



*Franklin.*

# THE GOLDEN TOOTH

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'THE ANGEL OF THE COVENANT' '170 CROWN'S REIGN'  
ETC., ETC.

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# The Golden Tooth

## CHAPTER I

### AT 'THE BOOK IN HAND'

THE landlord of 'The Book in Hand' put his head in at the bar door of his own bar-parlour and surveyed the five men who sat there listening to the story of a sixth.

'Will,' said he, hurriedly, 'Will Lomas!' The story-teller stopped his narrative, and turned his head. 'Squire Kesteven has just driv' into the yard. He'll be in here in a jiffey. If I was you, Will, I'd slip away for a bit.'

'What for?' asked Will Lomas. And 'What for?' demanded those who had been listening to his story.

'Because, Will, my boy,' said the landlord, 'you never did hit it off with young Mr Kesteven, and if you meet now, you and him are safe to quarrel—sure as eggs is eggs.'

'I don't want to quarrel with anybody,' said the young man called Will Lomas; 'but if

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anybody picks a quarrel with me, I think I can hold my end up.'

'You won't clear out for a bit, then,' asked the landlord, 'just to keep things peaceful like?'

'No, don't you, Will!' obstinately cried the five. 'Finish your story.'

'I won't clear out, Mr Parsons,' said Will, quietly. 'I want to finish my story and my ale.'

So the landlord withdrew his head and shut the door. In a second or two a loud, harsh, and dictatorial voice was heard without, at the bar.

'Give me a brandy and soda, Parsons. I'll have it in here, in your parlour.'

At the sound of his voice, which was plainly heard in the parlour, Lomas involuntarily slackened in his narrative, and listened with his ear turned. His audience of five also let drop their interest in the story.

'That's him, Will,' they said hurriedly. 'Keep your end up.'

Mr Kesteven banged open the public door of the room. When he saw that it was occupied, he stopped abruptly, and looked at the men, all of whom, except the young man called Lomas, had the prosperous appearance of young farmers or tradesmen. He turned angrily to poor Parsons, who brought his drink through the other door.

'Don't you keep any room private in your inn? Do you let the scum of the country-side drift in everywhere?'

Both the words and the tone were so insolent

and provoking that a man must have had the patience of Job to hear them without resentment. But the quickest there to retort was Will Lomas.

'Scum yourself!' said he, turning to Mr Kesteven with an angry glare. 'Who do you call "scum"? You?'

The squire was not only a recognised bully, but also a person of great wealth and consequence; and therefore it was a rare thing for him in his insolent and furious ravings up and down to meet with anything like opposition. He took a step farther into the room to look the better at the young man, whose back was to the light.

'Oh! You, is it?' he snarled. 'What business have you to be dressed like that?'

'I can dress as I like,' said the other, short and sharp, 'without asking your leave.'

'A soldier on furlough must wear his uniform,' rapped out the other.

'I am not on furlough.'

'Oh! Absent without leave! Deserted!'

'No,' said Lomas. 'Discharged! My time's up!'

'Show your papers,' said the other at once, holding out his hand.

'You be d——d!' said the young man, more and more angry.

'I am a magistrate,' said Mr Kesteven, with a smile of fiendish triumph. 'So show your papers or be taken to the police-station.'



Lomas inwardly cursed the law of his country which compelled him to obey the insolent command. He produced from the inner pocket of his tweed jacket his papers of discharge, and handed them over. Mr Kesteven read them leisurely. Then he laid them on the table.

'I suppose,' he sneered, 'you think that a good certificate to carry about?'

'Better,' rapped out the young man, taking and folding his papers, 'than if I had been an officer, and had had to sell out for cheating at cards.'

That, it was commonly whispered, had been the fate of Mr Kesteven. He glared a moment in silent fury. Then he flung the last drops of his brandy and soda in the young man's face. In an instant Will Lomas was on his feet, and his fist was flying out in a well-directed blow at the offender's jaw. But the blow was arrested just in time. Kesteven recoiled, as it were, from the wind of it.

'What the deuce do you mean by interfering?' cried the young man, fiercely turning on a tall, dark gentleman, with an eyeglass, who had suddenly appeared and gripped his arm as in a vice. 'Let me go, I tell you!'

'It was a pity to spoil it,' said the gentleman, in a calm, deep voice. 'It was a clean, straight hit! But it would have been bad for you! It would have caught him under the left ear—might have been fatal.'

'Will you let go?' cried the young man.

'My dear lad,' said the gentleman, 'you'll see in a moment that you made a mistake.' He then surrendered Lomas to the hands and persuasions of the other young men, who had by this time recovered their presence of mind. 'You should never lose your temper with a rude person like that,' and he indicated Mr Kesteven with a turn of his thumb.

'Who the hell are you?' demanded Mr Kesteven.

'I?' said the stranger, quietly. 'I am a person of no consequence, making holiday in this delightful country of yours. But, Mr Kesteven,' said he, as if on an afterthought, 'if you have anything particular to say to me'—he produced a slim Russian-leather letter case, from the pocket of which he took a card—'that is my name. I am staying at this excellent old inn for a few days.'

Mr Kesteven read the name, glared at its owner, and put the card in his vest pocket.

'For the sake of peace, Mr Kesteven,' said the stranger—'and you, I presume, are a Justice of the Peace—I would strongly advise you to go away.'

'Keep your advice to yourself, Mr—er—er—'

'My dear sir,' said the stranger, still in the same soft booming tones, 'if you don't go I shall be under the painful necessity of putting you out.'

The young men stood silent, waiting. They

were much interested in that calm, assured way of conducting a quarrel, and they had seen—as Mr Kesteven had—the steel-like strength of the tall stranger's muscles. The stranger stood with a steady eyeglass fixed on Mr Kesteven. Mr Kesteven hesitated, and was lost. He turned slowly about, kicked a spittoon, and went out. And the young men rejoiced with silent grins.

'Now, my lads,' said the stranger, 'you must taste something at my expense—just to show that we are all friends here. You will excuse me—won't you?' he said, turning and laying his hand on Will Lomas's arm, 'for interfering. But I couldn't see you make such a rash mistake. Of course, you could have pounded him to a jelly. But think. You would have ruined your prospects in all this delightful country-side.'

'I haven't any prospects here. I'm not going to stay here.'

'Not, I hope, on account of this Mr Kesteven?'

'Partly yes, and partly no,' answered Lomas. 'He and his have hated me since ever I can remember. I don't know why. His father drove me away from home and made me enlist, and now—there's him! You see what he's like. A nice time my old dad and me would have as neighbours of his. No. I can't live hereabouts. And when the old dad dies, I'll sell the place and never come back!'

'Farm?' asked the stranger.

'Yes,' said the young man, with a touch of pride. 'Freehold. Been in the family for hundreds of years.'

'Perhaps Mr Kesteven covets it?' suggested the stranger. 'Naboth's vineyard, you know.'

'Perhaps he do, perhaps he don't. Anyway he won't get it.'

'Well,' said the stranger, 'there are plenty of opportunities for a young man with good health and a sound head. You should get on.'

'The sooner I get away and get on the better,' said the young man, in a gloomy temper. 'If I stay here I shall end by killing that man—and going off with a swing.'

At that grim joke his friends laughed uproariously.

'Well, look here,' said the stranger, as if carefully weighing his words. 'If you are ever at a loss for something to do, call on me. My name is Townshend; 25 Jermyn Street, St James's, London.'

'Thank you,' said the young man, with a glance of doubt. 'And my name is Lomas—late sergeant-major, F Troop, of the 99th Lancers. May I ask what line of business you are in?'

'I am,' said Mr Townshend, while a singular smile curled under his heavy black moustache, 'a kind of Universal Provider.'

'Nothing to do with Whiteley's, I suppose?' asked Lomas.

'Nothing at all,' said Townshend, with another smile of the same flickering sort. 'I don't keep a shop.'

'I thought you didn't,' said the other. 'There are not many shops in Jermyn Street.'

'Very few,' said Mr Townshend; 'and 25 is not one of them.'

Yes; the gentleman was our old friend Townshend, otherwise 'The Marquis.' There was no doubt about the remarkable appearance of him: the same threatening look as ever of a great Polish fowl, with his crest of black hair tumbled upon his forehead, his hawk-like beak curved over his black moustache, and his long, thin throat with its enormous Adam's apple.

'Are you lads going to be at the farmers' ordinary here to-day?' he asked. They answered that such was their intention; but, looking at their watches, they protested that there was a good deal to do before then, and they rose to go about their business. 'I wonder,' said he, 'if you would think me a nuisance if I went out with you to see the beasts in the market, and the horses?'

'If you stick to Will Lomas, sir,' said one of the young farmers, 'you'll be right. He knows all about beasts and horses—what he don't know ain't worth knowing, as the saying is—and he can talk. And keep him out of the way of Mr Kesteven, sir,' added the young man in Townshend's ear, 'or he'll go for him again.'

'My very reason for proposing to go out with him, my friend,' whispered Townshend in reply.

'Aw! Is that so?' said the young farmer, and wondered at the close interest the gentleman took in Will Lomas.

It was the September horse and cattle fair, and the wide market-place of East Dingley was crowded, surging with men and animals—braying asses and bleating sheep, grunting and squealing pigs and lowing oxen and cows, besides horses of all sorts that were raced and clattered up and down the middle space and out upon the Brabourne Road to show off their speed and style. Into this mass of life, that seethed and reeked and smelt, Will Lomas and his friends, and the singular and surprising Mr Townshend, issued from 'The Book in Hand.' In a few minutes, the young farmers having stopped or turned aside here and there, to attend each one to his particular business, Will Lomas was parading the fair alone with Mr Townshend. They were remarkable persons both—Townshend with the appearance and manners of a very aristocratic and haughty gentleman, and Lomas, fair, sunburnt, and close-cropped, with the erect carriage and lithe figure of the trained cavalry man—and they were taken great note of.

'How do, Will?' acquaintances of Lomas would say in passing, with a knowing smile or a wink to him, and a shy glance at his com-

panion. Then they would turn when they had passed, and cry, 'I say, Will, Squire Kesteven's about somewheres. Look out!' and they would burst into laughter.

It became very plain presently that the news of the strange encounter between Will Lomas and Squire Kesteven, and the interference at the critical moment of 'the dark swell with the beaky nose,' had passed through the whole market-place as rapidly as the smell of spilt spirits through a room. And it became evident, too, from the glimpse to be had now and again, at this corner and at that, how Mr Kesteven was growing more and more drunk and unruly, and more and more breathing out threatenings of slaughter against Will Lomas and his distinguished companion with the eyeglass. Lomas, too, was in a dangerous mood, and the farmers and farmers' sons from the district round watched him and Townshend moving through the fair, in the eager hope of a renewal of the quarrel with the squire. In half an hour or so, Townshend, who perfectly understood what was going on about him, tired of that strain of publicity.

'Mr Lomas,' said he, 'I want to buy a strap or two, and a riding whip. You know the town. Will you take me to a saddler's?'

'Certainly, sir,' said Lomas. 'There's a good saddler on the road to the station.'

So they left the throng of the fair and found the saddler's. While Townshend was choosing

his straps and his whip, Lomas was looking round the shop, and his attention was drawn to a curiously wrought thing, which might be used as a walking cane, but which had the loaded head of a life-preserver. It was made of plaited steel-wire, and coloured like gun-metal. It was supple; it was light. It would be a sure protection on a dark night along a dangerous road, for it could deal a deadly blow.

'How much is this?' asked Lomas of the shopman.

'Seven and six.'

'I'll have it,' said Lomas.

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## CHAPTER II

### JENNY WREN

'Now then! Once more, if you please, gentlemen all! Will my tall friend with the churchwarden and the bass voice gave me a moment's attention? Ah, yes. Will you, my very dear sir, not try to sing alto? Alto, you will permit me to say, is a feminine or a neuter accomplishment, and you, sir, are distinctly male—a man! Now, gentlemen, if you please! (*singing*),—



'Who's there! A Grenadier.  
What do you want? A pot o' beer.  
Where's your money? I forgot.  
Get you gone, you drunken sot!  
You drunken sot! You drunken sot!'

With infinite satisfaction to themselves the company in the public room of 'The Book in Hand' trolled forth the old glee-catch, coming and going upon the last words with fearful and wonderful gusto. The leader of the singing was Mr Townshend who had distinguished himself that day in East Dingley. At the ordinary (old-fashioned English for *table d'hôte*) which was more than common crowded, and more than common late, so that the business of the fair should be to all intents over first, he had taken the head of the table, and carved with great dexterity in place of the landlord, Mr Parsons. He had kept Will Lomas busy at his left hand, and so kept him out of mischief; for Squire Kesteven occupied the vice-chair at the other end of the long table, according to his habit on these special agricultural occasions. The squire was half drunk and wholly quarrelsome, and it needed all the distinguished tact of Mr Townshend (whom every farmer now knew and admired), and all the good humour of the company to prevent more than one outbreak of offence.

The dinner had not begun till three o'clock. When it was over, and Squire Kesteven gone, Mr Townshend, out of sheer enjoyment and

benevolence apparently, had kept the company together 'to be merry,' as he said. It was five o'clock, and no man had yet stirred from table—whereat the landlord greatly rejoiced. Mr Townshend for some while had been teaching the company to sing glees; and they had accomplished with great satisfaction to themselves 'Margery Daw,' and (as you have heard) 'The Grenadier.'

The volume of sound and the laughter that followed had just ceased, when a head appeared at the open top of one of the windows that looked upon the yard. It was the head of Squire Kesteven, mounted in his high dog-cart and evidently ready to drive home.

'Where's that scoundrel?—that deserter, Lomas? If he's there, tell him I've a horsewhip for him when next we meet.'

With an oath Will Lomas was on his feet, eager to be at him. But he was restrained again, and Mr Kesteven drove away.

'Take my advice, Lomas, my lad,' said Townshend a moment later, 'and keep out of his way. I think I may say I know the world pretty well, and I pronounce Mr Kesteven a very nasty customer—all the nastier for you that he is what common idiots would call a gentleman. I hope,' he continued with a touch of self-consciousness, 'I know how a gentleman should behave.'

('Hear, hear!' cried the whole table within hearing.)

'Mr Kesteven,' said Townshend, 'is neither a gentleman nor a cad; he's no class.'

'He's a brute! He's a devil!' said Lomas.

'No,' said Townshend. 'Permit me, my dear lad. He is neither. He is less and worse. At anyrate, you've got to keep out of his way.'

'All right,' said Lomas, rising and offering Townshend his hand. 'I am much obliged to you, sir, for your advice—very much obliged, indeed. I don't know why you have taken the trouble of giving it me. But you have given it, and I am obliged. I must say "good-bye."'

'Not going, are you?' said Townshend. 'So early?'

'I must,' said the young man. 'I've an appointment to keep before I go home.'

'Not you!' cried two or three neighbours; and 'Not you, my lad!' said Townshend.

'Truly I have; and I must go.'

And he went at once.

It was turned five o'clock, and the late September sun was almost sunk as Lomas took his way through the churchyard and over the meadows. There were several men and women returning from the fields who took notice of him as he strode along, erect and manly, swinging by the end the new and extraordinary cane which he had bought at the saddler's. The women turned their heads to look after him, and murmured to each other, 'There's a fine, handsome fellow!' For his military bearing made him seem very

different from the young farmers of the district. He passed on unheeding—he was evidently bent on some business—over the little foot-bridge, and along the elm-shaded walk by the side of the stream. Still he hurried, until he reached a turnstile; and there was waiting a young lady dressed in black, and veiled. As soon as Will Lomas appeared she put up her veil and showed a face which, if not beautiful, was singularly bright and winning. But even before she revealed her face it was evident she was handsome; for her loose dress and short mantle could not conceal the fine lines of her figure, and she had the alert poise and carriage of health.

‘I was afraid you weren’t coming,’ said she.

For first answer he folded her in an embrace and kissed her heartily; and for second he said, ‘I’m not really late.’

‘No,’ she answered. ‘But I’ve been waiting; and I’m always afraid of being seen by somebody that knows me.’

‘My dear love,’ said he, putting his arms about her again, ‘I know it is very awkward for you. But it won’t last much longer, Jenny. “Wait till the clouds roll by, Jenny! Jenny, my own true loved one!” I think that song must have been made up for you and me.’

‘You’re a dear, brave, cheerful boy, Will!’ said she, giving him a sudden kiss. ‘And you always make me feel better. But it won’t be long now—will it?—till we shall be always together.’

‘No, Jenny, my sweet,’ he answered, taking

her arm, and leading her forward along the elm-shaded path. 'I had a letter this morning from that Riding School in London, and it is now as good as settled that I go there as Instructor. And then when I have looked round and found proper lodgings, or a little house, up you shall come, my girl.'

'Never to be parted any more, Will?'

'Never to be parted any more, my sweetheart,' said he.

She hugged his arm, and then went on: 'Now tell me what you've been doing all day without me.'

'Well,' said he, 'I've been nearly all day at the fair. The old dad was too ill to come, so I came instead—to see his old friends, to find out if there was anything worth buying that we could afford to buy, and to have a gossip.'

'I reckon, Will,' said she, with a laugh, 'that you had a gossip, at least.'

'I had, my dear. And,' said he, with an uneasy laugh, 'I was nearly in for a very nasty row.'

'Oh, Will, how was that?'

'It was that brute Kesteven.'

'Oh,' she exclaimed, 'he is a beast! When he comes to Lady Morton's I always try to get out of the way. He's always making up to me.'

'Like his confounded cheek!' cried Will.

'Oh, don't you know?' said Jenny, rather bitterly, 'a girl that's only companion to an old lady is expected to feel highly flattered by the attentions of a gentleman.'

'The deuce she is!' cried he, whacking his leg with his steel cane.

'Well,' said she; 'but tell me about your row.'

He told what had happened in the morning; and added, 'That Mr Townshend's rather an odd sort of chap. I can't make him out. He seems quite a gentleman, but somehow—I don't know—a little shady; just the least bit on the wrong side of a perfect gentleman. That's how he strikes me. Anyhow, I ought to be very much obliged to him; and I am. I was about with him all the day after, and he kept me out of mischief; for I was in a very nasty temper about Kesteven. He seemed to take quite a fancy to yours truly.'

'Showed his judgment and good taste,' said she.

'I was sure you'd say that,' he laughed; 'because his taste runs with your own.'

'You're a nasty thing,' said she. 'And I wonder what I saw in you.' At the same time she gave his arm another hug.

Thus they walked and talked until the full moon was up, and it was time for Jenny to return to her occupation by the side of the invalid Lady Morton.

'Shall I see you to-morrow evening, Jenny?' asked Will.

'Come here again,' said she, 'and I'll try to meet you. But you know how it is. I may not be able to leave my invalid.'

They embraced each other warmly and tenderly.

'My own, own sweetheart!' he murmured.

'My dear, dear boy!' murmured she.

Then he whispered a word in her ear, and she whispered another in his; and so they parted not very far from the garden-hedge of Lady Morton. It was seven o'clock when they gave each other a final hand-clasp, for the strokes of the hour boomed over the meadows and along the stream from the old church tower.

He watched Jenny enter safely within Lady Morton's domain, and then he set off legging it over the fields, home to Holly Bush Farm. He crossed the high road to continue his short homeward cut; and then he was on the Kesteven domain. For some little way the path was within easy view of the high road; and he came up with a cartful of men driving hilariously half-a-dozen tired bullocks. He thought he might pass unrecognised; but the moonlight revealed him. The men knew him; they had met him earlier in the day; and they greeted him loudly.

'What ho, young Will Lomas! Not at 'ome yet? Thought ye'd 'ad supper and been a-bed by now!'

'I soon shall be. Good-night!' cried Will, and hasted away over the field.

In a little while he came to a turnstile and passed through. He kept carefully to the path, although he might have shortened his

distance by striking away from it. But he was in Squire Kesteven's private park, and he was prudent enough to run no risk of being accused of trespassing if he should be seen by the squire or any of his people. That part of his walk was within view of the road again, which wound round on the higher level. Presently the path led through a spinney. There he turned aside for nearness and took a pheasant track, and so he passed out of the domain of Squire Kesteven. In an open field again, on the edge of a disused chalk-pit, he saw one or two rabbits scutter before him. Quick as thought he flung his new loaded cane at one. The rabbit tipped into a hole, and the cane bounded on and flew over the edge of the chalk-pit.

'Oh, bother!' exclaimed Will Lomas.

The chalk-pit, however, was both deep and steep. It was difficult and dangerous to enter at any time, and particularly dangerous to enter at night. He therefore resolved to wait till the morning before seeking to recover his new loaded cane; and so he went on.

Ten minutes later he was scraping his feet at the door of Holly Bush farmhouse, and old Towzer was barking within to welcome him. The door was opened, and he was received by his aunt, a tall, handsome, but worn woman, who had been a mother to him since ever he could remember.

'Where have you been all day, my boy, till



so late?' she asked, in a meek voice of reproach. 'But you're just in time. Your father's been looking at the clock and snoozing off and waking up to wonder when supper would be ready. It's ready now, and just coming in.'

'And so am I, auntie,' laughed Will.

'You seem in spirits, lad,' said she. 'It's more than your father is, or me.'

'Well, dad,' he cried, when he had entered the little parlour, 'how's the leg?'

'Squirming and squinching, Will, my lad,' said the old man.

'That's what comes o' too much fine old port, dad,' laughed his son.

'Nay, lad, 'tis poor man's gout,' said the old man, seriously. 'Tis many and many a year since I saw the colour o' port. But how was things at the fair?'

Then Will Lomas told of the day's doings, not omitting his quarrel with Mr Kesteven. So they talked on through supper and after, and about nine o'clock they went to bed.

Will Lomas was sunk in his first deep sleep, when, as in a dream, he heard a loud and insistent knocking, and the frantic barking of dogs. Vaguely he heard voices also, and presently he woke up to see a light in his room, and three strange men, and in the background the pale, terror-smitten figure of his aunt in a night wrapper.

'What's the row?' he demanded sleepily.

'You must get up, William Lomas, and come wi' me.'

The man who spoke was dressed in the uniform of an inspector of constabulary. Will Lomas sat bolt upright in wonder.

'What do you want with me?' he demanded.

'I have a warrant to arrest you in the Queen's name.'

'I have my discharge!' he cried. 'It's in my pocket!'

'No discharge yet for this, my lad,' said the Inspector. 'It looks like murder.'

'Murder!' said Lomas, aghast. 'What murder?'

'There's only one yet that I have heard of,' said the Inspector. 'Mr Kesteven's been found dead in his own grounds!'

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### CHAPTER III

#### VISITORS AT HOLLY BUSH

It was one of Jenny Wren's duties, as companion to Lady Morton, to open letters and read them aloud. The old lady, therefore, who thought she had a pretty wit of her own,

called Jenny at such times 'Spectacles.' Lady Morton was in the invalid habit of taking breakfast in bed, and her correspondence was always carried in to her on her breakfast tray. Jenny commonly accompanied the tray into the room, and opened and read the letters while Lady Morton ate her egg and toast. On the morning after the day already described, she was later than the tray by a minute.

'Come along, Spectacles,' said the old lady. 'Here's a budget of letters for you this morning. I don't know why everybody will pester a poor old woman with their affairs.' (She always pretended to hate her correspondence, although it was in truth one of her greatest delights.) 'Here's one, I see, from Margaret Kesteven. I can tell her big scrawl a mile off. What has she got to say this time, I wonder? Wants to get out of her visit, I daresay. Open her first, Spectacles.'

Jenny tore open the letter and began to read:—

'MY DEAR MARIA,—It will be impossible for me to visit you to-morrow. A terrible thing has happened. My poor son Charles has been killed!'

'Gracious mercy!' exclaimed Lady Morton. Jenny read on:—

'After dinner he felt not quite well. He thought that the air might do him good, and he went out into the park. He never came back. Two young men walking home through

the park from the fair came upon him quite dead. His head was broken with a frightful blow on the temple. They called assistance from the house, and he was carried in; and he is lying here now quite—quite dead.'

'What a dreadful thing!' exclaimed Lady Morton. 'Good gracious, girl, what's the matter?' For Jenny had cried 'Oh!' as from a sharp pang of pain.

'It's terrible, isn't it?' Jenny had the presence of mind to say, in order to hide the real cause of her exclamation, which was in the last sentence of the letter. She read it aloud with difficulty.

'I hear that young Lomas of Holly Bush Farm—he that went, you remember, for a soldier—has been taken up on suspicion of being the assassin. I am heart-broken.'

Jenny gazed an instant at the horrible sentence. Then she folded the letter and put it in its envelope.

'Is that all?' asked Lady Morton.

'Yes, that's all,' answered Jenny.

'She does not give us many particulars, does she?'

'No, my lady,' answered Jenny. 'But what will they do with him?'

'Do with him?' said Lady Morton. 'What should they do with him but bury him out of the way, when the inquest is over. There'll have to be an inquest; and then we shall know all about it.'

'I—I mean,' stammered Jenny, 'what will they do with—with the young man that they have taken up?'

'Hang him, most probably! That is, after they have tried him. I should hang him first, and try him afterward.'

'Why?' demanded Jenny, with ill-restrained indignation. 'Why would you be so unfair and so cruel?'

'To make an example of him! These low fellows that come home from the army are the pest of the whole country-side; and I have no doubt this is one of the worst of them.'

'He is not!' said Jenny, in a tense voice of protest.

'Eh?' said Lady Morton. 'Should be shot, do you say? Well, that was the old, honourable punishment for a soldier; but they hang now for a crime like this—soldier or no soldier.'

'How horrible! Horrible!' cried Jenny, clasping her hands tight in her lap.

'You seem to have a great deal of unnecessary pity for the young murderer, Spectacles!'

'They haven't proved him to be a murderer yet. And it seems to me very unjust to talk of the poor young man as if he were condemned already.'

'Highty-tighty!' exclaimed the old lady, with a severe and frowning eye fixed upon her companion.

Jenny feared she had gone too far. 'It is too terrible,' said she, 'to think how an innocent

person has often been taken to be guilty! And I should think Mr Kesteven was quite capable of killing himself!

'Oh, that's your notion, is it? He, he! I know you and he never got on. But I think Charlie Kesteven the last person to take his own life. He was too great a coward!'

Jenny could not trust herself to say another word. She moved softly and swiftly about the room to set this thing and that in order, but though her hands were occupied her mind was flying over the country like a terrified bird. Where was Will? Where was her lover, for whom she yearned whether he was guilty or not? She did not believe he was guilty: he could not be! But yet, if he had met Mr Kesteven in the park on his way home, and they had renewed their quarrel, might he not have in sudden anger struck a blow that proved fatal?

It was too horrible to admit; but yet her sense suggested that it was only too likely Will might have struck Mr Kesteven a blow—he was so strong, so very strong—without any intention of killing. But, no. She could not believe it. He had mastered his temper when she had seen him in the evening.

Thus her mind flew to and fro in a wretched torture of guessing. If she could only know. But how could she know without talking to Will himself? And how could she get to him? And where was he? In prison somewhere, probably. But where? In the police-station

of the little town of East Dingley? That was hardly likely. In the county gaol, then, perhaps; and that was ten miles off.

Jenny was recalled to actual things by the voice of Lady Morton.

'Well, Spectacles, aren't you going to read me the other letters? You've lost your head this morning and put on a turnip!'

Jenny reduced herself to the necessary task, and read through the letters, and by-and-by she had her reward. Lady Morton's curiosity to know all that was to be known of the Kesteven mystery demanded immediate satisfaction.

'I think, Spectacles,' said she, 'you might put on your things and walk up to Mrs Kesteven's and find out something more about this business. And then you might go on to Holly Bush Farm—'

'Oh, Lady Morton, I have never been there!' exclaimed Jenny, in a sudden fear, which Lady Morton could not comprehend.

'And you don't know the Lomases at all, I suppose?'

'N—no,' said Jenny; 'I have never entered their house.'

'That doesn't matter,' said the old lady. 'You can say you were passing, and ask to rest for a little while. And then you can get into talk.'

That seemed to Jenny a good suggestion after all. If she followed it out with care she might hear a good deal that she wanted to learn.

Will's people did not know her ; she feared she could not say much without betraying herself ; but she determined to risk betrayal. She made haste, therefore, to set forth on her expedition ; and Lady Morton encouraged her in her haste.

She first went to Sinton House, the home of the Kestevens. She was received by Mrs Kesteven, step-mother of the dead squire, whom she knew pretty well from her frequent visits to Lady Morton. She was a tall, dark lady, under forty, of impressive appearance and gushing manners. Jenny had been in the habit of doubting the genuineness of her manners, and wondering at the impressiveness of her appearance. For, while Mrs Kesteven was undoubtedly handsome, she had a certain air of ferocity and fright. When she laughed, she displayed a mouthful of large, white teeth set well apart ; and that had a strange effect of savagery. And her large dark eyes commonly had the expression of a creature that had seen, at some time or another, a horrible sight, and had never got over the terror.

Mrs Kesteven had nothing new to say to Jenny, except that the inquest would be held next day in East Dingley, where she believed the young man Lomas was confined.

'I think I'll walk with you a little way, my dear,' said she, when Jenny rose to go, 'for I don't much like sitting all alone, with my poor, murdered son lying in the next room.'

She took Jenny's arm and clung to it, and



led her out into the park. She insisted upon showing the spot where her son was found, and then she returned to the house. And Jenny was glad; for she wished to hear no more about the dead young squire, and she feared she might be led away from the track she had to take to Holly Bush Farm. As she passed the chalk-pit, two men climbed out. One of them was in constable's uniform, and the other held in his hand a singular cane, the like of which she thought she had seen before. Yes; it certainly was like the new cane that Will had carried. But she passed on without thinking what the discovery might mean; for her mind was anxiously fixed on the interview before her with Will's father and aunt.

She could arrange nothing that she would say, and she finally determined to leave all to the inspiration and feeling of the moment. With beating heart she knocked at the door and heard a maid-servant come clamping along the stone-laid passage. She inquired for Miss Lomas, and was shown into the ancient low-ceiled little drawing-room that smelt, like the closed best rooms of so many old farmhouses, of apples in the cupboard and dry-rot in the wainscot. In a second or two Miss Lomas appeared, wondering. The maid-servant had not asked Jenny for her name, so she was under the necessity of explaining who she was. She had seen Will's aunt frequently at church, and remembered her as a handsome, strong, and fresh-coloured woman.

She was now shocked with the change in her appearance. She looked pale and broken, and her eyes were heavy as with long weeping. Jenny's heart went out to her, and she spoke with little forethought how she might commit herself.

'I hope you will excuse me, Miss Lomas,' said she, 'for coming in upon you at such a time. Of course, you don't know me.'

'Oh, yes, I do,' said Miss Lomas. 'You're the young person that's companion to Lady Morton; I've heard the name, but I forget it.'

'Wren; Jenny Wren.'

'Yes; that's it,' said Miss Lomas. 'But I hadn't heard the "Jenny."' She waited, and looked for Jenny to tell her errand.

'I was coming this way, and thought I would call in,' said Jenny.

'Yes, Miss Wren. Very kind of you, I'm sure,' said Miss Lomas, and plainly waited to hear more.

Jenny was hot and cold all in a moment, and then hot again. On an impulse she spoke out. 'Oh, I want you to tell me—please, Miss Lomas—where Will is!—your nephew, I mean!'

'Will?' said Miss Lomas, in astonishment. 'What do you know of my nephew Will?' Then almost fiercely she demanded, 'I'll thank you, Miss Wren, to tell me what you mean.'

'Surely you don't forget, Miss Lomas,' said Jenny, clasping her hands in her lap to keep her resolution steady, 'when he came home from

India a year ago he brought me a message from my brother who died there, in another regiment.'

'I remember,' said Miss Lomas.

'My brother,' continued Jenny, 'was the last of all my family. Our father was curate at Over Stillborough; and my brother went for a soldier when I went as companion to Lady Morton. So when I got my brother's message from your nephew I was very much upset, and he was very kind. And—and then when he went back to his regiment he wrote to me once or twice.'

'Not oftener than once or twice?' asked Miss Lomas, with a smile breaking on her sad face.

'Well,' said Jenny, 'yes. Perhaps a few times more.'

'I see,' said Miss Lomas. 'And since he's come home now you've been keeping company.'

Jenny said nothing. She only blushed and looked down.

'Seems odd,' said Miss Lomas, 'Will has said nought about it. He's not for common a close fellow.'

'Oh, that was my fault!' said Jenny. 'I asked him not to tell anybody—just yet. Because, you see, Miss Lomas, people talk so with the faintest provocation. And some way or other it would have got, almost certainly, to the ears of Lady Morton, and she would have sent me about my business, I know.'

'And you are really his sweetheart?' said

Miss Lomas, closely scanning the girl's form and features, and general bearing. 'And engaged to be married to him, I suppose?'

'Don't be cross with me!' said Jenny, slipping to her knees on a quick impulse, and laying her head in Miss Lomas's lap. 'I couldn't help it!'

'I suppose you couldn't, my dear,' said Miss Lomas, raising the girl to kiss her. 'And it's not me that will blame you. But I doubt, my lass, you'll need to be brave as you are bonny. You've heard what's happened?'

'Oh, yes, yes!' said Jenny. 'And to think it must have been just after he left me last night!'

'What's that you say, girl?' cried Miss Lomas. 'He met you last night? There may be something in that. A clever lawyer-fellow may make something out o't. His father, sick and ill as he is, has gone in the train to Wrottesley for a lawyer.'

As she spoke there came a loud rat-tat at the outer door.

'Bless us!' said she, rising. 'Whoever can that be now?'

She went to the door. Jenny sitting within heard the door opened, and she then heard a gentlemanly voice say, 'Oh—er—this, I believe, is Holly Bush Farm? I—my name is Townshend. I take a great interest in young Will Lomas. Indeed, I may say I am a friend of his.'

'Are you from the army, sir?' said Miss Lomas. 'Excuse my asking.'

'No,' answered the strange voice. 'I'm not from the army—except, I may say, remotely. Can I see Will's father?'

'He's not in, sir.'

'Ah, then, I should be glad if you would favour me with a few words of conversation. You are, I presume, the aunt I have heard him speak of.'

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## CHAPTER IV

### TOWNSHEND AS DETECTIVE

IN a few seconds the door opened, and Miss Lomas appeared with Mr Townshend.

'This gentleman,' said Miss Lomas to Jenny, 'has seen Will this morning.'

'Oh, where is he?' cried Jenny.

'This, sir,' said Miss Lomas, 'is Will's young lady—Miss Wren. I forget the name you gave, sir. You will excuse me. I am not good at names.'

'Townshend—with an "h,"' said he, and spelt the name.

'Oh,' said Jenny, 'you must be the gentleman

Will met at the inn yesterday. He told me about you last night.'

'Ah,' said Townshend, with a flash of interest, 'you saw him last night? He did not tell me that. There may be something in it to his advantage.'

'How do you think the case is likely to go?' asked Jenny, anxiously.

'Well,' said Townshend, carefully considering her and speaking in slow, impressive tones, 'it's an awkward business, you see. There's nothing but circumstantial evidence, but that will seem to the ordinary stupid person of a rather convincing sort. There's this, for instance. I did not know it of myself, but it has been pointed out to me. Will admits that he passed through Kesteven Park on his way home. Why? The park, I am told, is right away from the direct road from the town to this farm.'

'And that's true enough,' said Miss Lomas.

Jenny looked thoughtfully from the one to the other.

'Now, if you,' said Townshend, considering her through his eyeglass, 'can explain that, it will be a distinct advantage.'

'That's very easy to explain,' answered Jenny, firmly. 'The direct way from the town is as you say; but the direct way from the end of the elm-walk by the brook is through Sainton Park.'

'And the end of the elm-walk,' said

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Townshend, 'is, I presume, where you met him, Miss Wren.'

'Yes,' said Jenny, frankly; 'it is. It's like this.' And she drew with her finger on the table a triangle. 'This is the way direct from the town,' she indicated the long side of the triangle. 'This is the way he came,' and she marked the other two sides.

'And that angle,' said Townshend, 'is where you met him. I understand. I suppose, Miss Wren, you are prepared to give that evidence in public?'

'Oh, must I?' she asked in sudden alarm. There flashed before her the fact that everyone would share her cherished secret—that she was Will Lomas's sweetheart—and the fear, the certainty, indeed, that Lady Morton would then send her away. She was disturbed and dismayed; but she courageously declared, 'Of course I will give my evidence, if it will do him any good.'

Miss Lomas noted and understood the sudden change on the girl's countenance. 'Surely,' said she, 'there is no need for Miss Wren to appear to say that.'

'I am afraid there is,' said Townshend. 'But if Miss Wren objects—'

'Oh, no,' said Jenny. 'I don't—I don't object.'

'The gentleman doesn't understand, my dear,' said Miss Lomas, who had evidently now taken Jenny into her protection. 'It will get you into trouble.'

'Never mind that,' said Jenny, firmly. 'I'll do what is right.'

Townshend considered the one and the other through his shrewd eyeglass. Then he let it drop, saying soothingly, 'Oh, you must not get into trouble. We must think about it.'

Jenny declared it was time for her to be returning to Lady Morton's. Townshend said he must be going, too, and asked Jenny which way she went. Through Sain-ton Park she said.

'Then,' said he, 'may I go with you so far? I wish to see for myself the place where Kesteven was found.'

'Oh, yes, I can point it out to you,' said Jenny. 'Mrs Kesteven showed it to me, as I came here.'

Townshend was interested, and inquired who was Mrs Kesteven—wife or mother of the dead man? Jenny answered him, and so they set off in company.

Townshend was a favourite with all sorts of women; he had a kind, engaging, and protective manner which won their trust; and in five minutes Jenny Wren felt and behaved as if she had known him a long time. Her liking and her confidence were no doubt quickened by his extraordinary interest in her sweetheart.

'It is very kind of you, Mr Townshend,' said she, 'to give yourself all this trouble about a perfect stranger.'



'But he is not a stranger, Miss Wren,' said he. 'Don't you know how you may understand some people in half an hour better than others in half-a-dozen years?' And his odd smile appeared at the corner of his mouth and flickered away under his heavy moustache.

'Oh, yes,' said she, readily; 'that is quite true.'

'And then,' said he, smiling again, 'I was with him a long while yesterday, and a little while this morning; so I reckon that I know him very well.'

'And,' she asked, 'you believe him innocent, don't you?'

'I do,' he answered; 'don't you?'

'Of course,' she answered. 'But it strengthens my belief to know that you, who saw him all day yesterday, think him innocent too.'

'Yes, Miss Wren,' said Townshend, with careful emphasis, 'but we can't stop at that. If Will did not kill Mr Kesteven—and we are sure he didn't—someone else did. Who?'

'I haven't the smallest idea,' answered Jenny. 'But the truth is sure to come out.'

'On the contrary, Miss Wren,' said he, 'in my experience of strange cases like this, and I have known several, the truth is the very last, and the least likely, thing to come out. You may drag it out ultimately, force it out with a corkscrew, but it seldom comes out very easily or very quickly.'

'Oh,' she cried, looking on him with much respect and some wonder, 'how is that?'

'Well,' said he, 'mostly because of prejudices and prepossessions. In Will's case, now, the prepossession is that he killed Mr Kesteven. He was known to have quarrelled with Mr Kesteven, and he is known to have been arrested; and everybody, I am convinced, believes he did it—everybody—even his friends, excepting you and me. I am sure from my talk with his aunt, Miss Lomas, that even she is afraid he did it.'

'Really?' exclaimed Jenny, now thoroughly alarmed. 'How terrible!'

'So you see,' said Townshend, 'how difficult it may be to bring the truth out and get it accepted. And that is why it is necessary not only to declare and try to show that Will did not kill Mr Kesteven, but also to find the person that did.'

'How very clever of you to think of that!' said Jenny. 'But don't you believe that Mr Kesteven may have killed himself?'

'Well, no; I don't,' answered Townshend, while his odd smile flickered again under his moustache. 'It is scarcely possible for a man to break in his own head and no likely instrument for the purpose be found near him.'

'I see,' said Jenny; and then fell silent.

When they reached the spot where Mr Kesteven's body had been found, Townshend held out his hand.

'We must for the present say "good-bye" here,' said he; 'it will be best that we should not be seen together. And, to tell you a secret, I am going to try to see Mrs Kesteven up at the house.'

Jenny agreed that they should not be seen in company. Townshend said he would write to her if he had anything to communicate, and so they parted.

Townshend was, you may say, a strange, whimsical person to take this engrossing interest in the affairs of a man whom he had seen for the first time only twenty-four hours before. But he was even more engrossed with Will's case, and had committed himself more, than he had let Jenny Wren know. Greatly daring, he had that very morning telegraphed to his friend Inspector Littlejohn of Scotland Yard, for a detective to be sent down. He had requested that the man should not be too clever—for the reason that he intended to be the detective himself; and only desired to have the man from Scotland Yard as a sign of official authority. He expected the man to arrive by an early train and, in the meantime, spurred by his restless energy, he had set about the business of inquiry and detection by himself.

So he stood and thoughtfully surveyed the spot where Mr Kesteven had been found. It was close to the right-of-way footpath through the park. The ground, which was damp, had been very much trodden, but there had been a

quiet, clear night with a touch of dew ; and it was not difficult to distinguish recent foot-marks from those of the night before, because where any feet had passed that morning the dew had been brushed away. Townshend stood and strove to reconstitute for himself the violent scene of the night before. It did not seem that Mr Kesteven could have been taken unawares by the blow that had brained him, or else there would have been much less trampling of feet. There must have been something of a struggle.

Suddenly, as he peered about, a gleaming speck caught his eye. It shone in one of the dewy footprints. He knelt down and pored upon it. He dug it out with his nail and examined it. It was a front tooth of the upper jaw—a false tooth, broken from a gold setting ; and, apparently, from its size, it had come from the mouth of a man !

'What a fool I was,' said he to himself, 'not to have somebody with me, as witness of my finding this !'

The tooth might be Mr Kesteven's or his assailant's ; that could only be determined by looking at the mouth of the dead man. And, therefore, when he had peered about a little longer and discovered nothing more, he went on to the house with the more resolution.

Arrived in the wide porch, he rang the bell, which clanged loudly in the hall, and set a dog off barking. Through the glass panels he

could see approach an old manservant, who reminded him a little of his own Mortimer in the Jermyn Street Chambers.

'Is Mrs Kesteven at home?' he asked, when the man had opened the door.

The man looked in some surprise at the stranger with the eyeglass and the ease and accent of a gentleman, but who manifestly had walked for some distance, for his trousers were carefully turned up from a pair of muddy Balmoral boots. The man hesitated and scratched his side-whiskers, and before he answered, the stranger spoke again, producing his card.

'I am—er—a detective,' said Townshend; 'a detective inspector,' he added, with a consciousness of committing himself deeply.

'Oh, indeed, sir,' said the man, with a blending of respect, curiosity, and dread in his manner. 'I daresay Mrs Kesteven will see you.'

'To see me? I'm Mrs Kesteven,' said a voice from an open doorway on the right of the hall. She looked at the card which the manservant handed on the silver tray, said, 'Mr Townshend?' and looked at her visitor.

Townshend bowed. 'That is my name,' said he. 'I have been a detective inspector, and I am taking a little holiday in this part of the country. I have presumed to come and offer my services, merely in a friendly way, as an amateur, to help you to get at the right of this mysterious crime.'

'It is very good of you; but is there any mystery about the crime, Mr Townshend?' she asked in a soft voice.

'Is there not, Mrs Kesteven?' said he.

'The man has been arrested,' said she, looking at Townshend with enlarged and more attentive eyes.

'A man has been arrested,' said he.

'How very neatly you put it,' said she, in a voice that grew more soft and caressing in its tone. 'You do not think he did it?'

'I have my doubts,' said he.

'How very interesting, Mr Townshend,' said she. 'Pray come in—won't you?—and tell me why you doubt.'

He followed her into the little morning-room where she had been sitting. She invited him to take a seat, said, 'Now tell me,' and looked as if she would hang on his words.

'I happened,' said he, 'to see Mr Kesteven a good deal yesterday in the company—let me say—of this young man who has been arrested.'

'And you do not think—'

'No,' he answered, looking at her very straight, 'I do not.'

She returned his look, and said in her softest, most caressing manner, 'I do wish you would tell me all about it. It is most interesting, Mr Townshend. Do, please, explain to me how it all seems to you.'

Then Townshend told her how it appeared to him—or rather how he wished her to think

it appeared to him—and ended up with some such observations as he had made to Jenny Wren. And all the while he noted that, in spite of the eagerness and emphasis of her 'Yes, I see,' every now and then, her eyes roved about and were never truly fixed on him, and her attention evidently wandered.

'Will you allow me to see the body?' said he. 'I have a good deal of experience in head wounds.'

'Certainly,' said she, 'you may see it.'

She conducted him to a door on the other side of the hall. She opened the door, but she did not enter herself. 'He is in there,' said she; and then she turned to receive someone who was being ushered in by the old manservant from the back parts of the house.

Townshend advanced into the room softly; for the silent and dignified presence of Death must ever be affecting to all but the most callous. The one notable object which caught the eye at once was the body; not yet confined, but stretched under a white sheet upon the table. He went to the head directly, for he wished to assure himself about the tooth before anyone else should enter. He drew back the sheet from the face, and then he paused; for the eyes were but half-closed and seemed to watch him. But he must make haste. He put his hand on the moustache to raise the upper lip.

'What are you doing?' said a voice of alarm from the door. It was Mrs Kesteven's.

Townshend was startled for the instant; but he maintained his self-possession, and kept his hand on the mouth as she ranged up with the Inspector of Constabulary on the other side.

'I thought,' said he, calmly, 'that the lips looked rather swelled;' and without asking permission he raised the upper lip and disclosed the teeth. They were intact!

'You are from Scotland Yard, sir, I understand?' said the Constabulary Inspector, looking across the dead body at Townshend with jealousy and suspicion in his eye and on his tongue.

'Well, not immediately,' said Townshend, carelessly. 'I am retired.'

It was an awkward moment, but he was saved from further questioning by the announcement of the manservant, 'There's someone here asking for Mr Townshend.'

'Oh, yes,' said Townshend, 'this will be the man I wired for—an acting Scotland Yard detective. We do not wish to interfere with you, Mr Inspector, but only to aid you.'

'Much obliged, sir, I'm sure,' said the Inspector, somewhat grumpily; but his professional dignity was hurt.

'May the man come in, madam?' asked Townshend of Mrs Kesteven.

Mrs Kesteven signified her permission and the man came in. He was of the common type of detective, merely a policeman, that



is to say, promoted for intelligence and courage in dealing with thieves and such-like cattle. He made his bow and said he had been sent to be at Mr Townshend's orders. Townshend was kind and condescending—he knew the effect on the other of his behaviour—and then he set about presenting the facts of the case to the man. The man examined the wound on the head in a business-like fashion.

'An ugly knock that,' said he. 'What was it done with?'

'That has not been discovered yet,' said Townshend.

'Oh, yes, it has,' said the Inspector in triumph. 'An ugly life-preserver kind o' cane—found in the chalk-pit—bought yesterday at the saddler's.'

'Really!' said Townshend. He was truly staggered by the news.

Then came an unlooked-for revelation—quite casually, as important matters so frequently come.

'Why was the gentleman out in the park at that time of dark?' asked the detective from London.

'He left the dinner-table, feeling rather ill—a little sick,' said Townshend. 'Is not that so?' he asked deferentially of Mrs Kesteven.

At a venture the detective asked a question, which seemed foolish, but which elicited a remarkable answer. 'Did he vomit?'

'No,' said Mrs Kesteven, 'I don't think so.'

'Yes, ma'am, he did,' said the old manservant from the door. 'Mr Kesteven was very sick, indeed—out there by the laurel bushes.'

Townshend's eye was upon Mrs Kesteven, upon whose face a look of horror, or of terror, come and went. He kept his eye on her, while he said, 'Is it there still?'

'Yes, sir,' answered the manservant, while Mrs Kesteven's complexion seemed to turn green for an instant.

'Let us see,' said Townshend; and he and the other men went out into the garden.

The stuff was found. Townshend insisted that it should be scraped up and analysed by a doctor or a chemist. The Inspector objected.

'What is the good,' said he, 'of bothering about that? We know what Mr Kesteven died of.'

'My dear friend,' said Townshend, 'in Law we know nothing till it is proved. Mr Kesteven may have committed suicide—or tried to—for all we know,' he suggested in order to turn him aside from his own suspicion.

So finally, the stuff was scraped into a pot, covered over, tied and sealed in the presence of them all. Then Townshend and the detective from London and the Inspector departed with it into the town. There was a young doctor recently established in the place,

who was reputed very clever. To him the pot was taken. The Inspector went off about his business, openly careless about the result of the analysis. But Townshend waited restless and agog with expectation.

'Well?' said he, when the young doctor at last emerged from his little laboratory.

'There's poison!' said the doctor.

'What?' asked Townshend.

'Tartarate of Antimony—commonly called Tartar Emetic.'

'Much?'

'Enough to kill an ox!'

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## CHAPTER V

### TARTARATE OF ANTIMONY

'I THINK, Spectacles,' said Lady Morton, to Jenny, next morning, 'that it mightn't be a bad idea for you to go to this inquest and hear the evidence. You've a good memory, and you can come back and pour it out to me. That'll be better than waiting for the newspapers. Besides, those newspaper people put no life or character into their writing. What do you think?'

'Yes,' said Jenny, 'it will be nicer for you,

I daresay.' She scarcely knew what she said. She was so surprised by the suggestion.

'Nicer for me!' snapped the old lady. 'Why, have you no curiosity yourself? Don't you want to hear the evidence? It'll be quite an experience for you to be present at an inquest.'

'Of course it will,' said Jenny. 'I am quite willing to go. And,' she added, 'if I am going, I had better get ready. I suppose the inquest will begin pretty early, and I don't know yet where it is to be held.'

'I know,' said Lady Morton. 'Doctor Dobbs told me. It is going to be held in the schoolroom at Sain-ton Green at ten o'clock. So you may as well be getting ready.'

Jenny was glad to escape from the presence of the shrewd-eyed, gossiping old lady, before whom she feared every moment that she might betray herself. She was brave enough commonly, but the thought of being near her lover, when he was being tried (she thought of an inquest as a kind of trial), made her shrink and tremble with a dread of she knew not what. Law and Police seemed to her, as they must seem to most quiet people, very terrible and threatening 'things to have any dealings with. Moreover, Mr Townshend had been as good as his word, and had written her a little consoling note, bidding her have no anxiety about Will, and saying that he did not think her evidence would be required, and

she was, therefore, all the more troubled by Lady Morton's command that she should attend the inquest. She put a brave face upon it, however, dressed herself, adding a heavy veil for her face, and set out.

The little village of Sain-ton Green was on the high road from East Dingley, not far from Sain-ton House. To reach it expeditiously from Lady Morton's, Jenny passed, as she had done the day before, through Sain-ton Park. She was astonished at the number of curious and gaping people who loitered on the right-of-way path, and lingered by the spot where Mr Kesteven's body had been found. She was more astonished and embarrassed still when she came out upon the village to find the little place as busy as a fair. There were spring carts and vehicles of all sorts drawn up by the roadside, or against the cottages, while a crowd of men and women, but chiefly men, waited about the door of the schoolroom. It seemed evident that the Coroner had not yet arrived, for the door was shut; while the sexton stood remarkable and important with keys in his hand, and the Inspector of Constabulary was to the fore, herding his jurymen like a flock of sheep, lest they should break and run away.

Jenny was becoming seriously troubled how to dispose of herself, when the Coroner (an old doctor from Wrottesley), drove up in a high dogcart. Then the sexton opened the door of the schoolroom and the jury and the

public trooped in. Jenny also entered, and sat down by the door. She was shocked that so many seemed to regard the inquest as an agreeable entertainment. They pushed and scrambled, with laughter and loud talk, for the best seats. She could excuse them only on the ground that they were dull, and had no imagination; else, surely, they would have behaved differently when a fellow-creature was about to undergo something like a trial for murder.

But the Coroner's clerk and the police officers called for order, and the crowd obeyed the call; and then, before Jenny quite knew what was going on, she discovered that the jurymen were being sworn to do their duty, so help them God. After that they all trooped away with the Coroner and the Inspector to view the body. That took some time; for they had to march to Sainton House and back. In the meantime the names of the witnesses were called over. Jenny was surprised at their number. There were farmers from the country and tradesmen from the town, and the young doctor, the rival of Doctor Dobbs—she wondered why he was among the witnesses—and Mr Townshend, and Mrs Kesteven herself, already draped in black. When their names had been called over (and mostly mispronounced) by the Coroner's officer, they were conducted into a side classroom to wait.

When the Coroner and the jury returned the

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examination was begun. First entered Will Lomas, guarded by two constables. He was given a seat ; for an inquest is not a trial, and he was not yet 'the accused.' Yet it was plain how bitterly he resented his position. He looked round him defiantly, almost sulkily, and then he folded his arms and settled down to listen to the evidence. Jenny felt deeply for him. She longed to go and embrace him, and say, 'Never mind, Will! My dear, dear boy, you know I love you and believe in you, and ever shall!' But she must not stir from her seat or speak a word ; so she shed some tears behind her veil.

Next, and immediately after Will Lomas, came Mrs Kesteven. When she appeared Jenny was shocked with the change that had passed upon her since the day before. Then she had been almost careless, though subdued. Now she looked as if she had been through an illness. Half-way across the floor she seemed to totter with faintness and, apparently, she was only saved from falling by the prompt action of the Coroner's clerk, who jumped up, gave her his arm, and led her to a chair. Jenny's general doubts of Mrs Kesteven made her think that such weakness might be put on for the sake of effect ; but when Mrs Kesteven was seated and she plainly saw her face, she was certain that the lady's nervous distress was genuine ; her face was very pale, her lips were parted a little, showing her large white teeth, her eyes

were fixed on the old Coroner as if he were her judge, and her gloved hands were clasped tightly about the smelling-bottle in her lap. The Coroner took sympathetic note of her distress.

'This is a trying occasion for you, madam,' said he. 'But I shall spare you as much as possible, and be as short as I can.' She was sworn still sitting, and then the Coroner continued, 'Your name is Margaret Kesteven. Yes, yes. What relation to the deceased? wife or mother?'

'Stepmother,' answered Mrs Kesteven; and then smelt at her salts.

'When did you last see him alive?'

'About a quarter to eight on Wednesday evening. When he rose from the dinner-table and went out.'

'You mean he went out before dinner was actually finished?'

'Yes.'

'Was there any particular reason for that?'

'He said he was not feeling very well, and he thought the open air would do him good.'

'Just so. And the next you saw of him was—?'

'When he was brought in dead by two men.'

'At what time was that?'

'About nine o'clock.'

'And you sent for a doctor at once?'

'I sent for Doctor Dobbs.'

'Thank you, Mrs Kesteven,' said the Coroner. 'That will do.'



But there sprang up a sudden breeze of excitement. From the neighbourhood of Will there rose a young man, who spoke with self-possession and authority. Jenny stirred with interest, and so did all the assembly.

'Mr Coroner,' said he, 'I represent ex-Sergeant-Major Lomas.' Jenny was pleased with the sound of her lover's military rank, even though it was 'ex.'

'Who?' asked the Coroner.

'The prisoner, sir,' said the young lawyer, and passed to the Coroner's table his name and condition written on a slip of paper.

'Well?' said the Coroner.

'I wish,' said the lawyer, 'with your permission, to ask Mrs Kesteven a question or two.' And Mrs Kesteven, who had risen, sat down again looking troubled.

'Not just yet,' said the Coroner. 'Presently you may. Your man's concerns don't come in yet. I want to get first the simple direct evidence of death. Eh?'

'Very well, sir,' said the young lawyer. 'I shall wait. May I ask that in the meantime, while you hear the other evidence, Mrs Kesteven shall withdraw?'

Mrs Kesteven looked from the lawyer to the Coroner, as if she failed to understand what was going on.

'Yes, certainly,' said the Coroner. 'Mrs Kesteven had better withdraw.'

So Mrs Kesteven was led out on the arm of

the clerk; and the two men who had found the body appeared, the one after the other. They related how they were on their belated way home from the fair, through Sainton Park. By the light of the moon they saw a man lying a few paces from the path. He was on his back, with his right hand flung back under his head, and they knew him at once to be Mr Kesteven—partly by his wearing the same tweed suit as he had worn in the town that day.

After them, Doctor Dobbs came forward to be questioned. He was a middle-aged, important gentleman, who monopolised the wealthy medical practice of the neighbourhood. His juniors in the town, in careless moments, had been heard to call him 'an old fool,' and 'an old woman'; but that did not affect Doctor Dobbs's dignity or position. Jenny, who now took an acute interest in the young man that had confessed himself Will's lawyer, observed that he closely followed all Doctor Dobbs's replies and made notes of them.

'Doctor Dobbs,' said the Coroner, 'you were summoned on Wednesday night to see the deceased Mr Kesteven?'

'A servant drove from Sainton House, and took me back with him.'

'At what hour was that?'

'Something after nine; perhaps half-past.'

'And when did you arrive at Sainton House?'

'About twenty minutes later; it takes that time to drive from my house.'

'And you found life quite extinct?'

'Quite extinct.'

'How long do you consider that he had been dead?'

'I judged that he must have been dead from an hour to two hours—certainly more than one.'

'What in your opinion was the cause of death?'

Then Doctor Dobbs described in learned words the fracture of Mr Kesteven's skull; but you would not be much wiser if I set them down. But at that point the young lawyer jumped up again.

'One moment, if you please, Doctor Dobbs,' said he. 'I understand that you examined only the head of Mr Kesteven?'

'Yes; only the head,' answered Doctor Dobbs, wondering.

'You did not think it advisable to look for any other cause of death?'

'Why should I?' said the doctor, growing red and rather angry. 'The blow on the head was enough. It might have killed an ox.'

Then the lawyer asked a startling question.

'Will you, Doctor Dobbs, swear on your oath that the blow you have described could not have been administered after death?'

'I do not think that at all likely,' said the doctor, looking troubled.

'Will you swear that the blow on the head might not have been administered while the

deceased was helpless or dying from some other cause?'

The doctor looked puzzled and aghast. 'No,' he answered. 'I can say nothing about that.'

'What, sir, may I ask,' said the Coroner, also looking troubled now, 'is the purpose of your cross-examination?'

'I will now request you, sir,' answered the young lawyer, 'to recall Mrs Kesteven.'

A thrill of expectation ran through the company; and Mrs Kesteven returned, looking (Jenny thought) paler, but more resolute, than before.

'Will you, madam,' asked the lawyer, 'kindly tell us in what condition the deceased was when he sat down to dinner on Wednesday evening?'

'I don't understand,' said Mrs Kesteven, softly.

'To put it roughly, madam,' said the lawyer, 'was he drunk?'

'No,' said she, with vehemence; 'certainly not.'

'He sat down to dinner, then, we are to understand, quite well and sober?'

'Yes,' said she, after a moment's hesitation, 'apparently so.'

'And ate and drank as usual?'

'Pretty much as usual.'

'What did he drink?'

'Burgundy. It was his favourite wine at dinner.'

'He did not take any drug or medicine, before or during dinner?'

'Not so far as I know.'

'Could he have taken anything without your knowledge?'

'Certainly,' said she, 'while he dressed.'

'But,' said the lawyer, 'he has been described as not in evening dress when he was found, but in the tweeds he wore during the day?'

'Oh, yes,' said she, while her eyes fluttered round. 'I had forgotten. He commonly did dress for dinner, but he did not that night.'

'Then,' said the lawyer, 'when he retired from the table what did he complain of?'

'He merely said he felt queer, and would go out into the air.'

'Was he sick when he went out?'

'I don't know,' said Mrs Kesteven, with a set face. 'I—I have heard that he was.'

Jenny's head was in a whirl with the strange suggestions which seemed to be made, and she noted that her lover was following every word with the closest attention. What followed passed rapidly, and like a dream.

The old butler at Sain-ton House was called, and said that Mr Kesteven, when he came out from dinner, was very sick. The Inspector of Constabulary and Mr Townshend both were called, and said that they had scraped up certain stuff pointed out by the manservant, and carried it sealed to Doctor Wright. And then Doctor Wright was called. Amid a breathless silence he

explained that he had analysed what had been brought to him in the sealed jar. He had applied to it tests for this and for that, and had come upon traces of poison. He had applied then more specific tests, and had discovered the poison to be—what?

‘Tartarate of Antimony!’

The unfamiliar name sounded terrible, and there was what reporters call ‘A sensation in the court.’

‘Did you,’ asked the lawyer, ‘find that poison in any fatal quantity?’

‘There was enough,’ said the young doctor, ‘to kill an ox.’ And everyone remembered that was the very phrase with which Doctor Dobbs had described the blow on the head.

Then all was haste and consultation, and Jenny, in the excitement of trying to get at what the new discovery might mean for her lover, could not make out what was happening. At last she clearly understood that the inquest was adjourned until next day, in order that a *post-mortem* might be held on Mr Kesteven.

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## CHAPTER VI

## A REVELATION

NEXT day an excited company met in the schoolroom of Sainton Green for the adjourned inquest, and Jenny was there again also. The main interest was to hear the result of the *post-mortem* examination of Mr Kesteven's body. Doctor Dobbs and his young rival Doctor Wright had concluded the *post-mortem* together, and Doctor Dobbs was triumphant. He was called by the Coroner. He first declared he agreed with Doctor Wright's analysis of the stuff from the sealed jar. He then went on to describe how he had examined the stomach and intestines of the deceased. The stomach was empty, and in its secretions there was just the faintest indications that Tartarate of Antimony had been present, while in the parts beyond no indications at all were found.

'In your opinion, then, Doctor Dobbs,' said the Coroner, 'Tartarate of Antimony could have had nothing to do with producing death?'

'Nothing whatever.'

'You agree, however, that the poison had been taken into the stomach?'

'Taken into the stomach, certainly; but rejected so quickly that no harm was done.'

'Can you suggest any reason why the deceased should have taken it?'

'He may have taken it as an emetic—it is called commonly, as of course you know, Tartar Emetic—and recklessly, in his condition, he may have very much overdone the dose.'

Doctor Wright then stood forward, and in every particular corroborated the older doctor's evidence.

'Have you any questions to ask, sir?' asked the Coroner of Will's lawyer.

'I have nothing to ask,' answered the lawyer. 'Only it would be more satisfactory if it were established whether the deceased took the poison himself or it was given to him.'

'What can that matter now?' said the Coroner. 'Very well, we can now return to the first plain cause of death.'

That, Jenny Wren knew, meant the implication and accusation of Will, and her heart sank in anxiety. Bit by bit, with inexorable plausibility, came out the circumstantial evidence—evidence which may appear so convincing, but which has been found so deceptive in far too many instances.

First came forward the Inspector of Constabulary, who 'on information received,' as he declared, had arrested William Lomas 'on suspicion of causing the death of Mr Kesteven. What was the 'information received?' Well, it was the common talk of the country-side that



there had been for long enough, even in the days of Mr Kesteven's father, a lot of ill-feeling between Holly Bush Farm and Sain-ton House. You see Farmer Lomas, being a freeholder, did not need to 'consider nobody.' Then he had heard that on the day of the fair in East Dingley, young Lomas, who was just come back from the army, had a very ugly, stand-up quarrel with Mr Kesteven about nothing in particular.

'Mr Coroner,' said the young lawyer, 'I object to the Inspector's evidence. It is merely hearsay and suspicion. There is not a single fact in all he has said.'

'It is a fact, sir,' protested the Inspector, 'that there was a stiff quarrel at "The Book in Hand," in East Dingley!'

'Yes, perhaps,' said the lawyer; 'but you are only acquainted with it by hearsay, Mr Inspector.'

'Quite right,' smiled the Coroner, who desired things to go smoothly and in order. 'Let us keep to facts, Mr Inspector, and facts at first-hand.'

And thereupon Mr Inspector said that he had finished.

Then the statement made by Will Lomas when arrested was formally read. How Mr Kesteven had provoked him early in the day, how he had passed the time in the fair until after five o'clock, and then how he had walked home by the roundabout way of the stream

and Sainton Park. And he was asked if he had anything to add or take away from the statement. He answered he had nothing. And then began the examination of the crowd of witnesses.

First Mr Parsons of 'The Book in Hand' was called. Reluctantly he related what he had seen and heard of the quarrel, and how he had advised Will Lomas at the first to go away before Mr Kesteven should enter. Up jumped the young lawyer.

'Was that because you were afraid of the temper of Mr Lomas or of Mr Kesteven?'

'Oh, of Mr Kesteven.'

'In all your knowledge of him,' asked the lawyer, 'was Lomas a quarrelsome man?'

'Not quarrelsome at all with anybody else. But Mr Kesteven's way with him would have provoked a picter saint.'

The lawyer sat down, visibly satisfied with that declaration.

Thereupon two of the young farmers who had been in Will Lomas's company were called to tell what they knew. Both declared that, if it had not been for Mr Townshend's interference, Lomas would have felled Mr Kesteven, and they gave their own simple, innocent version of his words afterwards—that he 'would swing for that fellow yet.' These simple witnesses done with, Mr Townshend was called.

His aristocratic appearance and calm bearing impressed both the Court and the public.

He recounted how he had interfered between Lomas and Kesteven, and how he had threatened to kick the latter out.

'Why did you do that?' asked the Coroner.

'Because,' answered Townshend, 'he was such an offensive beast. He was offensive to me even.'

He was asked about his being in company with Lomas for the rest of the day. Why had he been so much with him?

'Because I had taken a liking to him,' he answered. The Coroner smiled. Townshend, setting his glass firmly in his eye, looked at him very hard and said, 'He seemed to me much more of a gentleman than the fellow Kesteven; and I wanted to keep him out of the way of Kesteven's provocations.'

Had he gone to the saddler's with Lomas? Yes, he had. To buy that peculiar cane, which was produced? No; certainly not. To buy some straps.

'It was I,' said Townshend, 'that suggested the visit to the saddler; and there Mr Lomas saw that thing, fancied it, I suppose, and bought it.'

The final question put to Mr Townshend was—At what hour had he and Lomas parted on the Wednesday.

'A little after five o'clock,' he answered.

'Did he give you to understand he was going home then?'

'On the contrary,' said Townshend, 'he said he had somewhere else to go first.'

'Did you not think it odd that he should not tell you where he was going?'

'Why should I?' said Townshend. 'I was not so old a friend that he should tell me all his affairs.'

That made an end of his examination; and then the Court set itself to trace the movements of Will Lomas after five o'clock. Several witnesses were brought forward to testify that he was seen crossing the churchyard, and on his way to the brook, swinging his cane, and switching the thistles and other tall weeds as he passed; but it seemed odd that between half-past five or so and half-past seven his time could not be accounted for by witnesses. Asked if he would himself account for the time, Will Lomas merely said he had strolled by the brook—that and no more.

The disposal of those two hours had really nothing to do with the question of his guilt; but the jury evidently thought it had, and the twelve glanced furtively at each other, and pursed their mouths. Townshend looked significantly at Will; and lifted an inquiring eyebrow; but Will only looked defiantly back; he had said he would not bring in his dear Jenny's name, and he would not, on any account. As for Jenny herself she sat tremblingly expectant, fearing she would be called, and at the same time quite ready and resolved to reveal herself in answer to the call.

But she was not called, and the two doubtful

hours were skipped. About half-past seven Will was seen on the Kesteven ground, near the high road, and moving as if he did not wish to be seen. Three farmers related how they had greeted him from their carts, and how he would not stay to talk. And another described how, a little later, from the high road he had seen in the moonlight a man, whom he believed to be Lomas, walking along the path through the park. And then, too late, it was evident that the impression was he had not lingered by the brook at all, but had spent the time by skulking about the Kesteven domain—for what purpose except to find an opportunity for his deadly business with the squire?

Finally, Will's aunt and his poor old father were questioned. They were both so obviously troubled that they were allowed to sit during examination; and the wistful and pathetic look which the old man turned upon his son smote the hearts of all who saw it.

'When you let him in, was he carrying any walking cane?'

That was the question addressed to Miss Lomas, which arrested everyone's attention.

'No,' she answered, deliberately, after a moment's recollection. 'I can't say as how he had anything in his hand.'

'And he did not mention such a thing?'

'Never a mention!' said she, and looked rather bewildered.

The same questions were put to the old father, who answered them to the same purpose.

Then Will was asked if he had anything to say as to what had become of his loaded cane, and he told how he had thrown it at a rabbit, had lost it in the chalk-pit, and had meant to recover it next day. And even while he told the story he saw how poor an explanation it must appear of his loss; and he perceived in the eyes even of his friends that they were ashamed he could put forward no more plausible alternative to what was commonly believed. The Inspector was recalled to produce the cane, which, he declared, he had found in the chalk-pit.

'Do you identify that as your cane?' the Coroner asked Will.

'I do,' said he.

That seemed sufficient. But Will felt that everyone was misapprehending the meaning of his admission; he was angry and impatient.

'You think I threw it away,' he exclaimed, 'after knocking Mr Kesteven down with it! Is that likely? Why should I throw it away? It's quite clear—isn't it? Surely, it's much more likely that I lost it, as I've told you!'

The Coroner solemnly warned him that whatever he said would be used as evidence; and he said no more.

When all the evidence was taken, there was little doubt what the verdict of the jury would be. It did not take long for them to find that

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Mr Kesteven was killed by a blow on the head, 'administered' by William Lomas, with intent to kill.

So Will Lomas found himself arrested for 'causing the death' of Mr Kesteven; and the next stage in his judicial progress, as decreed by the law of the country, was that he should appear before the Justices, who would either dismiss the charge or commit him for trial at the Assizes. He himself was confident that the charge against him would be dismissed—because it was absurd, and because the Justices were gentlemen of understanding, not ignorant fellows like the Coroner's jury—but his friends, and especially the experienced Townshend, had no such confidence.

'We made a mistake,' said Townshend, in an interview he had with Will in his cell at the police station in East Dingley. 'You should have let us account for those two hours in the evening.'

'What had that,' asked Will, 'got to do with my hitting Kesteven on the head or not?'

'Not much, it is true,' said Townshend. 'But, my dear lad, that is not the point. The thing is that the thick-headed jury thought it had. They were too cunning to believe you were only strolling, as you said; they believed you were up to mischief. They believed that you did not stroll by the brook, but went on to Sain-ton Park to find a chance of getting at Kesteven.'

'Well,' said Will, 'I suppose that's done now, and can't be undone. But the Justices will have more sense.'

'I'm not so sure of that,' said Mr Townshend. 'The Great Unpaid are not celebrated for their good sense.'

'You want me, then, to tell them about my meeting Jenny—Miss Wren?' broke out Will.

'Why not? There's nothing to be ashamed of. And Miss Wren is quite willing that you should mention her.'

'I won't,' said Will, obstinately. 'I've brought trouble enough to her, poor girl, without that.'

'But,' said Mr Townshend, screwing his glass straight, 'let us calmly consider it.'

'I won't,' said Will again.

Townshend, however, persisted, saying quietly,—

'If it is the loss of her position with Lady Morton that you are afraid of, that can easily be made up for. I'll engage myself to find her another—er—position quite as good.'

Yet it is not likely that Will Lomas would have yielded his point had it not been for the overwhelming influence of Jenny herself. While they were still talking, a policeman came to say that a lady wished to speak to him. It was Jenny—veiled. Townshend withdrew and left the lovers together. After a little while he was recalled.

'I give in,' said Will Lomas at once.



'Jenny wants me to say I was with her that evening. She thinks the same about it as you do.'

So it came to pass that when Will was brought before the Justices on Monday there was evoked a new sensation. The evidence took the same course as at the inquest—the question of poison being, of course, suppressed—and the point was reached of accounting for the time of the accused after he left 'The Book in Hand.'

'You must have reached the brook about half-past five,' was said to Will.

'Somewhere about then,' he answered.

'What did you do there?'

'I strolled about,' he answered, for he was still reluctant to make his confession.

'For how long?'

'For two hours.'

'What? Strolled about there for two hours alone?'

'I was not alone,' answered Will, 'I was with a lady.'

'With a lady! Can you name the lady?'

'Miss Wren—companion to Lady Morton.'

At that statement there was a buzz of excitement throughout the Court.

'Is the lady present?'

Mr Townshend and Will's lawyer had taken care that the lady should be present, and Jenny came forward and put up her veil. Then came the sensation. Since the poison episode at the

inquest the Kesteven party had provided themselves with a lawyer to watch the case. He stood up.

'I object to the lady as a witness. She is disqualified by law. She is the wife of the accused. I have here the Register from Wrottesley to prove the marriage.'

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## CHAPTER VII

WITH MRS KESTEVEN

THAT disclosure of his marriage with Jenny Wren may be taken as the turning point in the condemnation of Will Lomas. It shut Jenny's mouth—(the law is now altered which used to prevent a wife from giving evidence concerning her husband)—and so hindered such evidence as would have been sufficient to show that he had merely passed through Sinton Park with speed, not to say haste, and without any thought of violence—and it created a new prejudice against him. For what, thought the narrow-minded provincial Justices and public of East Dingley, what must be the infernal wickedness and craft of a young man who could clandestinely inveigle into marriage a young lady of Miss Wren's position.

They would have failed to understand, if any one had told them, that it was neither wickedness nor craft which had made Will Lomas persuade Jenny Wren into a secret and hasty marriage—nothing but modesty; for Will feared that, when he should go to seek occupation in London, his Jenny might perhaps be snapped up by some other fellow, better and more eligible than himself. Therefore he had prevailed on her to be bound to him. That, you may say, was selfish. But strong love is selfish.

But how, you may ask, had the other side discovered the marriage? It is hard to say. But it is plain that people who are in love never know how much they are observed even by strangers in a small provincial town, nor think how very public a place for their names is the Notice Board outside a Registrar's office. At anyrate, the marriage was discovered somehow, and the couple paid the penalty of the discovery. Will Lomas was committed for trial at the approaching Autumn Assizes on the appalling charge of murder, and Jenny was dismissed with a month's salary from her position near Lady Morton.

'I can't, you see,' said the old lady, in a tone of virtuous indignation, 'have a married woman about me! Especially a woman that has not seen proper to be married at church! What would your father have thought of it? I can't make out what makes some girls ruin all their prospects for the sake of a man!'

'You surely do not think, Lady Morton,' Jenny was stung into retorting, 'that I have had any prospects here!'

So, immediately after Will was taken to the gaol at Wrottesley to await his trial, Jenny established herself in a lodging not far off. She had been kindly invited to make her home at Holly Bush Farm; but she had declined, saying, 'For the present, at least, I must be near my poor Will, to do what I can for him!' And the only friend either Will or Jenny had to depend on now was the comparative stranger, Mr Townshend; for Will's father and his aunt both, although absolutely devoted to him, had neither the knowledge nor the resources that could avail for his deliverance.

While these were the circumstances of the afflicted young couple, their friend Townshend still lingered at 'The Book in Hand,' in East Dingley. On the Thursday morning he sat down to breakfast in his private sitting-room at the same time as Parsons himself entered with a tray of dishes.

'Well, my friend,' said Townshend, spreading his napkin on his knees, 'what's for breakfast this morning?'

'A nice, fresh bream, sir,' answered Parsons.

'Ah!' said Townshend. 'Bream!'

'Yes, sir. D'you like bream? Bream's a very pretty, well-flavoured fish, sir—for a fresh-water fish.'

'Yes; I know. I was only thinking that

this is the first time you've given me any fish from your stream here.'

'Yes, sir,' said Parsons, 'perhaps it is, sir. But I don't often go fishing myself. What a pity, sir,' he went on, dropping into a tone of confidence, 'that poor Will Lomas couldn't ha' said he was fishing that night!'

'Fishing?' exclaimed Townshend. 'What good would that have done him? Nobody would have believed he went fishing in the dark.'

'Oh, wouldn't they, sir! Pardon me, sir. But a many of us go fishing in the dark. The fish take the bait better,' said he, and Townshend was amazed to see him wink. 'Besides, sir,' he added, behind his hand, 'in the dark you sometimes fall acrost a bird or a rabbit. And, if in the dark, sir, you don't know the difference betwixt a strayed chicken or a pheasant, or betwixt a rabbit and a hare—why that ain't your fault, sir, is it?'

'Of course not, Parsons,' said Townshend, solemnly, with that odd lifting of the end of his moustache which signified there was something of a smile underneath. 'It's the fault of the light—or, rather, the want of it.'

'Most decidedly, sir. Why, sir, that very night of Will Lomas's I went fishing, and fell acrost a—a chicken, sir. But, since then, I didn't go fishing again, sir, till last night.'

'Why was that, Parsons? Frightened?'

'Well, yes, sir; I was a leetle alarmed. A

fellow came smashing down from Sainton House way, through the copses.'

'And you ran, I suppose, with the bird in your hand and your heart in your mouth?'

'No, sir; he ran—flisk past me, and blowing—oh!'

'Oh!' exclaimed Townshend, pausing with his cup half-raised to his mouth. 'And why, you infernal idiot, have you not told me that before?'

'Begging your pardon, sir, but I'd ha' been a idiot of the kind you put a name to if I had. And I'm a worse idiot to be telling of you now, sir. The fact is, sir, I was at that identical moment where I should not ha' been—where I would not be publicly know to ha' been. I was, sir, what is termed trespassing.'

'And you were afraid?'

'That's it, sir. Is the bream to your liking, sir?'

'It's very good, thank you. Parsons, I must think that over.'

'Think it over as much as you like, sir, but keep it to yourself. I was a idiot to let it out, sir. Don't mention it, if you please, sir.'

'All right. Come in,' he said, in answer to a knock.

The maidservant entered with a letter which the postman had just delivered, and then Mr Townshend was left alone with it and his breakfast. He looked at the superscription of the envelope:—'Townshend, Esq., "The Book in Hand," East Dingley.' He cut it open with a knife, and to his surprise read the following:—

'Mrs Kesteven presents her compliments to Mr Townshend, and begs that he will be so good as call on her, if he can spare the time. Mrs Kesteven will be at home all day.'

'Nothing could have happened better,' said Townshend to himself, as he put the note in his pocket. 'But I wonder what she's up to.'

Between ten and eleven o'clock he walked up to the door of Sainton House and rang the bell. The old manservant opened the door, and for the second time in his history he surveyed the Balmoral boots, the turned-up trousers, and the eyeglass—surveyed them this time as with fright.

'Mrs Kesteven at home?' asked Townshend, in his deep, deliberate tone.

'Yes, sir, Mr Townshend, sir,' answered the man. 'Mrs Kesteven has bid me show you in to her at once.'

'It's very good of you to come so promptly,' said Mrs Kesteven, when they were sat down together in her morning-room.

'Charmed, I'm sure,' said Townshend; and waited, rubbing his eyeglass slowly with his handkerchief. Some of his friends declared that he could see better without his monocle. I think that is a slander; but, if he could, then he must have seen pretty plainly that Mrs Kesteven showed most notable signs of being in a very tense, nervous condition. Her eyes were wide open, her lips were parted and somewhat

tightly drawn away from her teeth in a fixed smile, as if she were sitting for her photograph, and her handkerchief was rolled up in her lap like a ball.

'You are very much interested in that young man Lomas, are you not, Mr Townshend?' she said.

'I think, Mrs Kesteven,' he answered, while his little smile fluttered in its corner, 'most people would say that I had shown that rather plainly.'

'I wonder if you would mind telling me,' she said, trying to look sweetly appealing, 'truly, why you are so interested in him?'

'Well,' said Townshend, settling his eyeglass, 'I am interested in all sorts of people, and, if I may say so, I don't fix my interest by rule of thumb. I am interested in people just as the whim takes me.'

'You had no particular reason, then,' she urged, 'for your interest in him?'

But Townshend was not to be cornered. 'I took an interest in him, I think,' said he, 'because I found him interesting.'

'That means,' said she, shaking her head at him slowly and sadly, 'that you liked him because you did. You really won't tell me why?'

'Pon my word,' said he, 'I have told you the truth.'

'But you are very original and—and Quixotic in your likes and dislikes—are you not?'



'On the contrary,' he answered, 'I think I am very reasonable. I think I know what I'm about.'

'Then, Mr Townshend,' she suddenly flashed out upon him, with a passionate tone of reproach and of appeal, 'why do you dislike me?—why do you suspect me?'

That outcry scarcely took him aback; and he understood her the better for it.

'You mistake me very much, Mrs Kesteven,' he answered gently. 'But really,' he added, re-fixing his glass on his eye, 'I don't see what good can come of discussing any personal feelings of mine. You will pardon me for presuming it was not for that you invited me to this interview.'

'I am a poor, lonely woman!' she broke out. 'And I don't know which way to turn for advice or help? It is of no use you telling me you are merely a retired detective inspector! I did not believe that even at the first! I know a gentleman when I meet him; and detective inspectors, even if retired, don't live in Jermyn Street, St James's.'

'You do me too much honour,' said he, with gentle but sonorous deliberation. 'But I beg to assure you—if the matter is worth mention—that I have nothing but the kindest feelings towards you, Mrs Kesteven. Indeed, I have the greatest hopes of aiding you to discover the real murderer of your stepson.'

She leaned back and gazed at him, her lips parted in their fixed, pained smile.

'How good of you!' she murmured mechanically. 'You still think, then, that the young man Lomas is innocent?'

'My dear lady,' said Townshend, looking at her very fixedly, and speaking very slowly, 'if I am to be of any use to you, you must not keep up any pretence—you mustn't really! You should know, as well as I do, that Lomas is innocent.'

'I know it?' she exclaimed, as if staggered by the assertion. 'How should I know it?'

He considered her a moment. 'Well,' said he, taking up and carefully balancing a paper-knife on his finger, 'I have just discovered that on the night your son was killed a man came racing down from this direction, breaking through the copse towards the brook. He was evidently in a great taking of fright and haste.'

'A man!' she gasped. She was the picture of surprise and terror.

'Do you know nothing of such a man?' he asked.

'Now,' she cried, 'you are accusing me again!'

'And,' he persisted, 'was there no man near that you can think of in that connection?'

'Great heavens, no!' she said with vehemence. 'The only man in the house, besides the old servant you have seen, was my son!'

There was such a show of sincere amazement and distress in her tone and manner that Townshend was puzzled—immitigably puzzled.

'Well,' said he, 'let us leave that alone. I fear,' he added, with sonorous politeness, 'that I have been making this interview my own. I think I have not yet heard why you asked me to come to you.'

'Oh,' said she, half-leaning on the table in manifest relief, 'it was about that young man Lomas; and especially about his poor little wife. Whether he did it or not,' she said, hurrying through the words, 'I have no desire to see him punished. But I can do nothing for him; if anything can be done, you can do it, Mr Townshend, I'm sure,' she said impressively. 'But the poor girl! I'm very—very sorry for her! I've always liked her. She is a very nice girl. And Lady Morton has sent her away. Is there nothing I can do for her? I shall be so pleased to do something. That, Mr Townshend, is what I wanted to say. And I wanted to say it to you, because you seem to have great influence with them both.'

'Very kind of you, I'm sure,' murmured Townshend. He saw at once the advantage of having Jenny, an intelligent and faithful person, attached to Mrs Kesteven, who, he was sure, held the clue to the mystery. He did not hesitate. 'I shall tell her what you have suggested,' he said; 'but, of course, it is for her to decide.'

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## CHAPTER VIII

## IN THE PRISON

NEXT day, which was Friday, Townshend journeyed to Wrotesley to see the afflicted couple. He went first to the gaol to visit Will. He found him changed since Wednesday. He was in a high fever of desperation. He was like a kindly domestic animal that finds itself trapped. At first his feelings had been mere bewilderment, joined with a confidence that when once his case was properly considered he must be released; but when the time and the occasion passed, and he was still in durance, resentment and revolt made him savage, and, metaphorically, he spent his strength in shaking the bars of his cage.

'My dear chap,' said Townshend, 'what's come over you?'

'I can't stand this!' answered Will. 'I think, Mr Townshend, I've been a quiet, reasonable fellow all my life—too quiet and reasonable! I put up with a good many queer things before I was a soldier, and after I was a soldier. I've been in India and I've been in Egypt on campaigns; I've had some rum starts and shaves, but I never rucked on them! By George, though, sir, this is too much for me! If I don't get out of it I shall go stark, staring mad!'

'But, my dear lad, we are doing our best to

get you out of it. Between ourselves, I'm on the track of some fresh evidence, and you must really try to possess your soul in patience for the month or so there is before us.'

'Evidence be hanged, sir!' cried the young man. 'How much more evidence do they want than they've got—that I'm not the man? Juries are thick-headed fools, justices are fools, and I daresay judges are fools, too!'

'My dear Lomas,' said Townshend, in his voice of calm sonority, 'most men of all sorts are fools in their own way. And, to tell you the truth, I believe if I had not been with you and understood you all that day I'd have thought you were the man—on the evidence—and I flatter myself,' he added, with his flutter of a smile, 'I'm rather less of a fool than most people.'

Will looked at him sadly a moment, but kept silence.

'But now, my dear lad,' continued Townshend, 'we are getting new evidence together, as I have told you, and we'll make a good show at the Assizes.'

'You won't have me at the show,' said Will, obstinately, 'if I can help it.'

'What?' smiled Townshend. 'We can't have the play of "Hamlet" with the part of Hamlet cut out.'

'They can play what they like, but I'll be out of it,' again said Will, with darker obstinacy, 'or I'm a Dutchman!'

Then Townshend regarded him seriously an instant and was concerned; for there was no doubt that the young man's eye was inflamed with the fire of revolt and desperation.

'But, dear lad, consider a moment. If you get out of it—and I'm not going to ask how you propose to do that—'

'No, don't,' said Will, grimly.

'If you get out of it, you'll spoil yourself for ever; you'll seem self-condemned.'

'And what does that matter?' broke out the young man. 'Great Scott! Am I not as good as condemned already? They're all prejudiced against me! They're all set against me! The trial—the confounded play you speak about—would be a farce!'

'This is serious, my boy!' said Townshend, in a deep voice of sympathy. 'But, you'll forgive me for saying it, it is sheer madness. Aren't you forgetting, my boy, that you have a wife?'

'Forgetting?' cried Will. 'Good Lord! Isn't that the very thing I can't forget? I'm thinking of it every hour of the day and of the night! I married her to keep and cherish her; to adore her; to make an idol of her! So much too good for me as she was! And now I'm here, like a rat in a trap. She comes to me once every day, smiling at me and keeping up a good heart. I can't eat the muck they give me here, and she brings me nice little things, bought with her own money, cooked

with her own pretty little hands. And I can't eat them—they choke me! My God! It's driving me mad!' And he flung his arms upon his little table, put his face on them, and sobbed.

'Poor old chap!' murmured Townshend, laying a caressing and soothing hand on his shoulder.

There was the rattle of a key at the door, to intimate that the time for the interview was up. Lomas put a constraint on himself to recover his composure.

'You'd better go, sir,' said he. 'And you'd better not bother about me any more! I'm very much obliged to you for all you've done—very much obliged, indeed. I don't know why you've done it—why you take any interest in me at all.'

'The devil, sir,' said Townshend. 'If it's my whim to like a man, and do what I can for him, that's my own affair and the man's. No, no, my lad, I'm not done with you yet, nor you with me.'

But he had to go, for the warder was at the door to usher him out and to usher Jenny Lomas in. He said to her in passing that he should like a word with her before she left the prison, and would wait for her in the visitors' room.

When the warder left Will and Jenny alone he put his arms about her and held her close in silence. It was no time for the small raptures

of love, but rather for the deepening of those quieter feelings of trust and affection in which all raptures must ever find and re-find their source. Jenny clung to him an instant and then she disengaged herself.

'My dear boy,' she said, 'we've no time to waste. Look what I've brought you. Sit down; I want to see you eat it, and to hear you tell me all about yourself.'

She opened her little basket (which had already been explored by authority to make sure that it contained nothing forbidden) and she set forth her little surprise of food. He gazed at it sadly and helplessly a moment.

'Come; eat, dearest,' said Jenny, coaxingly.

He made a great show of eating, as with a voracious appetite, and then he suddenly stopped.

'It's no good, Jenny,' he said. 'I can't.'

'Oh,' she exclaimed, in deep disappointment, 'isn't it nice? And I took such pains with it.'

Then he amazed her by putting his face in his hands and breaking into sobs.

'Oh, my dear, dear boy!' said she. 'What is the matter?' She rose and put her arms about him, as if she were his protecting angel and would cover him with her wings.

'I'm a silly fool,' said he. 'But I can't bear to see you here, Jenny, and I can't bear to have you doing these things for me.'

'Why, Will?' she asked in some wonder;



for, being a simple, modest, loving woman, she had never thought that what she did for the man she loved could be regarded as anything but a matter of course.

'I'm ashamed—mad—that you should be waiting on me like this. It breaks my heart, Jenny, when I think how different we expected it to be!'

'But, Will,' said she, soothingly, 'am I not your wife, for better, for worse?'

'That's just it!' said he. 'If you were not my wife I shouldn't feel so bad!'

'Oh, Will!' she cried. 'Don't you love me any more? You wish I were not your wife?' She was unutterably distressed, nigh weeping. Perhaps that was her gentle feminine craft: with the exhibition of an unreasonable emotion to tempt Will into a more reasonable mood. At anyrate that was the effect.

'Love you, my dear Jenny? Of course I do!' said he in the most assured and soothing tone. 'But that is just why I hate myself for bringing you into this. Don't you see, Jenny? If you weren't married you wouldn't be here.'

'How do you know that?' asked Jenny, with a prompt and smiling confidence. 'Do you think, married or single, I could have kept away from you, my dear, when you were in trouble, and especially through no fault of your own?'

'You'd have come all the same?' he asked in wonder.

'Of course, I would! You don't know your Jenny if you can doubt it!'

Then a radiance of joy shone from his face.

'You're too good for me, Jenny!' said he. 'Too good for me!' and he bowed his head over her hands and kissed them.

And now, I think it is our duty to retire. We have no right to be present longer, and to hear the dear and sacred intimacies of talk that passed between them then.

A few minutes later Jenny appeared smiling before Townshend in the visitors' room.

'How have you left him?' asked Townshend. 'He was very downcast—I may even go so far as to say desperate—when I saw him.'

'He's better now,' said Jenny, with cheerful confidence.

'The imprisonment and the injustice of it,' said he, 'have worn his nerves to fiddle-strings. But he is himself again?' he added inquiringly, with a flash of his eyeglass upon Jenny.

'Almost,' said she. 'I've been telling him that, when it's all over, a month or so hence, we'll look back and wonder that we let it upset us so terribly.'

'Pon my word!' exclaimed Townshend, in a sonorous burst of admiration, 'you're a good fellow, Mrs Lomas; the best comrade a man could have!'

'Perhaps,' said she, with a flutter of breath which sounded very like a sob kept resolutely under, 'perhaps I'm not quite so brave as I seem.'

'Well, come away,' said Townshend. 'I've something to tell you.' And as they walked out of the precincts of the prison he related in a low voice what Parsons had revealed to him, and his interview with Mrs Kesteven. 'And let me say,' he ended with, 'that I think her offer is not one you need feel any deep gratitude for; it suits her to make it—suits her feelings—and it may suit you to accept it; suit our purpose of bringing Will clear out of this mess.'

'I see,' she answered. 'She wants me to suggest what I would like her to do for me?'

'Exactly.'

'You really think, Mr Townshend, that Mrs Kesteven knows more about Will's business than she pretends?'

'I think—I am sure—she does.'

'Then,' said Jenny, resolutely, 'I'll suggest that I should live with her as companion.'

'The very thing I'd have proposed,' said Townshend. 'You will be constantly in her company. You will see what she does, hear what she says, and, if I may say so, know what she thinks. And if you will not be "burning," as children say in their game, I am certain you will at least be "warm."'

'Won't all that be very mean and spying?' said Jenny, doubtfully.

But Townshend did not answer. His attention and his eyeglass were occupied with a gentleman who passed them, in the company of

the governor of the prison; a gentleman with a heavy moustache, who laughed so heartily and openly that he showed the gleam of gold under his moustache.

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## CHAPTER IX

## A PRISON VISITOR

BUT Will Lomas himself upset these calculations for the establishment of his innocence. When a man's conduct is altogether different from what our knowledge of him has led us to expect, we say he is 'mad'; and the word is well used. Will was mad—for the time being. He could view nothing truly; everything was out of shape and proportion; and his one consuming desire was for freedom. With the fierceness of a savage, of a wild man of the woods, he longed to be again in the open air, and in the company of the dear, sweet wife he had but newly married; and with the concentration and secrecy of madness all his thoughts were bent and strained to the problem of getting out of prison.

He had known the town of Wrottesley since ever he could remember, together with the outer aspect of the gaol and the arrangement of streets

that led to and from it. It was an old prison—dark and grim with age. It was in the centre of the town, upraised a little like the boss of a round shield. Everyone spoke of it as 'The Castle'; but nobody in Wrottesley was learned enough to tell whether it had ever been anything but a prison.

Will Lomas was not a reading man; and he knew no more of the history of the place than his neighbours of the country-side. But since the moment he had been shut up in 'The Castle,' the dread of it which he had cherished in his boyhood came back to him, and made him in that sense a boy again. He would sit by the hour, picking at his fingers, and thinking of nothing but 'The Castle' as a grim, watchful monster, that was silently satisfied to have and to keep him in its embrace—until the end should come. He thought of that, over and over, and to and fro, with fear and horror, till (as we have seen) his native courage and manhood rose in revolt, and he resolved to regain his freedom—if it could by any means be regained. Yet he still sat silent, as if afraid to let a sound of his desire and intention be heard by the listening and watchful monster. Hour by hour he brooded on the shape and arrangement of 'The Castle,' so far as he knew it, both inside and out; and ever and anon he would imagine himself, with fear at his back, carelessly walking out at the great, black, spike-topped gate, and down the street that it opened upon, or slipping over a

certain wall, and scurrying along a narrow, dirty, winding lane.

But by Friday his dreams and desires had come to no fruition. He had done nothing but dream and desire; for he was no practised prison-breaker—indeed he had never been in prison at all before—and he did not even know where his cell was situated. Unless, then, some miraculous dispensation came, like the sound of Joshua's horns at which the walls of Jericho fell flat, there seemed to be no hope for him. Yet he clung most tenaciously and obstinately to the desire; and the desire still maintained the hope, as a stem supports the flower.

When Jenny left him that day she was pleased to believe that he was more composed. And he was. It was not, however, the composure of patient and Christian resignation, but the composure of resolution. He had shut his mouth hard, choked back his passion of revolt, and told himself that 'howling' about his trouble was absurd waste of effort; he must do something, and he was in all the better spirits about doing something that he had long believed Friday to be for him a lucky day.

He looked round him at the white, featureless walls, and at the solid door, and then, as often before, he lifted his eyes to his barred window—which was truly not a window at all, but merely an opening to admit light and air. It was too high and too deep set for him to see anything through it but a scrap of dull sky divided into

meagre strips by the bars. As he had done before, he mounted on his little table and then on his stool, and craned his neck to look out. The fresh air caressed his cheek and increased his longing to be free. He pressed his head this way and that into the opening, but he could see no more than before—except—yes, except—the straight wires, like fine lines ruled upon paper for music, well overhead. Before he could descend without being noted his cell door opened and there entered the Governor of the prison with another gentleman.

'You can't see much from there,' said the Governor, quietly.

'Nothing but telegraph wires, sir,' answered Will, standing on the floor.

'Telephone, I believe,' said the Governor; 'but it doesn't matter.' He spoke quite kindly. He and Will had held several friendly conversations, for he was an ex-officer of the army, and he wrote books about prison life. 'I have brought to see you,' he continued, 'an old friend of mine—Captain Cathcart, who thinks he remembers you in India.'

'I have been with my regiment in India,' answered Will, looking at the stranger—a spare, tallish man, with a heavy cavalry moustache.

'You were with the Kabul-Kandahar Field Force of Roberts? There was a Sergeant Lomas, a Lancer in the Cavalry Brigade,' said Captain Cathcart immediately. The words

went off with a spring, as if they had been waiting to be let loose.

'Yes, sir,' said Will, his eye brightening; 'I was. That was me.'

'After the battle of Kandahar, in the pursuit, an officer of the Indian Cavalry had his horse shot under him in crossing a stream; when he was struggling in the water a Ghazi came hacking at his head; you struck the Ghazi with your lance, and hauled the officer up on your saddle.'

'Yes, sir,' said Will; 'I remember.'

'That officer was me,' said Captain Cathcart, holding out his hand. 'Somehow I never met you to thank you.'

'Our regiments, sir, were marched back to India separately,' said Will.

'And I've never met you till now—and here!' said Captain Cathcart, shaking him by the hand.

'It's not my fault that I'm here—I do assure you, sir!' said Will. 'It's a mistake, sir!' he added with passionate energy. 'I beg you to believe it!'

'Well, I will believe it!' said the Captain, in quick, sympathetic response: 'for the sake of comradeship!—though, I believe, any man might be excused for knocking down the brute Kesteven!'

The Governor, who had listened continuously, turning his eyes, as they winked, from the one to the other, shook his head, as if he would say, 'You should not have said that.'



'Eh?' said the Captain, noting him a moment. 'Well, I don't know; but I think some men are better dead. Now, Lomas,' he added briskly, 'what I want to say—what I came to say—is: Can't I do anything for you? Detectives? Lawyers? Anything?'

'I am very much obliged to you, sir,' said Will. 'But'—and he smiled a sick kind of smile as he said it—'I'm quite supplied with all I need in the way of lawyers, and the rest of 'em. They all say it's an awkward, ugly case—made up of circumstantial evidence. But they bid me hope all the same. Humph!'

'And you don't hope much? You don't think you've much chance of getting off?'

'What, sir?' cried Will, in bitter passion. 'With fools to give evidence and idiots to try you?'

'It's pretty bad,' said the Captain, 'if you feel and think like that.'

Then the Governor declared genially that there was truly no reason but 'prison depression' for feeling and thinking like that; and thus they talked to and fro for some minutes more. At last, when turning to depart, the Captain surprised both his friend and the prisoner by producing a little book from his pocket.

'May I,' said he to the Governor, 'give this to Lomas to read?'

'Well,' said the Governor, 'I daresay you may. But it is my duty to look at it first. What is the book?' He held out his hand.

“The Memoirs of Colonel Gardiner,” said the Captain, while his friend the Governor looked at him as though he would say, ‘Well, you are a fellow! Fancy you presenting a book like that!’

He took the book—a small, slim volume bound in calf—ran the pages under his thumb, noted it contained an old-fashioned silk bookmark, and handed it back. It seemed quite harmless—an old-fashioned book with an old-fashioned bookmark. The Captain passed it to Will Lomas.

‘I hope,’ said he, ‘you’ll find it a good book.’

‘Thank you, Captain,’ said he, and took it.

Then the Governor and his friend departed, and Will sat down to look at the book with some curiosity. He discovered that Colonel Gardiner was a godly officer of dragoons who lived more than a hundred and fifty years ago, and that his ‘Memoirs’ were not made up of warlike adventures, but of religious experiences. He shut the book, wondering why Captain Cathcart had given it to him. He had not imagined that the Captain—well, was that kind of fellow.

He lay down for a little while, despondent and thoughtful and still wondering. And, as he wondered, he slept and dreamed. Probably the few sentences he had read of Colonel Gardiner had brought memories of the Bible into his head. He dreamed that Peter the Apostle was in prison; but suddenly he felt

by the constriction of his heart and his sadness that Peter was himself. And there came an angel in a great dazzling glow of light, and lo and behold! the angel was his own Jenny!—his own sweetheart!—his wife so early afflicted in her married life! And when he knew her he thought that he wept and sobbed—he scarce knew why, except because of the prevailing disappointment and woe of his life! But the angel—that is, Jenny—beckoned him to rise, and he rose. She passed through the cell door as if it did not exist, and he confidently followed her. Oh, what joy!—what hope!—was leading him on! Down the corridor she passed, and he followed. Here and there they came upon a warder, who stood like a graven image against the wall, lifeless or unheeding. Across the quadrangle the shining, heavenly apparition moved, and he followed—out to the great, spike-topped gate, and through without its being opened. Then in the street there was a raging, roaring crowd; his vision vanished, and he woke, trembling with excitement. A noise from the outside was in his ears, and the light of the western sun pouring through his barred window flooded his eyes.

He sat up. It took some seconds' thought to bring him to himself. His dream had disturbed and excited him to an extraordinary degree. Had it any meaning? Was it a promise of escape? Was it absurd to think that it might be?

He took it in his hand again—the little book Captain Cathcart had given him, wondering anew why the present had been made. He slowly turned over the leaves without reading. He came upon the silk bookmark. He noted there were some faint pencil jottings on the margin of the page: they were made tolerably plain by the sunlight falling on them.

'After dark,' he read, 'tie this to the end of the silk and throw it out of window.'

'The silk.' What silk? He examined the bookmark, and found it was a hank of silk thread: and its purpose and the meaning of the Captain's present dawned upon him.

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## CHAPTER X

### WITH FILE AND FORK

'AFTER dark!' That was no exact hour, but a time to be guessed. He was compelled to judge for himself when he should carry out the pencilled instruction. And if his choice of the moment did not coincide with that of the person outside—for obviously there must be a friend outside—what then? Well, plainly, he must take his chance of that. If a man would not face risks (as Will told himself) he would do nothing.

So when the warder had paid him his last visit for the day, just as the shadows of night were gathering without, and the lamps were being lighted in the town, he prepared with a heart that beat up into his throat to face his adventure. Carefully he placed his stool upon the table, beneath the window, and carefully he climbed into position, with the precious 'Life of Colonel Gardiner' in his pocket. He craned his head, as before, to look forth, but, as before, he saw nothing—nothing but the telephone wires ruled upon the darkening sky. He stood and waited till he could distinguish the wires no more. Then he took the little book, and tied the end of the hank about it. That done, he stuck the book in his bosom, and, unwinding the silk thread, he coiled it on his finger, as a sailor coils a throw-line on his arm. Then—and then, after an instant's pause to view the momentousness of his act, he threw the little book clear through between the bars, out into the darkness, and the coils of silk flew after it, till it plucked at the loop he had made about his thumb. For a second he supposed that the thread must have snapped, and his heart sank, but on feeling with his other hand he found that the silk was taut, and he judged his connection with the book and the hope of deliverance to be still complete. He waited in faith, wondering what the issue was to be. Suddenly he was struck by the absurd view of what he was about. It was like fishing in a deep, dark sea: what would

he catch with that strange bait he had flung out?

Then, in further fulfilment of his fancy, he felt his bait nibbled at, and thereafter the tug of a pretty large catch. Carefully he drew in his line, coiling it again on his finger, and all the while fearing that its progress over the rough sill of his window would break it, to the loss of whatever he was drawing in. At length he heard a clink and a tinkle without, and he drew in upon the stone sill—what? It needed an instant's examination with his fingers for him to discover that he possessed two oddly-associated articles; a file and a common dinner fork with steel prongs!

Will was, as you may guess, a good deal set back with that discovery. The file was, of course, a recognised property in the deliverance of a prisoner; but of what use or significance was a fork. Was it intended to suggest to him that he should eat first, to fortify himself against the fatigues and privations that might beset him once he had escaped from prison? How was he to get out with the aid of them alone? Why was there no rope, for instance? Was the distance from his window to the ground so little that he could leap it? He doubted that, for he knew that his cell was on the second tier, or what in houses is called the first floor.

While he was turning over these thoughts swiftly in his mind, and the file and the fork in

his hands, he discovered there was something else dangling like a tail from these tools, a small roll of paper. He snapped the silk thread and unrolled the paper. He could not see (for he had no light), but he could feel that there were two half-sheets of note size. The outer one felt of the usual texture of letter-paper—it had probably something written on it—and the inner one felt—yes, most plainly—like a bank-note. He had not himself considered the necessity of money, if he should get clear away, but someone had considered it for him. He thought, naturally, of Captain Cathcart, and he was grateful.

But he must bestir himself to act. He put both papers in his pocket and fingered the file. He could not guess what was the purpose of the fork, but the file was clearly intended for cutting the bars of his window. He still kept his perch upon his stool, and he reached forth to examine the bars with his fingers, and with more attention than he had yet given them. There were four, all perpendicular. They were of tolerable thickness, but the prison was old, and the bars also were old, so their base where they were soldered into the stone was eaten away very much by lingering wet in times of rain. Will Lomas at once determined that at the base, therefore, he would begin his filing.

Yet no sooner had he brought the file to bear than he paused in fear of discovery. The instrument ground and grated and bit the rusty

iron so heartily that he conceived the noise must be heard both out in the street and also in the prison beyond the confines of his cell. He ought, of course, to have a little oil. But if he waited for heaven, or a friend, to send a little oil, he would never cut the bars—never get out. Yet, in default of oil, a touch of spittle might be an advantage; and so he rubbed on again with both hands to the file. He did not dare to think of what was to come after—for no guessing could enlighten him—but he bent all his attention to the biting of the file into the rusty metal.

At last the bar gave; its connection with the stone below was severed. And he considered how it was to be removed from the stone above. He was troubled for an instant by his inability to reach the upper socket. But when in his impatience he shook it and found it yield he exclaimed to himself 'Hooray!' He had forgotten that it was impossible to pour liquid—lead or anything else—upward, and therefore that the upper socket was unsoldered. Some strong shakes and wrenches this way and that and he had the bar out.

The opening thus made seemed to him sufficient to pass through. Grasping the bars on either side he hauled himself up. But he had underestimated his chest measurement, and down he had to slip again to his stool and renew his attack with the file. At length he had the second bar out, and an instant thereafter,



with file and fork in his pocket, he had mounted into the opening and was able to take note of his position.

Below him was a gulf of blackness; beyond him, with the width as of a tolerably wide road between, was a high wall, on the other side of which was apparently the open town and freedom; he judged so much from the reflection of light that hovered in the air. He now saw that a rope would have been of little or no avail to bridge that chasm. He wondered that he should seem so high, and that the gulf of darkness encircling the prison should seem so deep until he reminded himself that the prison stood upon an eminence, and that the ground must slope down from it to the outer wall. If he took the desperate chance and dropped from his window, how much nearer freedom would he be with the high wall to surmount—besides that he might break his neck or a limb on touching the ground, which he could not see?

He was in a great fix. Had he not better try back—through his cell? If he could pick the lock! Ah, that must be what the fork was for, as an alternative to the file; for he had heard that a fork made a good pick-lock, if the lock was not too good. Yet, before he turned back and essayed another way—he did not like turning back; in all his days he had never liked turning back—he looked about him from his airy perch in the window-hole; looked

this way and that, and up above. The light flung up from the street over the wall showed dimly a pipe running beneath his window; he could reach down to it with his hand; and his touch told him it was of lead and some two or three inches in diameter. To the right it sloped gradually downward out of sight. To the left it gradually ascended until about thirty feet off it seemed to cease beneath a small window from which a light shone. Instantly he told himself that the pipe was the waste-pipe of the Governor's bath, and the window that of his bathroom. He knew that the Governor's house must be on that side. And instantly he resolved that the only way of escape for him was through the Governor's house. Perhaps, he had just a wild hope that, since, presumably, the friend who was aider and abettor in his escape was the Governor's guest, he might find a passage through the Governor's house made easy for him.

How variously do human souls behave when caught in the clutch of circumstance, or when balancing on the knife-edge of deadly peril! How some invoke the aid of that Providence Whose guiding and overruling power they are disposed to neglect altogether in the common ways and events of life! Will Lomas was not of that temper. He was like a beast driven to bay. With the chasm of darkness before him and with no way of escape made evident save along a two-inch pipe of lead, he set his

mouth in grim determination; he uttered no word or cry, but his thought was:—'I'll do it for Jenny's sake!—for my dear's sake!—and if my feet slip, then my blood and her sorrow be on the heads of the fools and criminals who have forced me to this!'

He put off his shoes—for it would have been madness to try to keep a foothold with them on—and he dropped them into his cell. Then with file and fork between his teeth (he had thought of a new use for both), while he clutched with his hands the iron bars, he slipped out over the window-sill. He established his toes on the pipe, and gradually bore all his weight on it. It did not give. Then, holding by a bar with his left hand, with his right he took the file from his mouth. With its sharpish end he stabbed, stabbed into the old mortar between the bricks. But the prison had been built in a day when mortar was not half mud, and it was not easy to pierce it to any effect. The file must be securely stuck, for at his next step he must abandon the window-bar, and let his life depend on his hold of the wall. Feeling with his fingers he found a hole in a brick into which he could put the end of his little finger. In that he planted the file.

'For Jenny's sake!' he cried again, within his heart.

Keeping as flat to the wall as he could, while holding by the file with his right hand, he

carefully transferred to it also his left. It was more the thought than the fact that his life now hung upon the file that shook him with horror. It was a second or two before he could again stir a finger. The Lord save us from the experience of such seconds! They reveal all a man's self to himself—and they take years from his life!

Slowly he moved his right hand from the file, and with it took the fork from his mouth. He must stick the fork into the mortar, or into the brick, in order to take his next step forward. But he could not stab at the wall with the fork without giving a vibration to his whole body. And the hold of the file was crumbling! Yet haste was of no avail. With as steady and strong a nerve as he could command he must fix the fork, and transfer the dependence of his life to it. The fork at length seemed secure in the mortar, and anxiety was moved from the file, and the file was taken from its slackened hold.

But why should we harrow our hearts with the horror of that situation? Slowly, but as by a series of miracles, that passage of thirty feet was accomplished, and he arrived at the lighted window. His head was considerably above the sill, so he peeped from the corner. A small jet of gas burned; there was no one in the bathroom, and the door was shut. The window was unlatched, and with one hand on the sill it was easy to push up the sash with the

other, and quite easy thereafter to scramble in.

He took the immediate precaution to bolt the door, and he sat down to rest for a minute and to steady his nerves. It was well he had fastened the door, for while he sat someone came, turned the handle, pushed, and pushed again, and then withdrew with a mutter. It was, further, lucky that the person was a man; for he could by placing his ear against the door hear the sound of his footsteps. Evidently they descended; so, as soon as seemed prudent, he opened the door, listened, heard steps and voices below, and without hesitation he turned upward: he might hide till later, or he might find an egress by the roof and thence somehow into the street, for he did not forget that the Governor's house looked directly upon the street. On the first landing he came plump upon a little boy and a little girl, from six to eight years old, dressed in their night array. Plainly they had come from their nursery, for a door was open near them, and in the faint light from it the children stood. Lomas was in no mood to be daunted or turned back by children—he must quiet them either by craft or by force. Craft proved sufficient.

'Oh! A man!' cried the girl, the younger of the two. She was not afraid. She clapped her hands, although she looked doubtfully upon the man's pale face and trembling hands.

'Oh,' said the boy, with superior knowledge,

'it's Nursey's sweetheart, I do believe! Aren't you the policeman, with your 'at cocked back and your 'air all curly? That's what Nursey calls you!'

'Yes,' said Lomas, not knowing what to say; 'that's me.'

'But where's your 'at?' demanded the boy.

'I've left it downstairs,' said Lomas. 'It's not good manners to wear your hat in the house.'

'And isn't it good manners to wear your shoes in the house?' said the boy, looking at the man's feet.

'Hush!' said Lomas. 'That's all right. I pulled my boots off so that Nursey shouldn't hear me. She's at her supper; but she'll be up in a minute. So you'd better nip into bed. That's what I came to say.'

'Did Nursey send you?' asked the little girl.

'Not she!' said Lomas. 'Here she comes!' he whispered, for there plainly rose the voices of persons ascending. 'In with you!'

They scudded in. He drew the door to and shot upstairs. The door of a billiard-room stood open. There was no one within. He entered and listened. The voices were still ascending—men's voices; the men were probably coming to the billiard-room. Looking around and up he discovered he was in better case than he had expected. The room was plainly next the roof, and the centre of its ceiling was glass, part of which was a hinge-window half-open. It

was the work of a second or two to hoist himself through the window. He had barely done so when he heard voices in the room.

'How many will you give me?' said one voice.

It was the voice of the Governor, and he slipped away over the roof. A kind of fury of escape had now seized him. He could brook no delay—no delay! He looked over into the street; that way was impossible: the height was too great and the place too public. But overhead passed the telephone wires, slanting away across the quiet side-street. They were fastened against one of the chimneys of the house, and he could easily climb there to lay hold of them. At once his mind was made up. He had practised athletics with his regiment. He would risk the passage of the chasm by means of the telephone wires and descend into the town by the tall post which he descried beyond.

He scrambled to the chimney. He laid hold of two or three wires with his hands, and swung up his feet to lay hold likewise. But the weight of his body on his hands made the wires cut painfully, so he caught his arms over several, and his legs likewise; and thus, head first and back downward, he warped himself out over the abyss. The wires strained and hummed and sank alarmingly low. If they snapped he would fall into the street and break his back. But he held resolutely on, slowly and painfully,

arm over arm. He was well over the half-dark street when the shrill voice of a boy shot up from below.

'I say, Jake, look there! Up there! What is it? Crikey! It's a man! A chap out of the jail, I bet! Here's a lark!'

Will Lomas urged himself painfully forward, and the wires bent and strained and hummed. He did not, he could not, look down; but he heard the clatter and scuffle of feet below, and the subdued hum of excited voices.

He was discovered, but would he be betrayed?

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## CHAPTER XI

### 'THE BUTCHER KING'

AN English crowd is commonly of a generous temper, right or wrong. It commonly takes the weaker side, or what seems the weaker side, right or wrong. In this case it behaved as usual. It made no demonstration nor outcry, but gazed up breathlessly, with its extraordinary instinct of sport, as at a tight-rope performance. And, meanwhile, Lomas, after giving one fearful glance down, continued steadily warping himself across. His progress became more and more painful—for the thin wires were cutting into his



arms and his legs ; but he was half-unconscious with fatigue, and half-drunk with excitement.

At last, when he was close upon the first tall post, an alarm rang out. Someone in the crowd — probably a new and conscientious arrival — cried out, 'Stop thief! It must be an escaped prisoner! A convict! Perhaps a murderer!'

'What's he hollering about?' cried some others. 'Hit him over the head!'

But the note of alarm had been sounded, and the alarm spread.

Lomas, however, had reached the post. Then he thanked Heaven he had spared his feet and hands on the wires ; for he could hasten down the bracket-steps of the post without pain. When he had descended to the level of the house-tops (the houses were not high in that part of the town) he was unseen by the crowd ; and he had the lucky thought, not to descend to the ground, but to essay a leap of four or five feet on to the parapet of a house. He accomplished the leap unobserved—so far as he could tell. He passed crouching along the gutters of the roofs towards the main street of the town, while he could hear those who had taken up the alarm fussing, and squabbling, and bustling and hustling in the backyards around the base of the post which he ought to have descended completely. At the corner the series of houses was unbroken ; it was somewhat of the shape of a capital 'L.' So he passed on, and on, till he came to another street, and could pass no further.

The fury of haste was still on him. He could not think of delay, however much his chances might perhaps be improved thereby. So, spying a trapdoor on that last roof, he scrambled to it, found that it opened, and without hesitation he descended into the house—descended from the top-floor to the next, where there was a half-open door, whence light and sounds of talking proceeded. It mattered little whether or not Lomas would have cared at that pass to try to hide; for there he suddenly and unexpectedly stood revealed to a man who chanced to come towards the door. The man was of a fair height, but so broad and fat that he looked like a huge bladder of lard; a bladder dressed in the long blue smock of a butcher. Will Lomas recognised him on the instant: he was a well-known character in the town—Jim Joyce, who called himself 'The Butcher King.' He had introduced cheap meat to Wrottesley, and so had excited the ire of the 'old-established' and respectable butchers who had coats-of-arms over their shops and piles of account-books within, and he was reputed to give whole joints away to poor folk late on Saturday nights for next to nothing.

'Hullo, my fine feller!' cried this formidable person at sight of Will. 'Is it burglary? I'm your man.' And he turned with great alacrity, in spite of his bulk, and seized from the table the carving knife.

'Don't be a fool, Mr Joyce!' said Will,

stepping into the room and closing the door. 'I came here on purpose. I'm in a fix. But I'm not a burglar. I'll tell you in a second. But, for God's sake, give me something to drink first, or I shall drop.'

'Old girl, a drop o' drink,' said the Butcher King, curtly, to his wife, a comely person of a gipsy complexion who had shown herself by then. She turned and took up the beer-jug. 'No, my girl,' said her husband, in rebuke. 'That for a cove wot's fainting? Tiddley—a drop of tiddley! Which shall it be?' he asked, turning again to Lomas. 'Brown silk or white satin?' Will shook his head in mystification. 'Lor', what an innocent feller! I mean, will you have brandy or gin?'

'Brandy, please,' answered Will. And the Butcher Queen took a tumbler, went to a cupboard, and poured him out a generous peg.

'That's the sort,' said Joyce, watching him gulp it down, unqualified. 'That'll put your fur in order. We keeps it only for medicinal purposes,' said he, solemnly; 'faintness, depression, pain in the stummick, collywobbles, etceterer. There you are: you pays your money and you takes your choice. Now, young man,' he continued severely, 'you've bucked up: what're you doing here? Get it off your chest quick, 'cos my shop and my sheep and my oxen and all that is mine is a-waiting for me downstairs.'

'Mr Joyce,' said Will, 'my name's Lomas.'

'Lomas? Lomas?' said the Butcher King in rapid exclamation.

'I've just escaped from the gaol. Now you remember who I am!'

'Oh, Lor'!' cried the Butcher, looking at his wife, and then back at Lomas. 'And you don't want to stand your trial, then? You'll excuse me—I don't like to appear—mind you, to appear to 'it a man when he's down—but that looks bad, young man.'

'I can't help it! If I had stayed in there any longer I'd have gone mad or killed myself!'

'No, you wouldn't,' said the Butcher. 'You think you would; but you wouldn't, you know.'

'You don't understand,' said Will. 'It's not myself I've been worried about, it's my wife—my dear little wife!'

'I knows her! You knows her, Emmar! She deals with me: as nice a little lady as ever I see, that I will say!'

'Thank you!' said Lomas.

'But excuse me!—how's your running away going to help her?'

Will paused an instant. 'I am innocent,' said he. 'And what is the use of waiting for a trial that would be sure to go against me?'

'On your davy—your sacred davy,' said the Butcher King, looking straight at Lomas, 'you ain't the cove what done it?'

'If I were to die this moment, Mr Joyce,' said Will, 'I would still say I'm innocent.'

'When a man can speak like that,' said Mr

Joyce, 'and, mind you, look like that, I believe him! I believe you! And now I'm your man.' And he held out his hand to Will. 'Hallo!' he suddenly called.

A lad, also in a butcher's smock, had come clattering upstairs, and burst into the room.

'Father!' he cried, before he was well in. 'Father! There's a man got out of the gaol, and they're arter him! Crums!' he exclaimed, staring at Will.

'You young wagabone!' cried the Butcher King to his offspring. 'What do you mean by leaving the shop? Didn't I leave you there while I had a bit o' supper? Didn't I?'

'Yes, father.'

'Well now, young 'un,' said the father, 'I'll be up with you! You just off wi' that there dicky, and away to your 'ush-a-bye, and on with your nighty. You can leave your dicky here.'

The youth was evidently well under control, for he obeyed at once. He stripped off his smock and departed.

'I 'ad to be sharp with him, d'ye see?' said the Butcher King, with a wink to Lomas. 'Couldn't 'ave him about now, could we? Well,' he continued, leaning his arms on the table, 'they're arter you, it seems! How can we be upsides with 'em? Where can we stick you? Eh?' And he furiously rumbled his hair, as if to provoke the action of the brain beneath.

'Can't the gentleman,' said the Butcher Queen, who had held her tongue until then, 'put on Jim's smock and go down into the shop with you? Who'd ever think of finding him there?'

The Butcher King slapped the table with vigour and assurance.

'Right you are, Emmar! The very identical thing! They'd tumble over him in the shop without ever thinking it was him! D'ye twig?'

'I'll risk it, at anyrate,' said Will. 'I can't think of anything better.'

So he donned the smock of the butcher's son.

'Tightish,' said the Butcher King. 'But you'll do. Slip your feet into them there shoes and come along. Friday night's almost as busy a night with me as Saturday.'

Conceive the feelings of doubt, mingled with bracing resolve, that rose and fell and thrilled and quivered in Will Lomas's breast as he descended the stairs!

'You can stay inside the shop,' whispered Mr Joyce, 'and pretend to be busy with things. Can you chop and saw?'

'I think I can,' answered Will. 'I've done it in my time in the regiment.'

'Ah, you mean with a sword.'

'No, with saw and chopper—serving out rations.'

'Oh, you'll do,' said the Butcher King. 'I've a young man out in front; but I'll make it right with him.'

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The evening's business was just beginning for Jim Joyce, and for those who chose to be beforehand with their Saturday's and Sunday's marketing. Pulling himself well in with the belt from which his sharpening steel dangled, he blew a loud blast upon his nose and marched out to the scene of his conquests.

'Now then, ladies,' he cried in a loud and commanding voice, 'Buy! Buy! Buy! Buy!' He waddled forth to his assistant and murmured a word or two in his ear. Then he resumed his cry, 'Buy! Buy!' and, posing as in admiration before a joint he had set twirling, he exclaimed, 'There's a lovely bit o' meat! Look at it! Look at it! As tender as a chicken, and as lovely as a flower! Who'll buy?' and so he continued.

His customers stood and surveyed the display of joints and pieces anxiously and critically. They were not carried away by his eloquence, nor by his humour, for they were quite used to them. They were amused by them, but unpersuaded. If they needed anything they chattered for it, and finally bought; if they did not, they merely looked and listened and passed on. So it may appear, at first blush, that the Butcher King might just as well have conducted his business in quiet and decorum, like the more dull and silent practitioners of his trade; but he was wise in his generation, and knew the blessed uses of self-advertisement. If he had not made a noise he would probably

have had no customers at all.' He roared, and joked, and jibed himself into notoriety, and had made himself a success. He had half-a-dozen shops scattered over the district; he had the largest 'turn-over' of any of his acquaintance, and no poor man or woman of the country-side would have thought of buying meat from anyone but the Butcher King.

He became aware that the passing throng who stopped to look and listen was less attentive than usual to his japes. All seemed pre-occupied with some other interest, and they would turn sharply on the slightest fresh noise and look forth into the street. Anon he observed on the other side, moving slowly along, a row of people who appeared to be star-gazing.

'What's up?' asked the Butcher King, looking around.

'A prisoner broke out of the gaol,' said a woman; 'and they're arter him—pore feller!'

'Ah, that's it, is it?' said he.

Presently a voice seemed to come from the heavens: 'Mr Joyce! Mr Joyce!'

Mr Joyce looked up, and stepped out into the street to look the better. He saw a policeman's head and helmet peering over the parapet of his house. 'Hallo! what's the row?' he demanded.

'Your trap-door is unfastened, Mr Joyce,' said the policeman.

'Oh, ah!' said Mr Joyce. 'Somebody was out there this afternoon.'



'We think,' said the policeman, 'our man may have gone in that way and be hiding.'

'Right you are!' answered the Butcher King in royal fashion. 'Ave a look. In the cupboards! Under the beds! Everywhere! I'll tell the missus.'

He waddled into the shop, glanced an instant at his assistant who stood there, said, in passing, 'You might put them there sausages up into pound lots, Will,' and went on to call upstairs to his wife, in a loud voice which could be heard in the street, politely requesting 'Emmar dear' to give the policeman every attention and assistance in looking for the man they wanted to find. And the assistant in the shop busily began weighing the sausages into pound lots.

'Buy! Buy! Buy! Buy!' cried the Butcher King, returning to the pavement. But he was saying to himself, 'I hope to goodness Emmar 'll think to tell that Jim to 'old his tongue!'

The crowd before the shop had now much increased, more impelled by the instinct of sport than by the desire of meat. And the words, 'Pore feller,' sounded throughout the front ranks, mingled with such phrases as 'Arf a shoulder,' 'Pound o' blade-bone,' and so forth. By-and-by two policemen descended the stairs, and appeared in the shop.

'Well,' cried Mr Joyce from his place outside the door, 'how goes it?'

He would not go in to them; he wished to draw them forth. And they came, giving

scarcely a glance at the assistant in blue smock, who was making up sausages with his back towards them. They had discovered nothing—that was their tale—and presently they went away; and very quickly the crowd outside of curiosity-mongers and meat-buyers melted to almost nothing.

At that critical moment Jenny Lomas appeared. There was no mistaking her trim and lady-like figure. She seemed sadder far, and far, far more worried than when she had been in the prison that day; and her eye roved anxiously over the Butcher King's display in search of something tempting for her dear Will's appetite on the morrow. She was evidently quite unaware of the excitement that was pervading the town.

'Mrs Lomas,' said the Butcher King in as low and tender a tone as he could accomplish.

She started, stared, wondered, and flushed; for it had never occurred to her that the butcher knew who she was.

'Step in a moment,' said Mr Joyce. 'Don't be frightened, my dear, and don't 'oller out!' She gazed at him in amazement. 'Are them sausages done?' demanded he in a louder, but still not a loud voice. The assistant in the smock turned.

'Oh!' gasped Jenny. 'Will! Here! Oh!'

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## CHAPTER XII

## IN THE MIDST OF ALARMS

'TAKE her upstairs,' said Mr Joyce to Will. 'That'll be all right. I'll be shutting up in a jiffy.'

So Will left the shop, accompanied by Jenny, and ascended the stairs. They encountered the Butcher Queen at the top. Will was suffused with the most grateful and friendly feeling towards her.

'This, Mrs Joyce, is my wife,' said he. He said that proudly, and as if Mrs Joyce should be proud of the introduction.

'You poor dear!' said the motherly creature, pressing Jenny's proffered hand in both hers. 'What a time for you! But don't you be downhearted! Don't you! You sit down there and talk to him a bit.'

She left them in the room where she and the King had sat at supper, first preparing for Will another stimulating drink, and Jenny, panting with mingled bewilderment, affection and joy, sat down with Will's hand in her own.

'Oh, Will!' she murmured, 'what does it mean? Have they found the person that really did it and have they set you free?'

Will sadly and grimly shook his head. 'No, my dear Jenny,' said he, 'it's not nearly so good as that.' And he related to her all that had happened since she parted from him—the strange visit of Captain Cathcart and its conse-

quences, not forgetting his dream of the appearance of Jenny herself as a liberating angel. As she listened, her heart sank lower and lower in perplexity and fear. For had not Will made his case worse by his desperate action? And how could he be shown to be innocent if he thus ran away from his trial? But she permitted no sign of her distress to escape her, save a tear or two and the pitying moan, 'My poor innocent dear!'

'But I can't stay with you yet, sweetheart,' said he, 'nor take you with me.'

'No, Will,' said she. 'I understand. What are you going to do, my dear? You can't remain here, nor anywhere in the town.'

'Oh,' said he, 'I've got something in my pocket.' And he bent his arm to get it. He drew in a hissing breath of pain.

'What is it, darling?' cried the loving Jenny in tender compassion.

'I hurt my arms on the telephone wires,' he answered simply, 'and they're sore.'

'Let me look at them, dear,' said Jenny.

She helped him to strip off the butcher's blue smock, and then his own jacket. She turned up his shirt sleeves, and the flesh was so sore that Will frowned; he felt as if the linen were sticking to the skin. But the skin was not broken. Yet the flesh was marked and swollen and scored, as if it had been scorched over a fire upon a gridiron. Then all the tender, generous love of the true little wife broke forth.

She wept over the disfigured limbs, kissing them softly and moaning, 'Oh, my love! Oh, my poor, dear love.'

'Don't, Jenny,' murmured Will, himself suffused with grateful love, even to tears—weak, womanly tears, which made him impatient with himself. 'Don't, my dear. This will never do. There's nothing the matter with them. They'll be all right!'

'I'll ask Mrs Joyce for some oil,' said she, and rose with alacrity.

She opened the door, and Mrs Joyce appeared from the next room. She proffered her request, and the Butcher Queen descended the stairs to get the oil wherewith to anoint the bruised arms. Meanwhile, Jenny returned to Will, and he drew from his pocket the folded papers, which had been tied to the silk along with the file and the fork. He spread them out on his knee. The one was, as he had supposed when he fingered it in the darkness of his cell, a bank note—a note for £5; the other was a half sheet of letter-paper, containing these words: 'Accept the enclosed from a grateful friend. You had better make your way to London. Along the north side of the Strand, from the Gaiety to the Adelphi, every evening, rain or fine, from eight to half-past, walks a smart little man, clean-shaved, with a black patch over his left eye, and in a fawn overcoat. Speak to him. He will understand, and help you to get something to do.'

That singular note had been barely read, when Mrs Joyce entered with a phial of oil in her hand and an unwonted expression of dread on her face. Jenny began to thank her for her kindness, when she put her finger on her lips.

'Hush!' she whispered. 'There's a man—a gentleman—in the shop talking to Jim! He keeps on asking questions—about you, my dear—and Jim keeps on putting him off! Trust Jim to do that! You come out and listen!'

They crept out to the stair-head. Jenny had listened but an instant when she hurried down some steps to peep. Then she exclaimed with relief and glee,—

'Oh, how lucky! It's Mr Townshend!'

'A friend of yours, ma'am?' queried the Butcher Queen. 'What d'ye say is his name?' Jenny repeated the name. 'We'll ask him up, then,' said she. 'But first I'll make sure about his name.'

She descended into the shop, while Jenny observed and listened from above. Her husband and the tall, dark stranger turned to her as she approached.

'What's the gentleman's name, Jim?' she asked of her husband.

'Eh?' said Jim. 'What does the gentleman's name matter?'

'Sometimes a name matters a good deal, Mr Joyce,' smiled the stranger. 'It matters

a good deal that you are known as Joyce, "The Butcher King."

'Ah, well, of course,' said the Butcher King, 'if you look at it like that.'

Then the stranger turned to Mrs Joyce. 'My name, madam,' said he, 'is Townshend,' and he carefully spelt it.

'You'd better come this way, then, sir,' said she, and turned to the stairs, while her husband murmured, 'Well, I'm out of it, I suppose.'

'For the present, Jim,' said his wife, over her shoulder.

Mr Townshend was received gladly by Jenny, but Will frowned, and seemed constrained at the sight of him—for no reason that one may guess, except that he was pretty sure Townshend would not approve of his escape.

'How,' he demanded, with a touch of suspicion and truculence in his tone, 'how did you know that I was here?'

'My dear lad,' said Townshend, 'I did not know that you were here—not till this moment when I set eyes on you. I had made up my mind to stay in Wrottesley over the night—to attend to one or two small matters of business, and to see you again in the morning. I heard of your escape at the hotel, and I came out. I happened to see Mrs Lomas come in here. I waited to have a word with her. When she did not come out I came in—thinking these good people might be friends of hers.'

'Friends, indeed,' exclaimed Jenny, with a warm gush of feeling, 'although I have never known them before!'

'Yes,' murmured Townshend. 'Very kind of them, I'm sure.' May I smoke?' he asked, turning to Mrs Joyce with a bow. Mechanically he had produced his pouch of tobacco, and begun rolling a cigarette, a persistent habit of his when in perplexity or in debate with himself.

'Certainly, sir,' said Mrs Joyce. 'This is Liberty 'All.'

'You are a kind of unbidden guest,' said he to Will, while at the corner of his mouth there fluttered a smile. 'You did not come in by the door, I imagine.'

'No, I did not,' answered Will, shortly.

'The police came down through this house, didn't they?' said Townshend. 'How did they miss you?'

'I was in the shop,' said Will, 'in a butcher's smock.'

'By Jove!' exclaimed Townshend. 'Very neatly done, my dear lad!'

'It wasn't my idea,' said Will, 'it was Mrs Joyce's.'

'Ladies,' said Townshend, with an eye and a smile of flattery, 'are always the neatest at that kind of thing. Perhaps,' he added, 'Mrs Joyce can suggest how you are to get out of this.'

'Oh,' cried Jenny, 'will that be difficult?'

'Well,' said Townshend, 'if I know anything of the ways of the police—and I think I do—



they'll make it as difficult as they can. They must be pretty sure you haven't left the town yet; and they'll watch all the roads out of the town and all the railway stations round about.'

'At anyrate,' said Will Lomas, gazing at the fire with his hands clasped, while Jenny watched him anxiously, 'they can't turn the dogs on to me!'

Everyone looked surprised. Why should he have said that?

'The dogs? What dogs, Will?' asked Jenny, laying her hand gently on his.

'They do set dogs on sometimes—blood-hounds,' said he; 'but they can't with me, because I haven't touched ground yet. By Jingo! If I could only get away from here without touching the ground! That would be the thing! I dreamed this afternoon that an angel led me out!' He shook his head. 'That was only a dream; there are no angels about except Jenny, and'—he turned with the polite thought—'Mrs Joyce.'

'Go along with you!' said Mrs Joyce, plainly pleased.

Townshend glanced at the empty tumbler on the table, and exchanged a look of inquiry with Jenny. Was Will quite like himself? Was the tumbler of drink affecting him? Or were his nerves so shaken that his brain was touched? Somewhat of both, perhaps.

'How did you get out?' asked Townshend. 'You haven't told me.'

For answer Will produced and showed the file and the fork; he seemed set upon being reserved and mysterious.

'And where did you get them?' asked Townshend.

'From Captain Cathcart; he came to see me.'

A low whistle of amazement and discovery came from Townshend.

'What do you do that for, Mr Townshend?' asked Will, truculently. 'Have you anything against my friend Captain Cathcart?'

'I did not know, Lomas,' said Townshend, 'that Captain Cathcart was your friend.'

'He is my friend—a real, true friend,' said Will, 'and a fine soldier. A true friend,' he repeated; 'and there's not many of 'em.'

'Oh, Will!' cried Jenny. 'You forget how good Mr Townshend has been to you.'

'No, Jenny, my dear,' said Will, 'no, I don't—I don't forget. Mr Townshend has been very good, and I am very grateful to Mr Townshend.'

'Never mind that, my dear lad,' said Townshend. 'But tell me, if you don't mind, about your friend Captain Cathcart. Have you known him before?'

Then Will told him the story of the Afghan battle, and the rescue in mid-stream.

'He says he is the man,' said Townshend, quickly. 'Are you sure? Have you any proof?'

'Sure?' exclaimed Will, who had never doubted, and was now angry that a doubt should be suggested. 'Proof? What proof do you want?'

'Well, really,' said Townshend, rolling another cigarette, 'it is of no consequence. The point only occurred to me in my general view of Captain Cathcart. But I should like to hear, if you don't mind telling me, how he managed to give you the file and the fork.'

Then Will told him the whole story of his interview with Captain Cathcart, and its sequel. 'And,' he said, 'there was that too, tied up with the file and the fork.' He held out for Townshend's inspection the bank-note and the written note. 'Read it,' said he.

'Yes,' said Townshend, 'remarkably odd.' And he seemed to ponder.

'Well, now, Mr Townshend,' said Will, 'mysteries are not in my line of country at all. I've told you all I know about Captain Cathcart. Would you mind telling me what you know against him?'

'Well, to tell you the truth, my dear lad, I know very little. I never saw him, nor knew of his existence till this afternoon, when I made a note of him going into the prison with the Governor. But I've found out since that he is a friend of Mrs Kesteven's, and I have good reason for believing he was in the park of Kesteven's house that night we know of.'

'Great Scott!' cried Will Lomas, starting to

his feet. 'You mean—? Oh, nonsense! It's impossible! I don't believe it!' But his look and his attitude showed that he was filled with suspicion. 'Well, I'll send his five pounds back!'

'I wouldn't,' said Townshend, quietly, 'not yet.'

'No,' said Will. 'I won't. But in God's name, who is a man going to trust? I'll trust nobody!—not one!' he declared, turning moodily again to the fire, and leaning his arm on the mantelshelf. Jenny, watchful and pondering, put her hand in his. He bent on her a responsive look of trustfulness and love, which seemed to say, 'Except you, my dear! except you!'

At that juncture Mrs Joyce, who had been absent from the room for a little while, returned again, with immediate danger speaking from her eye. Seeing her thus, they all three were silent in expectation.

'How it's come about I don't know!' she said in quick accents of fear. 'But Jim says the police are all round the house, back and front!'

## CHAPTER XIII

## WITH THE FROZEN DEAD

FOR an instant all seemed smitten helpless. But that was just an occasion when Townshend was to be seen at his best. He ran his fingers through his singular crest of black hair.

'Mrs Lomas,' he said quietly to Jenny, 'you and I must make the best of being found here. But Will must be put away somewhere. Where, Mrs Joyce? Ha! Have you a place of cold storage—a cellar? Butchers generally have.'

'There's the frozen cellar out at the back, under the yard, that Jim has made,' said she.

'That should do,' said he. 'We must try it.'

'It's full,' said she, 'of carcasses—frozen mutton. And everybody knows it's there. Supposing they searched it and he was found! We'd look queer, wouldn't we?'

'No; I won't run that risk!' said Will. 'I think I'd better try a cut and run out by the back.'

Jenny gripped his hand, silent but resolute, while Townshend shook his head, and ruffled his hair again, as though he would say, 'No, that won't do. Let me see.'

They were in the front room over the shop. Townshend asked Mrs Joyce if he might look what the back was like. She led him into the

other room. As they crossed the stair landing a loud rat-tat sounded below.

'Jim's just shut up,' explained Mrs Joyce, 'and they're knocking to get in.'

Townshend walked to the back window, stooped low so that his shadow might not be cast on the blind, lifted a corner of the blind and peeped out.

'Two — three policemen there,' said he. 'And there's a van — and a man loading it with—heavens!—things that look like corpses wrapped in linen! He's carrying them up from somewhere on his back!'

'Them's the carcasses of frozen mutton,' said Mrs Joyce. 'Jim or one of the men takes them out every Friday night and drive them down to Hampton for Saturday's business. He's begun early to-night.'

'Ha!' exclaimed Townshend, turning to her sharply and standing erect. 'The very thing—if we can trust your man! Can you trust him?'

'What do yew think?' said Mrs Joyce. 'With untold gold! He's my brother.'

Townshend bowed and shook her by the hand. 'That,' said he, 'is quite enough.'

'Look here!' said a disturbed voice in their ear. 'What are we jolly well going to do? And what am I jolly well going to do? The coppers have knocked once, and I'll have to go and open the door in a minute.'

'Mr Joyce,' said Townshend, stepping for-

ward and laying a long forefinger upon the Butcher King's blue breast, 'I have an idea.'

'Chuck it off, then!' said the King.

'Get Lomas down into your frozen cellar, and get him carried out into that van'—pointing his thumb towards the window—'like a carcase of dead meat.'

The Butcher King gaped a moment. Then he swelled and almost exploded with laughter. 'Oh, Jerusalem!' he exclaimed. 'What a rise! What a spree!'

'Oh, I see!' murmured Mrs Joyce. 'I'll put that right!'

'Well, look ye here, mister!' said the King, laying his fat finger on Townshend's shirt-front. 'I'll shove up the front winder first, and ask what's the bloomin' row. They'll say, of course, they want to come in; and then me and you'll go down and talk to 'em. But what about a toff being in my house—at this time o' night?'

'I was just going to say, Mr Joyce,' said Townshend, 'I'm an old acquaintance of yours—happened to be in the town—and dropped in. And about Mrs Lomas being here: she deals with you; she came to buy to-night; you saw her looking queer; you asked her in out of sympathy.'

'Right you are. And quite right too. No harm in asking her in, is there?'

They hastened back to the front room. Will and Jenny were standing together, holding hands

in a pathetic attitude of farewell. Will looked desperate, but half-melted with the grief of the moment. Jenny was resolutely quiet, although her eyes were wet with tears: she was of those women in whom grief burns and scalds, and from whom it does not pass off as a vapour.

'What am I to do?' asked Will at once. 'I can't think of anything for myself. I believe I'm a fool!'

Another rat-tat-tat sounded on the street door. While Joyce went to the window to demand of the officers below what they wanted, Townshend rapidly recited to Will the proposed course of action.

'You'll get to Hampton that way pretty easily, I think—and without touching ground,' he added, with a flutter of his particular smile. 'There you can find a ship or the train to take you to London. I shall be in London about as soon as you; and remember I'm 25 Jermyn Street.'

'Right,' said Will. He held out his hand on the impulse. 'I'm very much obliged to you. I don't think I'm a bad fellow, or an ungrateful fellow. But this has turned me upside down—and shaken up all the dregs in me, so to speak. If I haven't seemed very grateful to you, it's because I don't know why you should bother about me.'

'Not another word, my dear lad,' said Townshend. 'We haven't time; and we'll meet again soon.'



'Come along!' said Joyce, moving his great bulk from the window to the door.

Will and Jenny were close in one last embrace. Then they clasped hands.

'I'm not going to despair, Will,' said Jenny, bravely. 'I'm going to help to clear this up. Don't you despair. And good luck to you.'

Will could not speak. He turned blindly away.

'Write to me!' said Jenny. Will nodded and bit his lips to keep down the fierce, rebellious emotion that would rise.

'Through me,' said Townshend. 'That will be safest.'

The Butcher King led the way downstairs, followed by Townshend, and then by Mrs Joyce and Will. The inner entrance to the frozen cellar was by a trap-door in the passage that led to the kitchen. To Mrs Joyce was left the task of Will's disposal, and when they reached the last short flight of steps that descended into the shop she turned aside with her charge, while her husband and Townshend went on. Joyce advanced to unlock and unbolt the door, while Townshend stood in the background, filling the door that opened into the house.

'You've kept us waiting a good while, Mr Joyce,' said the Police Inspector when he stepped over the threshold, with a spice of severity and suspicion in his eye and on his tongue.

'This is Friday night, Mr Inspector,' said the Butcher, with an answering touch of injury,

'and I'm busy getting the meat out to Hampton for to-morrow. I was in the cold storeroom and didn't hear you till the missus come and said somebody's a-knocking. Well, now, Mr Inspector, wot's the row? I've 'ad your men to-night already, dodging in and out o' my trap-doors like clowns in a pantermime.'

'I've a search-warrant, Mr Joyce,' said the Inspector.

'Oh, you 'ave, 'ave yer? Well, I'd like to see that there search-warrant. I believe I've a right to, ain't I? An Englishman's 'ouse is his castle, ain't it?'

'You have a right to see the warrant,' answered the Inspector; and he produced, unfolded, and presented it.

Joyce spent as long as he could in the apparent attempt to make it out, that he might gain time. 'Blest,' said he, 'if I can make 'ead or tail of it! Mr Townshend,' he called, 'cast your optic over that; it's more in your line than mine.'

Townshend went forward, and after a ceremonious bow to the Inspector took the warrant from Joyce's hand with an indulgent smile.

'Is this Mr Townshend?' asked the Inspector, with deferential, calculating eye upon the stranger.

'Yes,' answered Joyce, while Townshend himself gave no sign of attention except a lifting of the eyelid. 'He's an old friend o'

mine down from London; 'appened to be in the town and dropped in to see me.'

'That's quite regular, Joyce,' said Townshend, handing back the warrant as if he had not heard the remarks about himself.

'I have heard, Mr Townshend,' said the Inspector, 'that you are very much interested in this young man Lomas.'

'Very much interested in the whole affair—impersonally, of course,' said Townshend, carelessly, but with remarkable resonance of tone. Then, screwing his glass firmly on his eye, he looked steadily at the Inspector, shaking his head slowly. 'As a retired officer of the detective service I venture to say it's a deeper case than most people seem to think. You haven't got to the bottom of it yet, by any means. I could suggest a point or two—if you care to look me up at the Wrottesley Arms tomorrow morning.'

'Thank ye,' said the Inspector, with less suspicion and more respect in his tone; 'if I have time I will. But I must attend to this now.'

'Right you are, Mr Inspector,' said the Butcher King, cheerfully. He turned and rolled in front, into the house, and the Inspector, leaving a policeman on guard, followed with the other three. They came upon the trap-door, gaping open above the frozen cellar. 'There you are. That's where I keeps my flock. I'm a blooming shepherd, I am. I was

busy shepherding when you first done your postman's double. Want to go down there, any on you? All right. Mind you don't let none o' my sheep out. Ho! ho! And when you goes upstairs, don't you wake the baby—that's all. Ho! ho!

The Inspector sent two of his men stumbling down the steps, while he himself and the third climbed the stairs.

'Adn't no idea you'd been a 'tec, sir,' said Joyce, lowering his husky voice when he stood alone with Townshend.

'I haven't,' said Townshend, while his odd smile fluttered under his moustache. 'That, of course, between ourselves. I have found it useful in this business to say so; that's all.'

'I'm sure!' said the Butcher King. 'But s'pose they find out you ain't?'

'Do you think, Mr Joyce,' said Townshend, 'they'll ever go to that trouble? That would imply suspicion—and do you think that, after seeing and hearing me, they'd have any suspicion?'

'Right you are: they wouldn't!' answered Joyce, after considering him an instant. 'Tec? they'd say to theirselves. Yes, 'tec of a swell sort.'

'Exactly,' said Townshend, with a careless flick of loftiness in his manner. 'Hadn't we better go down and see how the sheep are?'

'Truly!' said Joyce, and squeezed himself down through the trap-door.

They had heard nothing. Consequently they

were pretty easy about Will Lomas. Yet absolute security was impossible while he was still on the premises. It was a strange scene which opened before them, and the air when once they were in the midst of it had the chill of a frosty day of haze. And haze there was haunting the lanes of that strange hall of death. Two dim lanterns burning on the floor made a dismal and ghastly show of the rows of frozen carcasses swathed in calico, and hanging stiff from hooks in the ceiling. The dim light flung the shadows upwards in vague, radiating blots on the white roof, and increased the grisly effect of death. Among the silent, blind, ghostly shapes the two policemen were prowling around, plainly out of love with their occupation. Their uniforms were smudged as with flour—truly, with the bloom of frost which they had brushed off the carcasses in their progress.

'They're cold company!' exclaimed Townshend with a shiver.

'They are, indeed, sir,' echoed a policeman. 'Shouldn't like to spend a night here!'

But Townshend was thinking of the frozen, deadly plight of Will Lomas in the covered van and in close contact with those ghostly carcasses.

They arrived at the other end, and emerged into the open air. Two policemen were moving to and fro to keep themselves warm; and the Butcher King's assistant (the brother of the Butcher Queen) was chaining up the back-door of the van.

'Got all your flock, Joe?' said Joyce, lightly.

'Yes, Jim,' answered Joe. 'Got 'em all—every one.'

'Well, Joe,' said Joyce, 'you'd better put the 'osses in, and be off. I'll bring you a drop of tiddley to keep the cold out. It's wonderful,' said he, looking round upon Townshend and the policemen, 'how chilly you feel with them frozen chaps behind you!'

'Cold company!' said Townshend again with a shiver.

Five minutes later the back gates were opened, and the pair of horses—'goers,' as butchers' horses always are—burst away through Wrottesley with their frozen load to Hampton.

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## CHAPTER XIV

### THREE EPISODES

COLD company, indeed! When Will Lomas, hatless, but not shoeless, was ushered into the frozen cellar by the intrepid Butcher Queen he felt chilled as in the embrace of death; and it certainly gave him no reaction of warmth to think that he was going to be transported into safety as one of these stiff, white, and ghastly shapes that peopled the underground

storeroom. But he did not hesitate to go through with it. How could he? It seemed his only chance—and a good one.

When Mrs Joyce's brother Joe came down the outer steps for another carcass, she beckoned him.

'Joe,' she whispered, 'you must take this gentleman with you to Hampton like one o' them.'

Joe looked puzzled, although he was a swarthy giant who looked strong enough to carry Lomas (who was but a light horseman) all the way to Hampton on his back. Mrs Joyce rapidly explained the position, and Joe grinned cheerfully, and said, 'All right. But he'll make a big sheep.'

'We must chance it!' whispered Mrs Joyce. 'He'll be ready for your next turn but one.'

There were several half-frozen calico wrappers at hand, which had been stripped from carcasses already cut up, sold and eaten. Mrs Joyce took two of them. By her direction Will stripped to his shirt and drawers, so that he might pack as slim as possible, and might not show dark through the thin calico; and she drew over his head one of the wrappers. It was shaped something like an under-vest, but without openings for head and hands to come through. Then she gave him a stick to grasp in his fists over his head.

'Now hang on a bit to one o' them hooks!' said she.

Will, who could see vaguely through the calico, suspended himself from the hook by the stick he grasped. Mrs Joyce then with great expedition trussed his legs up, tying his heels back against his thighs, and binding both limbs together. Then she drew on another of the calico wrappers, which met and overlapped the upper one. And Lomas hung like a great frozen sheep—not exactly like the real article, but sufficiently like to pass.

'Ready?' whispered Joe, returning from his second load. Mrs Joyce nodded. 'Keep stiff,' said Joe, and hoisted his new load upon his back. 'By Gum!' he murmured at its weight, but he gave it another hitch up and marched steadily forth.

Mrs Joyce did not dare to show herself to see the body deposited in the van. But, saying to herself to quiet her fears, 'He'll be all right, he'll be all right,' she fled upstairs to look from the back window. And Joe climbed manfully and briskly up the steps into the open air and the presence of the policemen.

'That seems a pretty big 'un,' said one of the policemen, carelessly.

'An old ram, I expect,' said Joe, turning and pushing his burden from his back into the van, and thereafter climbing up to haul it further in as he had regularly done with the others.

Will Lomas lay with the cold company that filled the van till he was chilled to the marrow



and till he was well out upon the deserted country road. Then Joe slit open his upper wrappage and handed him his flask of fiery liquor to taste. Thereafter his rehabilitation as a man was easy ; for Joe had brought his discarded garments with his own wraps. So Joe drove on, and Will ran for a while to restore his circulation to a healthy glow—ran beside the horses—and mounted into the van, and then after a chilling interval descended and ran again—forward and still forward to meet the troubles that lurked ahead. If we only knew all the troubles and perils that lie before us—the heartaches and the heartbreaks, the toil and the poverty, the backaches and the falls—how very little running we should make, how very little progress at all ! But, happily, no man can tell nor prophet reveal what the future will be, and therefore it is of no account till it has passed through the fire of the present and become the past.

Thus the police were baffled again, and after exploring high and low they retired. Mr Townshend withdrew at the same time, to make plain to all who cared to consider the points that he was in no way particularly concerned in the man who had escaped from the gaol, and that he was in no collusion with that man's wife. Out in the street he bade the Inspector an elegant and friendly farewell, and hoped he would be able to call on the morrow at the Wrottesley Arms.

'Early as possible,' said he; 'for if I'm not out by twelve—you know the ways of hotels—they charge me for another day. And a retired person like myself cannot afford to spend money uselessly.'

These all gone, the lonely and grief-stricken but still brave Jenny uttered her gratitude to Mr and Mrs Joyce for their wonderful kindness to her dear Will and herself, while these two simple and ingenuous creatures, suffused with satisfaction of conscience—or at least with the consciousness (always pleasing) of having given a helping hand to the weak, and made a fool of the strong—exclaimed in smiling and polite embarrassment, 'Nonsense, my dear! Not at all!'

'I can never, never forget it!' said Jenny, with tears in her eyes and a lump in her throat. 'And I'm sure Will never can!'

'Good luck to him!' cried the Butcher, boisterously, but unnecessarily blowing his nose. 'One of these fine days the truth will come out—it must!—it's bound to!—and then we'll—we'll shake hands again with you and him together. And we'll make up a nice little tea-party!'

'God bless you, my dear!' said Mrs Joyce, and kissed Jenny with effusion. 'You're young, and you ain't used to things, to have all this trouble put upon you! But you have a brave 'cart, that I can see!'

'Like yourself, Emmar!' said the Butcher

King. 'As I always says—don't I, my dear?—your complexion may be yaller, but your 'cart's rosy!'

'Go along with you!' exclaimed Emma, administering a push.

Thus with an attempt at playfulness they sped the going of their guest, and the Butcher King insisted upon conducting her to the door of her lodging.

Arrived in her bare and lonely room, Jenny gave way to the feeling of desolation which she had kept back all the evening. Even with Will in prison, with trial and possible condemnation impending over him, she had felt less alone than now—when he had disappeared into the wide and unknown world, an escaped prisoner, sought for by hundreds of pursuing feet and hands, as in a monstrous and terrible game of blind man's buff! She thought of the extraordinary revolution in her condition which a few weeks—nay, more, which a few days—had wrought; and she wondered at herself. A month ago she was a gay, bright girl, with lingering memories of her parsonage home, with much thought of her duty to Lady Morton, but over and above all with a suffusion of romantic love for her brave and handsome soldier sweetheart. Now she was a new creature: she was altogether cut off from that past, which was now to her merely as if she had dreamed it. She was a wife—and not a wife—with the promise of conjugal bliss and

wedded duty snatched unexpectedly and cruelly from her.

But in the midst of this astonishment and bewilderment with her new desolate condition, while she lay on her bed quaking with sobs, by a sudden revulsion of feeling she turned all her thought and sympathy to her lover, her husband, wandering forth lonely, dejected, and desperate upon the bare and windy ways of life. Dear heart! How must he feel—torn from her, and from his hopes of the future, the victim of misunderstanding and injustice! Every true woman bears in her heart for the man she loves something of the tenderness and compassion of a mother, and Jenny was a true woman. She had no grievance against Will—her husband! (How she cherished the word, and kept it warm in her heart!) He had meant her no harm, and had done her none. But resentment—swelling resentment—filled her against the unknown criminal or criminals, for whose deed he was suffering, and with resentment came resolution.

She rose, saying to herself, 'I'm not going to be a silly girl! nor a weak rag of a woman!' She bathed her face in cold water, and then she sat down and wrote in a little diary which she had begun to keep on the day of her marriage. And this is what she wrote:—

'To-night, I, Jane Lomas, register and here set down a vow I make, while God and His angels look down—as they must!—in pity and

love ! I wish no harm to any man, woman, or child in the world, but better than anyone or anything on earth I love my own dear, my cruelly unfortunate husband, Will ; and, seeing that he is in no position to do himself justice, and to clear himself from the awful charge that hangs over him, I hereby promise and swear to do all that in me lies to find justice for him, to be secret and cunning and resolute to find out things, and never to relax or to rest in my secrecy or in my search, until I can put out my hand and lay it on the person or persons who committed the crime. And this I set down in writing that I may ever have my oath before me. Amen.'

Next morning Mr Townshend sat over the remains of his breakfast in the coffee-room of the Wrottesley Arms—sat smiling at a very long and lurid account of 'The Daring Escape of a Murderer from Gaol.' It was in the local weekly newspaper ; and it was set forth in what gentlemen of the Press know as 'Reporter's English.' For the true reporter always writes at the top of his voice, so to say ; and he uses as long and as many words as possible in describing any thing or any incident. For instance, when he means 'fire' he prefers to write 'the devouring element,' and when he means 'murder' he must describe it as a 'shocking tragedy,' or a 'horrible and brutal crime.' Townshend sat thus, amused with

the reporter's writing, and wondering if the Police Inspector would visit him—he hoped he would, for he believed he might make some use of him; and Mr Townshend never avoided even a doubtful acquaintance if he thought he could make him useful—he sat thus, then, when the Inspector's card was brought to him by the waiter: 'Inspector Mellish.'

'Show him in,' said Townshend.

When the Inspector appeared he received him as one comrade of a craft might greet another—with an easy manner of friendliness and confidence.

'Very glad you've found time to look in, Mr Mellish. Shall we go into the smoking-room? There'll be nobody in at this hour, and I don't like to miss my morning smoke, though for that matter I don't like to miss any of my smokes. Eh? Shall we smoke?'

'If you like, Mr Townshend,' answered the Inspector, freely. 'I'm a smoker.'

'I'm glad of that,' said Townshend, as if it were a new bond between them. Then, as he led the way, he recited, half to himself, and half aloud,—

"Sweet when the morn is grey  
Sweet when they've cleared away  
Lunch, and at close of day  
Possibly sweetest."

'A pipe it means,' said the Inspector. 'Yes. Very pretty.'

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'Pipe or cigar : tobacco, at least,' said Mr Townshend. When they had sat down he produced a cigar-case, and offered the Inspector his choice. 'I can recommend them,' said he. The Inspector took one, and Townshend himself took another ; for, though he commonly consumed cigarettes, he smoked a cigar when he was a little doubtful of his company and wished to impose himself.

'You've seen that, I suppose?' said Townshend, when the cigars were alight. He pointed to the heading in the paper which he had brought in with him—'Daring Escape of a Murderer.' That's a pretty bad case of contempt, isn't it?'

The Inspector turned on him an eye of inquiry. The question was a test. Was the Inspector quite spry and instructed and up to his business?

'The prisoner that escaped is not a proved murderer,' explained Townshend, 'and it's contempt of Court to call him by that name yet, isn't it?'

'Oh, yes,' said Mr Mellish. 'I see what you mean. Of course it is.'

Then Townshend made up his mind that the Inspector was a solemn ass, and that, therefore, he would suit his purpose. After some further talk about nothing in particular he opened out his business.

'Now, Mr Mellish,' said he, 'you're an officer of wide and varied experience.' Mr Mellish,

with an important air, allowed that he had seen and known a few things in his time. 'What,' continued Townshend, fixing his eyeglass, leaning back as if to get the Inspector well into focus, and then smiling with his knowing flutter of the lip, 'what do you think of this Kesteven case? Pretty queer and cranky, isn't it? Of course you have had no hand in it, or it would have looked very much less queer by this time.'

'I've had no hand in it. No,' said Mr Mellish, pursing his mouth, knocking the ash from his cigar, and plainly repudiating all responsibility for the way the case had gone, which, we may be sure, it had not occurred to him to think was any but the only way. 'And, between you and me, Mr Townshend,' he added, with vigour, 'the Inspector at Dingley is an ass—a common donkey, sir.'

'I'm glad,' said Townshend, 'that you confirm my own impression. Because,' he continued, leaning forward as in confidence, 'I made a small discovery which I did not think it worth while to reveal to Inspector What's-his-name. You'll see the value of it, however,' said he, with a sufficient emphasis on the you. 'Look at that.' He showed the golden-bound tooth which he took from his waistcoat pocket. 'What do you make of that?'

'A false tooth broken off a gold plate,' said Inspector Mellish, turning it over and over.

'Mr Mellish, we are of the same opinion,' said Townshend, in a tone which implied



'Where two very smart fellows like you and me turn our attention to anything we must agree.'

'Now,' he continued, 'where did I find that?'

Mr Mellish fixed his eyes on Townshend's mouth. 'Oh, no, not mine,' said Townshend. 'I have my own. See.' And he lifted his heavy moustache. 'I found it,' he continued, reaching out his forefinger and emphasising each phrase on the Inspector's sleeve, 'on the spot where they found Kesteven—found it the very next morning, trodden into the dirt!'

'You don't say so!' observed the Inspector, again looking at the tooth.

'That,' said Townshend, 'is not out of Kesteven's mouth nor out of Lomas's; out of whose, then?'

'Ah!' said Mr Mellish. 'That's it!'

'We are agreed again, Mr Mellish. You're the man to take that up, and work it out. I keep the tooth for the present, till we find the owner; I hand the business over to you. It will be worth your while. I have it on authority, which I am not at present at liberty to reveal, that a very considerable reward—a hundred pounds or so—will be offered for the discovery of the real murderer of Kesteven.'

The astonishment in the Inspector's eye was lighted up by a covetous gleam. 'You don't mean Lomas, of course?' said he.

'Agreed again,' said Townshend, with his odd smile. 'We don't mean Lomas, of course.'

They talked a little further, and then the

Inspector took his leave, in the belief that he had a kind of secret charge of the Kesteven case on a new issue. When he was gone, Townshend laughed softly to himself, while he reviewed his conversation; and a little later he bestirred himself to return to East Dingley.

He looked around the smoking-room to find a time-table to seek out a train. He found Bradshaw: for the Wrottesley Arms was an old and responsible inn that plainly could not countenance such easy and make-shift guides to trains as the A. B. C. But Townshend was at home with Bradshaw, and he turned the pages over, knowing what he was about. Suddenly he came upon something which made him pause. Between the pages devoted to the main line trains of the railway which served both Wrottesley and East Dingley he found, as if placed like a bookmark, the ordinary 'Certificate of Posting of a Registered Postal Packet.' It was folded lengthwise, and in mere careless curiosity he unfolded it, and read. It bore reference to something registered and posted to 'Cranswick, Dentist, 350 Brompton Road, London,' and it bore the date stamp of 'Wrottesley, October 1st.' That was the very day after the murder of Mr Kesteven. All his suspicions were roused like a flight of birds.

'By George!' he exclaimed to himself, putting the flimsy slip in his pocket. 'I am in luck's own way!'

## CHAPTER XV

## ONE HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD

MR TOWNSHEND'S discovery of that certificate of postal registration provoked him to thought and speculation. At the risk of losing the train that he had looked out, he sat down by the smoking-room fire and began rolling himself a cigarette with an abstracted eye upon the gently-licking flames. His view of the situation needed arrangement. He had little doubt but that he had 'spotted' again the owner of the golden tooth; and being a methodical man with all his mystery, he took out his pocket-book and pencil to set before himself the points to be deduced from his discovery.

'1. Owner of G.T.,' he wrote, 'is well-to-do.' (That was plain before; for only a well-to-do person would have a gold-fixed tooth, or a golden plate of teeth in his mouth.)

'2. That night he made his way to Wrottesley—by road or rail.' (He rose and consulted the time-table to judge if it were possible to catch a train to Wrottesley at the supposed hour. It was possible.)

'3. He came to this hotel and put up for the night. Note.—Perhaps he had been staying here.

'4. Next day, probably early, he went out to the Post Office to send to the dentist his broken tooth-plate.

'5. Did not go away at once, probably: else why send the tooth-plate instead of taking it?'

'6. Probably kept his room all day—because he could not eat well, and his mouth was unsightly.'

'7. Probably got his teeth back next day, or day after.'

He reconsidered these points, thought he could add nothing to them, and shut his pocket-book up. He congratulated himself upon having made the acquaintance of Inspector Mellish, and he stepped out in the hope of finding him at the police-station. He found the Inspector, showed and handed over to him his discovery (having first made a note of the dentist's address for his own use), and requested him to make such and such inquiries in the Wrottesley Arms at his leisure, and with all discretion.

On re-entering the hall of the hotel, he found his way obstructed by baggage—male baggage, plainly—and without scruple he looked at the name and destination. He read—'Captain Cathcart, passenger to Waterloo.'

'Going to catch the 10.50?' he asked carelessly of a hotel porter who fussed across the hall.

'Yes, sir,' said the porter.

Townshend coolly turned on his heel and passed out again. He went to the Post Office, and concocted a telegram in terms of his private code:—

'Captain Cathcart by 10.50 to Waterloo. Keep eye on. Also little man with black patch over left eye on north side of Strand every evening between eight and half-past.

'TOWNSHEND.'

That telegram he addressed plainly to the private office in London of his friend, Inspector Littlejohn. Then he returned to the hotel to get his Gladstone bag; and a very few minutes later he was on his way back to East Dingley.

When he had told Inspector Mellish that a considerable reward was about to be offered for the discovery of the actual murderer of Mr Kesteven, it was merely the utterance of a notion that had risen upon him at the moment. He felt he was now responsible for it, and must prepare to give it concrete shape. Therefore, when he was again within the homely and hospitable doors of 'The Book in Hand,' he immediately set himself to accomplish his purpose. He first drew up on a sheet of foolscap a form of 'Proclamation of Reward,' and then he lit a cigar and looked around him.

It was Saturday, and a pretty busy day in East Dingley and at the inn. Farmers of the neighbourhood and tradesmen of the village were bustling to and fro; and Townshend seized the opportunity of taking them confidentially by the button, and exhibiting his sheet of foolscap.

He imposed himself and his opinion upon everyone, from Parsons, his host, to the saddler

who had sold Will Lomas the woven steel cane, and who had always been of opinion that if the formidable weapon had been used upon Kesteven it would have borne some sign of the contact. He was so generous himself ('I'll be responsible for fifty pounds,' he said), and so eloquent and convincing that each one plunged his hand promptly in his pocket.

'Not yet,' said Townshend, putting forth a restraining finger. 'I want no more than your promise now. Your name here; that's right. For that matter, we may never need the money. The real man may never be found; or,' he added, in his loftiest and most mysterious manner, 'I may find him myself; and of course I wouldn't claim the reward. All I want to do at present is to make an impression—to make it evident that there are lots of people who don't believe Will Lomas to be the guilty man.'

All the names being set down that he thought obtainable or necessary, he buttoned his foolscap into his inner pocket and prepared to visit Mrs Kesteven. He had to inform the lady of Jenny Lomas's desire to be her companion; and he meant to prevail upon her to become a signatory of his 'Proclamation of Reward.' He was in haste (for he wished to return to London that night), and, therefore, he bargained with Parsons to be driven to Sainton Park and back.

In less than half an hour the door of Sainton House was opened by the shaky old butler.

He looked at Townshend as if he would say, 'What? You again?' But in answer to the question, Was Mrs Kesteven at home? he replied promptly, 'Yes, sir,' and to the next question if she might be seen, he answered, 'I'll inquire, sir.'

Mrs Kesteven received her visitor with no sign of surprise, but rather with an appearance of cordiality.

'How very good of you,' she said, 'to visit me again! The sight of you, and the sound of your voice, make me feel better. Don't you think,' she asked insinuatingly, 'that the presence of a stronger person than yourself always gives you strength?'

'Really, Mrs Kesteven,' said he, in his deliberate, resonant voice, 'I don't know. I have never tried.'

'Ah,' said she, archly, 'is not that—well, rather conceited? You mean, you are strong yourself—you don't believe there is anyone stronger.'

'No,' he answered, without embarrassment, flashing the light of his eyeglass upon her. 'It simply means I have not had the pleasure of meeting that person—although I have known in my time a good many interesting and charming people.' And he made a gentle, complimentary bow.

'I am afraid, Mr Townshend,' she added, shaking her head, 'you are very strong!'

'I have no doubt, Mrs Kesteven,' he re-

sponded, lightly touching her hand with his, 'that I have my weaknesses, my vulnerable place—the heel of Achilles, you know. But,' he said in a brisker tone, 'we have not sat down to make compliments. And I wish to be in town to-night.'

'You do?' said she, with a pretended touch of regret in her voice, but with a sincere touch of relief which she could not suppress; so, at least, Townshend thought. 'Well, I shall not be long after you. I must go away; I cannot endure at present the associations of this place.'

'You have heard, of course, that young Lomas,' he said, 'has escaped from gaol?'

He noted her carefully while she made reply.

'Yes. I saw it in the paper! How very clever of him!' But he could not make out that she was likely to have had any hand in his release.

'Both clever and reckless,' said he. 'But he could not endure the loss of his freedom, and he had no belief that his trial would clear him.'

'Really!' said she, with fixed attention. 'Poor fellow! And what about that poor girl, Miss Wren—Mrs Lomas, I should say? You have been in Wrottesley and seen her, Mr Townshend?'

'Of course,' said Townshend, 'he has not improved his own or her prospects by escaping. She is very grateful to you, Mrs Kesteven, for your sympathy and friendliness, and she bids me



say she would like to serve you in the same capacity as she has served Lady Morton.'

'Except that Lady Morton is bed-ridden,' said Mrs Kesteven. 'She will not find me a tyrant.'

'I am sure she will not,' said Townshend, with another bow of compliment.

'Well,' added Mrs Kesteven, 'let the dear girl come at once. This very day if she can. Perhaps you will be so good as to telegraph to her. The arrangement,' she continued, 'will suit both me and Mrs Lomas; we both need company and consolation.'

'I shall telegraph to her, certainly,' said Townshend, putting his hand in his inner pocket, as if he would make a note of the telegram to be sent. Instead, he surprised Mrs Kesteven by drawing forth a folded sheet of foolscap. 'I have here,' said he, 'something you ought to take an interest in, Mrs Kesteven.'

'A subscription list for some charity?' queried she, quickly. 'Or a memorial?'

'Well,' said he with his characteristic smile lifting his moustache, 'scarcely the one or the other. Only another manifestation of sympathy with that unfortunate young man Lomas. Many of his friends in the village and round about are convinced of his innocence. I, also, as you know, am convinced of his innocence. It has, therefore, fallen to me to prepare this—er—document, which has been signed by twenty or thirty respectable persons. We offer, you

see,' he continued, laying the paper open before her, 'a reward of a hundred pounds for such information as will lead to the discovery and conviction of the real murderer of your son. I make myself responsible for half the sum, and I think, Mrs Kesteven, you will put your hand to it also.'

'Me?' she exclaimed suddenly, as with a sense of shock. Up to that point she had listened, musing, while doubt, hesitation, perplexity went evidently to and fro in her mind. 'How can I—?' she began, and then stopped.

'How can you not?' said Townshend. 'There is no need for the money yet. It may never be needed, as you know; the real murderer may never be found. The value of this is in the fact that we all show we, at least, do not believe in Lomas's guilt. That is sure to ease the prejudice against him—especially with your name added—and may lead others to think as we do.'

'I see,' said she. But she was still unconvinced; she still held off.

'Permit me to point out, besides,' said Townshend, clearly and deliberately, 'that if you do not put your name to this it will not be regarded merely as abstention; it will be taken to be all the same as if you had really signed another statement altogether: "I firmly believe in the guilt of Lomas," and that while his wife is living with you!'

'I see! I see!' said she, with a quick look which plainly declared, 'You have caught me!' She continued rapidly, 'That would not do at all. And, as you say, with his wife in my house. Yes, I'll sign.' And she took up a pen and wrote in a bold, clear hand, 'Margaret Kesteven.'

'It will do you no harm,' said Townshend, gently, as she folded the foolscap away. 'On the contrary.' He rose, buttoning his coat. He glanced at the mantel-clock. "'Time is the warp of life!'" he quoted, with a smile. 'I'll telegraph to Mrs Lomas; and,' said he, while he held Mrs Kesteven's hand, 'if you should wish to communicate with me, either from here or when you come to town, I am—25 Jermyn Street.'

Late that night he walked upstairs to his rooms in Jermyn Street. His door was opened by the ever-faithful and ever-watchful Mortimer.

'Well, Mortimer,' said he, wiping his feet on the mat, and talking as carelessly as if he had been gone only a couple of hours, 'anything happened? Anyone called?'

'Nothing much, Markis,' said Mortimer. 'Mr Littlejohn's been here—about an hour ago, sir.'

## CHAPTER XVI

## JENNY HEARS A SECRET

IT was the middle of the afternoon when Jenny Lomas received Mr Townshend's telegram. She did not sit down and debate with herself whether it would be right and proper to do this or that, whether, for instance, she ought to descend upon Mrs Kesteven that very night, since it was Saturday; she merely stood an instant with the telegram in her hand, and resolved that she would go. There was nothing to detain her. She loathed the sight of Wrottesley now; she had very little packing to do; and she had very little money in her purse—none that she cared to spend uselessly. So she walked out at once to the Post Office to send a telegram to Mrs Kesteven, announcing her intention of taking up her duty as companion that very night.

When she entered the Post Office she was struck with surprise to find Miss Lomas, Will's aunt, there, making some strange inquiry at the counter which seemed to bewilder as much as it bothered the busy clerk.

'Oh, Miss Lomas!' exclaimed Jenny at sight of her.

Miss Lomas turned quickly. 'Oh, my dear!' she said, with a gasp of relief. 'I was just asking after your address. I thought the Post

Office knew everybody's address,' she added, flashing a glance of rebuke at the clerk.

The clerk smiled, and flashed back a look at Jenny which plainly meant that the Post Office could not keep in its head the address of every unknown person, however pretty and otherwise interesting.

'Wait a moment,' said Jenny to Miss Lomas, 'and I'll go with you.'

Miss Lomas made no inquiry about the telegram she saw Jenny write. Not that she was wanting in curiosity, but she was preoccupied and nervous and distressed.

When they were out in the street, Jenny spoke. 'Of course you know about Will?'

'I just read it in the paper this morning; and I came away here—to find you, my dear—as soon as ever I could get away. I couldn't get away at once, for—dear, dear,—my brother is in his bed with the rheumatism, and I'm hardly able to be about myself. Troubles are like clouds in the sky; there's hardly ever one by itself.'

'Have you been ill, too?' asked Jenny in sympathy.

'Oh, never mind about me,' said Will's aunt, hastily. 'I was silly to say it. But you may have been wondering that you heard nought about us. I've been thinking of you, though, my dear. And what are you going to do now he's gone? He'll not better himself, nor you either, with his going—will he? I can't make

it out myself ; I'm that mixed about it. But, oh, you poor, poor thing ! it's you I'm so sorry for ! Sad, sad was the day you ever met with him !'

'You mustn't say that !' said Jenny, with energy. 'And, please, you mustn't pity me. I can't bear it. And you don't want to see me cry in the street, do you ?' she said, with a piteous smile.

'Well, I won't,' said Miss Lomas. 'And I'll just say plump out that we'd take it kind and right in you if you'd come and stay at Holly Bush : there's neither rhyme nor reason in your staying any longer in this town—besides that you must hate the sight of it, and the folk in it.'

'I'm not going to stay here,' said Jenny. 'I'm leaving to-night. It's very kind of you to invite me to Holly Bush ; but I've engaged to go to Mrs Kesteven.'

Miss Lomas stopped dead and turned on Jenny a gaze that spoke of both amazement and fear. 'To Mrs Kesteven ?' she exclaimed. 'Never !'

'Yes, indeed,' said Jenny. 'She has asked me—'

'She's asked you !'

'Yes. And I'm going.'

'You're going !'

'As companion—as I was with Lady Morton.'

'Well, well !' exclaimed Miss Lomas, walking on. 'The things that do happen !'

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'But I'm not going,' said Jenny, 'merely because she has asked me. Mr Townshend believes, and I believe, that she knows more than she has told about the death of Mr Kesteven, and I'm going to find out—if I can—what there is to know.'

'Lord love you!' said Miss Lomas. 'You may find out more than you bargain for. There's a deal to find out in that house.'

'Do you know the house well, then, auntie?' asked Jenny.

'Oh, I know the house pretty well,' said Miss Lomas, 'and them that's lived in it.'

'I've always wondered why the Kestevens seemed to dislike Will so,' observed Jenny; 'he says they persecuted him from the first he can remember.'

'They did,' said Miss Lomas, slowly and painfully, as if plunged in a gloomy memory. 'Poor fellow! They never let him alone. Never! And now it's come to this—and God knows what'll be the end!' She sucked in a great sigh, with a catch of the throat, as if the sigh might change into a sob.

They had reached Jenny's lodgings. When they were in, Jenny said, 'I am sure you would like a drop of tea, auntie.'

'Oh, that I would, my dear!' said Miss Lomas with relief and without hesitation. 'I'm that shaken, a cup will do me good!—and you, too!' And again she uttered a long and tremulous sigh.

Jenny had a fire in her single room, and all the necessary apparatus for making tea. Jenny had thought that a kindly concession of her landlady; but she little understood lodging-house usage. With remarkable unanimity, as if there were a Trade Union of them, landladies throughout England have agreed that, while male lodgers must have their tea (and other things) made for them, female lodgers must make tea (and other things) for themselves. There is doubtless a philosophic reason at the root of the arrangement, but on a casual view it seems due to nothing else than the grudging meanness with which one woman is all too commonly ready to treat another. At anyrate, Jenny liked to make her own tea, and she made it now deftly and swiftly, so that Miss Lomas was moved to admiration and regret.

'To see you, my dear,' said she, 'makes me think how you ought to be in a house of your own!—neat and pretty like yourself! And you're here!—in a poor little lodging! And where is he? Oh, where's he, my poor, poor boy?'

Jenny stopped suddenly in her preparations. She stood quite still with her little hands clenched, and went deathly pale. 'You mustn't! oh, you mustn't! I can't dwell on these things. If I didn't stuff them away behind me—down out of sight and thought—I should go mad! I should go out and drown myself!'



'Oh, don't do that! Don't do that!' exclaimed Miss Lomas, looking white and terrified in her turn. 'It would be the death of him, too! That I know!'

'Auntie,' said Jenny with sudden energy, 'do you believe in God's justice? Do you believe that a firm, determined purpose, with God's help, can find out the truth? I do! Read what I wrote last night—after I had seen the last of my dear for the present.'

Miss Lomas read the oath which Jenny had written in her diary. When she had read, she slipped to her knees, remained still a second or two with her hands clasped, said 'Amen!' in a low voice, and rose again. After that she was very silent, and observed Jenny closely as if she had something heavy and dolorous on her mind. They drank their tea together and were refreshed, while Jenny told the story of Will's escape, of her meeting with him in the house of the Butcher King and his wife, and of their great goodness.

'Bless them!' murmured Miss Lomas.

In a little while they had agreed that they would return to East Dingley together; and again a little while and Jenny had finished the packing of her box.

'Look!' said she, with a queer, pathetic little smile, before she shut down the lid. She held up a pair of pretty little china figures. 'The first things I bought to begin furnishing our home!'

Miss Lomas glanced at her piteously, uttered another laboured sigh, and said, 'Oh, my heart is very sore! very sore and very heavy for you!'

The box was locked and addressed, ready for the carrier; and Jenny, with her hand-bag and Miss Lomas, left the lodging which she had tenanted scarcely a week, and which she hoped never to see again. Almost in silence they made the journey to East Dingley; for the train was full, and the other occupants of the carriage, recognising the two women, were observant, respectful, and dumbly sympathetic.

As they neared East Dingley, Miss Lomas sighed more and more heavily and more and more frequently, as if she were labouring under a sore and heavy burden. At the station Jenny so much doubted her companion's ability to make the two-mile journey home on foot (especially since it was now dark) that she went to the extravagance of hiring a fly from the Railway Inn. In this drive along the murky road they were still silent, although Jenny created a sense of companionship and understanding by holding Miss Lomas's hand. She also insisted on sending on the fly with her companion to Holly Bush, while she herself walked the distance from the high road to Sainton House.

'You're not well, auntie, I'm sure,' said she; 'and I can't let you walk.'

'Bless you, my dear!' said Miss Lomas,

clinging to her in an altogether unwonted fashion. 'And be careful up there—Mrs Kesteven's no lady,' she suddenly whispered. 'I tell it you as knows! So take care, for she's a queer un!'

'Don't be afraid for me,' said Jenny, cheerfully, 'and I'll try to come over to-morrow to see how you are.'

'Ah, yes!' said Miss Lomas, again with a heavy sigh. 'Do. I shall like to see you.'

And thus they parted.

Mrs Kesteven received Jenny with great cordiality. 'I saw so much of you at Lady Morton's,' said she, 'that I feel as if we were old friends.' And Jenny had a warm heart, which, in spite of all suspicion, could not fail to respond gratefully to such a reception.

'She is very kind,' she said to herself when she had gone to her own room. 'And she is certainly very handsome—very handsome, indeed, in that evening dress.'

And Jenny—the much-tried, the cheerful, the loving, and the resolute—considered herself in the glass as she undressed, and wondered how she would look in such a dress. She sighed a little at the prospect before her; but she did not weep. She had resolved to be very busy and very brave; and to keep herself up to the mark she had arranged with herself to write in her diary the doings of every day. So when her hair (it was beautiful and abundant) was neatly plaited for the night, she sat down to write.

When she began to think of the day's doings she found she had nothing much but her meeting with Will's aunt to set down, and almost to her surprise she found herself setting down this :—

'She seemed in a strange state of excitement, as if she had something on her mind she wished to get off.'

That impression had evidently sunk into her mind, although she had not been conscious of it till she thought of writing it down.

Next day she made the discovery that her impression of Miss Lomas's condition of mind had been correct—the quick, fresh impressions of youth are seldom wrong. She asked Mrs Kesteven at breakfast if she might be released from accompanying her to church. Mrs Kesteven herself was assiduous in her church attendance.

'Why not, child?' said Mrs Kesteven, kindly. 'There is no reason why you should go to church if you don't want to go.'

'It's not that,' said Jenny. 'It's merely that when I left Miss Lomas yesterday evening she did not seem well, and I should like to go to Holly Bush to see how she is.'

So, plainly, Jenny had begun by giving Mrs Kesteven something of her confidence. Probably that was good policy (though I doubt whether Jenny had intended it as policy at all), in order to invite confidence in return.

When Jenny reached Holly Bush she applied

the knocker at the 'best' door, the door which invited the approach of formal visitors; but, receiving no answer, she went round to the kitchen door. That stood open and the kitchen was empty; the maid, Jenny surmised, either was out flirting with one of the carters or had gone to church on a similar errand. Jenny entered and passed on through the kitchen into a passage to find the parlour. It was a rambling old house, and she scarcely knew which way to turn. She was about to call aloud to make her presence known when she heard a voice near at hand—a somewhat feeble and querulous voice—the voice of Will's old father.

'You hadn't ought, Nancy, to go on like this. It bain't nat'ral. He's your own son, for sure—tho' there's nobody now knows it but me. But folk may get to know it afore all's said and done, and then what'll they think? They'll think you was an onnat'ral mother. 'Stead of sighing and moaning, go and find the lad. I'd go myself if I had my legs.'

'Oh, I can't, William!' It was Miss Lomas's voice. 'I can't! What could I say to um? I could never, never tell um! And where—where can I find um to tell?'

'Ah, where?' said the old man. 'But the thing is, you're proud, Nancy—as you always was. I'd ha' thought the Lord's Providence had broken it for you by now! And,' he went on, after a second's pause, 'there's that little

lady-wife o' his. Are you to keep her for ever in the dark?'

What did it mean? Was Miss Lomas, truly, Will's mother? Who, then, was his father? Jenny could not forbear something of a cry.

'Did you hear aught?' asked Miss Lomas of her brother.

She suddenly opened a door and stepped forth, and was face to face with Jenny.

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## CHAPTER XVII

### MISS LOMAS'S STORY

THE two women looked at each other for an instant as two strange animals might look. Then the younger held out her hands to the elder.

'Forgive me,' said she. 'I didn't mean to listen. I came to see you. I found nobody in the kitchen, and so I came through!'

'There's not a thing—not one blessed thing—to forgive!' said Miss Lomas, turning her head this way and that, as if seeking for something. 'I had ought to ha' told you before; but I couldn't make up my mind. Now it seems Providence made up its mind for me

and sent you to hear.' She paused a moment, and Jenny did not know what to say. 'Won't you come in?' continued Miss Lomas, 'and see my brother for a bit? He thinks a deal of you, and you're one of us now, he reckons.'

'It's very sweet and dear of him!' said Jenny. 'I should like to see him very much.'

Miss Lomas led her into the ancient, low-ceiled, dank-scented parlour, where on a couch was stretched the old farmer, like a wrecked tree—his legs bulkily swathed and covered with a rug.

'It's Will's wife, her own self,' said Miss Lomas.

'Won't you just call me Jenny, since I am one of yourselves?' said Jenny, aside to her.

For answer Miss Lomas took her hand and led her to the couch. The farmer's head was to the door, and he could not see her as she entered. 'Here she is, John—here's Jenny Lomas.'

'I hope, my dear,' said John Lomas, taking Jenny's hand, 'that you'll live not to be sorry for taking that name.'

'I'm not sorry yet,' said Jenny. She smiled and stooped to kiss him.

'Well, well,' said the old man, 'there's a mouth to every sack, thank God! And a cellar's only dark 'cause there ain't no light in it. If Will comes out of this shemozzle, you and him'll be all right—won't ye?'

'I'm going to get him out of it, father,' said Jenny.

'You are? Brayvo! Good luck to you!' he cried. 'I'd ought to get up to pay my respects properly; but I'm a lamer, you see. It's the rheumatism. It sticks closer than a brother to me. I've new flannen; but new flannen ain't, I don't think, what it was ten year ago. And I believe, yea and verily, I ain't what I was ten year ago neither.'

During that talk Miss Lomas stood silent and meditative, looking, with an absent eye, from the one to the other. She seemed suddenly to come to a resolution.

'Well, John,' said she, 'I'm going to take Jenny into the kitchen to have a talk whiles I get ready the dinner.'

She led Jenny away, and they sat down in the large, sunlit kitchen—which in an old farmhouse is always the best place in the whole building. It was October, but the southern aspect was warm. The door was open and you could see all the farmyard. There were heavy cart-horses enjoying their Sunday rest, and sleepily sunning themselves, knee-deep in dry and fragrant pea-haulms, and there were geese on the grass-plot, stepping softly like fat and short-legged aldermen, and murmuring and conversing together between their bites at the blades of grass. You could see, moreover, far beyond the farmyard—the fields, brown and stubbled, the woods tinged with the colours of gold and copper, and away in the October haze the bare, rolling down-land. It was a pleasant and peace-



ful scene; and with that before them the two women sat down to their talk—Miss Lomas peeling the potatoes for dinner, and Jenny insisting upon aiding her.

'You heard,' began Miss Lomas, while the potato twirled in her fingers, and the peel curled away—'you heard what John was saying to me. It's true; and I'd ought to have told you before. But there seems to have been so little time—and well, I didn't, although I kept meaning to. Well, you'll be wondering how it happened; and that's what I'm going to tell you; for I'm none so sure but it may have something to do with this that's come to Will—poor boy!' She paused. She showed an inclination to break down. But she steadied herself, and continued in the same quiet, restrained tone. 'You may not think, Miss Wren—dear!' she broke off to exclaim, 'what am I calling you?'

'Always say "Jenny," or you'll make a mistake!'

'You may not think, seeing me now an old woman, Jenny,' she resumed, 'that I was once reckoned very good-looking—very handsome.'

'I can well believe it!' said Jenny with sincere cordiality. 'And you are yet! And as for old—what nonsense!'

'I'm fifty-three,' said Miss Lomas, 'and that's old enough.'

'And Will is thirty-two,' said Jenny, half-meditatively.

'He is,' said Miss Lomas. She paused an instant, steadily peeling, and then she went on. 'When I was twenty I was lady's maid at Sainton House. And young Mr Kesteven—not him, of course, that's just dead, but his father—he was five or six and twenty, or maybe thirty. He was a wild, rackety young fellow that had been in the army—'

'His son had been in the army, too, hadn't he?' said Jenny.

'Yes,' said Miss Lomas, going on more easily; 'the Kestevens always favoured the army. He was at home, and took a deal of notice of me—silly fool that I was! I was lady's maid to his mother, and though she saw a good deal of his carryings on she said never a word. That was not right in her—now, was it?—for I was but a girl, as you may say, being only twenty, and not knowing one thing from another. And I was vain too, and fond of pretty things and nice clothes, and I just thought, "Oh, what a splendid thing to be Mrs Kesteven," as if he ever would! Often and often have I thought over it since—many and many a time—and as true as God's in heaven, I had no wrong and wicked thought in me. I was only a vain, silly girl. But I knew nothing. And that's just it. Girls don't know, and they think they'll do what they like with men; but men know, and they do what they like with girls. I didn't know, and he did, and that was all the difference.

'Well, I thought I was in love with him, and I believed he was in love with me; but I didn't know anything. I was a silly fool of a girl, and frightened, too! But never mind all that.

'The family was in London for the season, and so was I. At the end of the season, Mrs Kesteven went to Scotland, and so did I—but not with her. He had said he wanted to marry me, and I had promised to go and be married on the quiet, for fear of his father and mother. He was going to join a yachting party of some racketsy friends of his as soon as we were married, and I had promised to go with him; I thought I was in love with him, and I was passionately fond of the sea. We were married in the lodgings I took on the shore by a minister—they call clergymen ministers in Scotland—and then I went on board the yacht with him. It was a big steam yacht, and there was about a dozen young men, and everyone had a lady companion. They all thought it a great lark,' said Miss Lomas, with bitter emphasis. 'I didn't. But I was into it before I knew. I was frightened; for I doubted I wasn't really married at all—being done in a little private house, and so very quiet. But he smoothed me over, and said it was all quite right, and introduced me all round as Mrs Kesteven.' She paused, raised her head, and looked out over the landscape. 'It was only afterwards,' said she, 'that he laughed at me, and told me the marriage was

all a sham! Yes,' she murmured, 'and that was thirty-three years ago.'

'You poor thing!' said Jenny, laying her hand on Miss Lomas's. 'How you must have suffered!'

'Suffer!' said the other. She uttered a labouring sigh. 'I was in a fair 'wilderment and fever of shame. And me no more then than a silly girl, though I was fine and well grown. Ah, it's too long ago to suffer now; but I just sit sometimes and wonder at it.'

'What did you do?' Jenny ventured to question.

'After a while I came home here, and I told John's young wife—as dear and sweet a creature as ever was—and she told John. They were both as good to me as could be. She was not very well—a delicate woman always, with a weak chest—and she arranged it so that she and me went away for a holiday together to London. We were away a couple of months, and when we came back she was thought to have had a baby. We called him Will after his grandfather. Next year she was dead; her weak chest carried her off in a consumption. And that's how Will always thinks me his aunt, though I've always been a mother to him.'

'Didn't Mr Kesteven know?' asked Jenny.

'Know? He knew quite well. I had letters from him about it. I've got 'em now. He was not by nature a bad-hearted man, and he tried to be kind for a while. Even after

he got married, he was quite for a while in just letting us alone. But of a sudden he changed: what made him change God only knows, I don't nor can't guess! But it seemed then that he couldn't bear the sight of us, nor the thought of me and the boy near him. He even persecuted poor John—always quarrelling with him about sheep breaking through his fences—sheep will break through, do what ye will!—and about the dog raising game. We were fair worn to the bone with it for years.' She paused, and then she continued, 'Will would have never gone away and 'listed if it hadn't been for his persecution.'

'His own father!' exclaimed Jenny.

'His own father!—yes!' repeated Miss Lomas, after a moment's thought, as if she had to consider whether the words were rightly used. 'And,' she added bitterly, 'that own father's son by marriage—the son he owned to before the world—was just as bad! I suppose he had been told about Will being his half-brother. I'm certain sure they wanted to drive us out of the country—but we weren't to be driven. And now it's come to this! And what'll be the end, the Lord above only knows!'

'I'm not going to sit still myself, nor let Will sit still under the horrible injustice!' said Jenny, with spirit. 'With God's help and Mr Townshend's—he's a wonderfully kind and clever man, auntie (please, let me call you

"auntie" still)—well, I'm going to do my best to find out who really killed young Mr Kesteven. Mr Townshend believes, you know, that Mrs Kesteven is somehow mixed up in it. Can you think of any reason why she should want her son out of the way?'

'I can't!' said Miss Lomas. 'I ain't good at guessing. I never was. I never guessed a riddle in all my born days.'

'Of course,' continued Jenny, 'he wasn't really her son.'

'No,' said Miss Lomas. 'It was only about ten years ago old Mr Kesteven married this madame. She is not a lady at all; and scarcely respectable, from all I've heard. An actress or an artist's model, or something, before Mr Kesteven married her.'

'But you don't know what?' said Jenny.

'No, I don't know what,' persisted Miss Lomas, 'but anything except a lady.'

'I'm not very clever, perhaps,' said Jenny, thoughtfully, as they rose from the peeling of the potatoes, 'but I think I'm not a fool. Somehow I am impressed that your story, auntie, has a good deal to do with what has happened, and I am very glad you have told it to me—very glad, indeed, though it must have been painful to you to tell it, you poor dear!' And she put her arm about Will's mother.

Then the elder woman clung to the younger, and sobbed and wept upon her shoulder.

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'And you are not ashamed of me, my dear?' she said, between her sobs, 'not ashamed of me?'

'Ashamed of you?' cried the generous Jenny, soothing and petting her as if she were her sister. 'I will fight all the world for you and my dear Will! I will be secret and crafty,' she added, with hot energy, 'and malignant and cruel, if it be necessary, to get to the bottom of this! There is one thing, auntie,' she added, when they were both calmer. 'I can't understand the connection of these things all by myself. May I tell Mr Townshend? He may understand.'

'Oh!' cried Miss Lomas, 'tell somebody else? Never!'

'He's quite a stranger, auntie,' urged Jenny. 'You may never see him again, and he'll not repeat it if it is not necessary. It's like telling a doctor all about yourself. You may not know what one thing has to do with another, but he may.'

'Well, my dear,' said Miss Lomas, kissing her, 'I trust you, and you can do as you think best.'

And thus, with another embrace, they left it. A few minutes later Jenny was hastening back to Sainton House, pondering all she had heard, and wondering how the bright, vain, fascinating lady's maid had become the sad, timorous house-keeper, unrefined in her manners and quite countrified in her speech. She was young her-

self, and she did not consider the changing, deadening effect of more than thirty years' hard work, sore trial, and fear.

That evening, when locked into her own room, she sat down and wrote as clear and succinct a statement as she could make of what Miss Lomas had told her, not omitting the suspicions of Mrs Kesteven's past. That—with an urgent request for news about Will—she put in an envelope and addressed to Mr Townshend ready for posting on the morrow.

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## CHAPTER XVIII

### BLACK PATCH

MEANWHILE, how had Will Lomas fared?

We need not linger over his arrival in Hampton still hid in the meat-van, nor his sleeping for a few hours and waking refreshed, to be breakfasted, shaved, and elegantly spruced up with the aid of the big, kind-hearted brother of the Butcher Queen. We need but note that he arrived in London clothed outwardly in a new long ulster, a new billycock hat and new boots, and with a sufficient appetite for some of the fare which the vast multitude of eating-houses and restaurants—from Lockhart's to the



Savoy and the Grand—were then serving up under the name of dinner or lunch.

He marched from Waterloo Station to the Strand with a light and vigorous step. He was free again—free!—with the memory of prison and the fear of capture drowned in the swelling tide of London life. So the hopes of youth and health sprang anew. His heart expanded, and already he saw visions of himself and his adored Jenny walking along the pleasant ways of life, with all this trouble (which already seemed remote) left far behind them.

The sight of the Strand brought to mind the man with a black patch over his left eye and in a fawn overcoat, who (he had been told) walked every evening from eight to half-past between the Gaiety and the Adelphi. He looked with interest at that northern pavement now, with the half-thought that perhaps the man might have taken it into his head to walk there at that hour. In any case he was resolved not to approach him; he was determined (especially since suspicion had been cast upon the good faith of Captain Cathcart) to try to work out his own salvation. He had money—sufficient to serve him till he found some occupation in a day or two. That day, being Saturday, was no day at all for the seeker after work, so with the cheering promise to himself of what he would do on Monday he went into a little eating-house near Villiers Street. It was of the quiet, old-fashioned, English sort, which flourished before London cafés and

restaurants appeared filled with foreign waiters and small marble tables. He was served by a trim waiting-maid with a cut from the joint, two vegetables, and a piece of 'household,' and with a pint of ale from over the way, and he sat in the semi-privacy of a mahogany box, and while he ate he scanned the 'Wanted's' in the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Daily Chronicle*, and the *Morning Post*. The advertisements in the last-named paper were scarcely of his sort, but all the same he ran through them. Who knew? There might, by chance, be something offered that he could take.

But the longer he considered the advertisements in all three papers the lower and lower sagged his heart again. He saw clearly what he had so often heard: there are very few things an old soldier can turn to. He might be a commissionaire, or, being well set up and of tolerable proportions, he might wear a uniform, and adorn the doorway of a Jew tailor's, a foreign café, or an English theatre. But for any one of these situations (which he did not desire, and to which he thought himself superior) he would have to show his discharge—and how could he do that, although he still kept it in his pocket? He was a good rider; would they take him into a circus? He was a good swordsman; would they engage him in a fencing school? He doubted; for mere manhood and the old-fashioned knightly skill with arms are at a terrible discount in our modern civilisation.

Sir Lancelot of the Lake himself would in these days be accounted only fit to be a doorkeeper of the Alhambra or the Empire when done with his battles.

He left the eating-house and returned into the Strand. He walked on into Fleet Street, and on and still on into the half-deserted City, and then by the City Road to Islington, and so back by Pentonville, King's Cross, the Euston and Tottenham Court Roads to the neighbourhood of Charing Cross. By that time dark had begun to fall, both over London and over the spirit of Will Lomas.

Of all men soldiers and sailors are the most sociable. During their years of service they are never alone, day nor night. When they return, therefore, to the ordinary walks of life, and are compelled sometimes to be alone, a horror of solitude seizes them. A dislike of solitude is strong with most men at night; how much stronger is it with a soldier! Solitude becomes unbearable—deadly—like the ghastly shade of separation and death. Will Lomas began to experience that horror now. He tramped unceasingly about the busy thoroughfares, and whenever his unfamiliarity with a neighbourhood led him into a quiet street he fled from it speedily. He longed for someone to talk to; and for the sake of seeing company—as well as to quench that thirst which his extended tramp provoked—he entered more than one public-house to drink a glass of beer. At length there came

the hour when he began to see soldiers in such places of entertainment. He then bethought himself that it was not prudent to expose himself to the risk of recognition; he might meet an old comrade at any moment—there must be many about—and what then!

He heard eight o'clock strike. 'Ah!' he thought, 'the man with the black patch will be beginning his walk from the Gaiety to the Adelphi.'

He would go and look at him. It would be very amusing to note the man and be himself unnoted; for he could not suppose that the man with the black patch would know him.

He first walked slowly along the southern pavement and observed the people on the other, when passing omnibuses and cabs did not eclipse them. He was in luck's way. When he was opposite Exeter Hall the road was pretty clear; there seemed to be some function on there of the religious or philanthropic sort which crowds of our countrymen and countrywomen prefer to theatrical entertainments, and the front of the hall was better lighted than usual. There was a tolerable press of people passing from the pavement up the steps, and that stopped the progress of a gentleman with a black patch on his left eye, who was walking briskly westward. Lomas stopped and gazed across.

The gentleman stood revealed in the light. He was in evening dress—his white tie and gibbous hat were evident—and over it he wore

a fawn-coloured overcoat. He was of medium height ('I would not call him little,' said Lomas to himself, thinking of the description of him by Captain Cathcart), but otherwise he answered the description: he had the black patch, he was close-shaved, and when he walked on again it was evident that he was 'smart.' He was certainly smartly dressed, and he walked with the gait—half-drag, half-swing—of the 'smart' man.

As he detached himself from the press of people Lomas noted that two men passed the other way, one on either side of him; and then, when they had gone a yard or two, they turned and followed him.

'Hullo!' said Will to himself. 'Are they watching him?'

He was immediately interested. He slanted across to the other pavement, and at some distance followed also, curious to see what might happen. He met the man with the black patch returning. As they passed each other they were just against a well-lighted corner window, into which a man was looking. That man cast on him with the black patch a glance which plainly told of watchfulness and scrutiny. Will, when he had passed, turned his eyes over his shoulder and saw a second man, who was a step or two in the rear of the man with the black patch, stop and exchange a word with the man who was against the shop window. Then the one loitered again, while the other followed on.

'Now,' thought Will, 'what do they mean by that? If they want him, why don't they nab him? Are they afraid of him?—not sure of him?—or what?'

Again he turned and followed also. He was beginning to be anxious about the gentleman with the black patch, and to entertain quite a friendly feeling for him. To be watched and followed like that, and not to know it! He would accost the gentleman (in spite of his resolve to have nothing to say to him) and warn him. He met him returning, just by the pit entrance of the Lyceum Theatre.

'Excuse me, sir,' said he; he did not stop the gentleman, but turned and walked beside him. 'Excuse me, but—'

'Ah,' said the gentleman, interrupting him in a quick, clear, low voice, 'your name is Lomas—isn't it? I passed you a minute ago, didn't I? We can't talk here. I'm being followed, why, I don't know. Here's a hansom.' He held up his hand. The crawling hansom stopped at once by the kerb. 'Jump in.' He pushed Will in with a light hand to his elbow, and followed at once. 'Savoy!' said he to the driver through the trap in the roof.

'Theatre, sir?'

'No, idiot! Restaurant!'

The cab turned to the other side of the way, and bowled off along the Strand, and rattled down the steep way to the red, beckoning

light of the Savoy Restaurant. As they alighted, another hansom rattled down the steep causeway. The man with the black patch clapped a coin into the hand of his cabman, and entered the restaurant door, which was held open for him.

'This way,' said he to Lomas.

'All right,' said Will, wondering the while that he had thus abandoned himself to the company and guidance of the man whom he had meant to avoid. But the excitement of adventure was on him, together with his roused desire for sociability.

His companion, as they hastened along a passage, took off his hat, whipped the black patch from his eye, and stuck his hat on again. He walked in front, and therefore Will did not see why his eye should have a patch. Swiftly, but without notable haste, and unerringly, as absolutely sure of his ground, he swung forward, and Will followed, this way and that, across a great hall with somewhat low ceiling and soft lights, appetising odours of food, and innumerable little tables at which well-dressed people sat dining. These cast the most casual eye upon the two as they passed, and the swiftly moving waiters gave no heed at all.

The man of the black patch led, and still Will Lomas followed, through swinging doors, and down a flight or two of broad, soft-carpeted stairs. At a turn of a landing the

man took occasion to slip off his overcoat, and hang it over his arm with the lining outward, so that he was no longer distinguishable among gentlemen in evening dress. Will did not inquire why these quick changes were made; he believed he understood. Over a wide entrance hall they passed to wide portals.

'Cab, sir?' said a hall porter (who, Will thought bitterly, might have been—probably had been—a soldier).

Will's companion (or rather, conductor) nodded; the porter blew a whistle, and in a second or two a hansom was drawn up before the door.

'Jump in,' said he of the black patch, 'and presently we shall have a chance of a talk.'

And Will being embarked upon the adventure, neither liked to draw back nor to ask questions at that moment. When seated in the cab, the owner of the black patch again intimated his destination through the trap (of which Lomas only caught the words 'Rupert Street'); and they sped away. 'Never give your address till you are in your cab,' said Will's companion. 'I never do. There's no risk then of a fellow on the pavement overhearing it.'

Will turned to get a glimpse of the eye that was usually covered; but already the black patch was again upon it. After a swift turn this way and that Will Lomas discovered the grey, sombre old river on his left hand, with its quivering lights, its barges, and its hulking, massive, ugly



warehouses on the opposite shore ; and then he knew he was down on the Embankment. His head being a little touched with all he had drunk, he felt as if he were the captive of a swiftly-moving, gorgeous and lurid dream. It was no more than ten minutes since he had accosted this stranger in the Strand. He had scarcely exchanged a sentence with him ; and yet there they were, after breathless and bewildering flight and dodging, rolling on in a cab together, as if they were old friends who completely understood each other. It was extraordinary—incredible !

And whither were they bound ?

'You'll excuse me,' Will felt compelled to say, 'but I should like to ask—'

'Don't, my dear fellow,' said he of the black patch. 'Not yet. Let us sit down comfortably first. Have a cigar ?'

Will did not object at all to indulge in a good smoke. Moreover, he had the reluctance of a naturally kind, easy, and polite person to insist against the desire of another, who also seems easy and polite, and who is a stranger. So he resigned himself to the situation, and to the sense of enjoying excitement in company.

In a few minutes they descended from the hansom at the door of a quiet restaurant in Rupert Street, Soho. They entered. The place seemed not much more spacious than an ordinary eating or 'coffee' house, and the partitioned boxes gave it something of the same look. But somehow it had more dignity and elegance. Be-

hind a counter, with a background of dazzling, multi-coloured bottles, presided a lady opulent in charms both of person and of dress. From one of the boxes rose a stout gentleman to receive them with a bow, and to usher them to another box. He was evidently the master and host; and he filled both characters with distinction. Both host and hostess and the few guests visible in the boxes were of a dark and foreign type. Will Lomas felt that he was in such a place of entertainment as he had never entered before. If it was not so gorgeous as the dining-hall of the Savoy, which he had hastily passed through, it was at least a 'superior' place—very 'superior.'

'I'm going to have some dinner,' said the man with the black patch, while the master and host leaned smiling over them in the most friendly and encouraging manner. 'You'll have some, too, won't you?'

'Yes,' said Will, bethinking himself that he was hungry. 'I think I will.'

'And what will you drink?' asked the other, when some slices of salame sausage, and anchovies and sardines, and small pickled gherkins had been set before them to whet their appetites upon.

'Ale, I think,' answered Will.

'My dear fellow,' said the other, 'I'm sorry. But I think it would be difficult to get ale here. I don't believe ale has ever been drunk in this place. It wouldn't suit the food. Let me

advise you to try what I'm going to drink—good old Chianti wine.'

'All right,' said Will, with a blush of embarrassment. 'But I want a big drink, for I'm very thirsty.'

'You can drink Chianti by the bucketful, and it won't harm you.'

And in absolute good faith, Will Lomas, as the dinner proceeded, did drink Chianti, if not by the bucket, by the largest pot-bellied flask that the cellar could produce. When another, and still another, and another yet of these jolly fellows of flasks were called for, the landlord smiled with admiration and benevolence, for never had he seen a mightier drinker than that fair young Englishman. As for Will, he drank and still drank, because he knew nothing of the potency of the wine, and because he liked its flavour and liked its effect. The effect on him was like that of no liquor he had ever drunk before; it soothed while it elevated; it suffused him with a languorous peace at the same time as it showed him clearly all that had lately happened to him, and set before him bright, glorious dancing hopes of the future.

He and his *vis-à-vis* had little to say to each other at first. The man with the black patch told him a few things about the place—as, that it was a few years before the chosen resort of ladies and gentlemen of the Italian Opera, but that it was declining upon unprosperous days, insomuch that it might soon have to be shut up;

and Will resolved that before it closed its doors he would bring his Jenny to dine there.

But as the Chianti filled him his confidence grew. He looked steadily and thoughtfully at his opposite, and his opposite looked steadily and thoughtfully at him, and nodded and said, raising his goblet-glass of Chianti, 'I drink to you, my dear fellow.'

'And I,' said Will, 'to you.' He was aware that his utterance was soft and smooth, not thick—no, it was not thick; for he was not drunk at all; he was only enjoying the wine. 'We seem to be very friendly and—and chummy—together,' he continued. 'But I don't in the least know who you are.'

'What does that matter, my dear fellow?' said Black Patch. 'We'll come to that presently.'

'It was Captain Cathcart,' continued Will—'I think it was Captain Cathcart—mind you, I won't be certain—but I think it was him gave me a bit of paper.'

'Yes, I know, my dear fellow,' interrupted the other, tapping Will's hand in friendly fashion—oh, most friendly!—with the tips of his fingers; so friendly was the touch that Will grasped the hand. 'I expected to meet you either to-night or to-morrow night.'

'Or the night after,' said Will, with a smile, as the other withdrew his hand from Will's grip. 'Excuse me, but I must call you something. I don't know your name, but I call you in my own mind "Black Patch."' The other

frowned. Will was quick to note the frown. 'No offence,' said he. 'But I must call you something, so I'll just call you B. P. Well, here we are, B. P., set down, friendly and comfortable, to understand each other. Let us understand each other.'

'Quite so,' said Black Patch. 'Well, first of all, you've arrived up here without anyone down there—anyone at all—knowing where you've come?'

'Exactly. Not a single blessed soul knows! Not a man jack—not even my dear little wife! My God!' he broke out at the mention of her, 'what a mess I've brought her into! The dearest, loveliest, sweetest girl in the whole world! I'm not drunk now, not by a long chalk; but when I think of it I could get drunk to forget it! But I can't forget it! I can't!'

'Try!' said Black Patch. 'Have a little more.'

Black Patch filled up Will's glass from the cognac. Will had not observed the cognac bottle brought to the table; but he saw it was there, and he knew it was from it that his glass was replenished, although Black Patch might not think he knew. But Will did not care; it was all one—drink to drown care, and memory, and thought.

'Now that I'm here in London,' he said, 'I'm going to buck up; with your help, B. P. You're going to give me a tip about something to do.'

'Certainly I am.'

'And then I shall lose not a day, not an hour, not a minute! I shall work like a horse for my dear pretty Jenny! It shall be a sacred task, B. P.! And woe betide the man or woman that tries to hinder me! I can be a very nasty customer when I'm roused! I'm the victim of injustice, B. P.! That don't matter so much—with me, I mean. But my Jenny! Let them look out when I find them that have made her suffer all this. Let them look out, I say!'

'They had better!' said Black Patch. 'But have a little more; it will settle your nerves.'

'No,' said Will; 'no more.'

But again his glass was replenished with wine and cognac mixed. He saw it and knew it without giving it heed; so strangely divided may be the mind of a person passing into alcoholic unconsciousness. He drank the mixture off. He knew he continued to talk for a while longer; he knew that he was led out into the street, and that he was in a cab with Black Patch beside him; and then—he knew no more. A heavy cloak of forgetfulness had fallen over him.

What was that familiar sound that broke in upon his dreams? He dreamt he was in his cot in the great cavalry barrack-room which he had dwelt in when first he joined the service. It was early morning—again that familiar

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sound—the sound of the bugle saying, ‘Wake up! Wake up!’ He leapt up, like a man used to obey the sound—like a soldier who has often at the bugle’s call passed from sleep to battle. He sat up and rubbed his eyes and looked around him. The bugle was sounding, ‘Wake up! Wake up!’ He was in a barrack-room, for the cots extended on either side of him! What did it mean?

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## CHAPTER XIX

### BACK TO THE ARMY AGAIN

‘HULLO, chummy!’ cried a towzle-headed youth, who sat up in the cot next to Will’s, with his knees gathered to his chin under the bedclothes. ‘When did you come in? There wasn’t nobody in your bed when I dossed down last night. Crimes! Ain’t it cold just? This is Sunday morning. I thought they wouldn’t ‘ave waked yer up so bloomin’ early! —’d ‘ave let a cove enjoy a extry wink! But no! The sergeant ‘ll be round in a jiffy! “Up ye git, ye lazy buffers!” he says. Here he is at the door!’

The youth flung off the bedclothes, swung out to the edge of his cot, and sat rubbing his

cold shirt-sleeves. He looked curiously at Will, who had not answered him a word, and who still sat in bed despite his warning that the sergeant was at hand.

'Say, chummy,' he asked, 'what-did you 'list for? Blest if I know what I 'listed for!'

So that was it, Will thought. He was enlisted as a soldier again. But he could remember nothing. His head ached, his heart was sick, and his whole being was racked with a storm of amazement and despair.

'What barracks are we in?' he asked the towzle-headed youth.

'Don'tcher know?' The barracks at Trafalgar Square, be'ind the National Gallery. This is the recruitin' quarters.'

Of course, the recruits' quarters. He was back to the army again—a recruit. How, in the name of wonder, had that happened?

'Now then! Up ye get! No malingering!'

A sergeant, very much in undress—the sergeant, doubtless, of the recruits' quarters—stood near the foot of his cot. With him was a sergeant of dragoons, very trimly arrayed in tunic and etceteras. It was the sergeant of the quarters who spoke, and the other stood and smiled, and looked indulgent and jolly and knowing. How well Will knew that professionally knowing and jolly look of the recruiting sergeant—the look of a man who knew your father and all your family and liked them, and who knows you and your little



weaknesses and is prepared to forgive them—and to receive your confidence and a drink.

Will knew both kinds of sergeants from long experience, and he was not abashed by either, as were the common recruits, who bustled feverishly into their clothes, like schoolboys in the presence of the schoolmaster. Will had not yet stirred from his cot, he looked steadily at the trim, jolly and smiling sergeant, and the sergeant looked steadily and knowingly at him.

'What am I doing here, sergeant?' asked Will.

That a recruit should still linger in bed, and that the sergeants should condescend to argument with him was so extraordinary that Will became the cynosure of every recruit's eye. Who was he who thus dared the wrath of the rulers of these regions?

'Doing here?' murmured the sergeant. 'Don't you remember?' he purred insinuatingly. 'Chuck on your clothes, and come and have a cup of coffee, and I'll tell you if you don't remember. You don't want all these blooming recruities to hear, I suppose?' He turned his head, and twirled his eye to suggest the whole compass of the room.

'Right you are,' said Will.

He had enough of the old soldier left in him to know and to feel that, however he had come there, neither protest nor rebellion then would deliver him from his desperate situation. He dressed himself with practised celerity, taking

note the while that all his clothes were there, and apparently intact. Then, with his ulster over his arm, he marched away with the trim and jolly sergeant, before the envious eyes of the raw recruits, who wondered why 'that new bloke' should have such favour shown him. Perhaps he was 'a bloomin' gentleman': he looked like it.

The sergeant led Will, not to the common room with long trestle tables and forms where the recruits would sit to breakfast, but aside into a smaller room, which was probably retained for the recruiting sergeants' mess. Anon they sat down with a large cup of coffee each. Will was glad of it: he had a parched throat, over which the warm, brown, stimulating decoction flowed gratefully.

'Well—down on your luck, old chap?' said the sergeant, laying a friendly hand on his shoulder.

'Yes,' said Will, 'I am—and no mistake.'

'Don't remember coming here—don't you?'

'I don't. Was I by myself?'

'You first fell acrost me out on the pavement. You was in company with a friend o' yours—a gent in evening dress and with a patch on his eye.'

'Did I speak to you, or did he?'

'Well, I won't say, but—so far's I remember—he took the first word. "Here's an old comrade of yours, sergeant," he maybe says, or words to that effect. And then up you speaks at once.'

'Yes! What did I say?'

"I've been in the army," says you, "and, by Jingo, I've a great mind to take on again, sergeant. For," says you, "I'm mighty down on my luck," says you. "All right," says I, "I'm your man. But you can't in your own name, you know," says I.

'And you took me on?'

"Right," says you, "I know all that." And out you holds your hand.

'And I took the shilling?'

'Like a lamb. You put it in your weskit pocket. P'raps it's there now.'

Will felt in his waistcoat pockets, and produced a bran-new shilling.

'That,' said the sergeant, 'is the very identical!'

'And what did I say my name was?'

"I'm old Bob Ridley," says you.

'And what did I say was my occupation?'

'Clerk,' answered the sergeant with a smile.

'Clerk!' exclaimed Will. He knew the recruiting sergeant's way; when he cannot learn a recruit's occupation, and thinks him of somewhat unusual respectability, he sets him down as a 'clerk.'

'Here you are,' said the sergeant, producing a blue paper and spreading it upon the table, 'Robert Ridley, clerk, aged 26.'

Will laid his hand upon the blue paper when the sergeant was about to resume its possession. 'And,' he asked in a low voice, intense with feeling, 'are you going to nail me down to this?'

'Rather! Why not? You're down on your luck.'

'I am. But back to the army won't suit me at all. Let me put this paper in the fire. I'll pay you the pound you'd get for taking me on, twice over. Do, sergeant. There's a good chap.'

The sergeant's eyes dropped before Will's straight look and impassioned appeal, and he turned his head away as if to consider. Will tried to move the paper; both his hand and the sergeant's were on it.

'No, you don't!' said the sergeant.

'Let me have the paper, sergeant, and you shall have every penny I've got!'

'I'm hanged if I do! I've this here recruiting business at heart, I have; and there ain't a colonel in the service but would give me five quid out of his own pocket to get an old soldier like you instead of half-a-dozen slack-baked bits of boys!'

Will did not believe that; but of what use was argument? 'Look here, sergeant. I was drunk last night. I didn't know what I was doing, and on my oath I remember not a blessed word of all that you say passed between us!'

'You mean I'm telling you lies?' said the sergeant, flaring into sudden wrath.

'No, I don't. I mean what I say. I remember nothing. You're playing it low down on me, sergeant. I'm just married—to the nicest, dearest girl in the world!—and I've

things to do that I can't do in the army! Put yourself in my place: how would you like to be nailed down like this?'

'Can't help it, old chap!' said the sergeant. 'Must do my duty.'

'It's not your duty, sergeant,' said Will, hotly, 'by the Queen's Regulations to entrap an old soldier!'

'Entrap? Who's entrapped—eh? Who's entrapped?'

'I am. And, by Gum! I'll show you up!'

'You daren't, sonny!' said the sergeant, triumphantly resuming the blue paper. 'You daren't stand up in public and tell your real name! You've done something. I don't know what, and I don't care; it's no business of mine! But you simply daren't say a word, my sonny! And there I have you!'

'Not much, sergeant!' said Will, now letting his anger go. 'And that you'll see! I'm not sworn yet!'

'Oh,' said the sergeant, rising; and it was wonderful how truculent the jolly, smiling countenance could become! 'That's your game, is it? You'd cut your lucky—would you? But you don't come that trick with me—not with Sergeant Hoskins!'

'All right, Sergeant Hoskins!' said Will, now hot and reckless. 'I know you, and I'll mark you, Sergeant Hoskins! You don't know me, but by the living Jingo, I'll make you pay for this!—pay for it twenty times over!'

'You're welcome, sonny! Fire away!' and the dragoon sergeant strode off with clanking spurs, beckoning to Will to follow him.

For an instant Will thought he would not obey; he would stay where he was. But he perceived that as a mere recruit he had no business there, and to make a disturbance would be madness. So he followed the sergeant out.

'That,' said the sergeant, pointing to the common room where there was already a large assembly for breakfast, 'is the recruits' quarters.'

Will understood, and entered there. He sat down in a corner away from the tables, for he loathed the thought of breakfast, and his heart was heavy—overloaded with trouble. What could he do? Oh, what could he do for his deliverance.

'And Jenny! Jenny!' he cried, within himself. 'What is to become of you, now? Better, far better, if you had never known me! Better, far better, if you never saw me again!'

He had played the fool with a most reckless and egregious folly. But had he truly been such a fool as his situation would suggest? He found it hard to believe. Might he not have been betrayed into this trap by the man with the black patch? But why should he betray him? Then there arose upon him Townshend's suspicion of Captain Cathcart, and he was troubled, bewildered, and enraged. He was not fit to deal alone with so complicated a situation: he

felt that, and he resolved that in an hour or two he would go out (all the recruits had free egress and ingress) and seek Mr Townshend at 25 Jermyn Street.

He was all the more desperately resolved to do that when, chancing to put his hands in his pockets to note what money he had to aid him in a bold dash for liberty, he found he had nothing remaining but a shilling or two and some coppers! He had no gold! Had he spent it, or had it been taken from him? He could not tell, and he knew—knew his sergeants all too well to question or challenge them. He had been a fool, a double-distilled fool, he continued to declare to himself, and he must pay for his folly. But he would go to Mr Townshend and set the whole matter before him.

About eleven o'clock, when almost all the recruits were bestirring themselves to go out to take the air, Will also bestirred himself. He washed himself (the lavatory arrangements were not nice nor well-ordered) and brushed his clothes and put on his hat to walk forth. He had left the common eating-room, had turned down something of a passage and was near the door, when two hulking fellows—recruits also—thundered down upon him.

'No, you don't!' they bawled, launching themselves upon him with all their might. 'Sergeant—Sergeant Hoskins! He's a-goin' to cut his lucky.'

Will shook himself and hit out this way and that, and for a breathing-space he beat off his assailants. He gained the door, when they were at him again, hanging on his arms, and trying to grapple his neck. Sergeant Hoskins and another ran clinking down the passage, and the encounter was at an end. Will Lomas stood still.

'Trying it on, were you?' said the smiling sergeant.

'I claim the right that other recruits have, sergeant, of going out for a walk,' said Will, as calmly as he could, for his violent exercise had shortened his breath.

'I have reason to believe that, if you go out, you don't mean to come back,' said the sergeant in a formal voice.

'I protest,' said Will. 'I appeal to the sergeant-major in charge.' And yet, while he spoke, he knew that his appeal would be in vain.

'All right,' said the sergeant, 'come to the sergeant-major. It's lucky for you he ain't gone to church,' he added, and grinned.

The sergeant-major was, of course, an intimate of Sergeant Hoskins, who knew all the quirks and turns of the recruiting business, all the plausibilities and falsehoods with which it is worked, and who perhaps knew also something of the conditions of Will's enlistment. It was to be expected, then, that he would confirm the sergeant's decision, and he did.



So Will Lomas was, to all intents, a prisoner, and he knew it. Sergeant Hoskins (for some reason) thought it worth his while to be the young man's custodian himself. He was assiduous in his attention, and it must be allowed he did his utmost to engage his captive in cheerful conversation; but the captive responded with no gratitude. Once he begged to be allowed to write a letter.

'And you'd like me to post it for you, I suppose?' said the sergeant. He wagged his head. 'Now, sonny, do you really think you have remarked anything green about me? But I promise you sha'n't be kep' long waiting here. I'll see your business through to-morrow, and after that you'll be off my hands.'

Next day, therefore, Will Lomas, under the name of Robert Ridley, was passed by the doctor and sworn in by the magistrate in Westminster to serve Her Majesty Queen Victoria as a soldier. ('God save the Queen!—Kiss the book!') And he dared not open his mouth and declare that he had already, for twelve long years, performed his duty—had fought and bled—in the Queen's service, and had been formally discharged from it: in proof whereof he had a certain document in his pocket which he dared not produce.

He had been enlisted for his own branch of the army—the cavalry—but he had not yet been assigned to any regiment. That very night he was whirled away to Canterbury, and

in the depot there he was told off to a dragoon regiment that was short of men. And because there were fears and rumours of war both in India and Egypt, he was dispatched, after inspection with half-a-dozen more recruits, to be trained with the regiment, which was stationed in a northern town.

On the journey he was in a mood of the darkest despair, and his ponderings were of the gloomiest. He had made a fool of himself—or had been made a fool of. He was caught—completely caught—without chance or hope of deliverance. It might be better thus—better, at least, for Jenny, better for all who were connected with him. He would let himself be forgotten; he would be as one dead; and then Jenny—

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## CHAPTER XX

### MR TIMMIS

Thus you will understand why Jenny could get no word of Will. In answer to her first inquiry Townshend wrote that he believed Will had arrived in London on Saturday quite safely and unpursued. He had discovered at least (through a detective friend of his own) that a person answering to Will's description had

met the man with the black patch in the Strand (Mrs Lomas must remember the mention of that man in Captain Cathcart's scrap of paper), and had driven with him in a hansom to the Savoy Restaurant, but that thence all trace of him and the man had been lost. It was odd ; but he had no doubt he would run them to ground soon.

That did not abate Jenny's anxiety. The business of the day, and her insistent necessity for continuing cheerful and alert, kept her trouble subdued while she was afoot. But when she went to bed, her solitude, which was like that of a widow, her woes, her doubts, and her despairs, all invaded her like a company of furies and lacerated her heart and soul. She might fall for an hour into a heavy sleep—the sleep of exhaustion, for to be company and solace to Mrs Kesteven was no sinecure—and then she would suddenly open her eyes upon a wide, horrid field of wakefulness. She would sigh, and sob, and weep bitter tears, and cry to herself:—

'Oh, where, where is my dear? Why has he not written a line to me to reassure me?—to save me from this horrible anxiety? What can have happened to him? He surely must be ill—or dead! (oh, heavens, if he be dead!)—or he would not leave me a prey to these tortures! He was always kind and tender to me! He called me his own Jenny. He loved me, certainly—and was proud of me. And

yet—! Oh what can I do? My heart will break!

Again she would sleep from sheer fatigue—from absolute inability to weep more than she had wept—and she would rise from her bed in the morning, pale and unrefreshed. Yet, for all that, she would appear before Mrs Kesteven with an aspect of cheerfulness and activity.

After the lapse of several days she wrote again to Mr Townshend, asking if there was no news yet, and saying she would soon be in London with Mrs Kesteven.

'No news yet, I am sorry to say,' wrote Mr Townshend. 'It looks very queer. It bothers me. But since I came back to town I have had my hands so full of business that I have not been able to give much time to your husband's case. I will now. When you come to town I have some things to tell you that I cannot write to you about.'

There was thus no alleviation of her anxiety, and a week—a whole week of seven days!—had passed. What wonder is it, then, that she began to consider and observe Mrs Kesteven with growing dislike and suspicion, since she was the one person near her who could be held in some degree responsible for Will's disappearance and her own heartrending anxiety? Mrs Kesteven was kind in a way that costs little, and most plausibly affectionate and confidential, but Jenny had discovered—by such subtle means as only a woman can use, and by

such added divination as is part of a clever woman's nature—that Mrs Kesteven was also a liar—a consistent liar about small things that did not matter; and therefore she argued that Mrs Kesteven was a 'born liar,' a liar who had practised lying so long that she scarcely could distinguish between her own truth and her own falsehood. She went a daring step further, and, considering together Mrs Kesteven's absolutely untrustworthy nature and her handsome person, she concluded that Mrs Kesteven was 'capable of anything,' and that if she had not committed crimes it was only because of fear. That conclusion was not logical. But it was feminine, and it might be true—as a woman's leap to conclusions so frequently is—and certainly no adverse argument would ever shake it.

Jenny was thus established in the favour of Mrs Kesteven, and at the same time stuck fast in her own prejudice against the woman—never, even in her own mind, did Jenny admit she might be a lady—when the day came for the journey to town. It was then that there arose upon her the first glimmering light of discovery.

Jenny was ever keenly watchful and cleverly suspicious of indications. Sainton House was to be shut up for three months, and the servants were dismissed, even Mrs Kesteven's own maid; all were dismissed save the timid, weak old butler. He and Jenny alone travelled with Mrs Kesteven to town; and Jenny, sitting with the

old man in a second-class compartment of the train, while Mrs Kesteven was forward alone in a first, found herself wondering why he was of the company; what need, or what room, was there for him in a tiny flat in Kensington? She and the old man were alone in the compartment, and she set herself to talk with him.

'You're not a country-bred person, I think, Mr Timmis?' she began.

Mr Timmis seemed quite glad of the opportunity for conversation. He had been taking surreptitious sips from a pocket-flask, and his tones were bolder and mellower than they commonly were.

'No,' he answered, 'I am not, Miss—dear me, what am I saying!—I mean, of course, Mrs Lomas—tho', with all due respect, a sweet, pretty girl like you has no business to be married and yet to be trapesing about like this!'

'Do you call riding in a railway carriage trapesing, Mr Timmis?' smiled Jenny.

'With all due respect, I do,' said Mr Timmis, taking off his hat to be more at his ease, and leaning a little towards Jenny. 'You're an innocent young girl, you know: I can see it; I've been noticing you. And it is trapesing for you to be going about with me—and her. I didn't hold with coming away, up to town; but she wouldn't hear me. No.'

He seemed to subside into a worried reverie. Jenny looked at him, considered his pursed, thin lips, his meagre face, with its loose folds of

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skin, his watery eye, his grey, ragged, flowing whiskers, and his wisp of hair swept over his crown in an attempt to hide its baldness; and she wondered why he should be so concerned with his mistress's movements. She looked at him again, and thought that in his youth he might have been reckoned handsome; although he now looked like a very soft man who had been seized and squeezed and wrung, and then shaken and blown out into an ineffectual semblance of a man again.

'No,' he repeated, still in his reverie of worry, 'no good'll come of it.' Then he seemed to put his worry off. 'But, yes,' he said, 'I'm really a town-bird;' and he smiled; Jenny had never seen him smile before. 'I'm a sooty London sparrow, and I do believe I've some of the blacks in my lungs at this minute.' He coughed a little, and smiled again. 'You don't know London, I daresay?'

'Not a little bit,' said Jenny, smiling back on him; 'not at all.'

'Ah, then,' said he, with a sprightly, knowing air, 'I know my London like the palm of my hand. If you're good I'll take you out sometimes of an evening, and show you round.'

'That will be very kind of you,' said Jenny, considering him.

'Dear, dear!' he chortled. 'The times I've had there!' A cloud seemed to pass over his vision, and again with tightly-pursed lips he was in a reverie of worry.

'Ah,' he murmured, 'but it wasn't all beer and skittles.'

Jenny was not by way of having heard that phrase before, and she asked, 'What do you mean, Mr Timmis?'

'My meaning is, my dear,' said he (Jenny doubted if she ought to let him address her thus familiarly, but she thought he was but an old man, and she let it alone), 'my meaning is that even in jolly London troubles come about you, like black fogs, if you're in the drawing-room, and creep about your feet like black-beetles if you're in the kitchen.'

Jenny was curious and wondering; but there was no illumination in his words. 'As to that,' said she, 'troubles come whether you're in jolly London or out of it, I suppose.'

'Just so,' said he. 'As the Bible says somewhere, "Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward." That's true; and it's mostly through Woman.'

'Oh, Mr Timmis,' said Jenny, 'I thought you were a gallant man.'

'So I am, my dear,' said he; 'but there's women and women; as can't be unknown to you, my dear, girl though you be. But what's hardest of all on a man,' he continued with emphasis, frowning and pursing his lips, 'is when the woman is his own daughter. To an old man, mind you, that's worse than a sweetheart or a wife to a young man. What is it Shakespeare says about "a serpent's tooth"?'



That's what it is to have a daughter of the wrong sort. And that's been my trouble.

'A twelvemonth of Sundays wouldn't be long enough to tell you all I did for that girl. I gave her the best of education, and I dressed her well. She was all the family I had. She might have done very well for herself and made a splendid match with a respectable, prosperous gentleman in a large way of business; for,' he added, with a pathetic touch of pride, 'she was a fine girl. Nothing would suit her, though, but that she should go on the stage—and of all things stagey, in the ballet! Well, my dear, you mayn't know much about it, but I do assure you there's nothing high-class and artistic about the ballet. She did no good in it.

'I can't tell you all,' he quavered, 'it not being proper for ears polite and well brought up. But I had her home and took care of her, and then I got her, myself, a situation in a very high-class West-End drapery establishment. She was in the mantle department; her figure suited it. Well, how she met him I don't know, or whether she had known him before, I don't know, but one day she tells me she's married, and not coming home any more, and I'd made her life a burden to her, and so forth.'

He had to purse his mouth very tightly to restrain his emotion, but even then his lower lip and flabby chin would tremble.

'Well, well,' said he, beginning to fumble in the inner pocket of his coat, 'let that pass.

Her husband was a blackguard—a scoundrel, and his hand shook with passion and hatred—the passion and hatred of a poor creature who has not the energy to feel even resentment strongly—that could not be an honest man if he tried. One day I got a bit of a letter from her. I've kept it ever since; and you shall see it—a monument of a daughter's ingratitude.'

He produced a pocket-book, and from it took a folded slip of paper, which he showed open to Jenny. She looked at it; it was dated fifteen years before.

'Read it,' said he.

'DEAR FATHER'—Jenny read—'Charlie has had to draw a bill for £500 (five hundred pounds), and he has put your name to it. We can't meet it, and it falls due this day week. You can't have the heart, after all the hard times I've had, not to meet it for him. Thanking you in advance, I am, your loving daughter,  
PEGGY CATHCART.'

The name 'Cathcart' struck her, and the handwriting seemed oddly but elusively familiar—very like some handwriting that she knew. Was it, indeed, very like her own?

'You know what that means?' said Mr Timmis, receiving the note back from her hand. 'That means forgery. But I was her "dear father," and a fool into the bargain. I raised money on my business to pay that bill; and

that was the end of me. I had to go bankrupt.'

'Poor fellow!' murmured Jenny in quick sympathy. 'That was hard on you.'

'It was hard,' said he. 'But it wasn't the worst. No—never mind. That was the breaking of me, and you can't break a broken thing much more.'

'Oh, yes; you can,' said Jenny.

'At anyrate,' said he, 'it doesn't much matter if you do. And, well—I am what I am, and what you see. But that,' he added, putting his pocket-book away with the slip of letter, 'I shall keep to my dying day, in memory of a daughter's gratitude.'

He put on his hat and leaned back in silence, and for some time they had nothing to say to each other. When they did resume talk he continued in a worried condition—the effect of refreshment from his pocket-flask seemed to have evaporated.

'Perhaps,' said he, suddenly, after some inconsequent remarks about the weather and the look of the country, 'I shouldn't have told you that. But,' he added, laying his hand on Jenny's, 'I've taken to you—taken to you wonderful; and you won't gossip about it. Here's Clapham Junction; we're going to stop.'

The train drew up; but though London sights and bustle were new to Jenny, her thoughts were still occupied with Mr Timmis's story and his daughter's letter. It was, therefore,

at first but vaguely that she noted, on glancing sideways through the open window by which she sat, that there was a man standing by the open door of the next compartment—the first-class compartment in which Mrs Kesteven travelled. He turned his head a little in talking, and then she saw, with a bound of the heart, that the man had a black patch on his eye and wore a fawn overcoat. She trembled with excitement. Should she jump out and demand of the man where was her Will? But before she could come to any resolve the train began to move on.

‘Why don’t you jump in, and come to Waterloo?’ she heard Mrs Kesteven’s voice say, as the man closed the door.

‘I daren’t,’ said he, quietly. ‘Bye-bye.’  
And he was left on the platform.

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## CHAPTER XXI

### THE UNGRATEFUL DAUGHTER

JENNY was bewildered, alarmed, almost stupefied by that discovery at Clapham Junction. It smote her like a buffet on the breast, making her sick at heart, and promoting to acute fears what had been only dull and wandering suspicions.

Who was this man with the black patch, in whose company Will had last been seen? He

knew Mrs Kesteven—evidently was on familiar terms with her—and he had been recommended to Will by Captain Cathcart. But both Captain Cathcart and Mrs Kesteven were under Mr Townshend's suspicion. What then? Her mind spun about among her fears; she tried to make it settle on this or on that, but it would not. Her eye lighted on Mr Timmis, who was sitting erect, and buttoning his coat with thin, trembling fingers; and she wondered what was the connection with the whole troubled business of that unfortunate broken creature, who was the victim of his daughter's ingratitude.

'We'll be at Waterloo in a puff or two; and that's rhyme, though such was not my intention,' said Mr Timmis, with a forced sprightliness of manner. 'You'd better put your things together. Let me buckle them straps for you. Got your list handy?'

The 'list' was the catalogue of articles that made up Mrs Kesteven's travelling baggage. It had been written by Mrs Kesteven's own hand.

'Yes,' said Jenny, 'I have the list ready.' And she produced and unfolded it. 'Oh,' she cried, as one might who lifts a lid and discovers something unthought of or forgotten.

'Eh?' said Mr Timmis.

'Nothing,' said Jenny. 'I just felt a catch in my side.'

'Ah,' said he, seriously, 'you should see to that. You shouldn't neglect it. It may be nothing, it may be everything,' he added,

giving significance to his words with gathered brow and pursed lips.

Jenny's discovery was this : the letter which Mr Timmis had shown her was in the same bold handwriting as Mrs Kesteven's list ! For her mind to leap from that discovery to another was the operation of a lightning flash—Peggy Cathcart and Margaret Kesteven were one and the same person—the ungrateful daughter of poor Mr Timmis !

She did not dare to say a word to Timmis of either discovery. But she considered him, and her heart bled with pity for him, and resentment against her. The father who had suffered all things, sacrificed all for his daughter's sake, was, then, a poor, dejected menial in that daughter's own house ! The daughter who had preyed upon the father, and reduced him to poverty, and who now was in a position of rank and wealth, did no more than that for his comfort and sustenance—clothe him in the garb of servitude, and feed him with the bread of affliction ! O affection ! O gratitude !

Jenny's heart so burned with generous rage that she could have taken the old man in her arms to console him and make much of him. She did not think—or she did not know—how common a thing it is in the story of poor humanity for the hand of kindred to be heavier and crueller than the hand of a stranger, all the heavier and crueller because the heart that moves the hand is conscious of its own unnaturalness.

When they descended on the platform at Waterloo, so quick and hot was Jenny's indignation that she could not keep her eyes from Mrs Kesteven. She had admired Mrs Kesteven's handsome person ; now she loathed it. It was to her the coarse, vulgar figure of Peggy Timmis, the ungrateful daughter ! When Mrs Kesteven smiled on the platform inspector who was attentive to her (it was her habit to smile on every male except her father), Jenny noted her teeth as she had never noted them before. They were white and strong, but they were set apart, and looked (Jenny thought) ready to rend and devour.

'Oh, do make haste with that luggage !' said Mrs Kesteven.

'You needn't wait, ma'am,' said Mr Timmis, 'we'll bring it along.'

'Ma'am' to his own daughter ! Jenny was ashamed.

But she looked at her list and checked each package off as Mr Timmis identified it from the luggage van. Besides Mrs Kesteven's baggage—dress-trunks, bonnet-boxes, and what not—there were Jenny's own box and Mr Timmis's old portmanteau, which had something of his own appearance—squashed, half-empty, and very much the worse for wear.

Mrs Kesteven had driven off in a hansom, gallantly attended thither by the inspector. Mr Timmis and Jenny followed, each in a four-wheeler piled with luggage. Jenny did not

know their destination, for her cab-driver was merely instructed to follow the cab of Mr Timmis. Nor was she any wiser from noting the streets through which she was driven; for she was an absolute stranger to London, and all its sights passed unfamiliarly by her like a phantasmagoria. When she alighted she only observed (and that casually enough) that she was before a row of high houses in a very wide thoroughfare, and she believed she was in Kensington, because that fashionable district had been mentioned as their destination before they left the country. 'A little flat in Kensington,' and there she was, rising in a machine called a 'lift,' which she had heard of but had never seen before—rising how high she did not know.

I am particular about these things because of what happened that night.

It was fortunate that Jenny saw little of Mrs Kesteven; for she was in no mood to be cheerful or even civil with her. They arrived late in the afternoon, and very soon Mrs Kesteven had to begin dressing to go out to dinner. She was without her usual maid, so, without scruple, and with little politeness, she solicited Jenny's help. At seven o'clock Mr Timmis descended in the lift to call a cab, and then returning he conducted his mistress (and daughter) down.

'Now, Mrs Lomas,' said he when he returned the second time, 'we can be comfortable.'

He rubbed his hands and glanced at the fire-



less grate of the little dining-room where Jenny sat.

'It's not too warm—is it?' said Jenny. 'Don't you think we might have a fire?'

Mr Timmis shook his head. 'She mightn't like it. She's mean, you know—coal, wood and matches mean. But I tell you what, Mrs Lomas, the kitchen's cosy; I always like a kitchen. I'll ask Mary if she wouldn't like to go out for an hour or two. She's sure to like it; they always do. Then—if I might take the liberty—I'd invite you to keep me company there.'

Jenny promptly agreed; for she had resolved to learn more of Mrs Kesteven—if more was to be learned from Mr Timmis. The arrangement was carried out. Mary (the only servant then in the flat) was agog to go philandering for an hour or two, and in less time than it would have taken her to answer the bell twice, Mr Timmis and Jenny had the flat to themselves, and were warmly installed in the kitchen.

'Now,' said Mr Timmis, 'we should be as comfortable and merry as a Lord Mayor's banquet if we only had something filling, and elevating too. I can manage to put something to eat on the table, but as for the other—well, I am supposed to be butler; but what's the use of being butler, if there's nothing to "butle," so to speak?' He liked his own joke so much that he laughed and repeated it, lightly scratching

his whisker. 'Yes, nothing to "butle," so to speak.'

'You'd like something?' queried Jenny.

'Yes,' he answered. 'If I may say so, with all due respect, what's your tippie?'

'Oh, water, Mr Timmis.'

'Um!' said he, again scratching his whisker, 'filling, cooling, and economical—but not elevating nor sociable, Mrs Lomas.'

'Well, never mind me, Mr Timmis,' said Jenny, 'have what you like yourself.'

'But I must mind you, Mrs Lomas,' he insisted. 'You've got to keep up—like me—and we can't keep up on water nor on beer—and there's nothing else in the place.'

'Well,' said Jenny, yielding to his humour, 'what had we better do?'

'There are shops,' said he, frowning at himself, and even blushing a little, 'but they will need cash.'

Jenny then understood, and her heart went out in a fresh gush of pity for the old man. It was evident he had no money wherewith to buy—doubtless because his daughter kept him short.

'What a shame!' she exclaimed, within herself. But she said aloud merely, 'Perhaps you haven't any change: let me lend you what you need.'

'Oh, thank you,' said he. 'I haven't any change, that's the truth.'

'How much?' asked Jenny, taking out her purse.

'For myself,' said he, blushing again, 'I like a glass of port best. Will that meet your views?'

'Oh, quite,' said Jenny. And she handed over the sum he suggested for a bottle of port of passable quality.

When he returned with his purchase they sat down and supped together on such viands as could be produced from the pantry. Mr Timmis pressed Jenny to take her share of the port, but she steadfastly refused; while Timmis, with ceaseless apologies for his greed, drank glass after glass, declaring that it did him good.

Whether it did him good or not, it flushed his poor, flabby face, and loosened his tongue. Indeed, his speech became quite reckless.

'I am ashamed,' said he, when their banquet was finished, 'to have treated you no better than this, Mrs Lomas—and at my own table, so to speak. It's hard, you know, very hard—when all the time she, I'll be bound, is eating and drinking of the best at some swell restaurant. Oh, she can spend on herself! Oh, dear, yes!'

Then Jenny ventured a home-thrust—a thrust that should produce a revelation.

'You don't seem to love your daughter any more, Mr Timmis.'

'My daughter?' murmured Mr Timmis, setting down the glass which he was raising again to his lips.

'Mrs Kesteven!' said Jenny, with a nervous smile.

Mr Timmis gazed at her, ghastly and terror-stricken.

'Who told you she was my daughter?' he asked.

'You've told me yourself, Mr Timmis,' she answered. 'At least, I've guessed it from what you've said. But don't look so frightened, please. I'm not the Law.'

'The Law?' he queried again, sinking into a deathlier white. 'What—what do you think the Law has got to do with it?'

'I don't know,' said Jenny, with entire and evident truthfulness. 'I just said that without thinking. But, please, don't be alarmed. I am only sorry for you—sorry from the bottom of my heart.'

'You needn't be sorry for me, ma'am,' said Timmis, with a certain melancholy dignity. 'I'm an old fool. After all, my daughter's my daughter, and I should have held my tongue.'

'What!' exclaimed a voice of terrible severity. 'Drunk again?'

Both turned in astonishment to see Mrs Kesteven standing at the open door, pale and glaring with passion. She had evidently let herself in with the latch-key which was in her hand.

'I was afraid you might be up to something of this sort, and so I came home,' she said. 'Now go to bed!' she commanded.

And the poor old man arose, trembling, and went.

'As for you, madam,' she cried, turning to Jenny, who stood by the table ready to pass from the kitchen when the open door was vacated, 'this is nice, lady-like conduct, isn't it? Drinking and hobnobbing with a ridiculous old man!'

'I have not been drinking!' said Jenny, with indignation.

'No!' cried Mrs Kesteven, casting her eye over the table. 'You've only been making him drunk! What for? What for, I say?' and she stamped her foot.

'Don't think you'll frighten me with your noise,' exclaimed Jenny, standing up, a white flame of wrath and resolution.

'You shall go out of my house this instant, miss!' screamed Mrs Kesteven. 'Mrs, indeed! "Mrs Lomas!" That's what creatures of your sort always do! Try to hide themselves under a respectable married name!'

'I ask for nothing better than to go out of your house,' said Jenny, 'now that I know what you are. Let me pass!'

Mrs Kesteven let her pass out to her bedroom; but she followed her with loud voice.

'Oh, you know what I am, do you? And what am I? What am I, miss? Have the goodness to tell me that!'

'You are a low, horrid, ungrateful woman!' cried Jenny, turning upon her. 'You have

broken the life and the heart of your poor father—and you now keep him in your house as a menial! And that, I suspect, is only one of the wicked things you have done in your horrible, wicked life!

'Oh, he has been stuffing you with his lies, has he? You poor, innocent fool! And I am a horrible, wicked woman, am I?' cried Mrs Kesteven, letting her temper loose, and blazing in a fury of passion. 'The little country miss that can't say "Bo" to a goose knows what wickedness means! The clergyman's daughter—! Ha, ha, ha!' she broke off into shrill, derisive laughter. 'Everybody knows what that means! But I'll show you! I'll teach you, you sly minx, if I'm a wicked woman! If I am, you shall see I am!'

In her fury she snatched up a pair of scissors that lay in Jenny's open work-basket, and grasping them like a dagger she flew at Jenny.

'You dare!' cried Jenny, boldly facing her. 'Put down those scissors! I know you are a coward, Peggy Cathcart!'

At the name—which was but an arrow shot at a venture—Mrs Kesteven changed. She became ghastly, ferociously pale. She trembled, and let the scissors fall. Jenny was so astonished at the change that she gazed at her in silence.

'What did he tell you?' demanded the woman. 'Do you hear? What did he tell you?'

'He did not tell me anything,' said Jenny,

in amazement and doubt; for she felt she had touched some secret which was eluding her.

'You are a liar!' said Mrs Kesteven, recovering her rage as Jenny seemed to become more subdued. 'You shall tell me! And you don't go out of this till you do!'

Saying that, she swung about swiftly to the door, took the key from the lock, went out, and locked Jenny in.

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## CHAPTER XXII

### MASTER AND MAN

SMITTEN with sudden alarm, Jenny sat down. She was trembling; but it was from excitement, not from fear. The ferocity and vulgarity of Mrs Kesteven appalled her—made her shudder as from contact with a gross, unholy, and noxious thing. Who, she thought, would have guessed that the smooth and smiling Mrs Kesteven was such a creature?

But though Mrs Kesteven, or Peggy Cathcart—('Now what,' thought Jenny, 'was the reason of her blenching and trembling at that name?')—although the daughter of Mr Timmis was so formidable, although she might go any lengths in her resentment—starve her there, even seek to destroy her by violence—yet Jenny defied

her. It was as if the primrose defied the tiger-lily.

'It is not likely,' said Jenny to herself, 'that she will try to kill me openly, for I do think she is a coward. And now I can quite believe she killed Mr Kesteven. No: tried to. It was not she that struck him out in the park. No. She tried him with the poison. Of that I am convinced. But,' she sighed, 'it has got to be proved. And, oh, where is my dear Will? Where is he? What is he doing? What is he suffering?'

Thus her thoughts wandered over all the topics that she took interest in—wandered fitfully and restlessly; for she was extraordinarily excited without knowing it.

She resolved she would seek aid from Mr Townshend; he would come and deliver her. And then, like an electric shock, there came the recollection that she did not know her address. How could she summon Mr Townshend to her aid if she could not tell him where she was? That was for the brave Jenny an overwhelming discovery; she was lost and in prison. Then one narrow gleam of hope came to her. She sat down and wrote a line or two: 'I am shut up forcibly by Mrs K. because she is afraid of something I have found out about her. I don't know this address, but perhaps you can find it out.' That she put in an envelope, addressed to Mr Townshend.

'I have often heard of dropped letters being



picked up and posted,' she said to herself. 'I'll risk it.'

She went to her window, and opened it. It looked out upon the well or courtyard of the block of flats. She flung her letter out, saying to herself it was less likely to be trodden under foot than if cast into the street.

Yet she was afraid. She could not go out at the door, but Mrs Kesteven could come in. What if that formidable and ferocious woman came in while she slept! But Jenny was a girl of decision. To doubt was to be resolved; to fear was to provide defence. Mrs Kesteven should not come in without her knowledge; and, therefore, since there was no heavy piece of furniture save her bedstead in the little room, she wheeled the end of her bedstead against the door.

That done, she performed her usual last duties of the day—wrote in her little diary, and commended her dear Will and herself to the care of an overruling Providence, who takes note even of the fall of a sparrow's nestling—and then she put herself to bed—but not to sleep for some hours.

Meanwhile, that same night, Mr Townshend sat in his chambers, talking with his confidential servant Mortimer. He had dined at home, and while Mortimer cleared away in a leisurely fashion, Townshend lounged by the fire in an easy-chair, smoked a cigarette, and ruffled his hair.

'Mortimer,' said he, 'I think I must be growing old or addled.'

'Why, Markis?' asked the discreet Mortimer.

'This affair of young Lomas does not run to my satisfaction. There are a good many strings to it, and I don't seem able to work them all.'

'You need a tonic, Markis,' said Mortimer, 'iron and phos. to stimulate the brain.' (Mortimer had been a doctor's man before he had joined himself to Townshend.) 'Your trip to the country didn't do you no good. You picked up this young man's case—and what for, sir? You took up young Graham's case the same way, sir, thinking you'd win him over to us; but didn't, Markis. And you won't this time, either, Markis—if you think you will.'

'I don't think I will,' said Townshend. 'I have never thought I would, Mortimer.'

'Then why bother with the case, Markis?'

'Because it has been my pleasure, Mortimer,' said Townshend, with the easy, confident tone of master, 'to like the young man and to help him. I like to play the part of a modern Robin Hood, you know that.'

'Robin Hood don't pay, Markis.'

'I'm not so sure that it won't in this case, after all, Mortimer.'

'Indeed, sir?' said Mortimer, pausing in his duty, leaning his knuckles on the table, and listening with more attention.

'I begin to think that Lomas is not Lomas,

but somebody else—a person of another name—of some considerable consequence, Mortimer.’

‘And what then, sir?’

‘Don’t you see how agreeable, and perhaps useful, it would be to have a grateful friend in a person of consequence? Don’t you remember the wise advice in the Gospel?’

‘No, sir,’ answered Mortimer, moving about again. ‘You know the Bible better than I do, sir.’

‘“Make ye friends of the Mammon of Unrighteousness”; that’s the advice,’ said Townshend, ‘and very good advice too.’

‘And is the young man, in your opinion, Markis, the—what’s his name?’

‘The Mammon of Unrighteousness? No,’ laughed Townshend; ‘although I strongly suspect him of being closely related thereto. But, as I tell you, I can’t get at all the strings.’ He took a letter from his pocket. ‘Here’s this communication from that nice girl the young man has just married.’

‘I believe, Markis,’ grinned Mortimer, ‘you’re half in love with the young person yourself.’

‘I am,’ said Townshend. ‘When women are good fellows they are far better fellows than men. Well, part of her story is that Mrs Kesteven is “no lady”—my own opinion from the first moment I saw her—but that she had been an actress or a model or something of that sort. Now, Mortimer, tax your memory. Can you

remember a person of that sort'—and Townshend described the appearance of Mrs Kesteven—'who disappeared ten years ago?'

'No, Markis,' answered Mortimer, after pondering, 'I cannot. Not in our time. And I think we knew them all, Markis,' said he, with a smile of exact intimate reminiscence.

'Well, Mortimer,' said Townshend, doubtfully, 'I thought we did. But perhaps we didn't. At anyrate, that's failure number one. I cannot identify Mrs Kesteven with anybody of that sort.' And he folded the letter away in his pocket again. 'Then,' he continued, 'we can't trace the young man; that's failure number two. We can't find the man with the black patch—he hasn't returned to the Strand since that Saturday night—which makes failure number three. And we have made nothing of the dentist's in the Brompton Road. You say it is only a receiving place—a place of call for a dentist whose address the people in the house won't give?'

'Yes, Markis.'

'Well, that's failure number four. It won't do, Mortimer,' said Townshend, jumping to his feet. 'I must wake up.'

'Better take a tonic, Markis, and go to bed.'

A rat-tat sounded on the outer door.

'The last post,' said Townshend, glancing at his mantel clock. 'There may be a tonic in that.'

Mortimer brought in several letters, and Townshend tore them open, while the trusted

and discreet Mortimer lingered to poke the fire and to hear what news his master might care to communicate.

'Ah,' said Townshend, opening the letters and reading half-aloud:—

“DEAR SIR,—Having important communication to make regarding discovery at inn here, I propose to visit you to-morrow evening.—Yours faithfully,  
JOHN MELLISH, *Inspector.*”

'Oh, Inspector Mellish at last!' exclaimed Townshend. 'Remind me to-night, Mortimer, to drop a line to Mr Stuart.'

'Stuart, sir?'

'Yes; the Scotch lawyer in the Temple. We'd better have him ready to meet Mellish, if necessary.' He continued the examination of the letters. 'Ho! Here's something—from Jones.'

'Ah, yes, sir,' said Mortimer. 'Jones went to Somerset House to examine the Kesteven will.'

'He has examined it,' said Townshend; 'and,' he exclaimed vivaciously, as he read, 'by George, we've got something at last! "It amounts to this," he says. "Old Kesteven left all his estate to his only son Charles"—that's the man that has been murdered,' Townshend broke off to explain. "'To his widow he left only a small allowance of £200 a year; but, in case of the demise of her stepson Charles before her, she would receive during her life the income and usufruct of the whole estate!" There,'

said Townshend, rumpling his hair, 'we have now a motive for the murder on her part.' He read on. "In the event of Charles's demise without issue, and of her demise also, the whole property will pass to the heir-at-law—whoever he may be." He thrust the letter back into its envelope. 'That,' said he, 'we must mark with a red pencil. It's important—with a vengeance. I think,' he added, turning a considering eye upon Mortimer, 'I can see how to work that. But there's another letter.'

'Very poor paper, Markis,' said Mortimer, handing the letter.

Townshend tore it open. It contained an official paper, together with a scrap of white. On the scrap he read :—

'Please take care of this for me.—W. L.'

This, he perceived, was young Lomas's discharge from the army, which he had seen once before—on the fatal day on which this story began.

'The idiot!' he exclaimed. 'He has given no address! Why?'

'There's the envelope, Markis,' said Mortimer.

'Ah, yes. Where was it posted? York, eh? York!'

They were still considering the matter when there came a rat-tat-tat upon the door. Mortimer went to open it. In an instant he reappeared. His visage was solemn, but his eyes were sparkling with excitement.

'A lady—to see you, sir.'

And in walked Mrs Kesteven, magnificent in evening array.

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## CHAPTER XXIII

### WHAT DID SHE WANT?

'WHY has she come?' Townshend asked himself, in suspicion, when Mrs Kesteven stood before him. 'And in such a splendid get-up? Has she come to make a confession—or to win me over?'

While he looked, however, he was fain to confess that there was no hint of meditated confession in Mrs Kesteven's triumphant presence. When she flung open her fur-trimmed cloak, she smiled in the supreme consciousness of being beautiful. She showed much like one of Rossetti's women. As I have said before, she was tall and erect. She had a white and queenly neck and throat, large, dark eyes, broad brows, and an abundant mass of black hair, arranged with an artful artlessness. She was rich of complexion and of lip, and her whole person seemed informed with ardent intelligence and sympathy. Yet, while Townshend considered her with his shrewd and experienced gaze, he had a consciousness of a lurking vulgarity about the woman. It was

glaringly visible in no detail of dress or of person, of manner or of speech; but it was there, subtly asserting itself. It was nowhere, and yet it was everywhere.

Mortimer had placed a chair for the visitor. He came forward and stirred the fire into a blaze, in order that he might have a better view of the lady as he went out.

'This is an unexpected honour,' said Townshend, letting his eyeglass drop, and then refixing it. 'Won't you let me take your cloak?'

'No, thank you,' said she. 'I think it will do very well just open like this; don't you?'

There was challenge in her bright eye, to which Townshend gallantly responded.

'Oh, I do,' said he. 'It looks very well—open—like that.' And he made her a courtly bow. 'But you will take this chair, won't you? It will be much more comfortable.'

He twisted his own leather lounge into position. She considered it an instant, gave him a quick glance, and sat down. Evidently she had made up her mind that in the easy-chair she would appear to more advantage, and a smile flickered under Townshend's moustache as he noted her decision. She reclined herself easily, thrust out and crossed a pair of neat and pretty evening shoes, and permitted to be seen a very trim and well-accented ankle clothed in a flesh-coloured silk stocking. Certainly her attitude was more effective than if she were sitting erect



in a stiff chair. She swept her eyes round and considered the appearance of the room, the beauty of this and the comfort of that.

'How very cosy you bachelors make yourselves!' she murmured in a soothed, cooing voice. 'You are a bachelor, of course?' she queried, as if moved by a sudden doubt.

'I am,' answered Townshend.

'How naughty and selfish you men are!' She bent her fine eyes on him an instant. 'Have you never met a woman you would like to make happy?' She put the question in a tone of infinite pleading and pathos.

'Scores, Mrs Kesteven,' said he. 'I'd like to make them all happy!'

'Oh,' she said, shaking her head and letting her eyes play upon him, 'that's too naughty, Mr Townshend—too, too naughty!'

'I think not,' said he, calmly, 'only too ambitious. It is an ambition that can never be fulfilled!'

'Ah, no!' she exclaimed, with a deep-drawn and powerfully-expelled sigh, as if she felt for all women, or were them all herself. 'Never!'

'Won't you permit me,' said he, 'to make one woman happy—with a cigarette?' He rose, found a box, and handed it open. 'They are Egyptian.'

'Now what,' she asked, smiling, stretching forth a slow, hesitating hand, and revealing a white, handsome arm, 'what would you think of me if I took a cigarette?'

'I would merely think you were taking what is your own.' And his smile fluttered in the shady corner of his mouth.

'What do you mean?' she said, with her fingers still poised over the outstretched box. 'You are much too clever for me.'

'Well,' said he, with another flutter of smile, 'I did not think of making a conundrum. You must have been often told you were like Cleopatra, Mrs Kesteven.' Still she shook her head and gazed; she did not understand, and Townshend had to labour out an explanation. 'Cleopatra, you remember, was Queen of Egypt. You know Shakespeare's play of "Antony and Cleopatra," of course?'

'Ah, yes!' said she in a voice of ardent intensity. 'Beautiful—wasn't it? I remember seeing Mrs Langtry in it. But,' she added with energy, 'I didn't think much of her!'

Then she dipped her fingers into the box, and, as if in absence of mind, took a cigarette. Townshend scratched a match for her, and held it.

'No,' said he. 'You'd have looked the part much better, and'—he declared at a venture—'played it too, I believe.'

'Oh, Mr Townshend!' she exclaimed, while her eyes swam in soft pleasure, and floated out upon him in gratitude for such exquisite flattery. 'But fie!—oh, fie! She had very little on!'

'Well,' said Townshend, regarding her carefully through his eyeglass, 'Cleopatra herself

couldn't have worn very much. Egypt, you see, is a warm place.'

'So is this room, I think,' she said, letting her eyes play on him again.

'Ye-es,' he drawled.

But he seemed to have no more interest in the topic. If he was not satisfied now that Mrs Kesteven had never been an actress—even if she had been upon the stage—he might very well have been. There came a somewhat awkward pause, in which Townshend carefully polished his eyeglass with a soft silk handkerchief. Mrs Kesteven watched the operation with an expression which was stiffening into anxiety. She stole a quick look at him, and he was in the act of glancing at her. Their looks met, they could not evade each other.

'You can't guess,' said she, again assuming her bright, seductive smile, 'why I've called on you to-night?'

'I can't,' said he, and no more.

'Do you know,' she said, by way of parenthesis, 'I don't think you are very fond of ladies, Mr Townshend?'

'On the whole,' said he, slowly, 'I think I prefer women.' He fixed his newly-polished eyeglass, looked at her, and said, 'Well?'

'You can't guess, then,' said she again, 'what has brought me?'

'I can't,' he repeated. 'May I ask if it is business or pleasure?'

'Mr Townshend!' she exclaimed, and sat up.  
'Business, of course!'

'Ah, then,' said he, 'let me hear.'

'I want you to tell me, please,' she said,  
'what has become of that young man Lomas.'

He considered her carefully a moment, and flicked the ash from his cigarette, before he made reply.

'I really don't know.'

'You mean you won't tell me.'

'No,' he answered. 'I simply mean what I said. I don't know.' He added as a concession of fuller information, 'I know he came to London, but I know no more.'

'You mean, Mr Townshend,' said she, quickly,  
'you haven't found out any more?'

'I haven't found out any more,' he assented.  
'You are still interested in him, then?' he asked.

'How can I help it?' she exclaimed. 'His wife is always with me, poor thing! And she's pining and pining for him—as of course she must.'

'Poor thing!' echoed Townshend. 'She has come to town with you, then?'

'To be sure she has. What else could I do but bring her? Didn't you know she was coming?' she asked suddenly.

But Townshend, on principle, was suspicious of that kind of direct question, and he answered guardedly, 'Well, she would be no companion—would she?—if you left her in the country.' And he smiled.

'She's very little of a companion to me anywhere!' broke out Mrs Kesteven. 'It's not a companion I need. At least, not that sort of companion!'

'Poor girl!' murmured Townshend. 'I'm very sorry for her!'

'I believe,' exclaimed Mrs Kesteven, with a passionate energy which surprised Mr Townshend, 'you think far more of her than you do of me.'

'My dear lady,' said Townshend, 'there can be no comparison. Why should I, or anybody, be sorry for you?'

'Oh, yes!' she cried. 'It's only poor people that ever get pity!'

'And very often,' said Townshend, 'it is all they do get. You recline, so to say, Mrs Kesteven, in the lap of luxury. You have everything the soul of woman can desire; why should you have pity also?'

'Ah!' she murmured, with a burdened sigh, 'how little you know—how little you think!'

'Really!' he murmured, as if in sympathetic wonder.

She rolled on him large eyes of appeal, sadly shook her head, and said, 'You don't care!' He merely flicked the ash from his cigarette, and looked at her. 'At anyrate,' she went on, changing her tone, for the pathetic note evidently had been ineffectual with Townshend, 'you must find the young man.'

'I mean to,' said he.

'And then,' said she, not venturing to look at Townshend while she said it, 'don't you think the best thing will be to get him and her—husband and wife—off to Australia or America, or one of those places, where he can't be found and can begin a new life? I'm willing to bear the expense.'

'You forget, Mrs Kesteven,' said Townshend, 'that we are as good as pledged to establish his innocence—to find the person, or persons, who really killed your stepson; in which case there would be no necessity for your going to the expense of helping him and his wife to emigrate.'

'But do you really think,' she asked, 'that there is any chance of finding the person or persons?'

'Oh, yes,' he answered. 'I have great hopes of being able to show the police where to put their hands on them.' A spasm of shrinking seized her, as if she had been touched by a breath of air of icy coldness. 'Besides,' added Townshend, with his eye on her, 'he may come into a considerable property in this country, when his innocence is established; and so I shall advise him, when I find him, not to run away again.'

She looked at him an instant, and then exclaimed, 'You *are* a man!'

'Am I?' said he. 'Well now, Mrs Kesteven, I think that is the finest compliment that has ever been paid me!'

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She rose slowly and drew her cloak about her with a great air of desolation.

'When I find Lomas,' said he, rising also, 'I shall let you know. Where shall I write to?'

She hesitated a moment. 'I am staying at present,' she then said, 'in the rooms of a friend. I shall probably move to-morrow or the next day. Then I'll send you my address.'

'Thank you,' said he. But he was not deceived. Mrs Kesteven little knew her Townshend. He was more subtle than she, and more alert. 'Sit down a moment,' he said. 'You'll need a cab. My man will call one.'

He stepped out and found Mortimer in waiting.

'She wants a cab,' said he to his man. 'And I want her address.'

'Right, Markis,' said Mortimer. 'Slinger's on the rank. I'll give him the call.'

So while Townshend returned to Mrs Kesteven, Mortimer descended to the pavement, and blew a peculiar call upon his whistle. Quickly a hansom rattled up.

'That you, Slinger?' he asked.

'Me, right enough, Morty, old boy,' was the answer.

'A lady!' said Mortimer, laconically. 'Bring back the address.'

He went in, and anon Townshend descended with Mrs Kesteven, in a lingering hope of hearing her address from herself. He did hear an address.

'Ten Conduit Street,' said she.

When Townshend saw her driven off, he shook his head and smiled.

In less than an hour Slinger returned with the true address. 'Between 10 and 20 Clanricarde Mansions, Cromwell Road.'

'Now, what's her game?' said Townshend to himself, rumpling his forelock. 'What did she want from me? And why so secret about where she's staying?'

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## CHAPTER XXIV

### MRS KESTEVEN

NEXT day, at ten o'clock, Mrs Kesteven sat at breakfast arrayed in an elegant morning-gown. Opposite to her was the man with the black patch. Mrs Kesteven seemed limp and sad. Indeed, she looked as if she had been weeping. The man with the black patch looked spruce, rosy—as from a fresh shave and a cold bath—and cheerful. He partook with evident appetite of a dish of bacon and eggs, while Mrs Kesteven's portion was untasted before her. She leaned back in her chair, and slowly stirred her tea.

'Well, Peggy,' said he, 'from your own



account, and you don't commonly tell the worst of yourself, you didn't get much from your Townshend.'

'And he didn't get much change out of me ' ecc ared Mrs Kesteven.

'I'm not so sure of that,' said he. 'You're such an idiot, Peggy, and so taken up with what men think of you, that he might have been having you on toast all the while without your knowing it—especially if he's the clever fellow you think him.'

'He's cleverer than you are,' she burst out, 'and handsomer and more distinguished!'

'Ah,' said he, smiling. 'But Peggy can never do without her Charlie!'

'And much good he does her!' said she. 'Haven't you finished eating yet, greedy?'

'Not quite,' he answered quietly.

'You're perfectly sickening!' she exclaimed, plucking herself from her seat, wilfully pushing the chair over, and then striding up and down the little room in fury.

'Now, Peggy,' said Charlie, 'now, Peggy.' His tone was of gentle remonstrance, strengthened with the assurance of the master and tamer that the wild creature would presently submit. 'Don't get angry, for we must talk quietly in a minute, love—quietly and seriously.'

She continued to march to and fro while he finished his breakfast. That done, he produced a cigar from his pocket-case, and carefully lit it. Then he rose, took her hands, and drew her

into his embrace. His touch so affected her that her temper subsided. She became yielding, soft, and ductile. He led her to the couch, and sat down with her, still holding her hand.

'Oh, Charlie!' she said, shaking her head and turning her great eyes full upon him, 'what are we going to do? I'm so frightened!'

'Frightened? Frightened?' said he. 'Of what?'

'I don't know! But he frightens me so! Oh, he frightens me awfully! It seems as if he looks me through and through, and as if he knows a great deal more than he says—as if he knows everything!'

'Um-m!' murmured Charlie. 'I've never yet seen the man I was afraid of.'

'You've never seen this man,' said Peggy.

'No,' said he; 'but I'm going to see him.'

'Oh, Charlie!' she cried, in evident dismay. 'What do you mean?'

'Only this, Peggy, my dear; I'm going to meet him at lunch. I believe he's a humbug—an adventurer—a card-sharper, very likely. I've come across a man that knows him; I said I'd like to meet him, and I'm going to meet him.'

'When?'

'To-day—at the Reckless Club.'

'Oh, Charlie,' she cried, 'don't go! Don't! He is truly a terrible man!'

'So am I when I'm roused,' said he.

'Ah,' said she, 'he is always—always terrible and always calm!'

'Well,' said he, 'I'm going to stick a pin in that terrible calm of his; I believe it's all humbug. And now, Peggy, my chick, let's say no more of that. What about this girl that you've shut up?'

'Oh, I don't know! I don't know!'

'You can't keep her shut up here long, you know.'

'I know I can't—I know! I wish I had never bothered with the creature! It was you that made me!'

'Yes; perhaps it was,' said he, carelessly. 'And now perhaps I can get rid of her for you.'

'Oh, how, Charlie?' she demanded, turning on him eyes filled with fear. 'How? You frighten me, too!'

'Do I, my chick-a-biddy? Well, you sha'n't be frightened, dearest. Everything shall be done easily and comfortably; and you'll be yourself again—won't you?—when the girl is out of the house.'

'But how will you get her out without a row?'

'Now, Peggy dear, do I ever make a row? I'll tell her I'm going to take her to see her husband.'

'Oh, yes!' said Peggy, with a round mouth of surprise, but a tone of satisfaction. 'And then?'

The door was opened, and the depressed Mr Timmis showed himself.

'Mr Townshend wishes to see you,' said he.

'You fool!' hissed his loving daughter—yes, 'hissed'; for she was a serpent. 'How did he know this address?' She was erect on the instant.

'How can I tell?' asked the old man, spreading forth appealing hands. 'He didn't get it from me!'

Mrs Kesteven cast her looks this way and that, like a cornered beast seeking escape. 'Now,' she said, 'he'll find her!'

'Keep your head, Peggy,' murmured Charlie. 'I'll slip out this way and get her away at once.'

'Oh, do!' said she, clasping her hands.

The inner door had just closed upon Charlie when the other opened again to admit Mr Townshend.

'I fear,' said he, letting his eyeglass flash from Mrs Kesteven to the breakfast-table, 'that I disturb you.'

'Oh, not at all,' she answered. But she was so shaken that she gripped the back of a chair for support.

'I hope,' he continued, setting his hat and gloves on a corner of the table, 'I have not interrupted your breakfast?'

'Oh, no,' said she, 'I have finished, thank you. But,' she added, with a touch of resentment, 'I don't usually receive callers so early.'

'And I,' said he, with his peculiar flutter of a smile, 'am seldom an early caller. But I was afraid of missing you.'

'Missing me?' said she, glancing at him with lack of understanding.

'You change your address so frequently, Mrs Kesteven,' said he, and still his smile fluttered in provocation. 'Last night it was Conduit Street. This morning it is Cromwell Road. By this afternoon it might have been something else.'

'Is there any reason,' she demanded, flaming up in ill-controlled defiance, 'why I should let you know my changes of address?'

'None at all,' he answered readily. 'On the contrary, I doubt there is every reason why you should not.'

The handkerchief which she was torturing with the fingers of her left hand fell to the floor. He stooped to pick it up, and handed it back to her. She looked as if she longed to strike him; but she neither spoke nor moved, and he laid the handkerchief on the table.

'There is, however,' he continued, and again he showed his fluttering smile, 'good reason why I should keep myself acquainted with your address.'

'You are a beast!' she exclaimed.

He smiled. 'Yesterday evening, Mrs Kesteven, you did me the honour of saying I was a man. I wonder which declaration is vain flattery, and which your real opinion.'

'At anyrate,' she cried, 'you are no gentleman to seek to annoy a lady with your—your suspicions and remarks!'

'I have no feeling at all about ladies,' said he, 'but I have every regard and respect for women.'

'You insult me in my own house!' she broke out, slapping her hand on the back of

the chair by which she still held. 'I hate you! I hate you! What do you want? What have you come for?'

'I have come,' said Townshend, quietly, 'for Mrs Lomas.'

'She has gone out,' answered Mrs Kesteven. 'Very likely gone to see you,' she added with an obvious sneer.

'Ah!' drawled Townshend. 'That will explain to you that I have good reason for doubting what you say.' He handed Jenny's little note to himself, which had been delivered that morning.

"DEAR MR TOWNSHEND," read Mrs Kesteven aloud: the rest she read to herself—"I am shut up forcibly by Mrs K. because she is afraid of something I have found out about her. I don't know this address, but perhaps you can find it out.—Your grateful  
JENNY LOMAS."

Mrs Kesteven held in her hand satisfactory evidence now that Townshend was still ignorant of what Jenny had discovered, and her manner and tone became triumphant.

'What does she mean?' she asked, handing back the scrap of paper. 'She is mad! How could she be shut up if she could go out to post that?'

'Evidently she did not post it herself,' said Townshend; and he exhibited the envelope, in the bottom corner of which was written, 'Please post this.'

And Mrs Kesteven experienced a deep resentment against her father, whom she suspected of aiding Jenny against his own daughter. The horrid, ungrateful old man!

'Well,' said she, 'I can't explain it, except on the supposition that her troubles have driven her mad! She's out now at anyrate. She had breakfast quite comfortably with me, and then she went out—on some business, she said.'

'I see,' said Townshend, 'you had a companion at breakfast, but I should have thought the companion was a man. I don't think Mrs Lomas smokes cigars.' And he sniffed the tell-tale air of the room.

Peggy had forgotten that Charlie lit a cigar when he had finished his breakfast!

'You don't believe me?' she exclaimed, however.

'I regret to say I don't,' answered Townshend.

'Oh, very well,' said she, spreading out her hands. 'If you think she is hid in these rooms, find her. I give you full liberty of search.'

She marched to the fireplace and touched the electric button. Mr Timmis appeared.

'Show this gentleman every room and cupboard in the flat,' said she. 'He wants to find Mrs Lomas.' And she laughed in loud derision of his desire.

Her father answered her with a troubled look, but she bore it down with a gaze of command and threatening. And he signified

with a bow that he was ready to conduct Mr Townshend.

'This,' said Mr Timmis, quietly, at the door of the first room he showed, 'is Mrs Lomas's bedroom.'

'Um-m!' murmured Townshend, sniffing the air. 'I had no idea that Mrs Lomas smoked, and cigars too! An odd taste in a country girl like her, isn't it?'

'Yes, it is, sir,' answered Timmis, scarcely knowing what he said. 'But,' he added, collecting himself, 'do you really think you smell tobacco, sir? It must have been me with my pipe. Very careless of me, sir.'

Townshend turned and laid his hands on the old man's shoulders.

'Breathe!' said he.

Without thinking of the purpose of the command, Timmis blew out a great breath.

'My dear friend,' said Townshend, 'you haven't smoked for twenty years! Go along with you! Besides, it is the smoke of a cigar that I smell—and a very good cigar. I'm too old a smoker not to know.'

He advanced a step or two into the room.

It was in some disorder, and the bed was unmade. But still there lingered the odour of cigar smoke.

'The same man has been here,' said he, 'as took breakfast with your mistress. What does that mean?'

He turned his eagle look on poor Timmis,



and flashed upon him the light of his eyeglass. Timmis feebly wagged his head, but said never a word. And Townshend said no more. He looked through all the rooms, but found no trace of Mrs Lomas.

'Well, are you satisfied?' asked Mrs Kesteven in triumph, when he returned to her presence.

'Perfectly,' said he, taking his hat and gloves.

That answer, prompt and unexpected, disconcerted Mrs Kesteven. She pushed a demand for another.

'Perhaps, then, you will believe the word of a lady next time?'

'To tell you the truth,' said he, 'I was never less inclined to take the word of a lady about anything—even about herself.'

'You are an insulting, hateful beast!' She took a step towards him, and thrust out her angry face, as if she would spit venom at him. 'And I hope I shall never set eyes on you again!'

'Ah,' said he, 'I fear that is a vain hope. If I live, you will certainly see me again.' He lingered a moment. 'You are playing a very desperate game against me, Mrs Kesteven,' he said.

'Oh,' she demanded, 'and are you so great a person? Is it wicked to play against you?'

'It is worse than wicked,' said he, and his fluttering smile enraged her, 'it is foolish.'

He made her a bow, and went out. She fol-

lowed him out to the landing, and while he descended the stairs, she leaned over the banisters and watched him go.

'Ah,' she exclaimed to herself, gripping the handrail and vainly trying to shake it, 'if I only had had the courage to stick a knife in him! If I had a tile in my hand now, I might drop it on his head—like the brave woman in the Bible! Oh—!'

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## CHAPTER XXV

### 'CRANSWICK, DENTIST'

IN returning from his visit to Mrs Kesteven Mr Townshend was driven along the Brompton Road. He reminded himself of 'Cranswick, Dentist,' and he requested his driver to stop at number 350. The driver stopped, and Townshend descended and knocked at the door, on the side-jamb of which was a small brass plate: 'Cranswick, Dentist.'

'Mr Cranswick in?' he asked of a somewhat slatternly woman, who opened the door, and stood wiping her damp hands on her apron.

'This is not his day, sir,' she answered. 'But if you like to leave any message, sir—'

'Would a message wait for him here?' asked

Townshend. 'Or would it be sent on to him at once at his other address?'

'It would be sent at once to his address,' said the woman.

'What is his address?' insinuated he, seeking to surprise an answer.

The woman looked at him with suspicion. 'I can't tell you, sir, but a message will reach him.'

'Oh, thank you,' said Townshend. 'I'll remember.'

And he did remember pretty promptly; for it was a characteristic of his successful cleverness that he took quick advantage of trifles—of such little things as an ordinary man would neglect.

On the stroke of one o'clock Townshend ascended the steps of the Reckless Club to fulfil his engagement to lunch. He was conducted to the Guest Room. He had not been told whom he was going to meet, and he was surprised—and, to say truth, rather taken aback for so self-possessed a man—to be introduced by his host to Captain Cathcart!

'We are to be a square party,' said the host; 'but our fourth member has not arrived yet.'

Then there came to Townshend what he would have called an inspiration. For the next hour and more, he considered he would be in the company of Captain Cathcart. So good an opportunity might never again present itself for the elucidation of an important point.

'Ah,' said he suddenly to his host, 'I've forgotten something. Can I send a note to my man?'

'Oh, yes,' said his host, carelessly. 'The hall-porter will manage anything of that sort for you.'

Townshend thanked him, and sat down at a side-table, which was furnished with writing materials. He wrote to Mortimer thus :—

'Capt. Cathcart here. Send telegram at once as follows : "Cranswick, Dentist, 350 Brompton Road. Come to Reckless Club immediately.—CATHCART." Also put somebody on to watch this.'

The note was laconic, but it was sufficient for the intelligent Mortimer. It was sealed up and taken to the hall-porter with two half crowns, and the request that it should be sent express to 25 Jermyn Street. The Reckless Club is housed in Piccadilly; so Townshend reckoned that his message would be read by Mortimer in ten minutes.

The note was barely sent off when there came another surprise to Townshend. The fourth member of the party arrived and proved to be the man with the black patch. A third surprise was added; for the man was introduced as 'Cathcart—Charles Cathcart.'

'Very glad to meet you, Mr Townshend,' said Charles Cathcart more lightly than his earnest look signified. 'I have heard of you.'

'The pleasure is mutual, then, I assure you,'

said Townshend, with his fluttering smile. 'And I, too, have heard of you—though not by name.'

'You have heard no good of him, I'll be bound,' laughed their host. 'For Charlie Cathcart is a scapegrace and a spendthrift. If anyone ever writes the history of the "Twelve Scamps of Christendom," he should be in it. You mustn't confound him with his cousin here'—upon whom he laid an intimate hand—'he's a good boy; worth twenty of him.'

Charles Cathcart smiled steadily, as if all that was said about him was complimentary in the pleasantest way.

'I'm afraid,' said the Captain, 'that no Cathcart is worth much. I heard a moralist say that a certain place is paved with Cathcarts. He knew us.'

'But what did you mean, Mr Townshend,' asked Charles, 'by saying you knew me, though not by name? How, I wonder, am I namelessly celebrated.'

'Ah, well,' said Townshend, 'a man may be widely known by a nickname.'

'Is that my case?' asked Charles.

'Not exactly,' answered Townshend, 'although nearly. You have been rather well known by a peculiarity that may very easily provoke a nickname.'

'Oh, really?'

'I have heard of you from friends as frequenting a certain bit of the Strand, dressed

in a black patch and a yellow overcoat,' said Townshend.

Charles Cathcart looked at him steadily. 'You didn't see me yourself?' he asked.

'No, I didn't,' answered Townshend. 'But it was you—wasn't it?'

'Oh, it was me right enough,' said Charles. 'But I had no idea that I was so noticeable.'

'Well,' said Townshend, 'the oddity of your get-up drew attention first, I suppose, and your regularity fixed it.'

Charles Cathcart boldly considered the man before him—considered the hawk-beak, the heavy moustache, the eyeglass, with its shifting flash, and the tumbled black forelock. As for Captain Cathcart, he looked troubled, but kept silence.

'Truly,' said Charles, 'I should not have guessed that my get-up looked so odd.'

'A black patch on the eye,' said Townshend, 'is not common, is it? I hope it is not a permanent feature of your face.'

'No,' answered Cathcart, 'no. I could leave it off now; but my eye is still rather unsightly.'

'An accident?' inquired Townshend.

'Yes, confound it! A branch of a tree, when I was shooting in the country.'

The waiter declared that lunch was served; and they sat down. The Captain still looked troubled, and as he wondered at Townshend's persistent interest in his cousin's black patch, so he glanced at him again and again. Who, after

all, was this Townshend? What was known of him? Why did he carry these airs about with him of knowledge and mystery?

Over lunch it was the turn of Charles Cathcart to push questions home upon Townshend; and then, too, came his opportunity of fulfilling the promise he made to Peggy that he would 'stick a pin' in Townshend's inflated calm. But his efforts were of small effect; Townshend was too practised and astute a hand to give himself away in answers.

'By the way, Mr Townshend,' said Charles, 'in the newspaper reports of that murder case, down in the country, somewhere near Wrottesley, I think—if I remember rightly—there was a person of your name mentioned.'

'Very likely,' answered Townshend.

'Any relation of yours?'

'A very intimate relation,' said Townshend, with his flutter of smile. 'It was myself.'

'Ah!' exclaimed the host. 'What case was that? Sure to be a mystery, or Townshend wouldn't take any interest in it.'

'One moment,' said Charles, turning again to Townshend. 'But that Townshend was described as a detective inspector.'

'Oh,' broke in the host again, 'Townshend would describe himself as anything that struck his fancy.'

'I think not,' said Townshend, answering Charles.

'I'm sure I read it,' persisted Charles.

'Not in the papers,' said Townshend: of that point he was quite certain, and he smiled.

'My dear chap,' said the host, addressing Cathcart—the generous lunch was taking effect on him—'it doesn't matter how Townshend was described. He baffles description. But if anybody is a dab at working out criminal riddles, it's Townshend. It's his relaxation. Where another fellow at a club will amuse himself with filling in missing words, or writing acrostics for *Truth*, or rot of that kind, Townshend'll take up the paper and read about the last mysterious murder or robbery, and then amuse you by telling you all about it, and finding the solution—just as if it were a confounded problem in Euclid. Look here, Towner, my boy. Tell us the story of this case—as you read it, mind—as you read it.'

Townshend flashed his eyeglass round. Both the Cathcarts were observing him. The situation struck him as comic, and he laughed. Now, for a man who smiled so unobtrusively Townshend laughed very noisily. His laugh seemed to annoy the cousins, for they both frowned. He subdued his laugh, and began at once.

'The story, to be properly told, needs an introduction,' said he. 'All good stories, like all good plays, need full introductions. Sardou commonly takes two acts for his introduction.'

'Oh, confound Sardou!' exclaimed the host. 'Cut the introduction and come to the story.'

'Well,' said Townshend, 'there was once a



country gentleman—a squire—of a rather racketsy sort.'

'Humph!' said Charlie Cathcart. 'That's nothing new.'

'No,' said Townshend; 'our gentry are the best breed in the country, and their racketiness is but a mark of health and energy—energy superfluous and misdirected.'

'Agreed, Towner, my boy,' said the host. 'Well, this squire—?'

'—married three wives,' said Townshend.

'What?' cried the host. 'Three? The glutton! The twopenny Blue Beard! At that general rate there wouldn't be enough women to go round! Three?—and all wives?'

'Three,' answered Townshend; 'and all, apparently, wives.'

'Aren't you wrong?' said Charlie Cathcart. 'You mean two.'

'Now, Charlie,' said the host, 'what do you know about it?'

'Oh, I think he knows about it,' said Townshend. 'But,' he maintained, addressing Charlie again, 'I assure you the number is three.'

'Two, I think,' persisted the other.

'As I read it, three,' said Townshend. 'You dispute it. It must be established and accepted before the story can go on.'

'What's that?' demanded the host, while the Cathcarts exchanged earnest and doubting glances with each other.

'If you men will dine with me this day week

at the Savoy,' said Townshend with emphasis, flashing his eyeglass on Charles Cathcart, 'I'll finish the story then.'

'Why not now?' asked the host.

'Because,' said Townshend, 'it's not quite worked out.'

None of the three could accept the invitation to dinner; but, for all that, the story was left alone.

Lunch was finished, and they were ready for their coffee, when the hall-boy in buttons entered to say that someone wished to see 'Mr Cathcart.'

'Which Mr Cathcart?' demanded the host. 'There are two here.'

'I don't know, sir,' answered the boy.

'Well, show him in,' cried the host, before either of the Cathcarts could demand the name of the visitor.

There entered a very dark, stout little man.

'Hallo, Cranswick!' exclaimed Charles Cathcart. 'What the deuce brings you here?'

That unexpected result of his experiment with the telegram upset all Townshend's deductions—upset them, but made them, so to say, merely turn a somersault, for they were speedily on their feet again, rearranged. The man whom he had from the beginning connected with 'Cranswick, Dentist'—Captain Cathcart—evidently did not know him. And thus being dissociated from the dentist, the Captain's intimate links with Mrs Kesteven and with the

crime dissolved, under that one exclamation of his cousin Charles.

'I have really been a fool!' said Townshend to himself. 'Like any common detective! Plainly Charles is the man! And he looks it!'

'Well, sir!' said Cranswick, in an injured tone. 'That has brought me here!' And he produced and unfolded a telegram.

'This is very odd!' exclaimed Charles Cathcart. 'I didn't send you this. Did you?' he suddenly demanded, passing the telegram on to his cousin.

'I?' said the Captain, glancing at the telegram. 'No.'

'A practical joke of some friend, perhaps,' insinuated Townshend.

'A doosid nasty joke, then,' said Charles. 'I don't like it.' And he looked both puzzled and troubled.

'Don't like the suggestion, perhaps, that you need a dentist?' said Townshend.

'Oh, it's not that!' said Charles, desperately. 'As a matter of fact, I've had a great deal to do with dentists, and doosid expensive I find them.'

'Bad teeth are constitutional in some families,' said the host, sagely. 'Look at the Captain. He has quite a gold mine in his mouth.'

'Ah,' said the Captain, 'but my teeth are my own; Charlie's are false.'

Townshend almost leaped from his chair.

He had been presented with the information which might have been as difficult as a tooth to extract. Then, to ease the patent anxiety and doubt of the situation, he resolved to make a little exhibition.

'Look here,' said he. 'I'll propound a riddle. My teeth are false like Charles's'—with a touch of his fingers he made them drop, to prove the truth of his statement—'but yet they are my own. How can that be?'

'Because you've paid for them,' said their host with a laugh.

'That's not the answer,' smiled Townshend. 'No, the answer is simple, but, I believe, unusual. The teeth are truly my own teeth. I had them taken out and cut down long ago, and set like false ones.'

'What on earth for?' asked Charles, interested in spite of his preoccupation.

'For the sake of convenience, and to avoid all danger of toothache.'

The dentist was extremely interested. 'May I look at them, sir?' he asked. He looked at them.

'Well,' he said, 'I've seen some queer things, and I've done some queer things; but I never saw the like of that before—although I could do it, mind you!'

'Townshend,' exclaimed the host, 'is the rummiest chap! I'm always finding out some new queer thing about him! He's uncanny! That's what he is—uncanny!'

And the two Cathcarts looked at him as if they believed he must be.

There was nothing to be done with 'Cranwick, Dentist,' but dismiss him. Then Townshend rose and said he must be going, and Captain Cathcart rose too. But Charles still sat on and looked troubled.

'Which way are you going, Mr Townshend?' asked the Captain, when they were out in the hall. 'I should like a word with you, if you have the time to spare.'

'Certainly,' answered Townshend. 'Come to my rooms; we can talk in quiet.'

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## CHAPTER XXVI

### HOW CAPTAIN CATHCART WAS WON

'All right, Mortimer?' asked Townshend, as he entered his chambers.

'All right, sir,' answered Mortimer.

Townshend motioned the Captain into the leather lounge-chair, and invited him to a smoke.

'No, thank you,' said the Captain. 'I don't smoke.'

That completely settled Townshend's doubt whether he might not have been with Mrs

Kesteven that morning. He invited the Captain to drink—something with soda; but neither would the Captain drink.

'The truth is, Mr Townshend,' said he, 'I am too worried to think of anything but what I want to say.' And the soldier looked Townshend frankly in the face.

'I think,' said Townshend, sinking into the chair he had occupied the evening before, when Mrs Kesteven reclined in his lounge, 'you need scarcely trouble to say it.'

Captain Cathcart looked at him, and noted the odd, flickering smile. 'Why?' he asked.

'Because I believe I know.' Still the Captain looked and wondered. 'You wish to ask me what I know of the Kesteven case,' said Townshend.

'Well, yes,' assented the Captain, 'I would like to ask you that.'

'And I'll answer, Captain Cathcart,' said Townshend, in his most portentous tone. 'I know everything.'

'Everything?' exclaimed the Captain, with a wandering gaze of alarm, that seemed as if it would take the 'everything' in its purview.

'I am now satisfied that I know everything,' repeated Townshend. 'I don't mind confessing that until the end of luncheon to-day I laboured under a mistake: I thought you were the person most deeply concerned.'

'Me?' cried the Captain, with a start of amazement. 'Great heavens!'

'I tender my apologies,' said Townshend. 'I don't frequently make a mistake of that kind. My sole excuse is that I did not know you.'

That was complimentary, but it failed to soothe the Captain's troubled mind.

'But why should you ever have thought that I—?'

'No animus, I need not assure you,' said Townshend; 'no malice. I was misled by the evidence I had.'

'You amaze me more and more, Mr Townshend!' exclaimed the Captain. 'What new evidence have you had since the end of luncheon to make you change your opinion?'

'We are talking in the dark, if I may say so,' observed Townshend, and his odd smile fluttered forth again. 'I'll concentrate my answer in one concrete point.'

He rose and turned aside to his little writing bureau—an antique bit of furniture of the secretary kind. He unlocked it with the key that was in the lock, and from a little drawer he took a tiny packet. With that between his fingers he resumed his seat before the Captain. He undid the wrapper of tissue-paper and showed in his palm a tooth.

'That,' said he, 'is the centre and root of all the evidence. You see what it is?' He turned it over while the Captain peered.

'It looks like a tooth,' said the Captain.

'A false tooth, you see,' said Townshend,

'with broken gold attachments. That tooth I picked up myself on the spot where Kesteven was found—picked it up the morning after the murder.'

'You did? And why didn't you produce it?'

'Before the Justices? That was no time for its production. I reserved it for the trial—which has not come off—not yet. I wanted to find the owner. In a little while I had reasons for thinking I had found the owner in you.'

'Good God!' exclaimed the Captain. 'How easily a man may be wrongly suspected!'

'Now I know better,' said Townshend.

'You think you know the owner?'

'I am sure I do,' answered Townshend. 'And this is the real piece of conviction, as the French say.'

He rose and restored the tooth to the drawer whence he had taken it. He relocked the bureau and returned to his seat.

'Was it you, then,' the Captain asked, with a sudden flash of suspicion, 'that sent the telegram to the dentist to-day?'

'It was.'

He did not ask how Townshend knew of the connection between that particular dentist and Cathcart: that seemed a matter of small consequence compared with the other.

'Mr Townshend,' said the Captain, gazing at him desperately, 'I think you must be the Devil himself!'



'Ho, ho, ho!' laughed Townshend. 'Much obliged, I'm sure.'

'There is something else I should like to ask you,' said the Captain, after a pause of consideration. 'What business of yours is all this? You're not an officer of the law, or a paid detective. Why do you spend your time and ingenuity in finding out the—the owner of that tooth? What harm has he ever done to you that you should hunt him down?'

'Captain Cathcart,' answered Townshend, seriously pondering, 'I suppose we all act from motives that are more mixed than we know or allow. I won't pretend that I have any interest in abstract or impersonal Justice. I haven't. But I might as well ask you why you have done your best to screen the—owner of that tooth, as I am sure you have. If nobody had been arrested for the death of Kesteven I should have merely said, "Serve him right for a ruffian and a brute! The world is well rid of him!" and I should have taken just a speculative interest in the mystery. But, Captain Cathcart, an innocent victim has been fixed on by blundering Justice—two innocent victims whom I happen to have a great regard and liking for—and since the innocent victim can go free only by the production of the guilty culprit, why then—And,' he continued, rising to his feet, moved by his own eloquence, 'I appeal to you, Captain, to help me. I think you should not hesitate between the owner of the tooth, although a

relative, and the innocent man, a soldier like yourself, and, as I understand, a good comrade who ran some risks for your sake.

'Oh, you know that, do you?' said the Captain, hard beset.

'May I ask,' demanded Townshend, on a sudden thought, 'if you are a—an admirer of Mrs Kesteven?'

'No—and yes,' answered the Captain. 'But why do you ask?'

'Because she is involved in this matter with—with your relative.'

'Good Heavens! You know that too, do you?'

'On the other side there is the fate of an innocent woman—as brave a creature as God ever made—involved with the fate of the innocent man. Since a choice must be made between the two pairs, it seems to me that, as a man of honour and of true human feeling, you cannot but choose the side of the innocent.'

The Captain was evidently sore perplexed. He had probably not viewed the case in that light before, and he sat clasping and unclasping his hands, and staring at the fire.

'And what,' he said, without looking at Townshend, 'about the honour of our name? And what about him. We were boys together—at school,' he continued in a half-musing, half-argumentative tone. 'He was as sharp and keen as mustard: I was a duffer. He always helped me. I liked him. I was very fond of

him—always have been. And he was really a good chap—before he came to town and loafed. And what about his old mother? What about her? It would kill her!’

‘And what,’ Townshend asked, ‘about the honour of Lomas’s name? What about his old father?—an old yeoman as proud, I daresay, of his family and his history as the noblest house in the land? And young Lomas has, I’ve no doubt, his notions of honour and duty and affection, just as you have yours!’

‘True—true!’ admitted the Captain. ‘And has as much right to them! What do you want me to do?’ he asked, suddenly looking up.

‘I suppose you don’t know,’ said Townshend, ‘that this morning your cousin and Mrs Kesteven added to their faults by hiding away Lomas’s young wife—so that she should not communicate with me. She must be produced.’

‘That’s rather a matter for them—isn’t it?’ said Captain Cathcart.

‘Well, rather for me,’ said Townshend on reflection. ‘I think I need not be anxious about her. I’ll find her. I have my own people at work. But what you ought to do is this: find and produce your comrade Lomas.’

‘Is he lost?’ asked the Captain.

‘Practically. He was met by your cousin, on your recommendation, the Saturday night he came to London; but since then no trace—to speak of—has been had of him. Discover from your cousin what he did with him.’

'Did with him?' echoed the Captain, going pale. 'You don't mean—?'

'No, not that. I know he didn't do that. I may even tell you, in confidence'—he emphasised the word—'that I have reason to believe he may be in or near the city of York; but that's nothing to go upon, since I don't know what he is doing. He may even have left the place.'

'I'll find out all I can,' said the Captain, rising.

'Can you let me know in an hour!'

'I'll try,' said the Captain.

He departed at once. In little more than the hour he was back.

'Well, Captain?' asked Townshend.

'Nothing?' For the Captain looked depressed and anxious.

'No,' he answered. 'Something—something that will cause more trouble. What do you think the foolish fellow did? He got drunk, and insisted on going back to the army!'

'But—!' exclaimed Townshend.

'Under another name! If they find out who he really is, he'll be handed over to the civil authorities on the charge of fraudulent enlistment and get a month's imprisonment!'

'Can't such a thing be arranged?' asked Townshend. 'You ought to know. I presume he is with his regiment at York?'

'That must be it,' said the Captain.

'Captain Cathcart,' said Townshend, solemnly, 'here I believe is your opportunity to undo the

mischief you have done ! Go to York at once, and see what you can do. I know he trusts you, and believes you to be his friend. And I'll write a line to him—if you will be so good as to take it. Go—there's a good fellow.'

After a moment's debate with himself Captain Cathcart said he would go ; and, after conversing together a little longer, the two men parted in mutual confidence and understanding.

It was Townshend's hour for solitary meditation—the empty hour in mid-afternoon when he considered the serious problems of life—when he took himself to task for neglect of opportunities, dulness of invention or imagination, and failure of perception and understanding. For, if Mr Townshend was not exactly the kind of man of whom Society would approve in all things, he was at least conscientious in making the most of himself. He was thus occupied in his quiet hour, when Mortimer announced a visitor.

'The gentleman with the black patch on his eye, sir,' he murmured, in warning.

'Oh !' exclaimed Townshend. 'Show him in, Mortimer.'

The gentleman with the black patch was shown in ; and Townshend, always polite, soon had him seated in his own favourite lounge. The gentleman seemed to be both embarrassed and in a tightly-strung condition of nerves ; so Townshend was patient with him. Yet he was an unconscionable time in speaking of the

business he had come upon. He spoke of the sudden cold bite of the weather, and the luncheon they had shared in that day.

'Is the door closed, Mr Townshend?' he suddenly asked.

'What—do you feel a draught?' asked Townshend.

He turned his head to glance at the door. Instantly the gentleman with the black patch sprang on him like a cat, smothering him in his overcoat, which he had carried on his arm, and cramming something into his mouth. Townshend had been taken unawares. He struggled but faintly, and he uttered no sound but a choking gurgle. In a second or two he lay quiet in the chair.

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## CHAPTER XXVII

### 'WRAP ME IN MY OLD STABLE JACKET'

IT is remarkable that when Will Lomas was conducted to the barracks in York at the top of the windy hill he had no thought of doing anything but accept his position. When he was confined in prison his whole nature rose in revolt; but here, although he had been caught by fraud and was held as it were by

force, no thought of rebellion entered his head. For he was an old soldier, and to the old soldier the sense of discipline is second nature ; it is as prompt and inevitable as obedience to the rein is to the harnessed horse.

He passed with mechanical ease and unconsciousness into the regular routine of the regiment, without feeling it hardship as did the common recruits. When the bugle sounded reveille at the cold, dark hour of five in the morning, he did not grouse and grumble like the sleepy-headed youngsters. Old habit—the habit of years—awoke in him ; he jumped from his cot, and in five minutes he was dressed and clattering downstairs to stables. When there, in the reek of the beasts and of the soiled litter, he did not swear and curse and shirk the duty set him, but—old habit again, not virtue—he cleared away with fork and rake the night's bedding, and groomed his horse with a will.

Such differences as these did no more than mark him off as a steady, industrious and promising young man, who would probably become a good soldier and get quick promotion. But there were other things in his behaviour—things which he could not help doing—things which he did unconsciously—that drew upon him the suspicions of the knowing ones. He was, of course, set to the goose-step with the other recruits ; but he could not help doing right about turn without the movement being ex-

plained, and when he halted he could not help dressing without being bid. And so the drill-sergeant—an experienced old hand—had his eye on him. When he passed up the front and down the back of his ranks of Johnny Raws, he stopped behind Will Lomas.

'What was your trade afore you took the shilling, young man?' he asked, half in confidence, half in banter.

'I'm set down as clerk, sergeant,' answered Will.

'Clerk be jiggered!' murmured the sergeant. 'You never got them shoulders and that back setting at a blooming desk!'

But the sergeant knew a good man when he had him, and set a proper value on him, so he asked no more compromising questions.

There was a man, however, who began to make trouble and provoke suspicion, and that was the corporal of the barrack-room in which Will Lomas was quartered. He was an old soldier—a sulky, bullying fellow, thievish and lazy. Will, from the first, conceived a dislike of him; and the corporal kept a lowering look on Will. One morning the corporal told Will he must groom his horse.

'I can't, corporal,' said he. 'I have already my own and the sergeant's to look after.'

'You mean you won't!' said the corporal, lowering.

'Well, then,' said Will, controlling his temper



with difficulty, 'since you put it like that, I won't.'

'Take you care, my fine fellow!' said the corporal, shaking a finger at him, 'or you may be put under arrest.'

'Oh, I know what I'm about, corporal,' said Will, imprudently. 'Although a sergeant may have his grooming done for him, a corporal needn't.'

'Ho, ho!' cried the corporal. 'You know that—do you? Perhaps you know a great deal more.'

'Perhaps I do,' answered Will.

That appeared to end the matter. In the afternoon, however, Will entered the deserted barrack-room to find the corporal turning over his property at the head of his cot. The corporal made the disciplinary excuse that some things were not neatly enough folded; but Will feared the inveterate Paul Pry might discover something that would betray his identity. And next day he contrived to send off his discharge paper to Townshend.

It was well he got that done; for at night there came a crisis.

He was not yet free of the barracks; for he had not got his uniform fitted. During the long evenings, therefore, he wore himself out in seeking distraction within the barrack bounds. He avoided the canteen as much as possible, for prudence sake; he found the reading-room dull, for he was not a bookish fellow, and the barrack-room, bare and deserted, was a horror

to him. For if he sat there by the fire, or lay awake upon his cot, such thoughts, memories, and regrets rushed in upon him as drove him nearly mad. He thought of his Jenny, and he felt as if his heart were torn and bleeding. He recalled the trick that had brought him there—back to the army again—and he could scarce keep himself from raging openly. Why was he not a free man, in London, with his wife in his company?

And then he remembered the crime of which he still remained accused, and a flood of despair swept over his soul. Out of the depths he cried and demanded if his intolerable condition would ever end, if his innocence would ever be established. And still his thoughts and desires and hopes turned to his dear Jenny. Where was she? Oh, where was she? What was she doing? Did she miss him? Or was she consoling herself for his loss? Such nightly torture was more than human nature could endure, and he fled to the canteen.

On that particular evening there was a full assembly there; for certain of the recruits were paying their footing with the old soldiers—that is to say, they were 'standing' the beer that freely flowed, and were exhibiting their quality of entertainment in an improvised sing-song. When Will appeared he was invited, as a 'rookey,' to contribute his share. He was ever a generous-tempered, sociable creature, and he did not refuse.

'Ridley!' called someone presently—  
'Ridley!' It was the watchful and suspicious corporal.

Will paid no heed; he heard as if he heard not. He had, in truth, forgotten that 'Ridley' was his present name.

'Blest!' cried the corporal. 'The chap don't know his own name. P'r'aps it ain't his own.'

Then Will recollected himself. 'Do you mean me?' he had the astuteness to say. 'I thought there might be more than one Ridley. I'm Bob Ridley.' At which there came a burst of laughter, as if it were a joke.

'Give us a song, chummy!' called another.

Now Will had one or two soldiers' ditties, in the singing of which he rather fancied himself. One was a translation of a French song, once very popular, called 'My Captain,' for the proper, dramatic rendering of which a sabre was necessary. He intimated so much; and a sabre and belt were hurriedly borrowed from the guard-room. Then, hearing that something unusual was afoot, the sergeants pushed in from their private parlour. Will stood up to give his performance. He buckled on the sword as if he knew all about it, which one or two did not fail to remark upon. Then at a certain moment of the song it was necessary that the sabre should be drawn: Will drew it in the regulation way for parade—first flinging the hilt round, and then drawing the blade straight

up from the scabbard with a sweep over his head. The instant after, the song ended.

'He ain't had no sword drill yet,' observed the suspicious corporal, loud enough for Will to hear. 'How did he know the regulation trick with the sabre?'

'An old cavalry sergeant taught it me for the song, corporal,' said Will, lying boldly.

'I should say he handled the thing like an old soldier—wouldn't you?' said the corporal, turning to the drill-sergeant who stood near him.

'Hold your blooming chow!' said the sergeant. 'What's it got to do with you if he does?'

But worse was yet to come. Later in the evening, when Will Lomas had arrived at a tolerably reckless condition, he was asked for another song. Then he prepared to give his great, his special, his favourite song—the song of 'The Dying Lancer.' In his old regiment none—neither officer nor private—could come near him in the singing of that song; and he gave it now to those strangers who had never before heard it, and who received it with enthusiasm. It is a true barrack-room ballad; and all caught up the refrain, and at the end of the second verse joined in the singing:—

'Wrap me in my old stable jacket,  
And say a poor buffer lies low—lies low;  
Bring six good Lancers to carry me,  
With step that is measured and slow.'

When the song was finished the door suddenly opened, and a clear, authoritative military voice rang out through the dense tobacco reek and over the burst of applause.

'Who sang that song?'

The colonel of the regiment was in the doorway, and with him was a stranger who had asked the question. All the men were instantly on their feet, and stood to salute.

'I thought nobody knew that song but my old regiment, the 99th Lancers,' said the stranger.

'Who was the singer?' demanded the colonel of the regiment.

'This recruit, sir,' said the suspicious corporal, with a satisfied smile, seeking to lead Will forward.

But Will stepped out of his own accord, and saluted, while his countenance was set and pale.

'What? Recruit?' cried the stranger, in sharp, staccato tones. 'Never! Surely, I know you? Surely you're Lomas?—late Sergeant-Major Lomas of the 99th Lancers?'

There was a visible stir of excitement and surprise among all the company at the mention of the rank of the recruit, and even the corporal looked respectful.

'Yes, Colonel Methuen,' answered Will, in a low, difficult voice. 'I'm Lomas; I can't deny it.'

'Then he's an old soldier?' said the colonel of the regiment, frowning severely.

'And a very good soldier, too!' exclaimed Will's old colonel. 'But what, in Heaven's name, are you doing here?'

Then Will's fortitude and self-possession gave way. He sat suddenly down upon a bench, and, flinging his arms upon the table, laid his head upon them, and was shaken with sobs.

'I don't know!' he cried. 'God help me, I don't know!'

The two colonels looked at each other in surprise and perplexity. The colonel of the regiment recovered himself first: his feelings were less involved.

'Bring him along, Methuen,' said he. 'Bring him to my quarters. We can hear what he has to say. There's evidently something wrong.'

'Yes,' said Colonel Methuen. 'I'd like to hear what he's got to say. Come, Lomas. A brave fellow like you shouldn't give way like this. But come along, and let's hear about it.'

Will resumed control of himself, and rose. Several were eager to hand him his cap, with looks of wonder and respect; for all soldiers were acquainted with the recent exploits of the 99th Lancers in India. Colonel Methuen took Lomas's arm and led him out.

Never say that the spirit of sympathy and of comradeship is lacking between good officers and good men in the British Army.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

## UNDER ARREST

WHEN the two colonels heard Will's story they found they had a more difficult business on their hands than they bargained for. Until Will told them—with the notion in his head that he was giving no information—they did not know that he was practically an outlaw, that he was an escaped prisoner accused of murder; they had not even heard of the Kesteven case, so little heed do some people give to such matters.

'Doosid sorry for you, Lomas!' said his old colonel. 'By gad, I never was sorrier about anything! But you see we can't help ourselves in the matter! It's a serious business! And it's not for us to determine whether you're innocent or guilty. Eh?' said he, deferring to the colonel of the regiment.

'You say,' observed the other colonel, more coldly, 'that you were trapped into this enlistment—that you don't remember taking the shilling. Well, though it seems an extraordinary story, I am willing to believe that, and I shall have it looked into. But my duty and the Queen's Regulations compel me to put you under arrest for fraudulent enlistment. You've got yourself into a mess. I am very sorry for you—all the sorrier that my friend thinks so highly of you.'

It was said with precision, but Will understood its kindness.

'Thank you, Colonel,' said he, simply. 'I know there's nothing to do but put me under arrest.'

And under arrest, accordingly, he was put.

It was quite a sensation for the whole barracks—a distinguished sergeant-major found among the recruits! One would have thought that nothing like it had happened since King Saul was found among the prophets. The sensation became more acute when some soldiers—who read the news of the Sunday papers with greater attention than the colonels—remembered the Kesteven case, and identified Sergeant-Major Lomas with the escaped prisoner. Then, indeed, was he a hero to the barrack-rooms.

Into the midst of this excitement Captain Cathcart descended next morning. He went directly to the colonel's quarters and sent in his card. He was received immediately. He found his exposition of the business he had come upon less toilsome than he had expected. He had determined, as he journeyed down, that there was no way of conducting the case but the truthful and open way. Therefore, he broke his purpose at once to the colonel.

'I have travelled from London,' said he, 'on what may seem to you a singular errand. It's about a recruit that came to you rather more than a week ago. He has no business to be with you.'



'What!' said the Colonel. 'Another old soldier?'

'Yes,' said the Captain; 'he's an old soldier, and has a good record.'

'You know him, I suppose, Captain Cathcart?'

'Yes. I know him,' answered the Captain, with a touch of hesitation.

'Does his name happen to be Lomas?' asked the Colonel.

'Yes,' said the Captain. 'That is his name. You have found him out then?'

'To all intents and purposes he betrayed himself; and the colonel of his former regiment spotted him last night. It's an odd, rather romantic story.' And he told it.

'And he is now under arrest?' said the Captain.

'He is—fraudulent enlistment, you know,' said the Colonel. The Captain was silent, and seemed worried. 'You are interested in him; may I ask why? You are not of the same regiment, I think?'

'No. But I owe him a good turn—indeed, as many good turns as I can give him. If it had not been for him I would not be sitting here alive—my bones would have been picked by the Afghan kites and crows.'

'Oh, is that it?'

'There's more than that,' continued the Captain. 'If I'm not mistaken, a ne'er-do-well cousin of mine was concerned in this absurd enlistment of his.'

'Ah!' murmured the Colonel.

'I suppose there is no getting out of this charge of fraudulent enlistment?'

'I don't see how,' answered the Colonel. 'It must be met, although we may lighten it for him. But I suppose you know there is a most serious complication?'

'You mean his connection with the Kesteven case;' and the Captain looked deeply troubled. 'I—I believe a mistake has been made there.'

'He says so,' said the Colonel. 'And I am sure, I hope so—for the credit of the army.'

The Captain remained silent and thoughtful an instant. Then he asked, 'May I see him?'

'I have no objection,' answered the Colonel, and rose. 'This morning of course we must hand him over to the civil power, and there we have done with it—except so far as giving evidence goes.'

So Captain Cathcart was introduced to Will in his confinement. He was struck dumb for an instant by his reception.

'What do you want with me again?' he demanded brusquely. 'Can't you leave me alone? Haven't you done me harm enough, Captain Cathcart?'

'Yes,' said the Captain. 'I've done you harm. I suppose I have, and I'm very sorry for it. I meant to help you.'

'Wouldn't it have been better for me not to have stirred out of prison? I've got to go back, I expect, and go through with it. You

tempted me to break out ; you gave me money and a note to your London friend, Black Patch, and he made me drunk and took me to a recruiting-sergeant ! I knew nothing about it till I woke up in the recruits' quarters in St George's Barracks !'

'Did he do that ? The scoundrel !' exclaimed the Captain. 'I had no idea of that !'

'And how, then, did you know I was here, Captain ?' demanded Will, with triumphant suspicion in his look.

'Ah,' said Captain Cathcart, 'that's through your friend, Mr Townshend. By the way, I have a note to you from him.'

Will read the note, and then handed it back to the Captain. 'You can read it if you like,' said he, with a complete change of tone, and something of a break in his voice. 'It seems too good to be true. My God, if it should be true !' And he leaned his arms on the table and set his face in his hands, murmuring, 'Jenny ! Jenny ! My dear, brave Jenny !'

This was Townshend's note :—

'Cheer up. I have sufficient evidence now to justify me, if I were a detective, in taking by the collar the man who should be in your place. Captain Cathcart brings this to you. You may trust him. As you know, I once thought he was the man. I made a mistake ; the greatest and best of men may do that. But I regret it ; the greatest can do no more.'

'And did you think that, too?' asked Captain Cathcart, sadly, folding the note.

'What?' asked Will, looking up.

'That I was the man.'

'Not at first,' answered Will, almost ashamed. 'I didn't know what to think, when he put it into my head. And what could I think when I came to this—to all appearance through you, Captain? I was in a regular mess and fog of doubts and difficulties.'

'A man in difficulties, I suppose, never understands the difficulties of another man,' said the Captain, with growing sadness.

A new suspicion rose in Will Lomas's mind. 'Do you know the man he means?' he asked.

'I do,' said the Captain, with evident reluctance, 'and I doubt I'll have to give evidence against him.'

Will considered him a moment. 'A man in trouble,' said he, 'becomes a selfish pig. Will you forgive me for the way I behaved when you came in?'

'Nothing to forgive, Lomas,' said Captain Cathcart, extending his hand, which Will took and grasped heartily.

'I am really and truly sorry, Captain,' said he, 'that I have behaved ill to you! But, there! I don't understand anything! My mind is—anyhow!'

Their interview was interrupted by the arrival of an escort to hand Will over to the civil authority. He turned a glance of appeal

to the Captain that was only meant to be of farewell.

'I'll see you through it,' said Captain Cathcart.

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## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE QUEST OF THE GOLDEN TOOTH

WE left the adroit and astute Townshend subdued by the man with the black patch, and completely at his mercy. Apparently so, at least.

When Townshend lay quiet in the easy-chair, with his head smothered, the man with the black patch, Charles Cathcart, stood silent an instant, listening. Then he stepped swiftly to the door, softly turned the key, and with his ear against the couch listened again. There was no sound of movement without, and he returned and cast a half-scared glance on his limp and prostrate enemy. But resolution animated both eye and mouth.

'He said it was in the bureau!' he murmured to himself, stepping forward to that piece of furniture.

Plainly he referred to his cousin, Captain Cathcart, who had indiscreetly let out where Townshend kept the incriminating tooth.

He tried the lid ; it was locked—but the key was in the lock. He swiftly unlocked and raised the lid. He was confronted with an array of small drawers. In which of them was hid the object of his search? He began to go through them in order, and grew amazed and daunted by the multitude of small and valuable things he fingered—each one carefully wrapped up, and almost every wrapper bearing an inscription, a number, and a date. He unwrapped, for instance, a ring of diamonds and rubies—evidently a thing of extraordinary value—and he read, 'Czar Nicholas, 359, 9-4-76.' He had a mind to put it in his pocket ; but he thought better of that desire, and put the ring back in the drawer. He touched strange and valuable things every time he unwrapped a paper. What did it mean? Where did this man get such things?

He was on the brink of a great discovery concerning Townshend ; but he did not guess that. Had he pursued systematically his search and his examination of everything he came upon, he would have come upon abundant evidence that the man who lay limp and unconscious must have been somehow concerned in every one of the undiscovered jewel robberies of years. But he did not guess that ; and the number of drawers, and the number of things in each drawer, alarmed him ; he had no time to go through them all.

He grew impatient. He opened a drawer at

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random, and picked up something at random ; but he failed to lay finger on his tooth. In his impatience he opened and shut the drawers rather noisily, and the noise disturbed Townshend—although Cathcart was so engrossed he did not notice that. Then Townshend began to stir softly, as a waking cat may move under a blanket. Softly he pushed the overcoat from his head, and the fumes of an anæsthetic rose into the air. Thus he gave himself free breath and vision. He looked about him with a languid, half-absent eye. He saw the man bending over his open bureau, and his characteristic smile lifted his moustache.

‘Looking for your lost tooth?’ he murmured in thick tones.

The man with the black patch started as if a shot had entered his back. He spun round and glared upon Townshend.

‘Found it?’ murmured Townshend, and smiled again.

Cathcart came fiercely at him. ‘Where the devil is the key of this inner place? I want the key?’

‘The key?’ murmured Townshend. ‘The sea! The sea!’ And he slid off again into unconsciousness, his last words plainly showing the surging effect upon him of the anæsthetic.

Cathcart seized the opportunity to fumble in Townshend’s pockets ; and that action again stirred him back to consciousness. He pushed Cathcart away from him, softly but effectually,

as a large dog might keep off a small one. But the other persisted in attacking his pockets, and Townshend seemed to awake to the seriousness of his position. A shiver ran over his nerves. He shook himself; with an effort he flung Cathcart off, and stood up. He was unsteady, but he knew what he wanted to do. He reached the button of the electric bell, and pressed it unobserved by Cathcart. The bell rang its clatter of alarm somewhere without.

'Curse you!' cried the man with the black patch. 'Give me the key!' and again he darted at Townshend.

It was like the struggle of a tall and strong man drunk, with a small and active man sober; for drowsiness still drenched all the muscles and faculties of the one, while the other was animated with the sharpest desperation and anxiety. A knock sounded on the door.

'That you, Mortimer?' asked Mortimer's master in a thick, slow voice.

'Yes, sir,' answered Mortimer. 'I can't get in. The door is locked.'

'Oh, is it?' murmured Townshend. 'I'll open it.'

'No, you won't!' cried Cathcart, and leaped with desperate energy at his throat. 'I'll choke you!—I'll kill you!—if you don't tell me where it is!'

And it seemed as if he would make his words good. The struggle was then as between a



mastiff puppy and a ferocious terrier; and all was in favour of the terrier.

'Stop a minute,' Townshend contrived to say. 'What is it you want?'

'My tooth!' cried the other, holding off a moment.

'Ah,' said the astute Townshend, 'you confess I've got it then? Well now, stand back a moment, and I'll show you where it is.'

Cathcart stood back. Townshend stepped to the bureau, opened a drawer, and took out a tiny packet. The action was all the more exasperating that the packet lay in the very front of a drawer which Cathcart had opened. Townshend undid the paper wrapper, exhibited the tooth between finger and thumb, then put it in his waistcoat pocket and buttoned his coat over it. He lifted his odd smile at his antagonist.

'If you can take it,' said he, 'you shall have it.'

With a curse Cathcart flew at him again. Townshend was recovered from his drowsiness a good deal; but he was not yet complete master of himself. It went very hard with him at the hands of so desperate a man as Cathcart was become.

But Mortimer was a servant worthy of his master; and, since his master did not immediately open the door, he made other arrangements for opening it on his own responsibility. No one who remembers what were the private

interests of Mortimer and his master will be surprised to learn that Mortimer had ready to his hand sufficient means for the picking of any lock. He opened the door with very little noise—so little that Cathcart did not note what had been done. Then, with a handy ruler which he had brought with him, and which he wielded like a policeman's truncheon, he hit Cathcart neatly on the head. Catching him as he fell, he deposited him as gently as if he were a fainting lady in the easy-chair.

'That dot,' said he, 'will keep him quiet for five minutes.' Then he sniffed the air of the room. 'Dosed you with ether, did he, Markis?'

'Yes,' answered Townshend. 'I was a fool to trust him.'

'You're given to be too trusting, Markis,' said Mortimer.

'I'm dead drowsy yet,' said his master. 'Give me something, Mortimer.'

'Yes, certainly, Markis.'

Mortimer scuffled out in haste. He had not been a doctor's man for nothing. He knew what to give to dissipate quickly the effect of an anæsthetic. And in a few seconds he was back with a dose.

'Drink that, Markis.' Townshend drank. And in a second or two he was himself again.

'Narrow squeak, sir,' said Mortimer, looking round the room and noting the open bureau. 'It's not like you to let this happen.'

And he shook his head, as if he believed that

the wariness and cleverness of his master were going off.

'But where the deuce,' cried Townshend—for he was truly nettled—'are those fellows who are supposed to be keeping their eye on this man? He's easy enough to follow with his black patch.'

'Hark!' said Mortimer, listening. 'Speak of the devil, sir—I believe this must be them.'

The outer bell rang, and Mortimer departed to answer it. In a few seconds he returned.

'It's all right, sir,' said he. 'A lady to see you, sir.'

He stood aside and the lady disclosed herself to be Jenny Lomas.

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## CHAPTER XXX

### AT BAY

To account for Jenny's appearance in 25 Jermyn Street it is necessary to return to what happened in the morning.

When the lock turned in the door of her captivity, and the man with the black patch stood before her, he appeared as if he had just walked in from the street. His manner was that of haste and secrecy.

'Quick!' said he. 'I'm going to take you to your husband. He is waiting for you.'

The thought of Will waiting for her made her heart bound uncontrollably. And she had no suspicion. Why should she have any? Was not this the man to whom Will had been commended by Captain Cathcart?

'Quick!' repeated the man, as she hastily donned hat and jacket. And he held his head in a listening attitude, as if he feared that her she-gaoler might appear.

'I am ready,' said she.

She hastened after him with light foot out of the flat and down into the street. He hailed a loitering hansom, and gave an address in the Temple, and then bowled away. She questioned her companion about her husband, and he answered her with a promising cheerfulness and vagueness, smiling all the while and nodding, as much as to say, 'Wait and see!'

They turned out of crowded Fleet Street, just after they had passed the Griffin, under a strange, deep arch, and then they clattered down a very narrow lane. Presently they got out, and the man with the black patch led her into a dark doorway and up a dark, uneven staircase, about which the mustiness of centuries seemed to linger, for she had noted that the building was very old. On the second floor he opened a heavy, iron-studded door, and ushered her in.

'Step in here, Mrs Lomas,' said he, gently, opening another door.

She advanced, nothing doubting, almost expecting to be taken in Will's outstretched arms.

But when she entered she turned about quickly ; for there was no one in the room, and it looked like a small and dirty kitchen. There was a dresser and a gas cooking-stove.

'I'll go and find him,' said the man with the black patch, nodding and smiling.

He shut the door, and Jenny heard him lock it, although he did it very softly. Then a horrid fear assailed her. She tried the latch ; the door was fast. She hammered with her fists. She looked at the window ; it was of frosted glass, and barred.

She had been deceived—played upon ! She had been taken from one prison to be shut into another—a worse ! For her former gaoler had been a woman ; her present was a man ! And the knowledge of that was very disquieting !

She began to look around the little, frowsy room. There was a portmanteau in a corner, upon which were painted the large letters 'C. C.' There was also a Gladstone bag with, besides the initials, a plate, on which was engraved 'Cathcart.' In a drawer of the dresser was a cookery book and a prayer book (strange conjunction !) in both of which was written 'C. Cathcart.' The recurrence of the initials and the name roused her suspicions.

Cathcart ? Cathcart ? It was the name of the Captain. Also, it was the name of Mrs Kesteven's first husband. Could it be that this man with the black patch— But that was impossible ; for Peggy Cathcart's husband must

have died before she could have married Mr Kesteven : must he not? It was the reasoning and the speculation of an inexperienced and innocent woman.

She grew cold ; and she lit the gas stove to warm the air. She had passed a wakeful night in fear of Mrs Kesteven, and the fumes of the burning gas in the little room made her unutterably drowsy. She slept, sitting in a chair, leaning against the dresser. Poor, sorely-tried, brave girl !

She woke with the turning of the lock, and the harsh opening of the door. She started up in the hope of seeing Will in the company of the man with the black patch ; but she was confronted by Mrs Kesteven—Mrs Kesteven in a rage—Mrs Kesteven the pale, flaming embodiment of fury ! The fury of jealousy, it presently appeared.

'So this is where you've come to, miss !' she hissed. 'You call yourself a married woman !—Mrs Lomas !' she sneered.

'What do you mean ?' panted Jenny.

'What do I mean? You know what I mean ! What did you come here for ?—To the chambers of a man !—chambers in the Temple ! A married man ! My man ! My husband !'

'Your husband?' cried Jenny, thinking of the name of Cathcart all around her.

'Yes, woman ! My husband ! And well you know it ! You !—you woman ! What did he say to you ? Tell me or I'll kill you.'

She had wrought herself to a frenzy. With flaming eyes, outstretched head, and raised hand she made at Jenny. Jenny was truly afraid then. She set the chair between herself and Mrs Kesteven, and, as she turned to reach her, she dodged round it, shot out at the door, slammed it to, and, quick as thought, locked it!

Then, with hurried feet and trembling limbs, she sought and found the great door that opened upon the staircase. She flew down the stairs. She was free!

It was growing dusk in the quiet, narrow lane when she reached it. She looked up and down; she did not know which way to turn. A man was loitering near. She stepped boldly up to him.

'Will you be so good as direct me to Jermyn Street?' She had at once thought of Townshend.

The man's careful and waiting manner at once changed. It became alert and eager.

'Are you Mrs Lomas?' he asked.

In alarm Jenny demanded, 'What has that to do with you?' And she turned to flee again.

'Do you want Mr Townshend?' the man asked hurriedly.

She stopped. 'Yes, I do.'

'If you will come with me I'll take you to him.'

'No!' said she, turning away again. 'I've been deceived once.'

'Very well, madam,' said the man, with a

smile. 'I'll just show you where to find a cab and you can go by yourself.'

He led her up the lane into Fleet Street and put her into a cab. And so Jenny arrived at Townshend's, as we have seen.

When her eye lighted on Cathcart still unconscious in the chair, she exclaimed in her excitement, 'That's the man! The beast!'

These were her first words. Townshend emitted his usual smile.

'Yes, Mrs Lomas,' said he, 'it is true; that is the man—or, rather, the beast!'

Then he questioned her, and she related her day's story.

'He was going to take me to Will,' she said, 'but—' her lips trembled, and she asked piteously, 'Where is he?'

'Now, my dear Mrs Lomas,' said Townshend, 'you've borne up, and been very brave. Don't break down now. I beg to assure you that I know where your husband is, and that in a little while he and you will meet as if nothing had happened.'

'Do you think so?' she asked eagerly; but she shook her head.

'I beg to assure you,' he repeated, 'of the truth of what I say. I wish to ask you another question or two; but first—you will excuse me—I must attend to my gentleman here; he is coming to.' He rang the bell. Mortimer reappeared. 'Call up Slinger,' said he, 'and tell him to go back to that house in the Temple



—the second floor, on the right, I think you said,' turning to Jenny—'and bring along the lady he will find there. Let him tell her that the man with the black patch has urgent need of her.'

'Very well, sir,' said Mortimer.

'By the way,' said Townshend, turning again to Jenny, 'did you close the outer door of the chambers?'

'I slammed it!' said Jenny, with energy.

'Then we need the key,' he said. He turned to the occupant of the chair. 'Mr Cathcart, oblige me with the key of your chambers.'

'Sorry to disoblige you, Mr Townshend,' said Cathcart, with assumed politeness, 'but you have too much of mine already.'

'What the devil, man,' cried Townshend, 'is this a moment for scruples of reserve? It is to release your wife we want the key.'

'My wife?' said Cathcart, looking and speaking as if suddenly found out in a crime.

'Yes,' murmured Townshend, with his flickering smile, 'commonly passing as Mrs Kesteven.' It was his revenge for the advantage Cathcart had taken of his trustfulness.

Cathcart looked at him a moment, shook his head at him, and said through his teeth, 'You devil!'

'Well now,' said Townshend, 'your key; to release your wife.'

'What does she need release from? But if

she needs release I can go myself,' said Cathcart, rising to his feet.

'Sorry I can't part with you yet,' said Townshend. 'But if you doubt that she needs release, question this lady, who locked her in; you have seen her before, I believe.'

Cathcart mechanically acknowledged the acquaintance with a slight bending of his body; it could not be called a bow.

'Yes,' said Jenny, with satisfaction, 'I locked her into the horrid little kitchen where you put me!'

'Now, Mr Cathcart, the key,' insisted Townshend, holding out his hand.

'Do you mean to try to keep me a prisoner?' asked Cathcart, lowering.

'Oh, my dear man,' said Townshend, 'don't be irrelevant. We can discuss that later. Come, the key. You do not wish me to use force?'

So Cathcart surrendered the key, which was handed over to the waiting Mortimer.

'And now, Mrs Lomas,' said Townshend, 'will you tell me what you discovered that made Mrs Kesteven (or Mrs Cathcart) turn against you?'

'Yes, I'll tell you,' Jenny began. But her brain reeled. She put up her hand feebly to her head. 'I feel rather faint. Can you give me a glass of water? I haven't tasted anything since last night!'

'My dear Mrs Lomas,' cried Townshend,

jumping to his feet, and ringing the bell, 'what an ass I am not to have thought of it! Mortimer,' he said, when that person appeared, 'give an eye to Mr Cathcart, and see if he wants anything. Mrs Lomas, come with me. I'll show you my kitchen. You must have something to eat. Ha! ha! it's not a glass of water that you need. I'm a devil of a fellow to make people eat proper food, and drink proper beverages. You don't know that I rather fancy myself as a cook? Well, you shall see me make an omelette; and you shall eat it! And if you don't say— But I'll wait till you've tasted.'

It was a revelation to Jenny how this mysterious man could pass easily and naturally from grave to gay, and from the detection of crime to the confection of a dish. While she observed his quick assured movements she wondered and admired.

'There cannot be omelettes without breaking of eggs,' said he. 'And the saying applies very widely.'

Never before had Jenny known how to make an omelette properly, and never before, she admitted, had she eaten one so light and exquisite. And Mr Townshend was as deft and attentive as a woman in serving her. He spread a neat tray for her at the end of his little kitchen table, he cut for her a crust from a new loaf, and he drew the cork of a bottle of old Burgundy, and made her drink a glass of the reviving wine. He was a dear—she declared to herself. And

then she told him of the disclosures Mr Timmis had unwittingly made. 'I hear a cab,' he said presently. 'That will be Peggy—the undutiful daughter! Let us receive her in my sitting-room.'

They returned thither, and set Mortimer free to answer the door. Anon Mrs Kesteven, otherwise Peggy Cathcart, appeared in the doorway. At sight of Jenny she stopped.

'Come in, Mrs Cathcart,' said Townshend, 'pray come in.'

'What do you mean,' she demanded, 'by giving me that name?'

'Giving it you!' exclaimed Townshend. 'It is yours, is it not?'

She said nothing, but came in, while Charles Cathcart steadily regarded her.

'We're trapped, Peggy,' said he, lightly, rising to his feet.

She regarded him with stern disdain and displeasure. It was to Townshend she spoke.

'What have you got us here for?' she demanded. She spoke like an injured and insulted queen of tragedy.

'Well, really,' said Townshend, 'I would find it hard to say. I am not sure, I only wish you to understand that the game is up—I have the ends of your story all neatly gathered together, or shall have to-night—and that either voluntarily or compulsorily you must clear my young friend Lomas—known as Lomas,' he added pointedly; but the point did not seem to catch on.

'What do you mean by "game"? What "game"?' demanded Peggy, in grand defiance.

'Ah, you don't know?' said Townshend, while his smile flickered. 'Well, let me tell you the story from the beginning, and then perhaps you will understand what I mean by "game."'

The door was flung open by Mortimer.

'Inspector Mellish, sir.' (Charles and Peggy exchanged glances at the word 'Inspector.')'

'Ah, Mellish, come in,' said Townshend. 'You are just in time. Do you mind sitting quiet for a little while, and listening to this story? It will interest you, I think.'

'Pleasure, Mr Townshend,' said Mellish.

He sat down, and continued to keep his eyes shifting from Charles to Peggy, and back again.

'A gentleman, a country squire,' began Townshend—'in fact, old Mr Kesteven—married, practically married, three women.' He threw an argumentative glance at Charles Cathcart. 'He either did not believe he had truly married the first woman, or else he trusted to her ignorance that she was truly married. But she was. And she is still alive. Now what would the law call the two following marriages?'

'What?' cried Peggy. 'Then I wasn't married at all?'

'You forget,' said Townshend. 'You couldn't be married, Mrs Cathcart, in any case. Your husband was alive—and is still.'

Peggy moved her hands and her head in a distress almost piteous to see.

'You mean Miss Lomas,' she said suddenly, 'his mother?'

'Ah, you knew that,' said Townshend; 'I thought you did.'

'She his wife!' she sneered. 'We'll see about that.'

'I have seen about it,' said Townshend. 'And I beg to repeat that, in any case, it has nothing to do with you. You never were Mrs Kesteven. Well, from that bit of dishonourable action on the part of old Mr Kesteven sprang all this trouble. 'Pon my word, I'm not fitted to be much of a preacher or a moralist, but there's a fine text about the sins of the fathers! At any-rate, here was a father hating and persecuting his own son, who did not know his father; and afterwards a brother—a half-brother—persecuting a brother, who did not know he was brother. Then came the murder of the half-brother, with the suspicion that the brother—the true, legitimate son—had committed it. How did that come about? Well, you will remember, Mr Mellish, that by that time old Mr Kesteven was dead some time, leaving presumably a widow, and also this young Mr Kesteven—so-called, though he had no legal right to more than his mother's name—this young Kesteven as his heir.'

'I understand perfectly, Mr Townshend,' said Mellish in business-like tones. 'I follow you.'

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'But the presumed widow had her husband still alive—the husband she was fond of—the husband of her youth,' said Townshend, lifting his lip.

'You devil!' spat Peggy.

'By the terms of the will of the deceased Mr Kesteven his widow was to enjoy the estate if his son died without issue. So the presumed widow and her real husband laid their innocent heads together—'

'It's a lie!' burst out Peggy.

'—and said,' continued Townshend, "'Why should he not die first?" The woman tried her fine hand at making him die. She bought some poison, called Tartarate of Antimony, which she had read about in a famous poisoning case. You remember it, Mr Mellish?'

'I remember it perfectly, Mr Townshend.'

'Oh, what lies! What scandalous lies!' exclaimed Peggy.

But her voice was growing weaker. As for Cathcart, he listened with set, pale face.

'She failed. Poisons—especially stuff like Tartarate of Antimony—are uncertain in their action. But her husband was waiting in secret—lurking outside the house—in case he was needed. An opportunity came. Young Mr Kesteven went out into the park to take the air; the husband attacked him and killed him with a well-judged blow on the head. But young Kesteven was a strong man. Before he was felled he managed to give his assailant a

blow on the mouth, breaking a tooth—a false tooth.' Townshend put his finger and thumb into his waistcoat pocket. 'Here it is,' said he, and showed the tooth.

'Just so,' said Mellish, who was growing excited.

'The murderer fled at top speed. He went crashing down through a spinney like a wild beast. A local innkeeper who was out—fishing—saw him.'

Charles Cathcart started as if suddenly discovered.

'He seriously injured his eye with the branch of a tree,' continued Townshend, 'and like an idiot he has worn a black patch ever since. He made his way to the hotel at Wrottesley, where he was staying quietly for a day or two with his cousin.'

'Quite so,' broke in Mellish again. 'I have taken the trouble to find out about all that—even sifting dust-bins and looking at old bits of paper and envelopes, and such-like.'

'Well?' said Townshend.

'Oh, I did quite right, Mr Townshend. I could not get at any name at first, but I came upon two envelopes to "Charles Cathcart," under cover to "Captain Cathcart."'

'D—n!' exclaimed Charles.

'Mr Mellish!' exclaimed Townshend with enthusiasm, letting the light of his glass eye flash upon the Inspector, 'you are a jewel of a detective! Perhaps you wonder, Mr Cathcart,'



he went on, 'how I became acquainted with the name and address of your dentist? I got it from yourself!'

'From me?' gasped Charles.

'By sheer good luck, when I was staying at your hotel in Wrottesley, I found in Bradshaw a Post Office certificate of registration, with "Cranwick, Dentist," upon it, and his address. I guessed it might have to do with the tooth I had found, although I had no knowledge of you. You should never be careless,' continued Townshend, 'about little things: little bits of paper, like little grains of sand, may go to create a terrible pile of evidence!'

There was a dead pause, as when a clock has stopped in a room that has been alive with its ticking. Charles Cathcart, for a wonder, seemed quite broken, while Peggy sat stoical and stony. Jenny, although she had suffered so much at their hands, was suffused with pity.

'I am very sorry, indeed,' said Townshend, rumpling his forelock, 'confoundedly sorry for everybody. I have said I have no right to be a preacher or moralist, but, 'pon my word, the folly of this crime strikes me, as a man of common sense. It has only been successful in ruining its perpetrators, and in discovering the true condition and rank of my young friend, the husband of this lady!'

Neither Peggy nor Charles found a word to say. The solemn and significant rising of Inspector Mellish attracted their attention.

'I have a warrant,' said he, producing a paper, 'for the arrest on suspicion of Charles Cathcart!'

'Already!' exclaimed Charles. 'Good God!'

'Oh, Charlie!' cried Peggy, disdainful and stoical no longer. 'Let me go with you!'

Townshend was surprised by Mellish's action. 'I don't like this happening here!' said he. 'I don't like it at all. It is no business of mine to bring criminals to justice.'

'Why do you do it, then?' demanded Peggy.

'I have not done it,' said he. 'But it was inevitable if my young friend—and his wife here—were to be restored to hope and happiness.'

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## CHAPTER XXXI

### CONCLUSION

IT was a remarkable coincidence that Will Lomas and Charles Cathcart—the innocent man and the guilty—entered the old gaol at Wrottesley together. But with feelings how different from those which had moved him in his first imprisonment did Will endure his second short period of durance. He had got over the charge of fraudulent enlistment pretty lightly, and had been brought to Wrottesley, as he knew, merely to await the formal proceedings before the Justices, which should

relieve him from the charge of compassing the death of Mr Kesteven, so-called. Jenny also was back in Wrottesley, in her former lodging, and had resumed her acquaintance with the Butcher King and Queen; while she who had been known as Mrs Kesteven occupied a lodging in the town, too.

Mr Townshend, with a lawyer from London, was busy in the neighbourhood. He had a long interview one day with Miss Lomas; and later he and the lawyer visited Will in prison, when Jenny also was allowed by the Governor to be present.

'Well, my dear lad,' said he, giving Will a hearty handshake, 'I little thought when I made your acquaintance in "The Book in Hand," at East Dingley—how many weeks ago? Not many—that I was taking the part of one of the most distinguished squires of these benighted regions!' And his lip fluttered with his characteristic smile.

'What do you mean?' demanded Will.  
'What are you chaffing me about?'

'Shall I tell him straight away?' asked Townshend of the lawyer.

'Tell him—yes, Mr Townshend,' said the lawyer. 'There is no need to make a secret of it any longer.'

'What on earth is it? No bad news?' said Will, glancing quickly from the one to the other.

'No, Mr Kesteven,' said Townshend; 'no bad news. And that is giving you the secret at once.'

'Kesteven?' exclaimed Will. 'Am I going mad, or are you, Mr Townshend? I used to be Lomas; for a week or two I was Ridley; and now you call me Kesteven! What do you mean?'

'Your true, legal, legitimate name is "Kesteven,"' said Townshend. 'I have used enough adjectives to describe it—haven't I?' he added, turning with his flicker of a smile to the lawyer.

'Then you mean,' said Will, rumpling his hair and gazing around him in wonder, 'that the old man is not my father?'

'Old Mr Kesteven was your father, as well as the father of the young man that was killed—who had legally no right to the name of Kesteven at all.'

'Poor fellow!' murmured Will. 'It seems a pity to take his name from him now he's dead. And I'd rather, myself, have the old man at Holly Bush for father. What's he now?'

'Your uncle,' said Townshend. 'And the lady you have called your aunt is your mother. She was truly the wife of Mr Kesteven—his first and only wife—married in Scotland in a lodging by a Presbyterian minister in the quick Scottish fashion. Mr Kesteven persuaded her afterwards that it was a sham marriage, and she knew so little about it, being a simple English girl, that she believed him: and being then filled with shame, as well as with pride, she said nothing about it to anyone, and you, when you came, by the collusion of your uncle, passed for

his son—to all but Mr Kesteven, who, of course, knew the truth.'

'And that,' said Will, 'was why he was such a brute to me.'

'That was why,' said Townshend.

'Did you know anything about this, Jenny?' asked Will, turning to his wife, who was well-nigh as much astonished as he.

'A little, Will,' she answered. 'Your—your mother told me herself; but—but I didn't know she was truly married any more than she did. It was Mr Townshend's cleverness that found that out.'

'So you see,' said Townshend, while his smile fluttered, 'you are very much obliged to me.'

Will gave him a queer look, half-sad, half-perplexed. 'Yes,' he murmured, 'I am very much obliged to you. The funny thing is that I don't seem to feel any different as Kesteven from what I felt as Lomas.'

'But you will,' said Townshend, 'when you are discharged from this gaol and drive in triumph to Sinton Park as its rightful owner.'

'Oh, will he do that?' cried Jenny, flushed with excitement. Then she looked upon Will with a heart overflowing with love, and forgetful of the presence of others, she took his hand, murmuring, 'My dear Will! My dear husband!'

He merely murmured, 'Jenny,' in return, but his tone and his expression were suffused with tenderness. Then to Townshend he said, 'I think I should like to see my mother.'

'She's coming to you to-morrow,' answered Townshend.

The Kesteven case never came to trial, after all. The reason was remarkable. Like the first, the second man accused escaped from the gaol and got clear off beyond detection. At the same time his wife Peggy disappeared also from the town. Some of those immediately interested whispered their suspicion that Captain Cathcart might have had to do with the second escape as with the first; but others were inclined to the opinion that it had been achieved by Mr Townshend. Certain it is that Mr Townshend had a long interview one day with Peggy Cathcart in her lodging, and that when he left her she came to the door of her room with him. She was in tears, and he spoke kindly to her.

'You do your part,' he said, 'and you may depend on me.'

Then she caught his hand and kissed it, and he went away without another word. That the landlady declared she saw with her own eyes and heard with her own ears over the banisters.

Mr Townshend himself said nothing about the escape, and I am the rather disposed on that account to think he knew a good deal; and, as you have heard, his constant saying was,—

'It is no business of mine to bring criminals to justice!'

#### THE END

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