followed this remark, during which Burrell lit his cigar.

"And now what can I do for you, my friend?" the other inquired. "I shall be most happy to oblige you as far as lies in my power. You were very good to me in de matter of——"

He paused for a moment. Then he thought better of it and came to a sudden stop.

"Well, in the matter that we both remember," he added finally.

"I want a little information from you, that I believe it is in your power to give," said Burrell, taking a note book from his pocket and from it producing the scrap of cigarette he had taken from the gutter of the house in Burford Street. He placed it on the desk before his companion.

"I want you to tell me if you can who are the makers of these cigarettes, and whether they can be obtained in England?"

The other took up his glasses and perched them on the end of his delicate nose, after which he held the charred fragment of the cigarette up to the light. This did not seem to satisfy him, so he took it to the window and examined it more closely. He turned it over, smelt it, extracted a shred of the tobacco, smelt that, and at last came back to the table.

"That cigarette was made by my good friend Kosman Constantinopolous, of Cairo, a most excellent firm, but as yet they have no representatives in England. Some day they will have."

"Where is the nearest place at which these cigarettes can be obtained?" asked Burrell.

"In Paris—if you like I will give you the address," the other replied, "or better still I will get some for you should you desire to have some. They are expensive but the tobacco is good."

"I won't trouble you to procure me any just now, thank you," Burrell answered. "I only wanted to try and fix the maker's name. It comes into some important business that I am just now at work upon. I suppose I can rely upon your information being correct? It will make a big difference to me."

"My good friend, you may be quite sure of that," the other answered with pride. "I am Israel Zevenboom, the expert, and after fifty years' experience, should not be likely to make a mistake in such a simple matter as that."

Then, at Burrell's request, he thereupon wrote down the address of the firm in Paris, after which the detective thanked him heartily for his trouble and bade him good-bye.

"To-morrow," said Burrell to himself, "if all goes well, I will take a run down to Mr. Henderson's country seat and make a few inquiries there. After that it looks as if Paris is likely to be the scene of my next operations. There are one or two little preliminaries, however, that must be settled before I leave England."

He was as good as his word, and the mid-day train next day landed him upon the platform at Detwich. He inquired how far it was to the Hall, and on being informed of his direction, set off along the High Road at a swinging pace. He was a man who never rode when he could walk, and, had he not chosen another profession, it is possible he might have made a name for himself in the athletic world as a pedestrian.

"It seems a sad thing," he said to himself, as he turned in through the lodge gates and began to cross the park, "that a young gentleman owning such a beautiful place as this should be clapped into limbo on a charge of murder. But here I suppose is what the literary gentlemen call the 'Irony of Fate.' However, it's my business to get him out of the scrape he's in if I can, and not to bother my head about anything else."

Having reached the house he sent his name in to Mrs. Henderson, and asked for an interview. Her daughter Kitty was with her in the morning room when the butler entered.

"Mr. Jacob Burrell?" she said in a puzzled way, looking at the card the man had handed to her. "I don't know the name, do you, Kitty?"

"Why, yes, mother, of course I do," the girl replied. "How could you forget? He is the famous detective whom the lawyers have engaged to take up the case for poor Godfrey. Tell him that we will see him at once, Williamson, and show him in here."

A few moments later Burrell made his appearance and bowed to the two ladies. That he was not at all the sort of individual they had expected to see was evident from the expressions upon their faces.

"Doubtless, ladies, you have heard my name and the business upon which I am engaged," he said, by way of introducing himself.

They acknowledged that they had done so, and when they had invited him to be seated, inquired what success he had so far met with. He shook his head cautiously.

"In these sort of cases you must not expect to succeed all at once," he said. Then observing the look upon their faces he added: "You see, Mrs. Henderson, a big case, unless the evidence is very clear and straightforward, is not unlike a Chinese puzzle, being a lot of little pieces cut out of one big block. Well, all the little cubes are tipped out upon the floor in confusion, and before you can begin to put them together it is necessary to familiarize yourself with the rough

outlines of the parts and to make yourself acquainted with the sizes, shapes, and numbers of the pieces you have to work with. That done you can begin your work of putting them together."

"Mr. Burrell is quite right, mother," Kitty remarked. "We must be patient and not expect too much at first. We ourselves know that Godfrey is innocent, and Mr. Burrell will very soon demonstrate it to the world, I am very sure." Then turning to the detective she continued: "Since you have spared the time to come down here, it is only natural to suppose that you desire to ask us questions. If so, please do not hesitate to put them. My mother and I will—only too thankfully—do all that lies in our power to assist you in your work."

"Well, miss," said Burrell, "I won't deny that there are certain questions I should like to put to you. In the meantime, however, if you will allow me, I'll just take a walk round the place, and if I have your permission to enter your brother's rooms, it's just possible I may be able to find something that will be of advantage to him there."

"Go where you please," said Mrs. Henderson. "Heaven knows at such a time we should place no restrictions upon any one. If you can save my poor boy—I shall be grateful to you forever."

"Be sure, madam, I will do my best. I can't say more."

Kitty rose from her chair.

"Perhaps it would be better for me to show you my brother's studio first," she said. "Will you come with me?"

Burrell followed her out of the room and down the long corridor to the room in question. Kitty left him there, and for upward of half-an-hour he remained in the apartment, busily engaged upon what he called "forming his own impressions." After that he passed through the French windows out into the grounds beyond, had a few minutes' conversation with some of the men, and, when he had exhausted that portion of the business, returned to the house to find that luncheon had been provided for him in the library. He thereupon sat down to it and made an excellent meal. That finished, he was wondering what he should do next, when Kitty entered the room.

"I hope you have been well looked after, Mr. Burrell," she said. "You are quite sure there is nothing else you would like?"

"Nothing at all, thank you," he answered, "unless I might ask you for a cigarette?"

"A cigarette," she replied, with a suggestion of astonishment, for he did not look like the sort of man who would have cared for anything less than a pipe or a strong cigar. "That is very unfortunate, for I am afraid we have not one in the house. My brother Godfrey, you see, never smokes them, and I remember his saying just before——" she paused for a moment and a look of pain came into her face, "just before this trouble occurred," she continued, "that the supply he had laid in for his friends was exhausted and that he must order some more." Then she appeared to recollect something, for her face brightened. "Ah!" she cried, "now I come to think of it, we *do* happen to have a box which Mr. Fensden left here before he went away. If you'll excuse me, I'll get it."

He thanked her and she left the room, whereupon he walked to the window and stood looking out upon the lawn, drumming with the fingers of his right hand upon the pane before him. What his thoughts were at that moment will in all probability never be known, but when, a few minutes later, Kitty returned with a box of cigarettes in her hand, he turned to greet her with as much excitement in his face as he had ever been known to show about anything. The box in question was flat and square, with some Arabic writing in gold upon the lid and the inscription Kosman Constantinopolous et Cie, Cairo.

Jacob Burrell may or may not have been a cigarette smoker (for my part I have never seen him with so mild a weed between his lips). I only know that on this particular occasion he stood with the cigarette in one hand for some time without lighting it, and the box in the other.

"Did I understand you to say that Mr. Fensden gave these cigarettes to your brother?" he inquired at last, after he had turned certain matters over in his mind.

"Yes," she replied. "He used to say laughingly that the weakest of all Godfrey's weak points was his dislike to Egyptian cigarettes, and that if he would only try to cultivate the taste for that tobacco, he would be converted from barbarism to comparative civilization. You have seen Mr. Fensden, of course?"

"I saw him in Court," Burrell replied, apparently without much interest. "And now, I think, with your permission, miss, I will return to the station. I have seen all that is necessary for my purpose here, and am anxious to get back to town as soon as possible. There are several matters there that demand my attention." Kitty was silent for a moment. Then she gained her courage and spoke out.

"Mr. Burrell," she said, laying her hand upon his arm, "I suspect you can very well imagine what a terrible time of suspense this is for us. As I said this morning, we all know that my brother is innocent of the crime with which he is

charged. But how can we prove it? All our hopes are centred upon you. You have done such wonderful things in the past that surely you can bring the real perpetrator of this hideous crime to justice. Can you not give us even a grain of hope to comfort us? My poor mother is fretting herself to a shadow about it."

"I scarcely know what I can say just yet," he replied. "I, of course, have begun to form my own theories, but they are too unsubstantial as yet for me to be able to pin any faith upon them—much less to allow you to do so. This, however, I will tell you, and any one who knows me will tell you that it is something for me to admit. What I say is that up to the present moment, I have been more successful than I had dared to hope I should be. Like yourselves, I have a conviction that your brother is innocent, and you may believe me when I say that it won't be my fault if we can't prove it. May I ask you to rest content with that? I can not say more."

"I can not thank you sufficiently for your kindness," she answered. "Your words give me fresh hope. May I tell Miss Devereux what you say?"

"Miss Devereux?" asked Burrell, who for the moment had forgotten the young lady in question.

"It is to Miss Devereux that my brother is engaged," Kitty answered. "You may imagine how sad she is. Yet she has been, and still is, so brave about it."

"Not braver than you are, I'll be bound," said Burrell gallantly. "And now I will wish you good-afternoon."

He did so, and refusing her offer of a carriage to take him, was soon striding across the park on his way back to the railway station. As he walked along he thought of what he had done that day, and of the strange good fortune that had so far attended his efforts.

"It is only the merest guess," he said to himself, "and yet it's the old, old story. It is when they think themselves most secure, and that detection is impossible, that they are in the greatest danger. At that point some minute circumstance is sufficient to give them away, and it's all over. This looks as if it will prove another example of the one rule."

It was nearly five o'clock when he reached London. Arriving there he called a hansom and bade the man drive him with all speed to Mr. Codey's office. As it happened he was only just in time to catch the lawyer, who was on the point of leaving.

"Halloa, Burrell," cried the genial Mr. Codey on seeing him, "you seem excited.

What's the matter now?"

"I didn't know that I had anything to be excited about," Burrell replied with a smile at the lawyer's attempt to draw him out. "I only thought I would drop in upon you, sir, to let you know that I am leaving for the Continent first thing to-morrow morning. I may be away a week, possibly a fortnight. I'm not able to put a definite time upon it, for it will all depend upon circumstances."

"Then I suppose, as usual, you are beginning to find yourself on the right track," the lawyer remarked drily.

"And, just as usual, sir, I reply that that's as may be," said the other. "I don't deny that I've got hold of a piece of information that may eventually put me on the proper line—but I've got to sift it first—before I can act upon it. That's why I'm going abroad."

"Don't be any longer than you can help about it, then," returned the lawyer. "You know when the trial comes off?"

"As well as you do, sir! That's why I want to get away at once. There's no time to be wasted—that's if we're to be properly posted."

"Well, then, good-bye, and may good luck go with you."

Next morning Burrell, acting on the plan he had made, left London for Paris, with the portion of cigarette in his pocket.

CHAPTER XIV

The first night of his sojourn in Paris was spent at the residence of a friend who was also a well-known Stamp Collector. They dined at a Restaurant together, and spent the remainder of the evening at a Café discussing matters connected with their joint hobby. Had one looked in upon Jacob Burrell then, as he sat sipping a glass of brandy and water, it would have been difficult to imagine that this man who was so emphatic and precise about Water Marks, Bâtonné Papers, Misprints, and Fudges, was in Paris for the sole reason of elucidating a terrible crime, and in the hope of bringing the criminal to justice.

Next morning he was up early and, as soon as was compatible with calling hours, was on his way to the office of which Zevenboom had given him the address. Sending his name in to the head of the firm, he asked for an interview. This was promptly granted him and he was ushered into the proprietor's office, a charming little apartment fragrant with the odour of the divine weed. Now Burrell's French is not particularly good, but Monsieur Zacroft's English was certainly a good deal worse. However, they managed after a fashion, and with the help of a clerk, to make each other understand, and that was perhaps all that was wanted. Zacroft inquired with much solicitude after the bodily welfare of his good friend Zevenboom, and on being assured that the latter enjoyed excellent health, so far as Burrell was aware, proceeded to ask in what way he could be of service to the Englishman. The latter immediately commenced to explain, speaking in a louder tone than usual and using many gesticulations, as an Englishman so often does, in the hope of making his meaning clearer to his auditor. Later on Burrell produced the charred remnant of the cigarette. The Frenchman admitted that the cigarette shown to him was of the same brand as that manufactured by Messrs. Kosman & Constantinopolous of Cairo, of which wealthy firm, he took care to point out, he was the Parisian representative. He was also acquainted with Mr. Victor Fensden, and admitted that he had supplied that gentleman with cigarettes of the brand mentioned for some years past.

Burrell admitted to himself that so far this was very good. He hoped that there would be still better news to follow.

"Perhaps you can tell me when he obtained his last consignment from you?" he said, after a short pause.

The manager begged Burrell to excuse him while he went into his shop to ask the question. When he returned he laid a piece of paper before the other. The latter took it up and examined it carefully, though he was not at all prepared to find that the information would be of much value to him. The surprise he received, however, almost took his breath away. It was the work of a moment to whip out his pocket-book and to open it.

He turned the leaves until he arrived at the entry he wanted.

"And am I to understand you to say that Mr. Fensden wrote to you from England for them? Are you quite sure of it?"

"Quite sure," replied the other, and intimated in exceedingly poor English that he was prepared to show his customer's letter in proof of the genuineness of his assertion. He did so, and Burrell examined it carefully. Ultimately he prevailed upon the other to permit him to keep the letter.

"I wouldn't lose it for a thousand pounds," he said to himself. "Good gracious, this is nothing less than a stupendous piece of luck. It's the last thing in the world I should have thought of."

He thanked the little tobacco merchant for his courtesy, and bade him farewell, promising to remember him most affectionately to Zevenboom when next he should see him. After that he went off to make arrangements about his journey from Paris to Naples.

It was at a late hour of the night when he reached that famous Italian city. Tired out he betook himself to his hotel, slept the sleep of the just, and rose in the morning with the pleasant feeling that the day before him was likely to prove a busy and also an exciting one. After he had breakfasted, which he made a point of doing in the solid English fashion, he smoked a contemplative cigar, and interested himself after his own fashion in the billings and cooings of a young newly married couple, who were staying at the hotel awaiting the arrival of the out-going Australian Mail Boat. Then, having discovered the interpreter whom the hotel manager had found for him, he set off for the street in which he had been told Teresina Cardi and her mother had dwelt.

"'See Naples and die' they say," he muttered to himself, as he made his way out of one into another tortuous and unsavoury street. "It should have been '*smell* Naples and die.' A connoisseur could discover a hundred fresh unsavouries in every hundred yards."

At last they found themselves in the street in question, and, after some little

hunting, discovered the house in which the murdered girl had resided with her mother. The interpreter questioned the head of the family who lived on the ground floor. With many flourishes and bows, the latter, whose only work in life, it would appear, was to smoke cigarettes upon the doorstep, informed him that the Signora Cardi was dead and that the funeral had been a most imposing one.

"Ask him what has become of the daughter," said Burrell, who was anxious to discover whether or not the man were aware of the murder.

"Gone," was the laconic reply. Eventually he condescended to add, "An Englishman came to see her, and the signorina went away with him. I can tell you no more."

He manufactured for himself another cigarette, with the air of a man who has done everything he could to prove himself hospitable, and is not quite certain whether he has succeeded in the attempt. At this juncture Burrell rattled the money in his pocket.

"Ask him if he thinks he would know the man again if he were to see him," he said. "Tell him also that I will pay him well for any information he may give me."

A vehement debate ensued—which might have lasted from three to five minutes. At the end the interpreter translated.

"He says, your Excellency, that he could pick the man out from a hundred."

"He's been a jolly long time saying it," said Burrell, and as he spoke he took from his pocket half-a-dozen photographs which he had brought with him for that purpose. "However, he shall try!"

Among the number were likenesses of Fensden and Henderson. There were also others of men who had nothing whatsoever to do with the case. The proprietor of the ground floor rooms picked them up one by one and examined them critically. When he reached Fensden's portrait he held it up immediately.

"That is the man," he said to the interpreter. "I need look no farther. I should know him anywhere."

Burrell replaced the photographs in his pocket.

"Ask him if he has any idea where the man he speaks of stayed when he was in Naples," Burrell remarked to the man, but upon this subject it appeared that the other could give no sort of information, though he volunteered for a reward to find out. This help, however, Burrell declined. After rewarding him, he retraced

his steps to the hotel.

"It should not be difficult," he thought as he went along, "to discover the Englishman's abode during the time he was in Naples. He is not the sort of man to put up anywhere but at a good hotel."

Foreseeing for this reason that the number of the hotels at which the man he was inquiring about would be likely to stay, were limited, he resolved to institute investigations that afternoon. He was very soon successful. At the second at which he called he discovered that Fensden had resided there and that he had left again on the 3rd of February. The manager knew nothing of any *liaison* with a girl of the city, nor could he say where his guest went after he left Naples. His servants were equally ignorant, though one of them believed Signor Fensden's destination to have been Rome. Thanking the manager for his courtesy, Burrell left the hotel more than a little disappointed, to spend the remainder of the afternoon securing affidavits as to dates and generally verifying the discoveries he had made.

"Well, I suppose there's nothing for it but to try Rome," he said to himself, when he had considered the matter in all its details.

Early next morning he accordingly shook the highly scented dust of Naples from his feet, and in due course reached the Italian capital. He had been there many times before, and in consequence he was a great favourite at the hotel where he usually resided. The owner welcomed him effusively, somewhat as he would have done a long-lost brother of whom he stood in some little awe, and trusted that he had come to make a long stay.

"I am afraid not," said Burrell. "I have got an important piece of business on hand just now which must be completed as quickly as possible. I am trying to hunt up the doings of an Englishman, who I have reason to believe came here from Naples with a Neapolitan girl, in February last. Possibly he may have stayed with you. Here is his photograph. See if you can recognise him!"

He thereupon produced the photograph of Fensden, and laid it on the table for the manager's inspection. The latter, however, shook his head. He could not remember the face among his guests.

"In that case I must begin my rounds of the hotels again, I suppose," said Burrell.

After luncheon he did so. The result, however, was by no means satisfactory. He made inquiries at every hotel of importance, and at many that were not, but try as he would he could glean no tidings of the pair whose doings he was so

anxious to trace.

"It's evident I've gone wrong somewhere," he said to himself. "I don't think I will waste any more time in this place, but go straight on to Vienna and look about me there. We know that the box hailed from the Austrian capital and that the wedding ring was manufactured in the same country. For my own part I don't believe they came to Rome at all."

Once more he resumed his journey and at length had the satisfaction of finding himself in Francis Joseph's famous city. He was very fond of Vienna, partly because he had made two important captures there, and possibly more so for the reason that one of the best deals in stamps he had ever effected was brought to a head in that delightful city. On this occasion he lost no time, but set to work immediately on his arrival. In this town, however, the search was not destined to prove a difficult one. He had not been more than twice unsuccessful when he tried the Hotel National in the Käarntner Strasse. The manager himself admitted that he had a bad memory for faces, but he was quite sure of one thing, if they had stayed at his hotel, his head waiter would be sure to recollect them. That functionary was immediately summoned to the council, and the photograph was placed before him. He had no sooner looked upon it than he recognised it as being the likeness of the gentleman who had stayed there with an Italian girl. They had come to Vienna to be married it was said.

"To be married?" said Burrell in astonishment. "What do you mean by that? Weren't they married when they arrived?"

Before the waiter could answer, light had dawned upon the manager, who thereupon chimed in.

"Ah, my friend, I remember now," he said. "That was the gentleman who was married at the Church of Funfhaus in the Gurtel Strasse. Now I can recall the pair perfectly."

"The Church of Funfhaus in the Gurtel Strasse, you said, I think," said Burrell, making a note of the name in his pocket-book for future reference. "Pray how long did the happy couple remain with you?"

"For upward of a fortnight," the manager replied, consulting a book. "But they were not happy all the time!"

"What do you mean by that? Why were they not happy?"

"For a very simple reason," the manager replied. "I mean that toward the end of their stay it was becoming plain to most of us that the gentleman was a little

neglectful of his bride. Yet she was a beautiful girl! Ah! a beautiful girl!"

"It was the waning of the honeymoon," said Burrell cynically. "Poor girl, it didn't last long." He paused for a while to pursue his own thoughts, then he continued aloud, "Have you any idea where they went after they left here?"

The manager reflected for a moment.

"To Munich, I believe. But of that I am not quite certain. We will ask Adolphe."

The head waiter was once more consulted, and corroborated his superior. The couple had left for Munich with the intention of proceeding later to Paris. He was sure of this for the reason that he had heard the gentleman talking to the lady on the subject on the morning of their departure.

The next day was spent by Burrell in collecting further evidence. He interviewed the worthy clergyman who had married them, obtained certain necessary documents from him, discovered the jeweller who had sold them the wedding ring, and when he had learned all he wanted to know, took the train and started for Munich.

In Munich he discovered the hotel at which they had stayed and sundry other particulars which might, or might not, prove useful later on. Thence he continued his journey to Paris, where more discoveries awaited him. At last, and none too soon, he boarded the steamer which was to carry him to England. Even this short voyage was not devoid of interest, and by the time he reached London once more, he felt that there was not very much standing between him and the end. But what remained was in all probability more important than the beginning. There was a blank to be filled in, and filled in it must be, somehow or another, before the trial commenced.

His first act on reaching home was to write out a true and complete record of his doings since he had left London. This done he consulted the memoranda he had received from the representative of Messrs. Kosman, Constantinopolous & Co., in Paris, and then set off by train to the little town of Staines. From Staines to the charming little village of Laleham is a comparatively short and a most charming walk. It was almost mid-day by the time he reached the village and began to look about him for Laburnum Cottage. When he discovered it it proved to be a pretty little thatched building standing in a garden which in summer would be bright with hollyhocks, nasturtiums and other homely flowers. A card in the window proclaimed the fact that apartments could be had within, but at that particular season of the year this announcement would be little likely to attract attention. Pushing open the gate, Burrell made his way up the garden path to the neat little

porch where he gave a smart rat-tat with his stick upon the door. The sound had scarcely died away before it was opened to him by a stout, matronly person, dressed in black, and wearing a cap and a neat white apron.

"Mrs. Raikes?" asked Burrell, to make sure she was the person he desired to see.

"That is my name, sir," said the woman. "Perhaps you will tell me what I can do for you."

"I want you to give me some information," Burrell answered. "I have come down from London on purpose to see you."

"From London, sir," she exclaimed, as if that were rather a remarkable circumstance. "Will you be pleased to step inside?" So saying, she held the door open for him to enter. He did so to find himself in a neat little sitting room, unostentatiously yet comfortably furnished. Three cases of stuffed birds decorated the walls, together with some pictures on religious subjects, a bookcase, the latter scantily furnished, and last, but not least, a Chippendale sofa, and two or three chairs that would not have disgraced a ducal drawing-room.

"Kindly take a seat, sir," said Mrs. Raikes, dusting one of the aforementioned chairs with her apron as she spoke. "If it's apartments you want I am quite sure I can satisfy you. Of course it's a bad season of the year, but at the end of the month we shall begin to fill up. There's some splendid boating on the river, as perhaps you know, and at night, when the houseboats are all lit up, well, it's quite lively."

Her desire to impress him with the gaieties of the place was almost pathetic, and Burrell felt that he was acting meanly in permitting her to go on, without acquainting her with the real object of his visit.

"I am sorry to say that I am not in search of lodgings," he said. "My business is of an altogether different nature. In the first place, I think I ought to tell you that I am a detective."

"A detective?" she cried in horror. "Lor', I *do* hope, sir, there's nothing wrong?"

"Not so far as you are concerned, you may be sure," he answered. "I have come down here to make some inquiries regarding a gentleman who was known to be staying in your house some time back. His name was Fensden."

The woman shook her head.

"I haven't had a gentleman in my house of that name," she answered. "In fact, the

only gentleman I have had since the beginning of the year was a Mr. Onslow. The name of Fensden I don't remember at all."

Burrell consulted his pocket-book before he went further.

"And yet the information I received was most complete," he continued. "Victor Fensden, Esq., %George Onslow, Laburnum Cottage, Laleham-on-Thames. There couldn't be anything plainer than that, could there?"

"It seems all right, sir," said the woman. "There is only one Laburnum Cottage, and Mr. Onslow was certainly staying with us. He had his wife with him, a sweet young thing, which was more than could be said of the gentleman, I can assure you."

It was plain from this that she and Mr. Onslow had not been on the best of terms. Burrell took from his pocket the photograph of Fensden, and handed it to her. He was beginning to have an inkling of the truth.

"Is that the likeness of Fensden or of Mr. Onslow?" he inquired.

"Mr. Onslow, sir, to be sure," she replied, "and a very good one of him it is too. I hope he's not a friend of yours, because I couldn't abear him. The way he treated his poor foreign wife of his was enough to make an honest woman's blood boil."

"So he had a foreign wife, had he?" said Burrell. "That's interesting. Tell me all you can about him."

"There's not much to be told, sir, except about his bullying and nagging that poor young thing. She was a foreigner, as I have just said, but as nice a young lady as ever stepped in at my door. When they first came she told me that Mr. Onslow was an artist, and that they wanted to be quiet and away from London. They didn't mind putting up with the roughness of things, she said, so long as they could be quiet. Well, sir, they had this room and the bedroom above, and for the first few days everything went as smooth and as nice as could be. Then I noticed that she took to crying, and that he went away day after day and once for two days. At last he disappeared altogether, leaving her without a halfpenny in the world. Oh! I'd have liked to have seen the brute and have given him a bit of my mind. It would have done him good, I'll promise him that. I shall never forget that poor young thing in her trouble. She waited and waited for him to come back, but at last when there was no sign of him, she came to me in my kitchen there to know what she should do. 'I know you have not had your money, Mrs. Raikes,' she said in a kind of piteous foreign way, that went to my heart. 'I can not stay here any longer, and so, if you'll trust me, I'll go away to London and try

to find my husband. Even if I do not, you shall not lose by us.' I told her I didn't want the money, and that I was as sorry for her as a woman could be. Poor dear, I could see that her heart was nearly broken."

"And what happened then?"

"Nothing, sir, except that she went away, and she hadn't been gone a week before the money that was owing to me was sent in a Post Office Order. From that day to this I've heard nothing of either of them and that's the truth. Whether she found her husband I can not say, but if she'd take my advice she'd never try to."

"You are quite sure that you'd know the man again?"

"I am certain I should," the woman replied. "I hope, sir, in telling you all this, I've been doing no harm?"

"You have been doing a great deal of good," Burrell replied. "Shortly after she left you, poor Mrs. Onslow, as you call her, was most brutally murdered, and I have been commissioned by the friends of the man who is wrongfully accused of the crime to endeavour to discover the real criminal."

"Murdered, sir? you surely don't mean that?"

"I do! A more abominable crime has not been committed this century."

The good woman was honestly overcome by the news and during the remainder of the interview scarcely recovered her composure. Before he left, Burrell cautioned her most strongly against saying anything about the case to her neighbours, and this injunction she promised faithfully to observe.

"By the way," said the detective, before he left, "do you remember whether this man Onslow received any letters while he was staying with you?"

"Only one, sir, so far as I know," the woman replied.

"You're quite sure of that?"

"Quite sure, sir, and why I happen to be so certain is that it caused a bit of unpleasantness between them. I was brushing the stairs just out there, when the letter arrived. It was Mrs. Onslow that took it in, and when she saw the post-mark she asked him who it was that he knew at Richmond. He snatched the letter from her and told her to mind her own business. That afternoon he went out and never came back. It's my belief it was some woman at Richmond as enticed him away."

"Have you any other reason for supposing that except the post-mark on the

envelope?"

"Well, sir," returned the woman, "to be candid with you, I have, though perhaps it's a tale I shouldn't tell. I was so sorry for that poor young thing that I couldn't get her trouble out of my head, and nothing would serve but that I must watch him. I saw him sitting down at the head of the table where you are now, sir, about half-an-hour after he had spoken so cross to his wife, and she, poor dear, was upstairs crying, and I noticed that he was writing a telegram. Presently he calls to me. 'Mrs. Raikes,' said he, 'want to send a telegram at once, who can take it for me?' 'There's Mrs. Hawkins's little boy next door, sir,' says I, 'he's taken messages for gentlemen I've had in the house before now, and always done it very well. I saw him playing in the field at the back of the house only this minute.' 'Call him in to me, then,' says he, 'and he shall have sixpence for his trouble.' I called the lad in, and Mr. Onslow gave him the message, and then off he went with it, but not so fast but that I was able to run across to the corner of the field at the back there, and catch him on the road. 'Tommy,' I said, 'let me have a look at that telegram.' He was a good little boy, and handed it over to me without a word. It was addressed to 'Montgomery, 13 Bridgeworth Road, Richmond.' There was no other name to it, and the only other word was 'yes.' It didn't seem to me that there was anything out of the common about it, and so I thought no more of it, until you spoke of his having letters just now."

"I think I'll make a note of the address in case it should be useful," said Burrell. "And now I'll be off, thanking you again, Mrs. Raikes, for the information you have given me."

On leaving the cottage he walked back to Staines, caught a train to London, and hastened to his house. Later on he made his way to Euston Station. Another twenty hours elapsed before he was able to acquire the information he wanted there—but he had the satisfaction of knowing, when he had obtained it, that there remained now only one link to be forged, and then the chain of evidence would be complete. That link was forged at Richmond, and next day he handed in his report to the astonished Codey.

"Good heavens, Burrell," said that astute gentleman, "this is as marvellous as it is horrible. What do you think?"

"I think, sir, that we shall be able to prove that Mr. Henderson is innocent."

At last, after all the weary waiting, the great day arrived. The Sessions had commenced at the Old Bailey. For two or three days prior to this, Godfrey had been busy with his solicitor and his counsel. It was not, however, until the afternoon before the commencement that he could elicit from Codey any information as to Burrell's discoveries. Immediately he was ushered into the room where Codey was awaiting him, Godfrey saw from the expression upon the other's face, that there was something to tell.

"You—have good news for me," he said, as they shook hands.

"The very best of news," Codey replied. "My dear sir, you may rest assured that your innocence is completely established. The whole plot has come to light, and, when we give the word, the authorities will be able to lay their hands upon the man who committed the deed."

"But who is the man?" Godfrey hastened to ask, scarcely able to speak for excitement. His pulse was beating like a sledge hammer inside his head, until it seemed as if his brain must burst.

"Don't ask me that now," said Codey. "Put your trust in me until to-morrow. Then you shall know everything. Believe me, I have my own very good reasons for asking this favour of you. Rest assured of one thing; at latest the day after to-morrow you will be at liberty to go where and do what you please."

"But why can not it be settled at once? Why must it be the day after to-morrow? It is cruel to keep me in suspense!"

"Don't you understand that we can not bring forward our witnesses until the proper moment arrives?" said the lawyer. "The English law has its idiosyncrasies, and even in a case of life and death, the formalities must be observed. There is one thing, however, I can promise you; that is, that when the truth comes out, it will be admitted that such a sensation has not been caused in a Court of Justice before."

And with this assurance, meagre as it was, Godfrey had perforce to be content.

CHAPTER XV

When Godfrey woke on the morning of his trial he lay for some moments thinking over the strangeness of his position. He had been definitely assured by Codey that nothing could prevent his being proved innocent, yet how difficult it was to believe this when he was lying on a prison bed in a prison cell with all the grim appurtenances of a convict's life before him. The very books upon the shelf, the spy-hole in the door, even his bed-clothes, reminded him that he was shut off from his fellow men. At the usual signal he rose and dressed, and, having done so, tidied his cell in the customary fashion. After this his breakfast was served to him, and then he was permitted a short period of exercise in the prison yard. He had not long returned to his cell before he was informed that it was time for him to set off to the Court.

Never, if he lives to be a hundred, will Godfrey Henderson forget the scene that met his eyes when he entered the Court—the judge and the sheriffs upon the Bench, the jurymen seated in their box, the rows of counsel, and the line upon line of eager-eyed spectators. When Godfrey made his appearance in the dock a sudden silence fell upon the Court. The Clerk of Arraigns rose and read over the charge preferred against him, namely, of murdering one Teresina Cardi, and this done he was called upon in the usual manner to plead. Advancing to the front of the dock Godfrey looked straight before him and said, in a calm, strong voice: "Not guilty, my lord." The jury were then sworn, and as soon as this important business had been completed the counsel for the prosecution rose and told the story of the crime. He described the engagement of the dead woman by the prisoner, his employment of her for some considerable time, and then his hasty departure for the Continent. It would be shown that he had received a letter from her while in Egypt, and that almost immediately afterward he had returned to Naples. In the latter city he had invited her to dine with him, and had taken her to the Opera afterward. He commented upon the fact that the prisoner had voluntarily admitted to the police authorities that he had endeavoured to induce her to return to England. At that time, however, it must be borne in mind that he had not met the lady he now desired to make his wife. Whether he had seen anything of the deceased, prior to their meeting in the Strand, it was as yet impossible to say. The fact, however, remained that his engagement to the lady in the country was ultimately announced. Despite that fact, only ten days before

the wedding was to take place, he was known to have met the deceased woman at midnight, and had taken her to her home in Burford Street, leading out of the Tottenham Court Road. By the medical evidence he would presently call, he would prove that less than half-an-hour afterward she was brutally murdered. Before half-past twelve, that is to say, within an hour of the cabman picking them up in the Strand, he would prove that the prisoner returned to his Hotel in Piccadilly, very white and agitated, and had called for brandy. Since his arrest, an exhaustive search had been made at his residence, with the result that a blood-stained knife, which had been identified as having been purchased by the prisoner in Cairo, had been discovered hidden behind a bookcase in his studio. As for the motive of the crime he would point out that the deceased woman wore a wedding ring, that she was known to entertain a great affection for the prisoner, and that the latter was about to be married to another lady. What was more probable than that he should wish to have the other woman out of the way before he could do so? That was certainly only a conjecture, but it was one that carried a large amount of probability with it. He would now proceed to call his witnesses.

The first witness called was the proprietor of the lodging-house, who had identified the body. He was followed by the German cabinet-maker, who had made the first and most important discovery. The police officer, who had been called in when the door had been opened, followed next, succeeded by the doctor who had made the post-mortem examination. The question of identity and discovery having been settled, what the counsel next proposed to do was to connect the prisoner with the crime. The cabman who had picked them up in the Strand and had driven them to Burford Street, was called, and the policeman who had seen them talking together on the pavement there. Victor Fensden next deposed as to the affection the deceased had entertained for the prisoner, and the efforts he had made to induce the latter to give her up. He described Godfrey's receipt of the letter from Teresina when on the Nile, and stated that the prisoner had said nothing to him concerning his intention to visit the woman in Naples. His next meeting with the prisoner was at the Mahl Stick Club, where he had noticed a reluctance on his part to refer to his association with the woman in the past. This was accentuated on the following Saturday at the prisoner's residence in Midlandshire. He recognised the knife produced, and recollected the circumstances under which it had been purchased by the prisoner. This concluded Fensden's evidence, and he accordingly sat down. Various other unimportant witnesses followed, and then the case was adjourned for the day.

Wrapped in suspense, Godfrey was driven back to the jail to turn the evidence

over and over in his mind all night long. Whatever trust he might place in Burrell and his discoveries, it was quite certain that another twenty-four hours would elapse before his deliverance could be expected. Once more he scarcely slept. The various events connected with the trial thronged his brain with merciless reiteration. With phonographic distinctness he could recall almost every word that was said. He could see the judge upon the Bench making his notes with pitiless exactness, the various counsel in the well of the Court whispering together, the importance of the jury, and the self-sufficiency of the Court servants. Yet he had Codey's assurance that all was to be put right in the end, and with this knowledge he was perforce compelled to be content.

At the same hour as on the previous day he was ordered to prepare himself for his journey to the Court. The evidence already given against him was so incriminating that the officials of the jail felt sure that his condemnation was assured. They already looked upon him as a dead man, and marvelled among themselves that he could carry himself with so much assurance.

Once more the Court was crowded. Fashionable London felt that the end of one of the most interesting cases of late years was drawing near, and it was anxious not to lose an opportunity of witnessing the *dénouement* of the tragedy.

"The Court is ready," said the warder, and once more Godfrey ascended the stairs that had constituted the link between life and death for so many hundreds of miserable beings before him. He found the judge, stern and implacable as before, upon the Bench, the various counsel in their places, and everyone eagerly awaiting his appearance. He bowed to the judge and took up his position at the rails. He determined that, whatever else they might think, they should not imagine that he was afraid. Then, with the customary ceremonial, the case was commenced.

The counsel for the prosecution having finished his case, Mr. Rolland, having addressed the Court, prepared to call his witnesses. They were few in number. The landlord of Godfrey's old studio in London deposed that his rent had always been paid to the moment, and that he had heard the deceased talk of the kindness she had received at the prisoner's hands. "It was always in the language of a dependent," he said, "and in no way that of a girl who believed her patron to be in love with her."

When the prosecution had declined to cross-examine this witness, the counsel for the defence arranged his gown and assumed an even more important air. It was evident that something was about to happen. A moment later Victor Fensden

was recalled.

"I am anxious, Mr. Fensden," said the counsel, "to ask you a question regarding your return from the Continent. You have already told the jury that you returned on the morning of the murder. Am I to understand that that was really so?"

"I arrived on Thursday, the 15th," said Victor, and a close observer would have noticed that he shifted uneasily on his feet as he gave the answer.

"I should be glad also to have your repeated assurance that, from the moment you saw the prisoner purchase that knife in Cairo, you did not behold it again until it was handed you at the Magistrate's Court?"

"That also is quite true," said Victor, who by this time was more at his ease.

"That is all I want to ask you. You may sit down," said the counsel. "Call Simon Updale."

In response to the summons, a short, stout man, who was the possessor of a fiery beard and the reddest hair ever seen on a human being, made his appearance and took up his position in the box. He deposed that his name was Simon Updale, and that he was an able seaman on a steamer plying between Dover and Calais. On a certain day, a month before the murder, he had been made the subject of a complaint to the captain by the previous witness, Mr. Fensden. He was quite certain of the date and of the passenger's identity, for the reason that one of his mates had broken his arm before reaching Dover and he wanted to accompany him to the hospital. On account of the complaint, however, he was not permitted to go.

George Perran, steward on the same boat, was next called. He corroborated what the previous witness had said, and recognised the witness Fensden as being the gentleman who had made the complaint.

"That," said Mr. Rolland, "proves conclusively that the witness in question has committed wilful and corrupt perjury, inasmuch as that he was in England a month before he stated in his evidence."

Every eye in Court was riveted on Victor Fensden, whose face turned as pale as the paper upon which I am writing.

"I shall now call James Tidmarsh," said Mr. Rolland, and in response to the summons a small boy climbed into the witness-box.

His name, he stated, was James Tidmarsh, and he called himself an errand boy, though as a rule he spent his time hanging about the vicinity of Euston Station.

He remembered distinctly on the night of Friday, the 16th, meeting a gentleman about eight o'clock outside the station who carried a small wooden box in his hand. That gentleman stopped him and asked him if he would care to earn half a sovereign. Upon his eagerly answering in the affirmative, the stranger gave him the box in question with the sum of fifteen shillings. "Take it to the station," he said, "and hand it in at the parcel-office to be despatched to the address written on the label. It won't cost more than a couple of shillings or half-a-crown, and you can keep the change for yourself. I'll wait here until you return to tell me it's all right."

The boy then declared that he started off, handed the box in at the parcel-office and paid the money. In taking the money the clerk had *sauced* him and he had retaliated to the best of his ability. The result was that the policeman on the platform gave him a good shaking and turned him out of the building. He informed the gentleman that he had sent the parcel off, and he had not seen him since that moment until he came into Court and had heard the witness Fensden give his evidence. He, the witness to whom he alluded, was, without a shadow of doubt, the gentleman who had handed him the box to send to Detwich Hall.

The excitement in Court by this time may be better imagined than described. The colour of Fensden's face was a dirty gray, and he seemed to gasp for breath. The counsel for the prosecution seemed uneasy, and even the judge leaned farther forward than usual, as if he were afraid of losing a word of what was said.

The clerk in the parcel-office was next called, and stated that he remembered the incident in question. The box was a foreign one, and as he had placed it on the floor he had remarked, "Another made in Germany."

The policeman who had turned the boy out of the station followed him. He had seen the boy deposit a small box upon the counter and heard him say something cheeky to the clerk. He thereupon bundled him out of the station.

When this witness had finished his tale Mr. Rolland said: "Call Jacob Burrell."

On hearing this a stir ran through the Court. The famous detective was well known to all the officials within the building, and they, in the light of this new discovery and the knowledge that this individual had taken up the prisoner's case, began to regard the matter in a somewhat different light. There was a slight flicker of a smile upon the austere countenance of the judge when the counsel asked the detective his name.

"Jacob Burrell," was the reply.

"I understand," went on the counsel, "that you were instructed by my friend, the solicitor for the defence, to make an investigation into this case. In the course of that investigation did you visit Naples?"

"I did," the other replied.

"And what did you discover there?"

"I found that the witness Fensden, although he has denied the matter on oath, was in Naples three weeks after the prisoner passed through on his way to England."

The counsel here informed the jury that five affidavits to this effect would be produced and read. Addressing the witness once more he said:

"Are you aware that the witness Fensden spent the greater part of his time in Naples in the company of the deceased woman?"

"I found that to be the case. On February 3rd they left Naples together for Vienna, stayed together at the Hotel National, in the Käarntner Strasse, and were married on the 26th of that month at the Church at Funfhaus, in the Gurtel Strasse. The wedding-ring, which was still upon the left hand when it was sent to the prisoner, was purchased at the shop of Messrs. Radler & Hass, in the Kohlmarkt."

"The head of that firm is now in Court," said Mr. Rolland, "and will give his evidence. Call Herr Radler."

Herr Radler thereupon entered the box which Burrell had vacated, and stated that he well remembered selling the ring in question to an Englishman who was accompanied by a beautiful Italian lady. The gentleman he recognised as the witness Fensden, and from the photograph, that had been shown to him of the dead woman, he was able to swear that it was for her the ring was purchased.

Victor Fensden, at this point, sprang to his feet as if to speak, but his voice failed him, and he sat down again.

A sworn copy of the marriage certificate having been produced and read, and handed up for the inspection of the jury, Jacob Burrell was recalled.

"When you had traced the witness and the deceased to Vienna, what did you do?"

"I returned to England, *viâ* Paris and Calais," he answered. "On reaching London I followed up certain clews I had received, and found that the witness and the deceased lived for a short time together in the country."

"At what place?"

"At the village of Laleham on the River Thames."

Here the counsel for the prosecution rose to protest.

"Your lordship," he said, "I must respectfully submit that the question as to whether Mr. Fensden cohabited with the deceased is not relevant to the case. We are trying the prisoner at the Bar and not Mr. Fensden."

His opponent took up the challenge.

"I respectfully submit that I am in the right," said Rolland. "In eliciting this information I am leading up to the question of motive, and I am sure my learned friend will admit that that is an all-important point.

"I am afraid I must rule against you," said the judge, addressing the Prosecuting counsel. "Anything that tends to throw a light upon the proceedings of the deceased so short a time prior to the murder can scarcely fail to be relevant."

Once more readjusting his gown, Mr. Rolland invited Burrell to proceed.

"How long did witness and the deceased occupy the house at Laleham?"

"For more than a fortnight. Then Fensden left her in a strange place without a penny in the world." (Here a murmur of indignation ran through the Court, which, by the judge's orders, was instantly suppressed.)

"That will do," said Mr. Rolland. "Call Elizabeth Raikes."

The owner of Laburnum Cottage next entered the box, and, though much flurried by the novel position in which she found herself, gave evidence to the effect that the deceased and Fensden had occupied apartments at her house for the period mentioned by the previous witness. She was quite sure, from things she had overheard, that they were not happy together, and she knew that the man treated the woman cruelly. Sometimes he was away for a couple of days, and one day he disappeared altogether without paying for anything they had had while in the house, and leaving his wife totally unprovided for. She had heard the present case talked about, but had not associated the victim with the Mrs. Onslow who had occupied rooms at her cottage.

"I have two more witnesses to call," said Mr. Rolland, when Mrs. Raikes had stepped down. "Then, my lord, I shall have completed my case. Call Mrs. Wilhelmina Montgomery."

A tall, handsome woman, fashionably attired, stepped into the witness-box and took the oath. In response to the question put her by the counsel for the defence, she stated that her name was Wilhelmina Montgomery, and that she was the widow of George Montgomery, late of Sheffield. "I live at No. 13, Bridgeworth Road, Richmond," she continued. "I first met the witness, Victor Fensden, at Baden, while travelling with some friends, in December last. We became very intimate, and, when he returned to England early in March, he called upon me at my house. Eventually he asked me to marry him, and after some hesitation I consented to do so. I have three thousand a year invested in Consols, and a considerable amount of ready money lying idle at the bank. This may or may not

have been his motive, but I have no knowledge of that. Mr. Fensden was anxious for an immediate marriage, but to this I would not consent. I knew that he was in the hands of the Jews, but I would have paid off his indebtedness after marriage. He stayed at my house on several occasions, as did others of my friends. One day I went out to do some shopping, and on my return discovered him in my boudoir. He held a piece of yellow soap in his hand and a large number of door-keys were spread out on the table before him. I asked him what he was doing, and he answered that he was endeavouring to find a key similar to the one he had lost. My housekeeper had furnished him with several, and he had at last found one that fitted the imprint in the soap. On the night of the murder he informed me that it would be necessary for him to attend an important meeting, and that it was just possible he would not be back until late. As a matter of fact, it was considerably after one o'clock, perhaps half-past one, when he returned. On the Saturday following he left me to go down to Midlandshire to pay a visit to an old friend, he said, who was about to be married. Before he went he once more pressed me for an early marriage, suggesting, knowing that I am fond of travelling, that we should immediately set off for a long trip round the world."

The box which had contained the hands was then handed to her, and she was asked if she recognised it.

"Yes," she answered immediately. "If you look underneath I think you will find a large inkstain. (This proved to be the case.) I brought some things in it from Vienna. How Mr. Fensden obtained possession of it, however, I do not know."

The counsel for the prosecution having no questions to ask, the witness was allowed to stand down.

"Call Joseph Hodder," said Mr. Rolland, and, to Godfrey's amazement, one of his own under-gardeners entered the box. Having taken the oath, he stated, in reply to the counsel's question, that, on the Sunday following the murder, it was his duty to attend to the stoking of the fires of the various conservatories at the Hall. He knew that his master and the ladies had gone to Church, because he had passed them in the park, and that the strange gentleman had remained at home, because, when he had passed the drawing-room window on his way to his work, he saw him sitting before the fire reading. Having attended to the fires in the vineries and other garden-houses, he returned to the Hall itself to look after the heat in the new winter garden that Mr. Henderson had built. From this house in question it is quite possible to see into the studio, and, to his surprise, he discovered the gentleman visitor was no longer in the drawing-room, but was kneeling beside the big bookcase near the fireplace in the studio. It looked as if

he were feeling for something behind it, but what that something was he had no idea. When he was asked why he had not given information on this matter before, he replied that he had not attached any importance to it until he had talked it over with the head gardener on the day following the search by the police. Then he had gone to Miss Henderson, and had told her. She had written at once to his master's lawyer, and that was all he knew about it.

"The evidence of this man," said Mr. Rolland, "completes my case."

The words had scarcely left his lips before Victor Fensden was seen to spring to his feet. Once more he opened his mouth as if to speak, and once more he failed to utter a word. Then, with a loud cry, he fell forward in a swoon. Two of the policemen near at hand ran forward to pick him up. Between them, they carried him out of the Court to an adjoining room. In the Court itself at that moment, it would have been possible to have heard a pin drop. Then the judge found his voice.

"Gentlemen," he said, addressing the jury, "after the astounding evidence you have just heard, I am thankful to say that, in my opinion, there is not the least shadow of a reason for continuing the case against the prisoner at the bar. In this I feel sure you will concur with me."

The foreman of the jury entirely agreed with his lordship, and at the same time desired to express, on behalf of himself and his brother jurymen, their great regret that a gentleman of Mr. Henderson's position should, by another man's action, have been placed in such an unhappy predicament.

"With that I quite agree," said the counsel for the prosecution.

This was the signal for general applause in Court, which, somehow, was not checked by the judge as quickly as is customary in such cases.

When silence had been restored, the latter addressed Godfrey.

"Godfrey Henderson," he said, and his voice was very impressive, "by reason of the false evidence that has been given against you, by a cruel and vindictive man, you have been brought to the dock of this Court, and charged with the perpetration of a most cruel and bloodthirsty crime. Of that crime twelve of your countrymen have declared you to be innocent, and to their testimony I emphatically add my own. While it is not in my power to offer you the hope of receiving any return for the anxiety you have suffered, I can say something that I know you will value much more; that is, that you leave this Court a free man, and without the shadow of a stain upon your character."

"I thank you, my lord," said Godfrey, quietly, and at that moment one of the ushers of the Court entered and approached the judge.

"Gentlemen," said the latter, again addressing the Court, "I think it only right to make it known to you that a Higher Power than that I represent has intervened, and the wretched man, who has caused all this misery and suffering, has been suddenly called to appear before a greater Tribunal. May God have mercy upon his soul!"

Then the Court was cleared, and Godfrey found himself shaking hands with Sir Vivian and the men who had worked so hard to prove his innocence. When he had thanked them from the very bottom of his heart, Sir Vivian took his arm.

"Come away now, come away," said the old gentleman. "There are other people waiting to welcome you."

Seizing Godfrey by the arm, he hurried him out into the street to a cab which was waiting there. Ten minutes later he was locked in his mother's arms.

"O Godfrey," said Molly, as he embraced her in her turn, "I knew that God would send you back to me!"

A week later Godfrey and Molly were married by special license, and left England the same day for the South of France. They are now back again at the Hall, and as happy as two young people could well expect to be. The clouds that shadowed their lives at one time are now completely dispersed, but, if Godfrey lives to be a hundred, he will never forget the agony he suffered in connection with what the newspapers called "The Mystery of the Clasped Hands."

THE END

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