THREE

FERGUS HUME
To my dear friend,

Miss Deeley.

With kind regards and all good wishes

[Signature]

Castle-Hadleigh
Essex

26th May 1921
THREE
POPULAR NOVELS
BY
FERGUS HUME
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THE BLACK IMAGE
NEXT DOOR
THE CARETAKER
THE LOST PARCHMENT
RED MONEY
THE SOLITARY FARM
THE SPIDER
THE THIRTEENTH GUEST
THE SILENT SIGNAL
THE RED BICYCLE
THE GREY DOCTOR
THE MYSTERY QUEEN
CRAZY QUILT
THE WOMAN WHO HELD ON
THE DARK AVENUE
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THREE

CHAPTER I

MAN PROPOSES——

"URSULA, you have been living in this out-of-the-way village for close upon three years. When you came you had little money; now you have none, and look to me for supplies. How long is this to last?"

"Until my purpose is accomplished."

"And that purpose——"

"Has nothing to do with you, Mr. Wench."

"There you are wrong, Ursula, or Madame Valeria, as you now call yourself. It has much to do with me, seeing that I am parting with solid cash on doubtful security. As the friend of man——"

"A money-lender," she interrupted scornfully.

"Why not? Such a one is the friend of man—the dear friend."

"Very dear!"

"Tush! Pish! Pooh! Popular prejudice, Ursula—popular prejudice. Why, I am always extricating fools from present difficulties——"

"To plunge them into future troubles."

"Their look-out, Madame Valeria, their look-out. I am not supposed to dry-nurse those who borrow. This persiflage is very pretty, Ursula, very clever, very amusing—you always possessed a ready tongue. But it is the drawing of a red herring across the trail
—my trail, which has to do with lending you money on doubtful security."

"There is the furniture," suggested Ursula, alias Madame Valeria.

Mr. Wench surveyed the room, and hunched his bony shoulders with a snarl of contempt. It was of no great size, and its distempered walls of a stony blue tint were disfigured rather than adorned with cheap pictures in dismal black frames. The furniture was cheap also, of that meretricious kind sold on the time-payment system to needy young couples who begin married life on limited incomes. The scheme of decoration—if it could be called so—was grey, with a dash of white in the trifling china ornaments and a note of brown in the carpet. Chairs and sofa, upholstered in hard red velvet, were covered with dusky holland: the draperies of windows, mantelpiece and door were the colour of ashes. Extreme care seemed to have been taken to rid the apartment of cheerful hues. Even the Indian screens of fluted silk behind Madame Valeria's chair and before the door were black, as was the marble clock on the mantelpiece. The whole aspect of the room suggested cheapness; suggested funerals: suggested all that was melancholy and dreary and depressing. Mr. Silas Wench, as became a money-lender, was not imaginative, but after his snarl—a business habit—he shivered. The more so, as the dull grey light of the cloudy September sky, filtering in through gauze half-blinds, created a chilly twilight atmosphere, which added to the prevailing gloom.

"When I remember you forty years ago, Ursula," grunted the old man, "fond of colour and light and flowers and jewels; fine raiment and rainbow surroundings, I hardly recognize you as the same woman in this mausoleum."

"It is a different woman to the one you knew, who lives here," said Madame Valeria in a hard unemo-
MAN PROPOSES

tional voice. "Come to the point. The furniture?"
"Cheap! Only fit for firewood."
"This house? I mortgaged it to you, remember."
"Pooh and Tush! A jerry-built villa of little value."
"The acre of ground on which it stands?"
"Worth next to nothing in this backwater of civilization. I was an ass to lend you money on such rubbish, Ursula, and only because I remembered old days did I act like an ass."

Madame Valeria shivered in her turn, but more with suppressed rage than with depression. "You have recalled old days twice, Silas: don't do so a third time, or you'll be sorry."

"One of your famous royal rages, I suppose." He hunched his shoulders again and again snarled. "As if I cared! I shall recall old days as often and as clearly as I chose, Ursula, since they have something—I don't know what—but something to do with your stay in Carrowell. Come now, speak out. Am I to lose my money?"

"You will lose nothing," said the woman emphatically.
"Ta! ta! ta! That's talk-shadow without substance. I want a better assurance than that. Tell me why you are here and how you propose to repay me."

Madame Valeria did not answer these leading questions. She closed her mouth firmly and smiled in a grim fierce way which should have disconcerted her visitor, but did not. Indeed, he would have been surprised had she displayed the softer emotions, for he knew her nature if not her purpose. And to a certain extent he sympathized with her latent savagery, as he also was somewhat uncivilized and resented those laws which seek to bridle the predatory brute in man. But being feminine, Madame Valeria went further than the money-lender, and was twice as hard, twice as
reckless, twice as vindictive and violent. When a man goes to Hell, he accepts the topmost layer of evil as his goal: woman, more thorough, probes the nethermost depths. This dour lady had done this, while her guest, scratching on the surface, was ignorant of the deep below the deep which she had found. Yet her wicked smile hinted significantly at a more extended knowledge of infernal geography than Wench possessed.

"Well?" he rasped out, impatient for a reply: "Well, well, well?"

He was a long, lean, yellow-faced man, clothed, rather than dressed, in a shabby snuff-coloured suit, with rounded shoulders and the stoop of a student. But there was nothing of the pundit about Mr. Wench: his only books were those which had to do with accounts of money lent to hard-up people at amazing cost to their empty pockets. His face was wrinkled like a walnut shell with a bird-of-prey nose and thin hard lips. With his sparse grey hairs streaking an egg-like baldness, and his clean-shaven face, cunning as that of a fox in expression, he represented very thoroughly the traditional priest of Mammon. And never did that sordid god have a more zealous ministrant, for morn, noon and night was Silas in the temple,—represented by a dingy City office,—offering up victims. The cries of these—and they naturally shouted loudly—did not move him in the least, since he was deaf to all voices save those of self-interest. He was at once Judas, Harpagon and Shylock,—three money-grubbers rolled into one: a species of miserly Cerberus, who guarded the Gate of Gold.

Yet on this present occasion, Mr. Wench felt uneasily that he had been false to the god of his choice: far from sacrificing Madame Valeria, as in duty bound, he had lent her a goodly sum of money at a ridiculously small rate of interest—a bare thirty-five per cent. And fearing the anger of his deity, who had the power
to change his luck, Silas had come to Carrowell with the intention of dragging his hostess to the altar, as a belated victim. He knew very well that she would decline to submit herself to the sacrificial knife, and blamed himself greatly for having yielded to her demands. Had she pleaded indeed,—but that was not Ursula's way. She had demanded money, and he had supplied it meekly. The more fool he.

"You must have hypnotized me, you jade," he growled uncomfortably.

Guessing the train of thought which resulted in this remark, Madame Valeria smiled like a stormy sunset. Judith must have smiled in just such a way when she lopped off the head of General Holofernes, and Silas winced at the ominous amiability. He at once hated this woman and admired her: feared her greatly, yet liked her more than was wise. She reminded him of his youth, when he haunted the Temple of Venus,—a most expensive goddess,—and dangled at her heels. He would have married her in those silly days but that she—ah, there was the story he wished to recall. Wench was shrewdly certain that the doings of the past had suggested the purpose of the present, whatever that might be. Determined to find out, he sat eagerly forward in the arm-chair with restless hands clutching his lean knees, and stared with unwinking eyes at the woman he had formerly adored. Indeed he felt that, even after forty years, he was not wholly free from her chains and was miserably conscious that some shackles still clanked about his meagre limbs. The mere idea of such bondage made him perspire with anger and fear, for only by working up such stimulating emotions could he hope to defend himself against her silent and overpowering influence. It was as potent as of old, and he attempted to force her into speech with the dim idea of breaking the uncanny spell.

"Talk!" he cried fiercely, wiping his face with a gaudy bandanna handkerchief,—the sole touch of
Three colour in the room. "Talk, you jade! Don't sit smiling there like the harpy you were and are. Curse you, Ursula!" raged Mr. Wench with fluttering nerves. "Why don't I strangle you straight away, you cheat, you slut, you adventuress, you no-better-than-you-ought-to-be daughter of the horse-leech."

This agreeable speech betrayed weakness, which was just the revelation Madame Valeria was waiting for. Therefore she did not wither the old man with words, but sat on silent and smiling, at once mistress of the situation and of herself. In her youth this ancient dame must have strikingly resembled the patriotic Judith. She also was "of a goodly countenance and very beautiful to behold," even though her imperial looks were markedly tarnished by the passing of three score years and ten. Over seventy as she was, Madame Valeria sat upright in her chair, straight as a lance, and scorned the weakness of leaning back for ease. She looked singularly strong and imposing: one who would take many ells, but would not give an inch, cost what it might to keep it. Her face was handsome rather than beautiful; more masculine than feminine in its outline: and her ivory-hued complexion was so free from wrinkles that she looked less than her known years in spite of her silvery hair. Wearing a plain grey silk gown with a veil of white lace draped gracefully over head and shoulders in the Spanish style, she was as colourless as the room. The place suggested a tomb haunted by the ghosts of a shadowy old man and older woman.

Yet never ghosts possessed such vitality and purpose as this sinister couple. Wench was very much alive, even though he resembled an unwholesome mummy, withered and frail and dusty. As for Madame Valeria, she assembled in her own ancient person the proverbial nine lives of a cat. The flashing and masterful glances of her dark eyes, the grim tightness of her mouth, and the masculine grip of her capable hands on the arms
of the chair, revealed plainly her strength of will and body. Both man and woman were of a dominating nature and each strove to beat the other down. Finally the honours of war were with the woman, since her silence was more powerful than the man's speech: her mute scorn more eloquent than his abusive chatter. Yet Wench gained his victory just at the moment when defeat seemed to be certain, though rather by her yielding than by his compelling. Madame Valeria, having established her authority, bluntly told her visitor that which he was anxious to know. It was a long story, some portions of which he knew already.

"You have recalled the past," said Madame Valeria, frowning, "and having done so we can discuss it. As Ursula Hedge, the gipsy dancer, you loved me some forty years ago."

"Say half a century," croaked Silas, rubbing his skinny hands; "half a century and more. You were twenty when I met you first, and now—"

"I am seventy-five," she finished. "I am past the vanity of concealing my age. You knew me for ten years, and then I went out of your life."

Wench nodded. "At the ripe age of thirty, and with Nicky Graves. I would have made you a better husband than Nicky did, Ursula."

"He was never my husband." She frowned. "You know that."

"I had an idea that the marriage was a put-up job," chuckled the money-lender with a shrug; "but there, what could you expect from Nicky Graves? I didn't think you'd be taken in by his palaver, all the same," he ended in a dry voice.

"I loved him, and like many another innocent woman, paid dearly for my trust in his honour."

"He never had any that I ever heard of, Ursula. A rascal about town, who gambled and drank and ran after——"

"Yes! Yes!" Madame Valeria waved her hand
impatiently. "You needn't recall his vices. I knew all about them. But what I did not know," she went on with a darkly brooding look, "was that he had deceived me with a false marriage. He told me so when he grew tired of me, and then left me in poverty with his child to bring up."

"Why didn't you come to me?" asked Mr. Wench with an odd tenderness of manner. "I would have married you. I always loved you, Ursula, and, worse luck, the old passion remains in spite of your ancient looks. I think," added Wench, with a surprised expression at his own discernment, "that it was yourself I loved, not your beauty, or your intellect."

"You are very faithful," answered Madame Valeria, not unmoved by this passion so durable after fifty years; "but I was too much ashamed to see you or any one else. I followed Nicholas to the Continent, but he evaded me. I then returned to the stage and danced in Italy, France, Germany, Russia and Austria for many years. I brought up my daughter in luxury, and when she was twenty we went to America."

"Why America of all places?"

"I wished to start a new life. Besides," said the woman sadly, "I was old—quite fifty years of age. My time as a dancer was over. I wrote to Nicholas many times, but he never answered."

"He couldn't, you know," chuckled Wench, spreading his hands. "He was married."

"I learned that when I was in New York. A maternal uncle left him a large fortune, conditional on his taking the name of Basser."

Mr. Wench nodded, chuckled and rubbed his skinny hands. "Which was the name of the uncle in question. Quite right, Ursula, quite right. Nicky Graves, the man-about-town scamp, became Nicholas Basser, a respectable country gentleman, the Squire of Carrowell and a supporter of the Church. He married a young lady with plenty of money, who has one son."
He married and has one daughter, born when her mother died. Mrs. Basser, her son Paul and his daughter Lesley live at the Carrowell Manor House, with plenty of money and many friends. I know the family history as well as you do, Ursula."

"So I see. How do you come to know it?" she asked coldly. "What business is it of yours, Silas?"

"Intimate business, Ursula,—money-lending business. Ask your friends the Purcanes. They live in the village and come here, I believe."

"They do, both father and son. Well?"

Mr. Wench shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, that is none of my business: you can entertain whom you please without interference from me. But Marcus Purcane the father married another sister of the maternal uncle you mentioned, and there is one son, Joseph, who is a client of mine. Through him I learned much of the Basser history, since the Purcanes expected the money, which the old man left to his other nephew, our late friend, Nicholas."

Looking stiff and distant, Madame Valeria assented with a haughty nod. "I know all this. Why tell it to me?"

"Well, you wished to learn how I came to know the family history," protested the money-lender, spreading out his hands to intimate that the question was silly. "I don't waste my time in unnecessary chatter, Ursula. The Purcanes resent Mrs. Basser having the money, and want to get it back. Joseph made himself acquainted with the will by paying a shilling at Somerset House and learned that Mrs. Basser and her son have a life interest in the old man's money. When they die it goes to the daughter, and Joseph proposes to marry her, so as to get back the lost fortune."

"He won't, then. Lesley Basser has other lovers, whom she prefers."

"I know that also," said Mr. Wench coolly. "She has two, but which of the two she wishes to marry I
can't say: neither can Joseph, who hates them. There is young Godwin, the rector's son, and your weird relative Juve Mendel."

"Why weird, Silas?"

"Because he is weird, Ursula. His name, his looks, his genius for violin-playing—he is all weird. I am crazy on music,—I always was, if you remember,—and Juve Mendel will one day make a great name. If he does, he may have a chance of marrying Lesley Basser; if he doesn't, he won't. Her grandmother and father would never hear of her marrying an unknown lad, the shabby relative of Madame Valeria, of whom they know nothing."

"They will know a great deal about her before Madame Valeria finishes with them," said that lady vindictively.

"Quite so, Ursula, and I know that you are down here for the purpose of affording them the information. Why? It is not a pleasant thing for you to let the decent Basser family learn you are the discarded mistress of the late Nicky Graves, alias Nicholas Basser, Esquire."

Madame Valeria looked as grim as the most forbidding of the Fates. "In due time they will learn what I wish them to learn," she said darkly, "although at present they know nothing. I can trust you to hold your tongue about my past, Silas, as it is not to your interest to reveal it, seeing that I am your creditor."

"Ha!" Wench raised his lean face with the look of a dog scenting a trail, and stared hard. "So you want the money also, Ursula?"

"I want revenge." The woman's mask dropped; her ice melted; her caution vanished. "I want revenge," she repeated hoarsely, "and revenge I intend to have. Listen, you starved ape, and if you have any blood in your veins applaud me for what I am doing."

"But I don't know what you are doing," remon-
strated the money-lender very reasonably. "You are down here for a purpose, but what is it?"

"I have told you. Revenge!" Madame Valeria started from her chair, clenched her hands and walked the dismal room like a caged pantheress. "Revenge!"

"Don't be melodramatic, Ursula," said Mr. Wench with a croak. All the same he rubbed his hands with glee, as by breaking down her reserve, and bringing the natural woman to the surface, he was now likely to learn the truth.

Madame Valeria turned on him in such a fury that he threw himself back in his chair and flung out his hands to keep her off. "Don't talk to me. I am dangerous when I think of my wrongs," she raged.

"Nicholas was responsible for them, not me," squeaked Mr. Wench nervously. "Don't behave like a mad-woman, Ursula. He is dead: you can't hurt him."

"I can hurt his widow, his son and his grand-daughter, and I'm going to do it," stormed the old woman furiously. "I'll make them suffer."

"But they are innocent," said the man, instinctively just.

"So was I: so was my daughter: so is Juve, who is my grandson. Don't talk to me, I tell you." She paced the room, restlessly fierce. "Don't talk to me."

"But I must, Ursula. I don't understand."

"Listen and you will. In America my daughter married Hans Mendel, a musician; but when Juve was born, he deserted her, because she had no money. As my beauty was gone, and old age had ended my dancing career, I took up fortune-telling to support my dear ones. For a time I did not succeed, and my daughter perished of starvation—do you understand, Silas?—of starvation. I then made money, when it was too late to save her, and brought up Juve. As a fortune-teller I had many rich clients, and through one of these
I managed to ruin Hans Mendel. He went to prison on a charge of forgery, through me,"—she struck her breast furiously,—"through me."

"Well, he deserved it," said Mr. Wench honestly. "But the Basser family—?"

"Are innocent." Her interruption came so viciously and strongly that the old man jumped. "I know what you would say. I should forgive them."

"I don't, Ursula; so far as they are concerned, there is nothing to forgive."

"Don't lie, Silas: don't dodge: don't contradict. There is everything to forgive. Why was I deserted? Because Nicholas loved another woman and gave her the place of his wife, which was rightfully mine. Why did my daughter—his daughter, mind—starve? Because he left the money to his widow, and forgot me. I wrote to her and asked her for money. She did not even answer my letter, and so my daughter died of starvation, I wrote to her son: no answer. I wrote to her granddaughter: no answer. And yet you talk to me of forgiveness. Bah!"

"I didn't talk of forgiveness," protested the man feebly, for her vehemence frightened him. "The word was your own. I only said they were innocent."

"They are not," she retorted savagely. "They have all that I should have had and refused my appeal for a crumb from their loaf. But they shall suffer, as I have suffered. I swear it." She shook her hands fiercely in the air.

"Don't be melodramatic, Ursula," objected Mr. Wench once more. "I'm not so young as I was, and these scenes try my nerves. I don't see what you can do, for the money goes from the old woman to the son; then to the granddaughter, and failing her to the Purcanes. They—the Purcanes, I mean—won't part with it to you, so I don't see what you can do." Mr. Wench reflected and shook his wicked old head. "I really don't."
"You are not asked to." Madame Valeria returned to her chair and again wrapped herself in icy reserve.
"I know my own business."
"It will bring you into contact with the police, Ursula."
"Will it? Well, let it."
"What are your plans?" asked Wench after a nervous pause.
"I have told you all I intend to tell you," replied the woman coldly. "It is enough for you to know that, much as I have suffered, they shall suffer still more. The mother, the son and the girl. I pardon none of them."

Mr. Wench rose with a vigour surprising in so aged a man and wiped his wrinkled face with the yellow bandanna handkerchief. "I protest, Ursula. I really protest. Be reasonable. These poor people are innocent."
"They are not."
"Spare the girl, at all events."
"I spare none of the three."
"You are mad."
"There is method in my madness."
"I'll warn them," said the money-lender desperately.
"How can you?" she scoffed. "You don't know my plans."
"I can tell them that you are Ursula Hedge, bent upon avenging fancied wrongs, and not Madame Valeria of New Orleans, a wealthy Creole lady."
"Tell them if you like," said the woman indifferently. "Your betrayal will only alter my plans slightly. Fancied wrongs!" she said bitterly; "fancied wrongs! Ha! Truly, Silas, you understand women thoroughly."

Mr. Wench took up his hat and cloak and stick and shuffled towards the door, there to raise a protesting hand. "Ursula, I am not a good man, and many
people have cause to regret knowing me. But there is a limit to my evil-doing. You go too far—you go beyond me, and I swear that I will baulk your wicked schemes, if I can."

"Yes, if you can," she mocked, and spread out her hands to the warmth of the fire. "Go, Silas, and do your worst."

"I'll do that," he nodded. "if only to save you from yourself, for I still have some love left for you. Give up your revenge, Ursula!"

"No!"

"Well," said the money-lender, "I am not religious, but you know the saying that Man proposes but God disposes"—and with that warning he took his leave, while the woman laughed contemptuously, brooding over the fire like an old witch.

CHAPTER II

GOD DISPOSES

FOR quite seven days after the enlightenment of Mr. Wench, life went with Madame Valeria much the same as it had done for the past three years. During the morning she secluded herself in the dismal sitting-room, paying calls in the afternoon, or walking the country lanes for her health's sake. When the two Purcanes, Mr. Basser, or other visitors came to see her at night, the time was passed in card-playing and conversation until eleven o'clock, when the hostess retired to bed. The same routine prevailed daily, and all in Carrowell accepted Madame Valeria as a blameless, cheerful old lady, whose age precluded the enjoyment of more exciting moments. This was precisely the effect Ursula wished to produce, as it warded off suspicion, and during her residence in the village she
had lived according to plan. Her pertinacity in ostensible well-doing gained its reward, in counting her out as one, past action, and no one suspected the presence of an active volcano ready to pour forth destruction at any moment.

It will be seen that there was no opportunity in the woman’s ordered life for necessary attention to domestic details. And indeed she took no interest in these, delegating her authority to Mother Monkey, who had Maggie Salt under her as housemaid and Tavy Tern as factotum. Maggie was in her teens, greedy, lazy and stupid; Tern was old and dingy, extremely patient and almost an imbecile. The housekeeper harried them and bullied them, scolded them and drove them at the sword’s point to work; constantly complaining of their incompetency. But Madame Valeria refused to dismiss these dull underlings. In point of fact she approved of such density in her servants, as others with greater understanding might be more observant of her ends. These, obviously, she did not wish to be known.

This being the case, it was singular that she should have retained Mother Monkey, who was clever and excessively sharp with the adaptable wits of a born Cockney. Scarcely younger than her venerable employer, the housekeeper answered to the name of Hetty Hale, but was called what she was called by reason of her diminutive stature and aggressive ugliness. A withered little atom, the height and girth of a ten-year-old boy, this ancient spinster possessed an amazing vitality, which never seemed to fail her, however long the day and arduous the work. From dawn to dusk Mother Monkey never rested, and if not cooking meals, or driving Maggie to make beds and sweep floors, was busy digging in the limited garden. During her three years’ stay in Carrowell she had turned the barren acre upon which the gimcrack villa stood into a paradise of cultivation. At the back were vegetables in
plenty, while the ground on either side of the house and in front of the house bloomed with flowers. How she contrived to keep the garden trim and the house tidy was a marvel, but the miracle was accomplished by her methodical industry. No one ever beheld her idle, and in looks and energy she might have passed for one of Michael Scott's imps fulfilling an age-long task.

Juve Mendel was very fond of this weird little woman with the yellow wrinkled face and nut-cracker chin. He approved of her lively conversation and brilliant dark eyes, which sparkled with fire when she was excited. Disliked by his grandmother, the boy—he was nearly nineteen—constantly sought the society of Mother Monkey in the kitchen. There, in a blue dress, wearing a red woollen jersey and with a man's cap on her sparse grey hairs, the little woman entertained him during his leisure moments with chattering and songs and dancing. As Hetty Hale,—so she informed him,—her early profession had been that of a music-hall singer in the distant seventies. Afterwards, when too old to attract, she had occupied herself with a hundred makeshifts to keep the bread in her toothless mouth. When Madame Valeria returned to London, she found the famous Hetty Hale earning her living as a charwoman, and for old acquaintance sake had offered her the post of housekeeper. Ursula could not have made a better choice, as, at a small wage, she secured a grateful heart, a good cook and an untiring servant, whose one aim was to make things comfortable. Also the little woman was quite a pal to Juve—so she put the understanding between them,—and talked of her prosperous days to amuse him, dancing as she used to dance and singing forgotten ditties in a cracked voice, when conversation failed. Mother Monkey loved Juve and Juve loved her, so they preferred each other's company to that of the stern old dame who glowered over the fire in the front room.
Juve himself was a tall slim lad, far removed from the eccentrically dressed, long-haired type of musician, notwithstanding his real genius as a violinist which Mr. Wench had discerned. With well-cut features, a clear brown complexion, closely-clipped black hair and an attractive smile, he was a very presentable young fellow. His clothes were fashionable, but not too much so, and he had a thoroughly well-groomed appearance, which appealed to English fastidiousness in spite of his pronounced foreign looks. The boy for the present earned a reasonably decent salary as violinist in a music-hall orchestra, and this employment helped to draw him and Mother Monkey together. For some unexplained cause Madame Valeria did not love her grandson, and had dragged him up in a more or less brutal fashion. When he became too old for the whip, which she had used freely enough, she treated him to cutting speeches, with occasionally a tornado of rage, forbidding him her presence and snubbing him on all possible occasions. Of an affectionate nature, the boy could not endure this injustice, and his grandmother's abominable treatment ended in his hating her as thoroughly as she hated him. But for Mother Monkey the boy would have left Carrowell finally for London, as he earned sufficient to live fairly comfortably without being indebted to the old termagant.

There was also another and more potent influence which chained Juve to the dull little village, and that was his love for Lesley Basser, whom he adored with the unreasoning idolatry of a youthful and highly romantic nature. Madame Valeria knew of this passionate longing, and scoffed at it in her cynical way; but Hetty, recalling her never-forgotten love affairs, approved and helped and sympathized. She was the stage confidant, the "Charles his friend" of the old farce to the boy, and supplemented his rhapsodies with lengthy details of her own experience when
she also had lived in Arcady. So Juve, in spite of his dull home, the hatred of his grandmother and the weary treadmill of the orchestra, was not wholly unhappy. He had Lesley to worship, and Mother Monkey to confide in, so, as he often thought, he might have been worse off.

On the Sunday, a week after the money-lender's visit, Juve made his appearance in the kitchen, looking depressed and anxious. He had been to church in the morning, hoping to walk to the Grange with his beloved, only to find that Archie Godwin, his rival and the rector's son, was her escort. Of course he could have accompanied the pair, but Juve was of too jealous and haughty a nature to form an inconvenient third, so had sulked back to the gimcrack villa. A mid-day dinner with Madame Valeria had not improved his temper, as, for some reason, the old woman was particularly snappy and disagreeable. Afterwards, he had walked for some miles to cool down, but only succeeded in becoming dismal. In this uncomfortable mood, he sought the company of his aged friend, and, as usual, was received with open arms.

"My deary boy, whatever is it?" asked Miss Hale, hurrying to get a chair and dust it with her apron. "You look as handsome as a picture on a wall as a song I used to sing says, and as black as thunder, which I believe we'll have if them dark clouds don't move."

"I'm in the dumps, Monkey darling," said Juve, who had a singularly musical and impressive voice.

"All on account of Eliza?" questioned Hetty, recalling another famous song. "Why, bless me, lovey, it don't do to take stock of her and her tantrums. She always was a trying piece with managers and young men as ran after her in dancing days, which are far enough in the past, worse luck; for set her legs going—I don't deny they were a handsome pair,—and she worked off her bad tempers somehow."
“Why does she hate me so?”

“Never knew her to love any one particular, myself,” sniffed Mother Monkey, folding her skinny arms under her apron and preparing for a comfortable chat, “though she’s been kind enough to me because I’m useful to her. But she did let out, ducky, that your pa had treated your ma badly, and was no class at all.”

“I know that,” retorted Juve gloomily, stretching out his legs and thrusting his hands into his trouser pockets; “but what’s that got to do with me?”

“Ask me another, deary. Sins of the pa visited on the nipper, I s’pose. Laws me, doveys, don’t take it to heart. Some day you’ll make a forting with your fiddle and marry Miss Basser, and live as happy as a pig in a sty.”

Juve smiled in a wry fashion at the inelegant simile, but was not comforted by any means. “She walked home with Godwin this morning,” he groaned.

“Who? Oh, Miss Basser. Well, my pet”—Hetty caressed the lad’s head,—“gels will be gels, and it ain’t to be expected as young appetites will stick to one dish. I was that various meself,” said Miss Hale, expanding, “as I’d have a baker’s dozen of them silly swells trailing after me, only to take up with the stage-keeper’s soldier son, who had only had enough money to run to porter and sausages. Ah,” she sighed, “it was a life of ‘buses and broughams, just because gels are whimsical.”

“But I love her,” exploded young Mendel, who was very young indeed, so young as to think that his statement was sufficient to make Lesley return his passion. “I want to marry her.”

“So does the parson’s son,” chuckled Mother Monkey shrilly. “Laws me, my dear, there never was a play or a book without two of them to keep things going. ‘The course of true love never did run smooth,’ as Shakespeare says, though I never acted in his plays,
being a star of the Halls. It'll all come right, my dear, when the marriage bells ring."

"They may ring for Godwin as the bridegroom."

"Tut! Tut! Never say die," said Mother Monkey soothingly, "you're as handsome as him and twice as clever with your heart in the right place. And I daresay that parson's son wouldn't do for her what you'd do."

Mendel looked up with an odd smile. "I'm quite sure he wouldn't," was his emphatic answer. "I love her more than my life, my name, my music even." He arose abruptly. "What's the time?"

"Wants ten minutes to four, lovey, and getting dark, for the days do get as short as short with the leaves falling, me knowing, as I've swept up bushels of 'em lately."

"Where's Tavy?"

"In the shed smoking away what brains he's got, which ain't much."

"I want him to take a message to the Grange. Mrs. Basser asked me to tea this morning, but I have a headache and can't go."

"And a heartache too, my dear," said Hetty sadly; "for that parson's son will be there, I'll be bound, and it ain't much catch, your watching him flirt with the gel. Get her alone and shake her."

"Shake her." Juve was horrified at the idea of so treating his idol.

Mother Monkey laughed at his amazement. "Be soft with gels and they'll lead you a dance: be hard and then you'll show you're the master. There was a man I b'lieved a milksop," she added, rubbing her nose thoughtfully, "till he shook me. After that I always liked him better than the others. Queer things we women are, deary. Shake her, lovey, shake her and she's yours."

"Oh, I couldn't do it," gasped the boy, shocked by this truculent advice.
"Natural enough in your state of mind," commented the old woman. "Will a cup of tea do you good, deary?"

"Yes, but not just now. I'm going up to my room to sleep for an hour. Send Maggie up to me at the end of that time with the tea, but if I am asleep don't let her waken me. She can leave it."

"I hope you'll wake up to drink it while it's hot, Juve. Cold tea never did any one good. How's she?" Mother Monkey jerked her head towards the front of the house to indicate that she meant Madame Valeria.

"I don't know," said Mendel coldly. "I haven't seen her since we quarrelled at dinner. Is she alone?"

"Yes, lovey. Mr. Basser came to see her, but he's gone, as I heard the front door close with a bang. So I expect she's sitting over the fire thinking."

"She's always doing that, Monkey. What does she think about?"

"The past, I s'pose," said Hetty, after a pause. "Old folk always do that, my dear. I do myself. And Ursula's got heaps to think about. And not anything pleasant either," went on the little woman, more to herself than to the listener. "She had a good time when I knew her, but a bad time since she married Nicky Graves."

"Who was he?" asked Juve curiously. "I know little of my grandmother's past life."

"Nicky was a swell in the days I was at the Halls, deary, and a handsome scoundrel he was. Ursula married him, and that's the last I saw of her till she turned up to find me charing and take me down here. I daresay Nicky is dead,—he was your granpa, of course, but I hope you don't take after him in morals. Those he had were awful."

"Well, it's no use bothering about him," said Juve carelessly. "Grandmother has knocked all family affection out of me, and I know little about things."
My mother died when we were poor and grandmother brought me up when we became rich through her fortune-telling. I hardly remember my father, as I only saw him a few times. He's dead too, I suppose."

"I don't know," said Mother Monkey. "Ursula never talks of him."

"You call her Ursula."

"Why shouldn't I?" asked the little woman in astonishment. "That's her name—Ursula Hedge, though she calls herself Madame Valeria."

"Dubourg," added the boy swiftly. "Madame Valeria Dubourg. My grandfather was Monsieur Dubourg of New Orleans."

"Your grandfather was Nicky Graves," insisted Mother Monkey shrilly. "Why, I knew him as well as I know the nose on my face. He might have changed his name to Dubourg, for reasons of his own which weren't decent ones, I'll take my oath. And why don't she call herself Dubourg?"

"She says that the name recalls too painful recollections and prefers to be known as Madame Valeria. She told fortunes in New York as Madame—"

"Told fortunes," interrupted Mother Monkey. "Well, being a gipsy as was well known in her dancing days, I daresay she did tell fortunes. But she never could tell her own, I'll be bound. She made plenty of money, though Nicky was as poor as a mouse. I daresay he spent it as Monsieur Dubourg, and so she's come here to live anyhow—pigging it, I say."

Juve shrugged his shoulders and moved towards the door. "Well, it's no use discussing my grandmother and her doings, for we neither of us know anything about them. All I want to do is to make money and marry Lesley."

"I'm sure you will, if looks and cleverness go for anything," said Hetty in a fervour of admiration. "And believe me, deary, that parson's son don't matter so much as Mr. Purcane."
"Why—what?"

"Joseph Purcane, I mean, and he’s as loose a scamp as Nicky your Dubourg granpa, Juve. He’s Miss Basser’s cousin and he’s got his eye on her, or her money—the last, I think. As for his pa, he’s a regular old miser, though he do look like Father Christmas with his white hair and long beard. Oh they’re a pair, them two are, Juve."

"Joseph is too old for Lesley. Why, he’s over thirty."

"Daresay it seems old to you in your teens, deary," said Miss Hale with a shrug; "but he ain’t Methusaleem for all that, and he’s as clever as they make ’em. Him and his pa come here to win Ursula’s money at bridge. As well I know, for she’s always grumbling about their luck."

"Why does she always have the Purcanes here?"

"I dunno. For company’s sake, I s’pose. Them and she and Mr. Basser play bridge five nights out of the seven while you’re playing music in London."

"Does Mr. Basser lose money?"

"I s’pose so. He and your grandma generally play against Joseph and his pa, who are as clever as clever. But it’s none of my business, Juve. You go away and have your sleep, and I’ll enjoy myself with my box."

This was Mother Monkey’s Sunday amusement, when Maggie was out for her weekly walk and Tavy smoked in the shed. The box, studded with brass-headed nails and lined with cheap wall-paper, was a relic of Miss Hale’s professional days in which she kept all her treasures. Old programmes, wherein her name figured as a music-hall star; faded portraits of her in this costume and that; letters from dead and gone admirers; dried flowers, old gloves, articles of jewellery, which she had retained in spite of her poverty, and such-like mementoes of the past—these Hetty turned over and fondled and talked to in a babyish way. In her arid old age, nothing pleased her so much.
as occupying herself with former recollections of popularity induced by opening her box, and she was impatient for Juve to be gone so that she might indulge her fancy. The boy saw that she wished him absent, and nodded.

"I'll just write a note to Mrs. Basser saying that I can't come," he said. "Give it to Tavy and send him to the Grange. Ask him to wait for an answer, as I expect Lesley will send me a piece of music she promised."

Mother Monkey nodded absently and hauled out her box from under the dresser, where it stood throughout the week. While she opened this Juve went up to his bedroom and wrote the note, returning very quickly with the same, much to the annoyance of Miss Hale, who did not like the spell of the past which was on her to be broken.

"Give this to Tavy and send him off at once," said Juve, glancing at the kitchen clock, the hands of which pointed to half-past four; "and, by the way, Monkey dear, have those Purcanes been here to-day?"

"Not to my knowledge," said Hetty, who was kneeling before her box, "but laws me, deary, sometimes they slip in by the window of the sitting-room and don't use the door. They come and go like shad-ders—or conspirators, which is more to the pint."

"Why conspirators?" asked Juve, turning at the door.

"Oh, it's just a way of putting it, deary. Ursula always was a plotter and contriver, so there's no saying." Mother Monkey sat back on her heels and spoke with great emphasis. "And who was the strange man she saw three days ago? The man she let in and let out without my setting eyes on him, though I did see his back in a green overcoat going out of the gate while I was digging beside the house."

"I never heard of any strange man."

"No, you wouldn't, lovey. Your granma can hold
her tongue when she likes, as every one knows. But he came and he went, Juve, without any one being the wiser, and since then she's been crosser than ever, as you know, having had a taste of her tantrums at dinner."

Juve laughed carelessly. "Well, her business isn't mine, nor yours either, my dear Monkey. I'm going to sleep. Send up Maggie with the tea in an hour, but if I'm still asleep don't let her waken me."

"You told me that before, and I'm not so old but what I can remember," said Mother Monkey with some displeasure. "There's that brooch. Billy Herd gave me that, and a fine man he was with the gloves when the Henley Pet stood up to him. I should have married Billy, only that slut—Martha Tait I mean, who was a pantomime boy—got hold of him. Both dead now, I s'pose: dead and buried. Laws me, and I still live along with Ursula, who's a handful for sure."

Rambling on this way, the little woman did not notice the departure of Juve for his hour's sleep. It was getting on to five o'clock, and the short September day was ending in the swiftly approaching shadows of night. The kitchen was growing so dark that Mother Monkey rose to light the lamp, not being able to inspect her treasures in the twilight. The action recalled Juve's note to Mrs. Basser, and she went to find her factotum in the shed. Tavy, a tottering ancient dirty old creature, came out of the darkness in answer to her shrill call and was given instructions regarding his mission. He repeated the message three times, so as to get it hammered into his none too clever head, and took the letter.

"Yis, missus; aw yis, missus. I do see fur sure."

"Don't make any mistake, then," rejoined Mother Monkey sharply; "and wait for the music which Miss Basser will send out."

"Aw yis, missus."

"You're a dratted old mummy," complained Hetty,
surveying him in the dim light, “and would make your fortin as a scarecrow. Get along with you. I wish I was younger,” mused Miss Hale, as her Mercury tottered round the side of the house, “for a make-up like that for me to play a scarecrow at the Halls would be a novelty. A scarecrow on a pole coming to life with a song and dance: ah, that would knock ’em. But I’m old; I’m old, blow it.”

With this vulgar affirmative, which somewhat detracted from the pathos of the remark, Mother Monkey returned indoors, glancing at the sky as she did so. It was heavy with rain clouds, but occasionally a haggard moon peeped forth to illuminate the leafless landscape bleakly. Hetty shivered and went back to examine her treasures, which took some time, as she did not hurry her enjoyment. The moments passed swiftly as the old woman lingered over the relics, each of which suggested a day or an hour of pleasure. Even when Maggie, fat and breathless with running—for she was late—returned, Mother Monkey did not put away her box. She ordered the girl to make the tea and take up a cup to Mr. Mendel, but not to waken him if he was still asleep.

“And you can see if Madame wants her tea now,” said Hetty absently, “though I daresay she don’t. See if her lamp’s lighted; if she ain’t done it herself you can do it, Maggie. And stir yourself, gel; don’t be a snail.”

Maggie knew better than to answer, knowing that to do so would bring down a storm of words on her head. She resented having had to come back and leave her young man, so made the tea sulkily and departed with a heavy tread to carry the cup upstairs to Juve’s bedroom. Mother Monkey took no notice of her departure, but went on turning over the rags and tatters of her former splendours. Talking to herself and fondling each article, Hetty did not notice that the time was passing and that Maggie had not
returned. Everything was quiet, so much so that the fall of a cinder startled her into a comprehension of actual life. Wondering why the girl had not come back, Hetty stood up feeling rather stiff after long stooping, and walked to the door. Three times she called Maggie shrilly, but getting no answer went towards the front of the house with a lighted candle in her hand. As she passed the stairs, she thought she would go up and see if Juve was awake. A peep in at his door showed him lying in bed with a rug over him and the untasted cup of tea beside him on a chair. Mother Monkey closed the bedroom door softly so as not to rouse him, and wondering more than ever where Maggie had got to, descended to enter the sitting-room. To her surprise the door was open. Also the lamp was lighted, and in its yellow radiance she stumbled across the prone body of the girl lying near the table, which obstructed her view of the fireplace. There was no sign of Madame Valeria until Hetty passed the table, and then she saw the old woman on the hearthrug, face upward, with blood staining her breast. She was stone dead.

CHAPTER III

CONFUSION

It was characteristic of Mother Monkey's sprung-from-the-gutter, London-street-Arab nature that she did not shriek when the appalling discovery was made. Maggie was merely stunned, for she still breathed, but Madame Valeria was as dead as a door-nail. So Hetty put it to herself, and stared slowly round the room to ascertain, if possible, how these doings had come about. There was nothing visible to reveal the truth, save that the French window was slightly open. Probably the
murderer had come and gone in that way, but how he had managed to knife the old woman and stun the young one without any outcry was more than Mother Monkey could guess, shrewd as she was. And clamours of any kind would assuredly have reached her ears in the kitchen, since the walls of the villa were so slight. It was at this moment of her cogitations that Hetty heard a slight stir behind the Indian screen at the back of Madame Valeria’s chair. The rustle coming in the stillness daunted her. The criminal was there. He was in the room, and so was she. Yet Mother Monkey lingered for two precious minutes before she fled.

When she fled, and how she fled, the old woman did not quite realize. Her gamín courage, which accepted anything and everything as part of Life’s game, disappeared for the moment, and only returned when she found herself out of doors in the cloudy, rainy night, pushing her distracted way through the little wood of stone pines which cut off the villa from the village. In a trice she recovered from the secondary shock, which had developed into panic, and ran onward with a speed amazing in one so old. It was now six, for the clock in the church tower told her so. Carp, the village policeman, was generally at home at that time before starting on his evening rounds, so Hetty, who knew the whereabouts of his house, flew there at top speed. Curiously enough, so thoroughly had she regained her calmness, that the little woman told her story in an unemotional way, as if the matter were impersonal.

The policeman, as bulky as an ox, and as stolidly bovine, heard her communication as calmly as she delivered it. He might have been hearing a description of a catastrophe in China for all the astonishment he showed. Not so his lean and anxious-looking wife. Mrs. Carp flung up her hands, and all but fainted when she heard that Madame Valeria was dead. Fearful of the tragedy, yet fascinated by its horror, she "woo’d
terror to delight her" and requested details. Her heavy-faced husband stopped the hurried questions.

"This must be looked into, Jane," he said, officially unmoved, "but this ain't the place to look into it. I'll go back to the house with you," he addressed Hetty,—"an' you, Jane, hold your tongue, till I gives you leave to speak."

"I don't like to be left alone," wailed Mrs. Carp, shaking with fear. "That murdering beast might come here to cut my throat."

"I don't know as he wouldn't be doin' me a good turn, if he did get the idear," said Constable Carp stolidly. "You're a cackling hen in any case, an' you always were. And what d'ye mean keepin' me here a-wastin' of my vallable time?" he ended threateningly. "Hold your tongue and lemme go."

Mrs. Carp loosened her clutch on her husband's cape and ushered him out with Mother Monkey into the dark night. Then she bolted and barred all the doors, finally seeking refuge in her children's bedroom, armed with the poker in case of danger. Without a thought of her quandary, Carp strode on towards the villa so swiftly that Hetty had to run in order to keep up with him. And, what was worse, he demanded a repetition of her story, which she was obliged to tell in gasps for want of breath.

"An' you never heard no sound?" inquired the policeman with a meditative air; "not a squeal, or a fall, or a howl, or a beller?"

"I heard—nothing," panted Mother Monkey, "being—in the—kitchen all the time. Mr. Mendel—he didn't hear—either. Sound asleep—when I saw—him."

Mr. Carp ruminated like the animal he resembled, scratched his head, and without checking his stride delivered an oracular opinion. "This," he said again, "requires lookin' into."

Hetty, accustomed to smart London policemen,
could have boxed his ears to sharpen his wits. But she knew that even so drastic an action would not avail to move him out of his complacent lethargy, so spared word and deed to save her strength. Wiry as she was, the old creature was quite spent when, along with the constable, she reached the kitchen. She had wished to save time by entering the house through the French window, but here Carp showed a gleam of sense by insisting that the scene of the crime should not be changed in the slightest degree.

“'That there open winder,' said Carp, 'might hang the man as done it.'"

Tavy was in the kitchen, sitting by the fire with a roll of music in one hand and a blackened clay pipe in the other. He displayed no emotion when Mother Monkey entered with Carp, but held out the parcel and delivered his message. Mrs. Basser sent her regrets that Mr. Mendel should have a headache, and Miss Basser sent the piece of music asked for. That was all Tavy had to say, and having said it, he began to smoke again. Hetty and the policeman looked at one another, amazed that the old man had not scented the blood which besprinkled the house. She would have spoken, and advanced to do so, but that Carp pushed her back with his large hand.

"You ain't heard anythin'?" asked Carp, staring at Tavy, who was crumpled into a dingy heap on the chair.

"There's the rain, sir, and the—"

Carp silenced him with a wave of his hand and asked another question. "I dessay you dunno what's happened?"

"There's the message from Mrs. Basser and the music from Miss," said Tavy with a dull look, and striving in his poor wits to understand.

"No brains you 'ave, Tavy," said the constable pityingly. "'Ave you seen any one 'angin' about this 'ere house?"
"I met Mr. Purcane coming out of the garden gate when I was coming back fro' Mrs. Basser's house, sir."

Mother Monkey uttered a slight scream: "Oh! And I heard sounds behind the screen. He was there and ran away while I went for you, Mr. Carp."

"Hold your jawr," said the policeman elegantly. "I conduct this 'ere case perfessionally." Turning to Tavy, he asked, "Which Mr. Purcane?"

"The old gentleman, sir."

"Can you swear to that?" Carp took out his note-book.

"Yessir. Moon wor badish like, but I sawr enuff to see his white hair and beard, which is as long as a billy-goat's. He'd his grey overcoat on, and a cap with flaps tied over the ears."

"You ain't such a fool as you make yourself out to be, Tavy," said Carp in patronizing tones, and noted down the information. "In my 'pinion Marcus Purcane did unlawfully and with malice murder the mistress of this house, for the which he mus' be 'anged by the neck till he die."

"Marcus Purcane!" gasped Hetty, horrified. "Why should he kill her?"

"What's the matter with murders and killing?" bleated Tavy, who had turned as pale as his dingy complexion would permit.

"Madame Valeria hev been knifed," said Carp in a superior manner.

"Who did it?" The old man rose slowly with a scared expression.

"Marcus Purcane. You said so."

"I never did, Mr. Carp."

Tavy dropped on his shaky knees. "I met him when I come back fro' th' Grange fifteen minutes back, but I never said aught to he, nor he to me. I dunno nothing I don't, so if you put me on the gallers——"

"That's all right. You'll be in the witness-box, not in the dock, Tavy. An' now,"—Carp thrust his hands
into his belt with an important air—"let us look into things."

"Wouldn't it be best to waken Mr. Juve?" asked Hetty in a terrified whisper.

Carp nodded again, patronizing inferior intellects to his own. "An' git the doctor," he said, clearing his throat. "Tavy, go to Dr. Brent and say with my compliments, as Mrs. Valeria hev been murdered stone dead and he'd better come along to see if life can be revived."

Tavy departed in haste with this contradictory message, but his quivering old legs did not promise much speed in the fulfilment of his mission. Carp turned to Mother Monkey, and pushed her towards the inner door with a grunt to intimate that she was to conduct him into the sitting-room. The scared little woman did so—for she was scared by this time in spite of her early street training of nonchalance—and shortly Carp stooped down to inspect the stunned housemaid. He felt her heart and her pulse, then nodded.

"Get feathers and burn 'em, and cold water an' brandy. She's fainted."

"She's stunned," said Mother Monkey sharply. "There's a difference." All the same, she hastened to get what was asked for, while Carp passed round the table to survey the body of the dead woman.

Madame Valeria was dressed much as usual, in a plain grey silk gown and with the white lace veil swathed round her head. The knife of the assassin had pierced her heart in one sure strong thrust, and death—even the policeman could see this—must have been instantaneous. She could have had no time to cry out, so dexterously had the murderer carried out his awful purpose. There had been no struggle, as her garments were not disarranged. A sure blow had been struck, and she had fallen backward on the rug with suddenly loosened limbs. Lying there with all
CONFUSION

passion and life out of her, Ursula Hedge, who called herself Madame Valeria, looked so supremely beautiful and majestic that even the stolid policeman was moved to consider the splendour of her womanhood in old age. With a grunt of approval for the youthful loveliness which had returned to the rigid face, Carp searched for the knife with which the crime had been committed. He could not find it, although he looked in every corner of the room, and even behind the Indian screen. Here he found, much to his surprise, a hair mattress, and an eider-down quilt thrown aside carelessly, as if some one had risen in a great hurry. Remembering that Miss Hale had reported the presence of some unseen person in the room when she fled from the house, Carp came to the conclusion that the murderer must have concealed himself under the quilt and behind the screen when he heard her approach the door. And, of course, when she left the house, he had departed therefrom when he deemed things to be safe, only to meet with Tavy when emerging from the garden. The constable, on the evidence of the old man, was quite certain that Marcus Purcane had committed the crime, although he could by no means guess why it should have been perpetrated. But what startled him most was not the presence of the quilt and the mattress in the sitting-room (obviously not the place for such things), as a queer smell which yet lingered in the air. Carp sniffed, and the scent recalled to him a certain den down by the Docks raided when he was a boy, ambitious to go to sea.

"Opium," said Carp to himself. "I remember Kung Lee's place when I ran away to get a ship and see the world. Years ago that is; but Lord save us, what does opium here?"

This question he naturally could not answer, so busied himself with inspecting the French window. It was slightly open, but, so far as Carp could see by lamp-light, there were no signs of footprints on the grass
or path, even though it had been raining and there was every chance that such footprints, if any, might be discerned. The man concluded that the assassin had left leisurely by the door, having ample time to do so when Miss Hale fled, and had probably opened the window slightly to allow the smell of the opium smoke to escape.

"But who was smoking?" Carp asked himself. "Him, or her?" And he put this question to Mother Monkey, who was now trying to revive the housemaid. "She did take a pipe occasionally," admitted the little woman reluctantly, for although she cared little for her dead employer, she did not wish to speak ill of her now that she was gone. "Smoking opium helped her to bear her rheumatism. She suffered lots in that way."

"And the mattress—?"
"She told me to put it there with the quilt, so that she might smoke in comfort behind the screen."
"Queer for a lady born to use the black smoke," ruminated Carp heavily.
"She wasn't a lady born."
"Ho! You say so. And what was she?"
"A gipsy. I'll say all I know at the inquest. But just now," added Miss Hale tartly, "I've got enough to do in pulling round Maggie. I hope the doctor will be here soon."

Carp nodded. "I'm going upstairs to waken Mr. Mendel."
"You needn't," said Mother Monkey, still tart. "He's coming down. I hear him."

And sure enough Juve entered the room just as she completed her sentence, to stare in amazement at the unexpected scene. Maggie lying on the floor, with Mother Monkey bathing her head, and applying burnt feathers to her nostrils; Carp, the village policeman, looming large and stern in the lamplight, and beyond him the prone figure of his grandmother. No wonder
the boy was tongue-tied for the moment. He stared at the floor, at the ceiling, round the room and back again, finally looking at the constable.

"What on earth's the matter?" he asked in an amazed and dazed tone.

"Don't you know?" asked Carp, waving Hetty to discreet silence.

"No. I have been asleep for nearly two hours, more or less."

"That's true," said Mother Monkey, no longer to be restrained. "I saw you sleeping like a Cupid, deary, when I peeped in. And you didn't drink your tea while it was hot either."

Mendel paid no attention to her, but pushed past Carp. "What's the matter with my grandmother? Is she—— Oh!" he gasped and stepped back a pace.

"Yes," said the man behind him, "she's dead sure enough. Murdered."

"Murdered." Juve went as white as Tavy had done. "It's impossible."

Carp shrugged his brawny shoulders. "See for yourself, sir."

"But—but,"—the boy strove to collect his scattered senses,—"how could she have been—been—murdered"—he brought out the ominous word with a gasp—"when I was in the house, and Hetty and Maggie?"

"You were asleep, lovey," said Mother Monkey, looking up.

"Yes. But you were awake. Maggie was awake."

"We heard nothing," said the little woman, shaking her head, which even at this tragic moment was adorned with the man's cap. "I sent Maggie with your tea——"

"I never heard her enter my room."

"No. You were asleep, as I found you, my sweet. But she left the tea and then, as I told her, went to look up the mistress. As she never come back I went
to see you and found you asleep, and then came here to be’old—this.’

‘Is Maggie dead also?’

‘No, only stunned. When she talks we may learn much, sir.’

‘The name of the murderer?’ asked Mendel when Carp stopped speaking.

‘Oh, we know that, sir. Marcus Purcane knifed her.’

Juve gasped again. ‘It’s impossible, I tell you. Why should he?’

‘I dunno,’ said Carp, scratching his thick head. ‘All I do know is that Tavy met him comin’ out of the garden gate when this ’ere murder was committed. He knifed the old lady and stunned the girl, I take it.’

Juve sank down into a chair and clutched his head with both hands. ‘I can’t believe that my grandmother is dead,’ he said in a strange whisper.

‘She is, worse luck for you, sir,’ said Carp, not unsympathetically. ‘You feel it terrible, as is natural.’

‘I don’t know,’ muttered the boy, still in the same dazed whisper. ‘We were not very good friends and quarrelled frequently.’

‘What’s that?’ asked Carp sharply, and made as if to bring out his note-book.

Juve did not reply, but rose with a stagger to his feet, only to fall on the floor in a faint.

‘That looks bad,’ said the policeman half to himself.

‘Bad be hanged,’ cried Mother Monkey shrilly, and dropped Maggie’s head to spring to the side of her darling. ‘He’s over-wrought with this nasty business. Give me the water. Don’t stand there like a fool.’

Carp glared. ‘I represent the law,’ he said in a massive voice, but all the same passed along the bowl of water,
"Worse luck for the law, then," retorted Hetty, beginning to bathe Juve's face anxiously. "I hear some one coming."

"He quarrelled with his grandmother," said Carp, taking no notice of the last remark, but pointing to Juve.

"He never murdered her anyhow. I sawr him asleep myself. If I murdered all them as I've had words with," ended Mother Monkey vehemently, "I'd have to be a cat with nine lives to pay for my murderings—and that's putting it as low as low can be. Get along with you."

What Carp would have said to this audacious speech it is impossible to say, for at this moment Dr. Brent, a brisk young man, entered swiftly with Tavy the messenger lagging behind him. He took in the situation at a glance, and having had the startling news broken to him by Tavy was not so astonished as might have been expected. He certainly expressed surprise when he saw Juve on the floor.

"Are the three dead?" he asked with a puzzled look. "Tavy only said two."

"There's only one, and that's the mistress," cried Mother Monkey sharply. "I thought you knew Tavy to be a fool, doctor; if you didn't, you're one."

"Gently! Gently!" said Brent with a frown, for his self-sufficiency was great.

"Oh, I've no patience with men,—knowing so much about them," retorted the little woman, fuming. "Mr. Mendel's fainted with the news, and the gel there is stunned. You look after her and I'll look after my boy."

Being young and green, Brent would have argued Mother Monkey into adopting a more respectful tone, but that Carp, the more experienced man, hinted at the impossibility of such a surrender by a woman. He therefore applied himself to reviving the housemaid and gradually succeeded in bringing her to a state of con-
sciousness. But as Maggie was stunned and Juve had merely fainted, the latter was the first to come to his senses under the ministrations of the old woman. He opened his eyes slowly with a faint sigh and sat up in Hetty's arms to let his glance wander here and there listlessly. When it finally alighted on the body of his grandmother, he stood up with difficulty and with a shiver.

"It is true, then," he murmured; "it is true."

"True as taxes, sir," said Carp, who was watching him closely. "What have you to say about it?"

"Nothing. I was asleep all the time."

"When did you see the deceased last?" asked Carp, professionally.

"At dinner time."

"Were you on good terms?"

"No. We had a quarrel and I left the table abruptly. But look here," added Mendel, recovering his self-possession, "you aren't going to accuse me of murdering my grandmother, are you?"

"No! No. We know who did the deed, sir. But you might have been an accessory before the fact."

Juve stared. "What's that?"

"It's rubbish and silly talk," cried Mother Monkey wrathfully. "Come along to the kitchen and I'll give you some brandy, deary. As for you, Carp, just send for an inspector and let us have some brains."

"'Ow dare you?" demanded Carp, who dropped his "h's" when excited. "Don't you know, female as you are, I'm the lawr."

"Here! Here! Carp! Mendel, you woman, what's your name,—she's coming round."

This cry from Dr. Brent stopped all talk on Mother Monkey's part and cut short reproofs from the policeman. Maggie opened her eyes and groaned, while Juve bent over her—partly held back by Mother Monkey—and implored her to say who had struck down his grandmother. The girl only stared and
closed her eyes again, while Carp shook his head. "Give her time, give her time," he said; "we know the worst, and she can't tell us much."

"She can say who committed the murder," replied Juve angrily; "that it was Mr. Marcus Purcane I decline to believe."

"So do I," put in Brent, looking up. "Tavy told me how he met him passing through the gate, but that doesn't make him out to be the criminal."

"Why was he on the spot then, sir, at the time when the crime was committed?" asked Carp, not unnaturally. "The law--"

"Oh, the deuce take the law," snapped the doctor. "Don't jump to conclusions, Carp. You might as well say that Mendel yonder killed the old woman."

"It may come to that, sir," hinted Carp darkly.

"If you say that again, I shall complain to your inspector," said Juve with a frown. "Why should I kill my sole relative?"

"With whom you quarrelled," retorted Carp, sticking to his guns.

"Oh, rats, rats," cried Hetty in her Cockney way. "Don't make an ass of your blooming self. Mr. Mendel was asleep: I saw him."

"He might have committed the crime and gone to his room again."

Juve was so furious at this suggestion that he raised his hand to strike the constable, for his hot gipsy-Hungarian blood was on fire. But Hetty held back his arm, as she did not wish him to get into trouble, and would have spoken words of warning to him, but that Maggie suddenly sat up, and seemed to pull herself together though still faint. The doctor gave her a dose of brandy, which Mother Monkey passed along to him, and then the girl, when the ardent spirit had done its work, was able to talk.

"I took the tea up to Mr. Juve," she said, "and
knocked at his door. As he did not answer I looked in and saw him asleep on the bed.”

“There, you see,” cried Hetty, with a triumphant glance at the officer.

“As I was tole not to wake him if sleepin’,” went on Maggie, “I didn’t, an’ lef’ the tea on the chair ’side the bed.”

“Where I sawr it later,” supplemented Mother Monkey, again triumphantly.

“Not so much of it,” growled Carp, with an official brow-beating scowl.

“I come downstairs,” resumed the girl weakly, “an’ went t’ see if th’ mistress wanted tea and light. The lamp was lighted and she was lyin’ dead covered with blood.” Maggie gasped and shivered. “I tried to screech, but wasn’t able nohow, for some ’un come behin’ me an’ knocked m’head orf.”

“Who was it struck you down?” asked Brent, giving her more brandy.

“That Mr. Purcane.”

“Course!” said Carp with a hoarse roar. “I knew the old sinner—”

‘Twasn’t the old gent, but th’ young ’un,” murmured Maggie unexpectedly.

“Mr. Joseph Purcane!” the policeman started back in sheer bewilderment.

“Aw yis. I seen him plain as plain. Aw, let me be—I’m that sick—”

Brent nodded, and between Juve and Hetty the girl was half carried, half dragged, to her bedroom, where she wept herself to sleep. And while Mother Monkey was ministering to the badly shaken boy in the kitchen, and talking over the unexpected tragedy, Dr. Brent lingered behind to question Carp.

“Who is guilty of the two?” he asked, referring to the Purcanes.

“Two,” echoed the officer, who had made up his
narrow mind. "Why, sir, there be three in this 'ere matter.'"

"Three." Brent was surprised, and no wonder.

Carp nodded portentously. "Mr. Purcane, Mr. Joseph Purcane and Mr. Mendel."

"Oh! And which of the three is guilty?"

"All of 'em," said this Dogberry sweepingly, "an' all shall hang."

"But you can't——"

"I shall," declared Carp resolutely. "If I hang one, I'll be sergeant; if two, I'll be inspector; if three——" He stopped and gaped. The reward for hanging three criminals was beyond guessing in his rustic imagination.

CHAPTER IV

WHO IS GUILTY?

THE Grange, wherein lived the Lady of the Manor with her son and grand-daughter, was a rambling red-brick mansion of jumbled Tudor-Georgian-Victorian architecture, eminently picturesque, although somewhat incongruous. It stood in a small park at the extreme end of Carrowell, only a stone’s-throw from Trinity Church and its adjoining rectory; while between it and the scene of the tragedy stretched the village with one tolerably wide street and many offshoots of crooked narrow alleys. On all sides spread a smiling pastoral country of cultivated fields, comfortable farmhouses, well-kept roads and clumps of woodland with a distant view of low hills and a glimpse of the broad Thames. There was nothing romantic or impressive about the hamlet and its surroundings, but the whole aspect and atmosphere was one of peace-and-plenty somnolence. People dwelling in this stodgy Lotus-land more or less dozed through life—
they certainly did not live actively, being but half awake.

In her own colourless self, Mrs. Basser was the prototype of those who inhabited her petty kingdom—a large stout lazy woman, once pretty in an infantile way, but now run to seed—very willingly it would seem. She was most industrious in doing nothing, and was as slow mentally as she was physically. She ate and drank and slept, read the lightest of novels, fiddled with useless fancy-work, talked as little as possible, and altogether was an amiable nonentity, useless to herself and to every one else. Paul looked after the tenants and the estate: Lesley attended to domestic affairs as a kind of unpaid, unrecognized housekeeper; and the duty of both, so Mrs. Basser said, was to look after Mrs. Basser. They did so, by supplying all her needs, and by never suggesting that she should employ herself in any way.

Like a piece of furniture the old lady was moved here and there, contented so long as she—the piece of furniture—could choose where to be moved to. She wore expensive clothes, being always interested in the fashions, and was dressed and undressed by her maid like a large doll, never assisting more than she could help. A lazier old lady, or one more selfish for her comforts it would have been impossible to find. How she came to be Lesley's grandmother was a mystery of Nature which no one had yet succeeded in solving.

For Lesley was a tall, active, practical damsel of untiring energy and generous disposition. A nut-brown maid with hair and eyes to match, she was not unlike Juve, which was not remarkable, considering that the two were cousins, of which interesting fact both were ignorant. Wench knew of the relationship, for Madame Valeria had told him, and presumably, for the furthering of her schemes, the Purcanes father and son, knew also. But they gave no hint of their knowledge, so people were left to wonder
vaguely why rich Miss Basser and poor Mr. Mendel resembled one another so closely. The most marked difference between them was that Lesley's eyes were hazel, while Juve's were black, so that she looked less like a gipsy than he did, a fact to be accounted for by the lad's Romany strain coming from his mother, who was Ursula's daughter. Nicky Graves, who afterwards became Nicholas Basser, had nothing of the gipsy about him, but being active and quick-witted had transmitted these good qualities to his grand-daughter. And it was well for her that he had not given her his bad ones.

It was strange, so people gossiped, that the girl had nothing in her of father and grandmother. Mrs. Basser, as has been seen, was a lymphatic do-nothing, and her son Paul was much the same, although a trifle more alive. It was Lesley who kept him alive, and but for her constantly coaxing and spurring him on to make this effort and that, he would have lapsed into the somnolent ineptitude of Mrs. Basser. He was a slim, elegant-looking man rather over the average height, with mild blue eyes, hair so fair as to be almost white, and a handsome weak face. Although his mother, even in her old age, was sturdy enough, Paul confessed to a lack of vitality, which rendered him languid and disinclined to exert himself. But that his vigorous daughter made him look into matters connected with the estate, and constantly assisted him in doing so, he would have allowed things large and small to drift, anyhow and anywhere, after the fashion of Mrs. Basser. Lesley was the salvation of both, the only truly alive person of the trio, and was much more the ruling power in the village than the other two. The contrast of the youngest member of the household with the elder ones was so striking that a physiognomist and a psychologist, however clever, would have been greatly puzzled how to account for her being in the group. Lesley undoubtedly was a throw-back
to some virile ancestor, even beyond Nicky Graves, who had sent down to her through the ages Elizabethan qualities of no mean order.

On the morning after the catastrophe at the gim-crack villa, Lesley, in a smart tailor-made dress with a linen collar and linen cuffs—her usual garb for attending to indoor matters—was in her grandmother's sitting-room talking over the dreadful occurrence. With her russet hair and quick bright eyes, together with her charming face so intelligent and alive, she looked singularly handsome and competent. Juve always compared her to Diana of the Mountain Chase, and truly the comparison was just, although about the girl there was a human warmth alien, if tradition can be believed, to the coldness of the goddess. In a chair beside the fire, Mrs. Basser, dressed for the day in violet silk with an adornment of expensive lace and costly jewellery, was purring like an old tabby cat, while Paul walked up and down the room in a distracted manner, much to his daughter's wonderment.

"The thing has nothing to do with you, dad," she was saying in a voice as musical as that of Mendel—another point of resemblance between them. "We know very little of Madame Valeria, save that she brought a letter of introduction to the rector, who vouched for her respectability. So I don't see that we need trouble our heads."

"But the disgrace to the village; the blot on our miniature civilization, my dear girl," said her father grandiloquently, for he was fonder of talking than of doing. "I have always prided myself upon keeping Carrowell free from crime."

Lesley laughed. "You talk as if you were the policeman, dad. It's Carp's business to prevent crime, not yours. You can't do everything, you know. And I'm sure Granny's opinion is the same as mine."

"Yes, of course," purred Mrs. Basser, thinking consent was the best means to avoid an argument.
"Very nice, dear, very sensible!" Then she resumed the novel she was reading, caring little if the whole population of Carrowell were criminals of the deepest dye.

Not so her son, who had a positive genius for self-tormenting. "That such a crime should be committed with impunity reflects on us, who practically own the village," he insisted, plucking irritably at his weak chin.

"It is early days to talk of impunity, dad. Carp may find the murderer."

"Horrid words!" murmured Mrs. Basser placidly. "All very well in detective stories, you know, but in real life most unpleasant. I wish you and your father would talk of something more agreeable."

"We can't talk of anything more insistent," replied Lesley dryly. "As dad says, we have a certain amount of responsibility, as the chief people here."

"You change your tune, my dear," said her father crossly. "A few minutes ago you remarked that there was no need for us to trouble our heads."

"I mean as to personal grief over Madame Valeria's death," explained the girl patiently. "She was a stranger to us, and does not require our tears. But I admit that the matter should be looked into, and that I intend to do this morning when Juve comes. I have sent for him, so as to learn exactly what has occurred."

"Better leave things in the hands of the police," contradicted Basser uneasily, and altering his mind, which he did twenty times a day. "Criminal matters are too serious for a young girl like you to meddle with."

"They are serious enough for Mr. Purcane and his son, if rumour speaks truly, dad. I must look into matters for their sakes."

"I shall look into matters myself," said Basser with unnecessary violence, "so leave things to me, and don't meddle."
"As you please," assented the girl, intending nevertheless to superintend the doings of her father and prevent him from committing mistakes, which he was bound to do, as she knew from dire experience.

"As to Marcus and Joseph being concerned in the business," fumed her parent, working himself into a state of nerves, "I don't believe it. They were most attached to Madame Valeria, and often played cards with her along with me, as you know, Lesley. Why,"—his voice faltered a trifle—"I might as well be accused as our cousins."

"Very distant cousins, dad. Personally I don't like either of them."

"Yet Joseph admires you."

"So does Archie Godwin: so does Juve," she retorted with a shrug. "Why not, dad? I like admiration, but I am not bound to return the compliment."

"Joseph Purcane wants to marry you."

"He can want then. I certainly shouldn't think of marrying him."

"You prefer young Mendel perhaps?"

"Do I? At twenty-two years of age, do you think that I should marry a boy of nineteen?"

"I think nothing about it," said her father violently. "I have enough to think of, as it is. As to young Godwin—"

"I said nothing about him," interrupted Lesley, her colour coming and going.

Mr. Basser laughed. "You did not, and thereby prove that he is the one you prefer for a husband out of the three." The remark and the laugh were good-humoured for the moment, but again Mrs. Basser whirled to fretfulness like a weather-cock.

"It's a bad match for you, Lesley."

"I have not made up my mind to marry any one yet," said the girl, dismissing the delicate subject, although her colour still ebbed and flowed, "so it
is useless to talk about such a thing. About this murder, dad? Do you believe that our cousins, as you call them——"

"They are. You know they are," said Basser pettishly.

"Well, then, do you think that they have anything to——"

Paul interrupted again, pettish as ever. "No, I don't. I said so before. I would much rather believe that young Mendel is guilty. He's a tiger of a boy so far as temper goes, and was always quarrelling with his grandmother."

"I don't wonder," said Lesley, a trifle grimly. "I should have quarrelled with her myself had I seen much of her."

"You never liked her," commented Basser bitterly. "Why should I? She was nothing to me. Clever enough and handsome enough and comfortably off enough, but, to my mind, something of an adventuress, Madame Valeria." Miss Basser's lip curled. "The name suggests cheap fictions: penny romances and detective stories."

"Very nice too," remarked the old lady, raising her eyes from a story of this description. "I like horror in print."

"You are likely to find it in real life," answered her grand-daughter, "and then it won't be so pleasant."

"It won't dear. Keep it away from me."

"Sensible advice," said Paul, agreeing with his mother. "Lesley, as I observed before, leave these matters to the police."

"And not stand by the Purcanes when they are accused?" she asked with a shrug.

"Marcus and Joseph are only distant cousins, remember," remarked Basser, echoing her former remark with elaborate sarcasm.

"All the same they are cousins, and we must stand
by them,” said the girl, passing over the insinuation. “There’s Juve, too. I like that boy, and if he is in trouble, which he is, I want to help.”

“Leave things alone, Lesley, or you’ll burn your fingers.”

Miss Basser looked at him consideringly, then turned away to gaze out of the window, through which she could see the carriage drive, stretching for some distance between rows of elms and oaks. She really wished to help the Purcanes, little as she approved of them, since she did not believe for one moment that they were guilty. She also wished to help young Mendel, whom she liked—queerly enough at her age—in a motherly way. But her chief reason to meddle with the unpleasant matter was to see that her father did not get into more trouble than was necessary. She knew that he would interfere, as he liked to be important and to give advice after the fashion of weak natures, so it was just as well that he should be looked after. It was no wonder that Lesley’s motherly instincts were aroused prematurely, for ever since entering her teens she had looked after the child, her grandmother and her still greater child, the very troublesome parent she possessed. Still looking out of the window, she made several remarks, which seemed to render her father uncomfortable.

“I should like to learn who murdered Madame Valeria,” said Lesley musingly, “for although I liked her little and preferred her room to her company, still she afforded you amusement, dad, and kept you from running up to Town so often.”

“Why shouldn’t I run up to Town?” asked Basser, flushing and looking uneasy.

Lesley turned round. “You always come back from Town looking ill, and are never yourself for some days afterwards. Your strength and nerves aren’t equal to these visits, dad, and as you enjoyed playing cards with Madame Valeria, I owe her some gratitude.
But I never knew why you made such a friend of her, dad?"

"You have explained," said Basser, hurriedly and still flushing. "Cards were the lure. Along with Marcus and Joseph we had many pleasant evenings at bridge. Also Madame Valeria was an accomplished woman of the world, and a conversationalist of no mean merit."

"Oh, she was clever, I know," admitted Lesley, turning again to look out of the window, "but she always, as I say, suggested the adventuress to me."

"Nonsense!" cried her father angrily. "The rector vouched for her respectability. She was a lady of New Orleans, the widow of Monsieur Dubourg, a planter. It was a whim of hers to drop her surname, as its associations were too painful."

"What were they?"

"Madame Valeria never told me. I did not inquire into her private affairs."

Lesley shrugged her shoulders. "Perhaps it was just as well."

"You are prejudiced."

"I admit that, dad. Still, as the woman is dead, let us leave the subject. I am certainly not prejudiced against Juve Mendel, for I am sure he is all that is honest. Here he comes." She left the window and walked to the door. "Now I shall hear something truthful."

"Don’t bring him in here, dear," droned Mrs. Basser. "I have just got to a most interesting chapter."

"It won’t be more interesting than what Juve has to tell me," retorted her granddaughter and went out briskly.

Basser made a step forward as if to follow, then halted with a frown. "It is no use talking to that lad," he said, half to himself and half to his mother. "He’ll only tell his version of the affair, and he may have more to do with the matter than we think."
"Do you believe that he killed his grandmother, Paul?" asked Mrs. Basser sweetly; then without waiting for an answer, added, "Dear me! How dreadful!"

"I don't say that he killed her," said Paul irritably. "He was in the house and knew nothing about it."

"If he was in the house, I should think he did know," murmured the old lady, well up in detective fiction of which she highly approved.

"He was asleep—at least he says so," said Basser violently.

"Oh, he was asleep—at least he says so," pondered Mrs. Basser, rubbing her podgy white hands together. "Dear me! How interesting! I think I'll sleep for a few minutes myself, Paul, if you will go away. Don't get into mischief, dear," she ended, just as if he was a schoolboy.

"Oh, bother!" cried the man crossly, and pulling open the door with violence. "Do leave me alone, mother. I'm going to see Inspector Quinton. He has come over from Tarhaven to take charge of this case."

"Bring him here, dear, after I have had my sleep. If he will tell me all about this dreadful murder nicely, I shall enjoy a little conversation with him. Now don't be violent, Paul: my nerves, you know. Goodbye for the present, dear. I hope you'll enjoy yourself," and Mrs. Basser settled herself to snore for half an hour, while Paul fumed and fretted himself out of the room. He was always polite to his mother, but she tried his irritable temper considerably on all and every occasion.

Meanwhile Lesley in the large drawing-room was sitting on the sofa smoothing Juve's thick black hair. The boy thrilled at her touch, being deeply in love with her; but knowing instinctively that her interest for the time being—he hoped that it was only for the time being—was merely motherly, he remained outwardly calm. Mendel looked ill and worn, as was
natural, considering the strain he was undergoing. There were dark circles under his feverishly bright eyes, his hands were hot, and every now and then he was seized with a fit of trembling which he could not repress. The girl was truly sorry for him, and never thinking that he wanted to marry her, did not understand that the mere touch of her hand on his hair was a playing with fire of no common strength.

"You must keep calm, Juve, and not let yourself get ill," said Miss Basser soothingly. "It's very dreadful, but your being ill won't improve matters."

"I can't afford to be ill," said the boy gloomily. "To-night I have to go to the music-hall as usual and earn my bread and butter."

"I suppose Inspector Quinton—he's in charge of the case, I hear—doesn't object to your going."

"Good heavens, Lesley, do you believe me to be guilty also?" cried Mendel, with a violent start and a wild look in his eloquent eyes.

"No! No. A thousand times no, Juve. Only I understand that all witnesses had to remain in touch with the police."

"Oh, I'll be in touch with them right enough," muttered Juve, fiercely. "The police will watch me, never fear. That silly ass of a Carp has put into Quinton's head that I know something about the matter. I don't. I was asleep all the time, as both Mother Monkey and Maggie can prove."

"You heard nothing."

"Not a sound. Neither did Monkey, and she was in the kitchen."

"Do you suspect any one?"

"No. I knew little about my grandmother, who kept herself to herself. We didn't get on at all well, as you know, Lesley, for she always treated me in a cruel way. I suppose," added Juve heavily, "I should be grateful to her for having brought me up. And I would have been, had she showed the slightest
desire for affection. But she never did. She was always an iceberg and a keep-your-distance tyrant. I don’t know why she was murdered, or who murdered her. But I’m going to find out, if only to clear my name from the suspicions of Carp.”

Lesley approved of this with a nod. “And the Purcanes—those cousins of mine. What about them?”

“Carp thinks them guilty also, and he has certainly more cause to accuse them than me. Maggie was struck down by Joseph, so she says, while Tavy, on returning from you with the music, met Marcus Purcane at the gate.”

Miss Basser winced. This evidence seemed to put the rope round the throats of both her relatives, and as they really were her cousins, she did not like the idea. Little as she cared for the pair, socially speaking, she did not wish either to die a dishonourable death. “What do you say, Juve?”

“I can’t say anything, for I don’t know anything.”

“What do they say?”

“Oh,” the boy shrugged his shoulders, “they naturally declare that they are innocent. I don’t blame them for that, although the evidence of Maggie and Tavy is very strong and conclusive. Quinton saw Mr. Purcane this morning, and wanted to see Joseph, only he had gone to Town.”

“Does he want to arrest both of them?” asked Lesley breathlessly.

“He did, but after his interview with Mr. Purcane, he told me that he could only have them watched. There was not enough evidence, so he said, to prove them guilty.”

“But the clear statements of Maggie and Tavy?”

“That is the puzzle, Lesley. I can’t make top nor tail of things myself. All I know is that Mr. Purcane produced his housekeeper and gardener and their
little girl to prove that neither he nor his son were out of the house after four o'clock."

"Strange," pondered Miss Basser, looking honestly puzzled.

"There is something stranger still," went on the boy, feverishly vivacious, "for Mr. Purcane showed the Inspector a note from my grandmother asking him and his son to come to her between four and seven yesterday."

"That was about the time she was killed?"

"Yes. Mr. Purcane said that he had a bad cold and did not wish to venture out. Also he had to have a business talk with his son, and Joseph remained in also. Mr. and Mrs. Wrest—the housekeeper and the gardener you know, Lesley—along with their little girl, can prove that the two were indoors."

"Then Tavy's statement and Maggie's story?"

"That's the difficulty. Maggie and Tavy contradict Wrest and his wife and the girl. But, you see, Mr. Purcane and Joseph have three witnesses to disprove the evidence of two. Quinton doesn't know what to make of it."

"What do you think?"

"I hardly know," murmured Juve reflectively. "I don't like those two men, you know. I never did. The elder is a miser, and the younger a scamp. I have heard tales of Joseph in Town which I shouldn't dare to repeat to you. I can hardly think them guilty of murder, as I can't for the life of me see why they should kill my grandmother. But either Tavy and Maggie are telling lies, or Wrest and his wife and child are perjuring themselves."

"They might be bribed to perjure themselves," said Lesley, after a pause.

Juve started. "Are you against them?" he asked. "Do you believe them to be guilty of this crime?"

"No. After all, although I don't like them, they
are my cousins. I was only thinking how to account for the evidence of the three against two."

"I don't see how it can be accounted for," said Juve, shaking his head. "It's a mystery, for all five swear positively that each is speaking the truth. What the Inspector is going to do I don't know. He is as puzzled as we are. Perhaps," added Mendel cynically, "he'll cut the Gordian knot by accepting Carp's idea and put me in the dock."

"But Carp doesn't dare to say that you are guilty," said Lesley indignantly.

"No. But I rather believe that he thinks so. Anyhow," Mendel arose abruptly, "I have told you all I know, Lesley, and must leave you to draw your own conclusions. But if those Purcanes do get into trouble, I hope it will force them to leave the village and never cross your path again."

"Why?" asked the girl with unconcealed surprise.

"Because they are your enemies. Don't ask me why I know, for as yet I can't tell you. It's only a few words I overheard one evening when they were leaving after playing bridge."

"And the words, Juve?"

"I can't tell you just now. But those men are your enemies, Lesley. Be on your guard."

CHAPTER V
GOSSIP

In any case Carrowell would have been startled from sleepy ease by the report of the crime; but the circumstances connected with the same were so inexplicable that the villagers became wide awake to an alarming degree. Curiosity stimulates the
most lethargic natures to action of some kind, therefore in this instance with misplaced zeal every one immediately began to ask questions, encourage rumours and offer explanations. By evening the whole place was raging with detective fever, and in street and house excited people discussed the matter volubly. No story was too wild for acceptance: no person was so ill-informed as to decline giving an opinion. That Inspector Quinton and his officers kept what they knew to themselves mattered little, for fiction supplied the place of facts, and every one knew who ought to be arrested and hanged. Without a trial in the view of many, since the absolute guilt of the accused person was so plain that witnesses were not needed, let alone a judge or jury.

Of course amongst such a multitude of talkers, the name of the criminal varied. But, in spite of Quinton’s caution, sufficient had leaked out to indicate the possible guilt of Mr. Purcane, his son and young Mendel. As the last-named was popular in the village, only a few over-zealous people credited him with committing the crime. These were very resolute in their accusation, pointing out that the dead woman had always treated the boy shamefully, that the pair were constantly quarrelling, and that Juve’s foreign blood was proof enough of his guilt; foreigners, as every one knew, being accustomed to lose their tempers and stab on all occasions. And some of these wiseacres went even further, for knowing how devoted Mother Monkey was to the boy, they stated positively that the harmless little woman had assisted him to accomplish the murder. As a final clinching of the accusation, it was hinted that, as young Mendel expected to inherit his grandmother’s fortune, he had made away with her so as to obtain it immediately. Altogether Juve’s character suffered considerably, but it must be admitted that his accusers were in the minority.
By far the strongest feeling of the public was against the Purcanes, who were openly disliked and always had been: the father for his miserly habits, and the son because he was an insolent spendthrift. Had he squandered his substance in Carrowell, then indeed—so people said—there might have been some excuse for his lavish profligacy; but as Joseph enjoyed his evil pleasures in London and the village did not benefit by his faults, nothing was too bad to say of him. And it was certain that the evidence of Tavy and Maggie—who would talk in spite of Quinton’s admonitions—afforded much more reason to suspect the Purcanes than Juve. Tavy had seen the old man leave the villa after the deed was done: Maggie had been struck down by the young one in the very presence of his victim. One or the other was assuredly guilty—perhaps both; although every one was puzzled to invent any motive for the crime. Young Mendel, it was known, had something to gain by the death of the old lady, but there was no reason why the Purcanes should commit a murder, unlikely to benefit them in any way.

The rector took this view, little as he liked the men. They might be evil, and in his opinion they were evil; but that did not imply actual criminality of a kind punishable by death. Mr. Godwin believed, and very plausibly, that neither Purcane nor his son would jeopardize their lives for nothing. Marcus wanted money to put into his strong box, it was true, and Joseph was unscrupulous in obtaining money to waste on his pleasures, but, on the face of it, the death of Madame Valeria was not likely to bring them any reward. Then why should they kill a harmless old lady with whom, as was well known, they were on the best of terms? The rector put this question to Quinton, when he called at the villa to acquaint himself with all that had taken place. Quinton, a drill-sergeant police inspector with a bald head, a red moustache and
a gruff, abrupt military way of speaking, admitted that it was difficult to find an answer.

"All I can say, reverend sir, is that two witnesses swear they saw both the men in and about this place when the murder was committed."

"Young Mendel was also about the place," argued Mr. Godwin—"in the house, I understand. Yet you do not accuse him."

"Some do," commented Quinton grimly.

"Oh, that is ridiculous, Mr. Inspector. Juve, as I know, is a good lad and is most particular in attending church."

"That does not make him out to be innocent, rector. Many criminals go to church in order to blind people to their real natures. The evidence of the housemaid and the housekeeper that Mr. Mendel was sound asleep in his bedroom all the time proves his innocence, better than your plea of his being an ardent churchgoer."

"Well, well, perhaps you are right," said Godwin, who was a good man, but somewhat narrow in his views. "Juve, I truly believe, is innocent."

"So do I," said the officer, nodding sharply. "Two witnesses at least can prove that he was asleep. And two witnesses," he added abruptly, "can prove the guilt of the Purcanes, father and son."

"Yet I hear—correct me if I am wrong—that three witnesses can prove the innocence of the pair," said Godwin dryly.

"That is so, reverend sir. The housekeeper of Mr. Purcane, her husband, who is the gardener and their little girl, a sharp child of thirteen, swear that neither of the Purcanes left the house on Sunday evening. Some of the five witnesses must be telling lies. I can't get a clear notion of the case as yet, and so have made no arrests."

"What do you intend to do?"

"Search for further evidence. Whether it will be forthcoming or not, I am unable to say as yet."
"Tavy is half an idiot," remarked the rector meditatively, "and only saw the person he believes to be Mr. Purcane for a few minutes by the doubtful moonlight which prevailed last night. It is possible that he may be mistaken."

"It is possible," agreed Quinton doubtfully. "The Lord knows what the truth is, begging your pardon, for the expression, reverend sir. Where did you get this information?"

"Every one is talking."

"And that girl and the idiot are supplying material for talk. I wish they would be silent, but I can't make them hold their tongues—an impossible task where an imbecile and a woman have to do with things. Anyhow, the girl is pretty certain that young Purcane struck her down."

"Only pretty certain, Mr. Inspector?" asked the rector with emphasis.

Quinton nodded. "After she knew that the Wrests had given their evidence she hinted that she might have been mistaken. She only saw the man's face for a second, you know."

"Well, going by what I say about Tavy and you say about Maggie, it seems to me that the Purcanes are innocent."

"I can't be sure of that."

"There is the evidence of the Wrests."

"Yes. That would seem to excuse the pair. And yet"—Quinton drummed on the table with open fingers, and then glanced round the dreary sitting-room—"I hear that Madame Valeria was rich, though this place doesn't seem to show it. Dismal enough, rector, and by no means expensively furnished."

"I know little about Madame Valeria's financial affairs," said Godwin stiffly. "She had enough for her needs, I believe."

"Is that all you know?"
Godwin bent his head. "What else should I know?" he inquired, with a puzzled look.

"Well, I understand that you introduced this lady into the village."

"That is true. She brought a letter of introduction from an old school-friend of mine who went to New York. He stated that Madame Valeria Dubourg—her full name, Mr. Inspector—was the widow of a New Orleans planter who sought retirement after the death of her husband."

"Strange she should come to this place with all the continent of America to choose from," commented the Inspector.

"She gave me no reason for her choice," replied the parson carelessly. "On the authority of my friend's letter I took her to be a respectable lady, and therefore introduced her to my friends. And I am bound to say that although Madame Valeria lived here for three years, no one had a word to say against her. She lived quietly and decently. Why do you ask these questions?"

Quinton looked surprised. "I wish to get at the truth," he said frankly. "If the Purcanes' three witnesses are to be believed, they are innocent, and certainly I can see no reason for their murdering the lady. Young Mr. Mendel is also innocent, if the housekeeper and the housemaid are to be trusted. So failing my bringing home the crime to any of these three, it only remains for me to search into Madame Valeria's past life and learn who is likely to have killed her."

"I see the common sense of that," assented the rector thoughtfully. "Cannot the housekeeper enlighten you?"

"Mother Monkey, as they call her? No! She says that she was only picked up by Madame Valeria three years ago in London while charing and was brought down here as the housekeeper."

"Cannot young Mendel——?"
"He knows very little. All the time he was in America he was at school, as his grandmother disliked him, for some reason he cannot explain. He knows nothing about her history. If you can give me the address of your friend in New York I might learn something. He would scarcely have introduced the woman to you without knowing all about her."

Godwin was doubtful on this point, since he remembered how the friend in question had left England under a cloud. However he said nothing of this to Quinton, lest it should lead to further argument, but supplied the address and name. "And I'll write to Mr. Eliot myself," said the rector, rising.

"We may get some useful information between us," remarked Quinton hopefully, "and I trust we shall. To be plain with you, reverend sir, I am puzzled to account for this murder. There is no apparent reason why the two Purcanes, or young Mr. Mendel, should have killed the old lady, and those three are the only people we can suspect so far."

"Yet the evidence——"

"Both clears them and implicates them," finished the Inspector. "I know what you would say. It is true. Going by what the housekeeper and the housemaid state, Mr. Mendel is certainly innocent. With regard to the Purcanes, it is a case of contradictory evidence with the balance in their favour."

"I see your difficulty," said the rector, drawing his brows together. "What will you do under the circumstances?"

"What can I do save place what evidence I have gathered before the coroner at the inquest? He and the jury must decide, for, so far, I cannot."

"When does the inquest take place?"

"To-morrow at the Pink Pig—queer name for a hotel," said Quinton, breaking off his train of thought.

The parson laughed and agreed. "It's a weird
variation of the Blue Boar, and White Hart, and Red Lion signs.

"By the way," asked the Inspector, as Godwin picked up his soft hat, "do you happen to know if Madame Valeria received any strangers lately?"

"No. I live at the other end of Carrowell, you know, and knew nothing of those who came to see her. Why do you ask?"

"I only wish to get at something. That Mother Monkey—her name is Hale, I hear, and she's an old music-hall singer—won't tell me anything, as she says she knows nothing. Maggie Salt is so stupid, as never to have observed the coming and going of visitors, and Mr. Mendel declares that he was so little at home, as to be ignorant of many things."

"That last is true enough, Mr. Inspector. The boy earns his living by playing in the orchestra at the Castle Music-hall, and frequently goes up during the day to rehearsals and matinée performances. And when he did remain in Carrowell for the day, he usually went to the Grange. Mrs. Basser and her daughter like his playing, and no wonder, as he is a rare performer on the violin."

"Hum! I won't get much help from him," commented the officer, disconsolately. "Well, there's no help for it. I must put what evidence I can before the coroner and jury, writing meanwhile to your friend in New York. And if you hear from him—"

"I shall certainly inform you," said Mr. Godwin politely, "and I hope what we hear from Eliot will solve the mystery of this death."

"It's a chance certainly, but a somewhat doubtful one," answered Quinton. He turned to shuffle his papers while the rector left the house.

Meanwhile Juve, with the permission of the Inspector, was getting ready to travel to London for his nightly work in the orchestra. He was leaving rather early, it is true, but this was because the atmosphere of sus-
picion was getting on his nerves and he wished to be out of the district. "I'd stay away until the whole business was over, if I could," said Juve gloomily to Mother Monkey, as she spread his meal in the kitchen.

"So should I," replied the old woman promptly. "It's the first time I've been mixed up with a murder, and I hope it'll be the last. But we can't get away, deary, that's a fact. I've got my evidence to give and you've got yours. I hear," Mother Monkey chuckled contemptuously, "as they say in the village, as you killed her and I helped."

"What fools!"

"Dangerous fools, lovey. But there, you can't stop people talking. Why, they say white's black and black's white just as suits 'em. In London every one minds his own business, but here, my sweet, they're always meddling. Anyhow," added Hetty, with a shrug of her skinny old shoulders, "they can't say nothing about me, for I never say anything."

"Yet they have said something," insisted Mendel frowning, "since they accuse you of helping me to murder grandmother."

"Oh, let that slide, deary. If they don't say worse nor that, it don't matter, my pet. But that copper got nothing out of me as to Ursula's past. Not he. I just said as she'd picked me up in London while I was charing and brought me down here, as a cheap servant. I know nothing," said Mother Monkey positively, "and don't you know anything either, Juve."

"I can say truly that I don't," said Mendel, who was drinking tea and eating bread and cheese with the healthy appetite of the young-not-to-be-upset-by-any occurrence, however dreadful. "I know little about my grandmother, Monkey. She kept me at school in New York, and I only came home for good when she was leaving for England. Of course I know that she told fortunes as Madame Valeria, but I said nothing about that to the Inspector."
"Quite right," commended Hetty heartily. "Least said is soonest mended. When that police bloke asked me if Ursula had any visitors, all I said was the names of folks in the village. I said nothing about that Mr. Wench, or the cove in the green overcoat."

"Do you know who he is?" asked Juve, suddenly looking up.

"Not me, ducky. Only sawr him out of the tail of m' eye when I was digging at the side of the house. And as your grandma said nothin' to me, I didn't say anythin' to her. Mind your own business is my motter," ended Miss Hale with a wise look.

"Who is this Mr. Wench?"

"Ask me another, deary. Your grandma didn't introduce him to me, or me to him, as I'm in the kitchen and not in the droring-room. He's come several times, and a wicked old sinner he do look. Silas I heard her call him, so him and her was as thick as thieves, for some reason best known to theirselves."

Mendel gave her a keen look. "Do you think Wench and the green-overcoat man have anything to do with the murder?"

"May have," said Miss Hale coolly; "but not knowing, lovey, I can't say. P'raps Ursula knowed them in the old days, though I can't say as I remember 'em. But there, deary, Ursula knowed heaps of people I never set eyes on. Don't you worry your head, my sweet, but eat your food and get your bike to ketch the train at Havering. Marrying and burying and life generally must go on, murders or no murders, and you've got to earn your bread and butter."

"Ah!" Juve pushed away his plate, drank his tea in a hurry and looked at his watch, the hands of which showed that it was nearly time to leave Carrowell and catch the train at the Junction. "That's a point I wish to speak about, Monkey darling. Now that grandmother is dead, what's to become of us?"

"Don't see her death makes much difference," said
Hetty calmly. "You get three pounds a week and we can live on that, for leave you I won't, now me having found something to love."

Mendel put his arm round the old creature and kissed her. "I don't want you to leave me, Monkey. You're the only person I have to love."

"Ho! What about Miss Basser?"

"I love her," said Juve sadly, "but she's not for me."

"Goin' to give her up to that parson's son?"

"In the long run I think I shall have to. She loves him: she doesn't love me except in a kind, sisterly way. The truth came home to me when I saw her this morning. She doesn't love me, Monkey, and even if she did"—Juve paused and pushed Hetty away—"well, it doesn't bear thinking about. Let us talk, for the few minutes I have left, about our fortunes."

Mother Monkey was puzzled by Mendel's cryptic speech, but seeing that he wanted to change the subject, seized upon the word "fortunes" as a text upon which to preach. "Your grandma had money, so she told me, deary. And she being dead and done with it stands to reason that you'll come in for it."

"That depends upon any will she may have made," said Juve grimly and putting on his overcoat. "Knowing how she hated me, though for what reason I could never make out, I am pretty certain that I won't get a penny."

"Wait and see," advised Hetty, using the formula of a noted statesman.

"There's nothing else left for me to do. But in the meanwhile let us make this plan and stick to it."

"What plan, lovey?"

"While I am in London and you are here look round for a cheap cottage. After the inquest and burial"—Juve shuddered—"you and I can leave this house and—"

Hetty clapped her hands, nodding and smiling, with
shining eyes. "I'll look for a cottage while that copper is getting ready for the inquest," she said gaily, "as I wish to get out of this house as soon as I can. It gives me the horrors, that's a fact, though I know little about 'em, as I never did drink myself into delirious trimmings. Leave it to me, Juve. I'll get us settled, and all you've got to do is to earn the money. Wish I'd some m'self," added Hetty sadly, "but char­ing ain't profitable, and my salary as the Pride of the Halls went in smoke long ago, worse luck."

"Don't you worry." Mendel gave her another hug and made for the door. "We'll get on somehow."

"Until you marry Miss Basser," called out Hetty archly.

"I shall never marry Miss Basser," said Juve with a gloomy face, and disappeared quickly, so that she should not ask him further questions.

"Now what does that mean?" Mother Monkey asked herself, going to the door to look after her darling. "I never knew him to take on like this before. Oh, you gels, you gels," she muttered, clenching her fist. "Don't know a good thing when it's lyin' at your feet for the picking up. What do he mean?"

Juve would have found it difficult to answer this question, as he did not know himself. For this reason he had avoided further conversation, and was soon mounted on his bicycle racing for Havering. His conversation with Lesley in the morning had brought home to him that she could not give him the love he longed for—the love of a woman who would take him for her husband. She was sisterly, she was motherly, she was friendly and kind, but she certainly was not in love with him. Had she been, she would have betrayed more agitation over his troubles. But these she treated in a calm, detached way, which showed that her emotions were thoroughly under control. A woman in love would have been shaken to the depths of her being by what he told her, which included the
rumour that people threw suspicion on him. No. Lesley did not love him, and it was more than probable that she wished to marry Archie Godwin. The mere thought made Juve frown, for although he felt sure she was not for him, he did not wish to surrender her to another. It was for this reason that he had avoided further questionings on the part of Mother Monkey. He did not know really and truly what he meant, as his feelings for the time being were too complicated to be analysed.

It was just as well, while he was reasoning himself into deeper complexity, that Mr. Basser should hail him on the outskirts of the village. Paul, in a fur overcoat, with a cap and gloves and a gold-headed cane, looked smart and aristocratic in appearance, quite the typical man-about-town and young enough to be Lesley’s brother instead of her father. But this juvenile appearance was due to distance, for when Juve dismounted from his machine to see him at close quarters, he was shocked to see how ill the man looked. His face was white, his eyes were filled with nervous anxiety, and it took him all his will-power—which was not much—to steady his voice.

"What’s the matter, Mr. Basser?" asked Mendel, greatly concerned. "You look quite ill."

"Can you wonder, in the face of this dreadful murder? As my mother’s lieutenant and as deputy Lord of the Manor, I feel that your grandmother’s death is a great slur on the village."

"I can’t see that, Mr. Basser. You can’t help it."

"I should have helped it by protecting Madame Valeria."

"But you didn’t know she was in danger," said Juve, very reasonably.

"Did you?" Basser asked the question with a sudden pounce, yet seemed to dread the answer.

"No. Little as I loved my grandmother, I should certainly have protected her had there been any need.
The murder was as great a surprise to me as to you—to everybody. I was asleep all the——"

"Yes! Yes! Yes! I know all about that," broke in Basser testily. "You are undoubtedly innocent. And my cousins, Mr. Purcane and his son, are innocent also, if the evidence of the Wrests is to be believed."

"What about the evidence of my grandmother's housekeeper and Maggie Salt?"

"You mean the girl and Tavy?"

"Ah, yes," said Juve hastily. "I do mean that. They say——"

"I know what they say and I don't believe them," interrupted Paul again in a tremendous hurry, "and failing you and my cousins, who can be guilty?"

"I can't say," said Mendel, who naturally did not like this speech.

"Was any one else seen about the house?"

Mindful of Mother Monkey's warning Juve shook his head. "Not to my knowledge, or to any one else's that I know of."

"Ah!" Basser drew a long breath—it seemed to Juve of relief. "Well then, we can only wait for the inquest and see what is said there."

"Yes, that is all. I don't understand anything myself, so shall leave things to the police. Meanwhile, Mr. Basser, I must get away to Town. My work, you know, demands my attendance. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Basser, drawing a long breath, and resumed his walk looking younger and brighter from some relief the short conversation seemed to have afforded him.
CHAPTER VI
A KNIGHT-ERRANT

WHATEVER was the mental relief afforded to Mr. Basser by his short conversation with Juve, it certainly did him much good. He returned home in a wonderfully happy frame of mind, humming a little song and walking more briskly than was his custom. In the long drawing-room he found Lesley presiding over afternoon tea for the benefit of her grandmother and Archie Godwin. Feeling hungry, for the first time since hearing of the tragedy, he joined them at the easy-going meal, and did full justice both to food and drink. Indeed, he brightened so greatly that Mrs. Basser, not usually observant, noticed the change of mood and remarked upon it.

"You were quite dismal this morning, dear," she purred in her gentle old way, which suggested the felicity of a well-fed tabby-cat. "I am glad to see you are feeling better."

"The walk has done me good," replied her son, suppressing the incident of his meeting with young Mendel.

"Nothing like exercise," said Archie heartily, and passing his cup for more tea. "You can work off any worry in that way."

"As if you knew anything about worry," observed Basser disdainfully.

"Oh, I've got my share of disagreeables," rejoined the young man cheerfully—"shortage of money, lack of opportunity to make a real mark in literature, etc. We aren't all born squires of a ripping little village with good incomes, you know, Mr. Basser."

"I am not the squire," said the other stiffly, "and will not be until my mother passes over, and I hope that won't be for a long time."

"Thank you, dear," said the old lady placidly; "very nicely put. 'Passes over' is a much more agree-
able way of speaking than to talk of dying. I'm sure I don't want to go yet, as things are very pleasant and the world has much to commend it. I'm sure I don't know why people grumble at life."

Lesley laughed somewhat cynically for so young a lady. She knew much more of life and its troubles than did her grandmother. "You have been wrapped up in cotton wool all your days, my dear," she said, half in joke and half in earnest, more the latter than the former, "and don't know how unpleasant things can be without money and without friends."

"Oh, this young generation," said Basser, raising his eyes, "it will patronize the old one."

"We are knocking at your door, dad, with up-to-date knowledge. I hope I have not been talking like a prig."

"I rather think you have, my dear."

"As if Lesley could," put in Archie vehemently. "She is all that is perfect."

"Naturally in your eyes," said Mrs. Basser, who was quite aware of the feeling the youth had for her granddaughter and did not disapprove. As a matter of fact, so long as she was left to her comfortable dormouse existence, she was willing to sanction anything. "But you are young—young!"

"It is a fault I am correcting," said Godwin rather dryly. "Every day, you see, I grow older."

"Some grow older more quickly than by time," murmured Mr. Basser, suddenly becoming sad again. "Trouble ages people."

"Then you'll never grow old," said Lesley quickly, for she feared a relapse. "You have nothing to trouble you, have you, dad?"

"Certainly not; certainly not." Basser made an effort and brightened again as if to conceal his true feelings. "But I own that I have been somewhat upset over this crime."

"Has anything fresh been discovered?" asked Archie eagerly.
Basser looked at him suddenly and with suspicion. Knowing the young man's energy and perseverance, he did not wish him to search into the matter, as in his opinion, the less that was known about such a disagreeable thing, the better it would be for the reputation of Carrowell. Indeed, he said as much. "Nothing fresh has been discovered, and so far as I can learn there is no chance of the mystery of Madame Valeria's death being solved. I cannot say that I regret this, as if a fuss is made, the London papers will take up the matter and the village will suffer."

"On the contrary the village will gain," contradicted young Godwin sharply, "for if there is a mystery about the case, people will come from far and near to see things. Then the shop-keepers and our one hotel will benefit."

"We don't want publicity," protested Mr. Basser, and was supported by his mother, who murmured that things were very nice as they were.

"We do," insisted the young man earnestly. "Carrowell wants to be wakened up from the sleep of centuries. Don't you think so, Lesley?"

"It wouldn't do the people here any harm," she answered carelessly. "As it is, the murder has livened things up considerably."

"Don't speak like that, my dear," cried her father irritably. "We don't desire to depend upon crime to enliven the village."

"Nothing else would," said Archie with a shrug. "Carrowell folk have to be shaken up with some such catastrophe if they are to waken at all. It is useless to employ gentle means."

"You horrify me," said Mrs. Basser, complacently taking out her tatting, an early Victorian form of fancy-work to which she was much addicted. "For a young man, my dear Archie, you have the most revolutionary sentiments."

"It is because he is young that he has them," said
Lesley, smiling at her lover. "I quite approve."

"I don't," said Mr. Basser, unexpectedly becoming disagreeable and starting to his feet. "I desire the matter to drop, and I hope it will when the inquest takes place and the burial is over. That is my opinion!" and with an offended air, he stalked out of the room.

Godwin looked at the two ladies. "I hope I haven't upset him," he said nervously, for, after all, Basser was Lesley's father and had to be reckoned with, if he hoped to marry the girl, which he very much wished to do.

"Oh, Paul would be upset whatever you might say," said the old lady, perfectly composed. "He's never the same two minutes together. This murder has shaken his nerves, so foolish when it has nothing to with him. For my part I am very interested in it as a mystery: just like a detective story, you know."

"It is much more dreadful than a story," rebuked Lesley gravely, and thereby laying herself open to a fresh charge of being priggish, "seeing that it is an actual occurrence."

"I dare say," remarked her grandmother vaguely. "That's the nice part about it, as truth is always stranger than fiction, so they say, though I haven't found it so. Real life is never so neat as novels."

Archie nodded. "That is so, Mrs. Basser. A novelist can always give his hero plenty of money and marry him to the right girl." Here his eyes rested on Lesley, who smiled again. She quite understood the hidden meaning of the phase, and approved of it.

The rector's son was a very presentable young man, being tall and well-built, with plenty of energy and a fund of exuberant spirits. Being a correspondent for several big London newspapers, he lived a very out-of-door life, travelling all over the three kingdoms in search of interesting facts for his exacting editors. His face was tanned by the sun, so much so, that his closely-clipped hair and small tooth-brush moustache
looked white against the reddened skin. He was smartly dressed in a well-cut suit of blue serge, with irreproachable boots, the whitest of linen and a navy-blue necktie to match his laughing eyes in colour. Altogether a bright, agreeable young fellow, very well pleased with himself, with life, and with whatever company he found himself in. But for the fact of being an only son, he would have ventured far into the waste places of earth, being a pioneer by instinct, but the protestations of his parents had chained him to the island of his birth. As scribbling in an office was not to his taste, he had taken to travelling journalism, and having an observant eye and a ready pen did very well as a writer. But the task, widely spread as it was, irked him, and in spite of his father, he would have broken away from parental leading-strings had not Lesley kept him more or less in them by curtailing his activities. The girl herself quite understood his longings and agreed to them so thoroughly that she would gladly have become a pioneer's wife, had not her grandmother and father claimed her help. Without her she knew that the two children would be ruined. So both these young people from a sense of duty were held in check by the older generation.

A silence ensued while the young folk looked at one another with secret understanding, and Mrs. Basser, who had been nodding, slipped without any apology into the easy sleep of old age. It was growing dark, for night came quickly at the end of September, so Miss Basser lighted a standard lamp, far enough removed from the old lady to prevent the sudden radiance from wakening her. A ring of the bell brought in a soft-footed old butler to remove the tea-things. Lesley pointed significantly to her slumbering grandmother and then beckoned to Archie. They left the room silently and sought Lesley's own particular den without encroaching on the library where Paul held sway.

"I wish to speak seriously to you," murmured the
girl, when the door was closed and the lamp in this new apartment was lighted. "No, not here," for Godwin was about to sit beside her on the sofa. "Take a chair."

"But when we are by ourselves——"

"Oh, that's all very well, Archie. But you know the way you go on when we sit side by side. One can't get any sense out of you. I don't know why."

"Look in the glass and you'll see the reason," said the young man, pulling out his briar-root pipe.

"There you go, talking nonsense."

"I thought you liked nonsense," he said in an injured tone.

"So I do in its place. Meanwhile—give me a cigarette, please—this is not the place."

"Then why did you bring me here to be alone with you?" asked Archie, offering his cigarette case.

"I'll tell you." She lighted up and nodded permission to Godwin that he should follow her example. "It's that murder."

"Oh, Les, can't we find something more interesting to talk about?"

"No. Archie, do be sensible. I'm worried and I want you to help me."

"What's the matter?" Godwin removed his pipe and looked at her gravely. He saw that she was really troubled and the sight vexed him.

Miss Basser smoked for a moment or so in silence and turned over things in her very capable mind before she spoke. "You love me, Archie, don't you?"

"Oh!" he dropped his pipe and half-rose from his chair. "If you——"

"No! No! No!" She waved him back quickly. "It's not a case of telling me you do, even though I asked the question. But Juve——"

"Ah!" Godwin sank back into his chair, placed the stem of his pipe between his teeth and bit it fiercely. "Are you going to tell me that you love him?"
"No. Don't be ridiculous."

"It isn't ridiculous," said Godwin grimly. "If it were I should have fewer disturbed nights. The boy is handsome and romantic in his looks. Also, he plays the fiddle like an angel after the fashion of William in 'Black-Eyed Susan.' Oh, indeed, I am not comfortable in my mind, Les, when you mention Juve Mendel. He worships you and you worship his music."

"There you hit the truth. I worship his music, not Juve," she said gaily. "And of course I like him immensely."

"So do I. He's a real manly young fellow, and has put up with a lot of bad treatment from that dismal old granny of his."

"Don't, Archie. She's dead."

"Well, I can't regret it. I never did like her. That friend of the pater's in New York did Carrowell a bad turn in sending her over with a letter of introduction."

"Be just, Archie. You don't know anything about the woman."

"True enough, and I don't want to know anything. She had adventuress stamped all over her. The queer thing is," mused the young man, looking at his pipe carefully, "that I should like that grandson of hers. But I do. However bad the old woman may have been, Juve's all right, in spite of his odd name and foreign blood."

"Don't be insular, Archie."

"I'm not. The fact that I like Juve proves my broad-mindedness. All the same I don't want him to make eyes at you."

"A boy of nineteen. Don't be silly and put things so coarsely. Juve is fond of me, and will go on making eyes at me until I snub him, which I don't intend to do."

"Then I needn't fear Mendel as a rival," coaxed Godwin, child-like in his jealousy.

"You needn't fear any one. I love you and you only."
"Why don't you marry me, then?" asked Archie promptly.

"You know the reason quite well," sighed Lesley, for he had asked this leading question several times, always to receive the same answer. "I have to stay at the Grange and look after my grandmother and father. Particularly after him—now."

"What do you mean by—now?"

"To answer that I must go back to Juve. You know that people hint at his guilt."

"Rot! My pater told me that two people can swear to his having been asleep the whole time. Besides, why should he kill the old woman, badly as she behaved to him? All he had to do was to clear out."

"I am glad you think he is innocent," said the girl, much relieved. "I never had a doubt myself. Now my cousins?"

"Same reason applies to them," interrupted Archie, waving his pipe. "Why should old Marcus or Jos murder an unoffending old creature with whom they played cards five or six times a week?"

"But the evidence?"

Godwin interrupted again. "Tavy's an idiot, and that girl Salt is as stupid as they make them. Pretty evidence upon which to hang your cousins. Also there are the Wrests. They say the pair weren't out of the house last night, and I believe them. Even if the husband and wife swore falsely for money, the child wouldn't. At least I think so, although Esther Wrest is a sharp little monkey."

"Then if you excuse Juve and my cousins, who murdered Madame Valeria?"

"Ah, that I can't say. But an adventuress such as she undoubtedly was must have enemies. If they found her out——" He shook his head.

"Oh," Lesley became suddenly enlightened, "do you think that she was concealing herself in this quiet village to escape the death that has overtaken her?"
"Something of that sort." Godwin dropped his pipe and bent forward to speak earnestly. "If Quinton knows his business, he will try and ascertain if any strangers called to see Madame Valeria—with an American accent," he added as an after-thought.

"I see. Yes! She came from New York." Lesley drew a long breath. "I am very glad to hear you talk like this, Archie."

"It's only my opinion, you know," he said sapiently, "and the true criminal may be close at hand."

"Oh!" Lesley turned white. "Don't say that!"

"What do you mean?" Godwin was honestly perplexed by her change of colour, for it was unlike Miss Basser to betray such emotion.

And she betrayed more. Leaning forward she clutched her lover's hand. "I want your help."

"My dear girl, you have it."

"Swear that you won't breathe a word of what I am about to say."

"Of course not. Don't be so tragic." Godwin, seeing that she was seized with a sudden panic, rose and seated himself beside her on the sofa. Lesley did not repel him on this occasion, but allowed him to slip a strong arm round her and leaned her head with a sigh of relief on his shoulder. "What is the matter, dear?" asked Archie, smoothing her hair.

"I want your help," she said in a stifled tone.

"My darling, you will make me swear in a moment," said Godwin with true masculine vigour and impatience. "Don't I tell you that I give you my help. What is it you wish me to do?"

"Find out who murdered that woman."

"H'm!" She did not look up and Godwin resting his chin on her head stared across the room into a distant mirror. "That's easier said than done, Lesley."

"Oh"—this time she did look up—"you won't fail me?"

"Of course I won't. Only—there are difficulties
in the way. So far as I have noticed things connected with the case, there is nothing to show who is guilty. And I understand from the pater that Quinton is puzzled also."

"Do you think that the truth will ever be discovered?" she asked faintly.

"How do I know? I'll try and ferret it out, Les, but of course I can't promise. It's a devil of a mystery, you know."

"I hope so," groaned the girl in such heartfelt tones that her lover put his hand under her chin to tilt up her face.

"What do you mean?" he asked roughly.

"My father!"

"What's he got to do with it?" demanded Archie in startled amazement.

Lesley sat up and disengaged herself from his embrace to tidy her disordered hair and speak feverishly.

"I know that it is absurd, but—but—do you think the dad knows—anything?"

"My—dear—girl." Godwin drawled out the words with a look of surprise and rebuke, which made her flush.

"Oh, I know it is wrong of me to speak in this way, and I said, if you remember, that the idea is absurd. All the same, my father has not been himself all day: up one minute and down the next."

"He is always a weathercock," said Godwin, with the air of a man settling the question.

"Yes. But—but—he is hiding something." She bent towards Archie and seized the lapels of his coat. "I am sure there is something wrong. Oh, I don't dare to say that the dad—the dad—" She choked.

"Take your time; take your time," said Godwin, feeling that under the circumstances it was best to keep his head.

"Well," cried the girl desperately, "you know that
the dad was a great friend of Madame Valeria's. He used to go often to see her—"

"To play cards along with her and your cousins. Yes?"

"I think there must be something else he went for," murmured Lesley faintly. "He used to come back looking dazed and ill. When he went to Town, he usually returned in the same state, but not always. Lately—in fact, for a very long time—he has not been to London, finding the society of Madame Valeria sufficient to entertain him. And I think—I think”—Lesley faltered—"that the dad knows something."

"About the murder?"

"Yes." She answered in so weak a voice that he had to strain his ears to hear. "He is afraid of something. What I don't know. Usually I can learn what he is thinking about, for I know all his moods. He is like a child in my hands, as you know, Archie. But this time—this time”—she struck her hands together in despair—"there is so dreadful a trouble on his mind that he dare not tell it to me."

"And you think that the something has to do with the murder," said Godwin roughly cheerful. "Really, Les, for a sensible young woman you do talk tosh."

The slang and the cheerful note made her feel more reassured. "You think that I am wrong?"

"I am jolly well sure you are," said the young man, and truly meant what he stated. "My dear girl, if you will pardon my saying so, your father has not enough courage to kill a fly. He is one of those people who have a great lack of vitality and consequently of initiative."

"I don't say that he murdered Madame Valeria," said Lesley eagerly, "but he may know who did."

"Oh, bosh! Why your father is like a child, as you truly say, and if such was the case, he certainly would tell you."

"But if the person who killed Madame Valeria has any hold over him—?"
I can’t for the life of me see how any person can have a hold. Your father is not a strong-minded man—I hate speaking so freely, Les, but your nervous apprehensions leave me no choice—I say that not being strong-minded he is just the sort of man who would not be blackmailed.”

“Ah!” she gasped.

“On the other hand, he is just the sort of man who would confide in another person to help him, feeling very rightly that he is too weak to stand alone. Don’t worry, Les, your father has nothing to do with the matter, but is only upset, in his delicate state of health, by the happening of this beastly murder. Put such rubbish out of your head.”

“I can’t.” She made a despairing gesture. “I recognize the common sense of your words, and more or less I believe you. But not quite; so I want you to look into this case, and find out beyond all doubt who murdered the woman. Only the discovery of the criminal will put my mind at rest.”

“You are weaving ropes of sand, my dear,” said Godwin soothingly. “In all you say, which is the result of a too vivid imagination, you have given me no proof that your father has anything to do with the matter.”

“I know—I dare say I am wrong: but there is always the fear. Archie, in the days of old, knights went about doing deeds of note for the sake of their lady-loves. They sought adventure at the bidding of the women they adored.”

“I see.” Archie smiled at her whimsical fancy, which to her was real and true. “You wish me to be a knight-errant.”

“Yes. I wish you to look into this matter and learn the truth. I don’t for one moment think that my father has anything to do with the actual murder, but he may have seen something.”

“Was he at the villa of Madame Valeria at the time of——?”
"I don't know. He went to sleep in the library about that time, and said that he did not want any afternoon tea. I went to church at six and did not see him until supper-time."

"Was he agitated?"

"Very. He could eat nothing and that is what has aroused my suspicions. I wished Juve to search into the matter and desired to do so myself. But my father objects, and you heard yourself what he said when you talked about the crime waking up Carrowell."

"He desired the matter to drop," said Godwin meditatively. "Hum!"

Lesley was quick to catch the more earnest note in his voice. "Do you really think that—"

Archie stopped her mouth with a kiss. "I think you are a charming little donkey, darling, and are sending me on a wild-goose chase. However, I shall be your knight-errant, and if human skill can discover who polished off the old woman, the truth will become known."

"Darling." This time Lesley returned his kiss. "Sir Galahad."

"I'm not pure enough for him," laughed Godwin whimsically. "Call me Sir Percival, for truly in this matter I follow after a wandering fire."

"No! No!" said Lesley confidently. "You will learn the truth—Sir Percival."

CHAPTER VII

THE VERDICT

Godwin was more perturbed over the conversation than he chose to admit. Particularly to the girl herself, as it would not do to encourage her in the idea that her father had anything to do with the
crime, either directly, or indirectly. Lesley, it is true, was not an ordinary girl, and had been educated into common sense by early responsibility. But she possessed an uncommonly vivid imagination, and in five minutes could build up a tragedy on the weakest foundations. She had done so in this case, for Archie could see little reason why she should connect her father with the death of Madame Valeria. At the same time her insistence on the mystery of the man's attitude impressed Godwin, as something to be reckoned with, in spite of the undoubted truth that nothing tangible could be proved. Basser, as the young man considered, was a superlative ass, unstable as water and as whimsical as a monkey. He was just the kind of unthinking fool who would get himself into trouble with the best intentions. On the other hand, he was so much a fool that he could not hold his tongue even when silence had to do with his own safety.

It was this last trait which led Godwin to believe that Lesley might be mistaken. If Basser really knew something, and if he dreaded lest that something should come to the ears of the police, he certainly would have flown to his stronger-minded daughter for help. At least this was Archie's opinion, although he acknowledged to himself that he might be mistaken. The man assuredly was upset over some matter, which he kept to himself, and his anxiety that the death of Madame Valeria should not be talked about hinted that the matter had to do with the crime. Godwin at once disbelieved Lesley and believed her: in the first place because her reasoning was weak, in the second because there undoubtedly were reasons. In this dilemma—for he could not make up his mind about the matter—Godwin did the best he could: soothing the girl and promising to look into things. There was nothing else to be done at the moment.

The first impulse of the new knight-errant was to seek out Basser and ask questions. But he did not
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do this, as reflection told him that being obstinate, like all weak men, his prospective father-in-law would refuse to reply. Also, if his suspicions were aroused by seeing Godwin searching for the truth, the journalist believed he would cause trouble by placing obstacles in the way. More, he might grow so angry as to forbid Archie the house, which would debar the young man from seeing Lesley. It was necessary that he should see the girl on all possible occasions, both to discuss what discoveries he might make and because he was deeply in love. So Godwin went his way and said nothing to the elder man. Also, Archie decided that if he asked questions and interviewed the police, Basser might come to know of it with disastrous results. On the whole, after a wakeful night, Godwin thought it was best to wait and see what evidence was forthcoming at the inquest. So far he was greatly in the dark, and wished to have more light thrown on the subject of his search before taking any decided step. So far he believed that Lesley's imagination was at fault, yet admitted that there might possibly be some truth in her belief. It was a very uncomfortable frame of mind for a straightforward nature such as Godwin possessed. He was nothing if not logical and mathematically correct.

Meanwhile the mystery of the case continued to exercise the villagers' minds in no small degree, and many a mountain of talk produced its mouse of sheer conjecture. Quinton, as puzzled as the most dense over the matter, made no arrests, although he had the Purcanes and Juve closely watched. He did not believe that the boy was guilty, but he was doubtful about the other two men, in spite of the evidence in their favour and their indignant attitude. Naturally both Mr. Purcane and his son were extremely angry, and several times pointed out that they had nothing to gain by murdering the old lady to whom, as they said, they were very greatly attached. After his first
burst of wrath Marcus Purcane shut himself up in his house, refusing to see any one, or to talk about the case in any way. Not so Joseph. He perambulated the village breathing fire and fury, daring every one to say a word against him or his father. Of course a good many words of an unfriendly kind were said, but behind Joseph's back. When he was present not even the boldest dared to hint that he might be guilty, and only showed by significant looks that they believed there was something in Maggie Salt's evidence which the younger Purcane would be unable to do away with. Consequently Joseph, who loved ease and amusement, was very uncomfortable and urged Quinton to hurry up with the inquest.

"I can't go about being pointed at as a criminal by sniggering idiots," fumed Joseph when approaching Quinton on the subject.

"Then why go about at all?" asked the Inspector.

"You can stay indoors with your father, you know."

"Oh, can I? You wish me to tacitly admit my guilt," raged Joseph ungrammatically in his righteous wrath. "I'll do nothing of the sort. My father being old has shut himself up, as his nerves won't stand all this lying gossip. But I'm not going to take things lying down, Mr. Quinton, so don't you think so."

"I quite understand your feelings, sir."

"No, by Jove, you don't, nor does any one else. I wonder how you'd like to be accused of killing a decent old lady for the sake of nothing at all? I don't pretend to be an angel, but I'm not such an out-and-out wrong 'un as to make a murdering beast of myself. Let alone the fact, Mr. Quinton," ended the young man furiously, "that I am not so great a fool as to put my neck in danger of being twisted officially."

The Inspector could not cavil at this speech, notwithstanding the undoubted insolence of its tone. But even in danger Joseph Purcane could not refrain from insolence, as it was ingrained in his nature to
treat every one in this way. He was a dark-faced, clean-shaven little man, well-groomed and well-dressed, with plenty of assurance and an enormous opinion of his own cleverness. Quinton, noting his sly eyes, believed that he was more cunning than clever, and from his experience of life's seamy side was inclined to rank this gentleman, as Joseph undoubtedly was, as one on the fringe of the criminal class. As the Inspector judged, this cool, wary hawk would take money from a woman, would cheat a young greenhorn at cards, and would get what he wanted anywhere or anyhow in a blackguardly gentlemanly way. All the same, Quinton judged that Joseph spoke truly when he declared that he would not risk his neck. He was much too fond of his own elegant person to do that.

"Well, well," said the officer sharply, for Joseph's insolent looks and words irritated him, "we will see what evidence is forthcoming at the inquest. There you will have an opportunity of defending yourself. And may remark, Mr. Purcane, that I have not arrested you or your father."

"If you did we'd have an action against the Government for false imprisonment," retorted Joseph viciously. "There is no evidence against us which cannot be disproved by our own servants."

"We can talk of this at the inquest."

"Oh, we'll do that, you bet. And if I don't lay that little slut Salt by the heels, my name isn't what it is."

"Talking like this won't do you any good," snapped Quinton tartly.

"That's my business, my good man. What you've got to do is to prove your confounded case. Mind you, I'm going to fight, whatever my father may do"—and Joseph, lighting a cigarette out of sheer bravado, swaggered away defiantly.

"Hum," said Quinton to himself. "I wonder if he is guilty, and if that silly chatter is meant to keep up his spirits."
The Inspector, of course, could not answer this question, and perhaps he was too weary to attempt to do so. The officer was by no means clever, and although he could handle a straightforward case sensibly enough, the intricacies of this particular crime were beyond his powers to solve. His brain became bewildered and his nerves wore thin in his endeavour to fit the pieces of the puzzle together. It was quite a jig-saw problem, and Quinton was not the man to construct the whole out of the many disordered parts. And indeed, as he ruefully thought, the detectives of fiction would have found it difficult to solve the mystery, let alone the less marvellous detectives of fact.

"I can't make head or tail of it," thought the worried Inspector, "so I shall place what evidence I have before the coroner and jury without comment. They can sort out things for themselves, and I'll get back to my usual work at Tarhaven."

Needless to say, Quinton did not impart this intention to any one, since such an admission would have damaged his reputation. Looking mysterious, he kept his views to himself, and only now and then by a suggestive word or a significant glance intimated that he knew the truth. This he certainly did not know, and was not likely to know: what is more, he truly believed that no living man ever would know. Madame Valeria had appeared unexpectedly in this quiet English village, and had been as unexpectedly murdered. That was all Quinton knew. Who she really was, where she really came from, and why she had been killed he could not guess. When the hour of the inquest arrived he had given up guessing, as such efforts made his head ache. His salary was not so large and his zeal not so overpowering as to urge him to continue looking for the proverbial needle in a bottle of hay.

The Pink Pig was a quaint inn of no great size, built in the centre of Carrowell on what had formerly been
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the village green. Other houses of a more modern type had sprung up around it, so that its one-time spacious outlook was now decidedly limited. It was built of wood, tarred all over to endure wind and rain and sun, but had an ornate brick front, which gave it quite an imposing appearance. Ivy in profusion clambered up this, even to the red-tiled roof, and round the diamond-paned casements, so that the place looked old-fashioned and picturesque. At the corner, from a long pole swung a painting of the fat porker which suggested the inn's odd name, and wayfarers usually giggled when they saw it. Within-doors the accommodation was distinctly limited, the rooms being small and the ceilings remarkably low, so only those romantic people who wished to live again in the "good old days" really enjoyed their stay under its roof. Thus there was no room in the hotel, as the landlady grandiloquently termed it, large enough to hold so great a crowd as was likely to assemble at the inquest. But at the back a spacious hall of galvanized iron had been built out over the garden, and it was here that the coroner and jury came to discuss the affair. A number of morbid people came also, filling the hall, the hotel and even the street, talking and moving constantly. And as talk and movement beget thirst, the Pink Pig did a roaring trade while the proceedings were in progress. "It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good," and Madame Valeria's violent death was certainly good for the landlady's pockets.

Archie Godwin was present, ostensibly as a sightseer, since he did not think it wise to tell any one, even Juve, that his interest in the case was anything deeper. He sat beside Mendel, who was looking after Hetty Hale and appeared to be greatly troubled in his mind. This was natural enough, as Godwin thought, seeing that the dead woman was his only relative and he was more or less believed to have something to do with the crime. Hetty herself, dressed as usual with
the man's cap in full evidence, but with the addition of an ancient Cashmere shawl to keep out the cold, was filled with lively curiosity and perfectly cool. The death of her employer puzzled her greatly, and she was as anxious to learn the truth as any one present—more anxious, in fact, as she wished her darling Juve to leave the Court without a stain on his character. Tavy, more shabby and imbecile than ever, shuffled his feet and fiddled with his hat at the far end of the hall, and Maggie Salt, accompanied by innumerable relatives, sat near him. Carp was present, together with Dr. Brent and the Purcanes, father and son. Of these last, Marcus was the quieter of the two, for Joseph betrayed great excitement, due perhaps to the brandy he had swallowed to brace himself up for examination. The old man, with his long white beard, flowing locks and ruddy face, had quite a patriarchal appearance and wore his usual garb—a long grey overcoat with frayed trousers and unpolished mended boots, together with woollen gloves and a dingy brown velvet cap with ear-flaps. The villagers had never seen him in any other garments, summer or winter, yet although these were old and worn, he bore himself with dignity and looked like the well-born gentleman he was. Joseph, spic and span in the most fashionable of attire, formed a striking contrast to his miserly parent.

The coroner opened the proceedings with a short speech, saying that the jury had already inspected the body of Valeria Dubourg at the villa, and were now prepared to hear any evidence which had to do with the death. He also gave a bird's-eye view of the case, informing those present of the principal facts in connexion therewith so far as was known. At the conclusion of his speech, he called upon Constable Carp to give evidence.

Looking very stout and red-faced and important, the policeman related how Miss Hale—he spoke of Mother Monkey in this polite way—came to tell him
about the murder, and described in detail all that took place when he looked into the matter. The evidence of the witness was not particularly valuable save to establish the fact of the death, and to let the coroner know that the window of the sitting-room had been open. Carp had searched for the knife with which the crime had been committed, but had been unable to find it. He spoke of the examination of Maggie Salt and of Tavy Tern, and related how Mr. Mendel had entered the room, utterly ignorant of the murder. It was with some reluctance that the policeman gave this last piece of evidence, as he was certain in his own mind that the boy had something to do with the matter. But being honest, if dull, Carp was obliged to obey his conscience and to report events as they actually occurred. He positively swore that Mr. Mendel appeared to know nothing about the murder, and that two witnesses deposed to his having been asleep. "Which," ended the witness, "from his looks when he come into the room, he certainly seemed to hev bin."

Quinton then gave what evidence he could, and his speech strongly resembled that of the coroner. And indeed there was no doubt that the coroner had usurped the Inspector's function in speaking as he did. The officer described the examination of the witnesses, including the three Wrests, and acknowledged that he had found no tangible evidence likely to implicate any one. The window was certainly open, but there were no signs of footmarks, and the knife, as Constable Carp had stated, could not be discovered. According to Dr. Brent, who was called in immediately to examine the body, the woman must have been murdered between four and six on Sunday evening, although it was impossible to indicate the precise moment.

The doctor then came forward to corroborate this statement, and added that Madame Valeria must have been stabbed before she had time to cry out, which would account for her housekeeper hearing nothing
in the kitchen. The knife had penetrated the heart, and death must have been instantaneous. With regard to Maggie Salt, she had been struck down with some heavy weapon, and he had revived her with considerable difficulty.

The housemaid deposed how she had been sent with a cup of tea to Mr. Mendel and how she had found him asleep. She then told of her entrance into the sitting-room, her discovery of the dead body and the sudden attack made on her by—here she hesitated somewhat—Mr. Joseph Purcane.

"It's a lie," shouted Joseph from the body of the hall.

The coroner rebuked him for the outcry, and examined Maggie closely. After answering some questions readily enough the witness became confused when she was asked to swear positively to the identity of the man who struck her down. She said that she believed it was the younger Purcane, and then again hesitated, declaring that she only had a glimpse of his face when his back was to the light. Knowing that Mr. Joseph Purcane and his father frequently visited Madame Valeria, she admitted that she might have made a mistake from an obvious association of ideas. The coroner plied her with questions, and the witness became so confused that she burst into tears and broke down. When she ceased, the majority of the jury were privately of opinion that she had not proved her case. It might have been Joseph Purcane who assaulted her, or it might not.

Tavy Tern proved to be a difficult witness, owing to his weeping and shuffling and sheer terror of the law. He believed that he had seen the elder Purcane passing through the gate, but the moonlight was uncertain and he might have been mistaken. He went by the dress—by the grey overcoat, and the cap with flaps: he did not see the man's face, although he had a confused idea of noticing a long white beard. He was sure it
was Mr. Marcus Purcane, and then he was not sure, finishing with the remark that he did not like the gentleman because he never gave him anything.

"If Mr. Purcane gave you a shilling, would you be doubtful as to the man you saw being him?" asked the coroner.

"Aw surely," grinned Tavy, brightening at the mention of money. "Gents es guv shullings ain't to be talked about."

This statement rather disqualified Tavy as a witness, as it was proved thereby that he could be bribed. With a satirical smile Marcus Purcane called out that he would give Tavy a shilling, whereupon the idiot promptly stated that the man he saw was not the generous donor. The coroner rebuked Mr. Purcane, but confessed that the evidence of the witness was untrustworthy and dismissed him. Then Tavy went to Mr. Purcane and insisted upon having the money, which the old gentleman refused to give. Ultimately the idiot, howling and weeping, had to be ejected from the hall.

"A pretty witness to take away my character," cried Mr. Purcane when quiet was restored.

Wrest, the gardener, a bright-eyed lean man, declared that the Purcanes had not been out of their house on Sunday night, or indeed from two o'clock in the afternoon. He was called in twice into their sitting-room to answer certain questions connected with his work. Mrs. Wrest, also bright-eyed and sharp, although much stouter than her husband, deposed that she had taken in tea to her employers at half-past four and had cleared it away shortly before six, so she could swear that they had not left the house on or about the time Dr. Brent said Madame Valeria must have been murdered. Finally Esther Wrest, aged thirteen, as desperately sharp in looks and manner as her parents, said that Mr. Purcane and his son had remained in the house all the day. To get out of it, they would have
had to pass through the hall, and she was playing and reading in the hall most of the time. Altogether the evidence of the three witnesses proved conclusively that the Purcanes were innocent. The hearers took this view readily, the more particularly since the evidence of Maggie Salt had been confused and that of Tavy untrustworthy. It said much for those present that they came to this conclusion, since the Purcanes were, as has been observed before, much disliked.

Hetty was then summoned to say what she knew, and described how she had found Juve asleep, and his tea untouched beside the bed. Also she stated how she had stumbled unexpectedly upon the body and had been driven in terror from the house by hearing the rustle behind the screen.

"Did you think that the assassin was hiding there?" asked the coroner.

"I didn't think anything about it," said Mother Monkey promptly. "I just flew to git the police. But if it was the murderer, Mr. Marcus Purcane is innocent, since he'd left the house by then if that silly Tavy is to be believed. And as to Mr. Joseph," ended the witness positively, "I shouldn't think as he'd be such a mug as to stay and be nabbed, after killing my mistress and doing for Maggie."

"I didn't," called out Joseph, determined not to be suppressed. "I wasn't near the house, as I can prove."

The coroner again called the speaker to order and addressed himself to cross-questioning the witness. But Hetty, with her clear head and sharp Cockney wits, held to the truth of all she stated. She went so far as to declare that she believed the Purcanes had nothing to do with the matter, and for giving this unasked-for opinion was also called to order. As to Mr. Mendel—she was particularly insistent on this point—he had been asleep the whole time and was as innocent as an unborn babe. In fact, Mother Monkey's evidence was so clear and positive that the audience
were inclined to take her view, and think the three men entirely innocent.

Marcus Purcane and his son swore to having remained in their own house—in their own sitting-room—throughout the time when the crime was said to have been perpetrated. The father also produced a note written by the dead woman, asking him and Joseph to call on her at four o'clock, since she had something to tell them. "But we did not go," ended the old man positively, "since my son and I had other business to attend to."

"And why should we kill Madame Valeria?" asked Joseph immediately he was sworn. "We gained nothing by her death, and we didn't know anything about her save that she was a good card-player."

"And an opium-smoker," said the coroner, mindful of some words which Constable Carp had let drop, previous to the inquiry.

"Never heard anything of that, sir. She might have been a wrong 'un ten times over, but she never let on to me, or to the governor. Knew how to hold her tongue to us and to every one else. We knew nothing about her," finished Mr. Joseph Purcane fiercely, "and it's a shame that two innocent men should be dragged up here to be bothered with silly questions."

Juve Mendel was much in the same state of ignorance, and pleaded to knowing very little about his grandmother. Mindful of Hetty's caution, of which he recognized the wisdom, he said as little as he could, and, as an important witness, proved quite a failure. His mother, he stated, had died in New York when he was quite a baby, and he had been brought up by the deceased, who had kept him at arm's length for some reason he could not conjecture. Only when she came to England did she remove him from school, and he knew nothing about her past. On the night of the crime he had been sleeping for an hour in the afternoon, according to his custom on Sunday, and learned
about the tragedy only when he came down to the sitting-room. All that the witness Constable Carp said was true.

"This!" said Quinton, when the witness stood down, "is all the available evidence I have been able to obtain."

"It is not of much value, Mr. Inspector," grumbled the coroner, who, like every one else, had been expecting sensational disclosures.

Quinton shrugged his shoulders. "I can't make bricks without straw," he retorted, "and so far as I know, there is nothing positive to show who murdered the woman."

The coroner was of this opinion also, and in his final speech to the jury pointed out that the evidence collected was unsatisfactory. He added that it was impossible to say who had committed the crime, but that he left the matter in the hands of the jury. This was an ironical way of putting things, considering the very strong hint he had given the twelve good and lawful men as to the expediency of delivering an open verdict. However, the jury were not going to take the responsibility on their own shoulders, and forthwith declared that "Valeria Dubourg had been murdered by some person or persons unknown."

"Which is all you can say," declared the coroner, accepting the verdict. "I agree thoroughly. The matter is finished."

"Not yet," cried Joseph, still furious, although openly relieved by the conclusion of the dangerous affair. "I'm going to have actions for libel against that Salt girl and the other idiot."

"That's your business," snapped the coroner, who was tired of talking and listening. "But you won't get any damages, even if you win. Both the witnesses you speak of are too poor to pay."

Joseph would have answered this remark, but that his father tugged his sleeve with a warning look.
"Don't be a fool, boy," he whispered harshly. "We are well out of it. Let sleeping dogs lie."

Juve, near at hand, overheard the whisper, and looked hard at the two men, who said no more, but left the court immediately. Wondering what this significant warning meant, he would have followed them to listen and learn more, but that Archie Godwin came up in a friendly way. The rector’s son, in his capacity of knight-errant, had paid great attention to the proceedings, but their conclusion had left him greatly bewildered. For the life of him, he could not see how the mystery was to be solved, as everything seemed to be at sixes and sevens. In this dilemma he questioned Juve and asked for his opinion.

"I can’t give any opinion," replied the boy, with a searching look at his interrogator. "You heard the evidence; you are as wise as I am."

"It’s great cry and little wool," rejoined Godwin. "Nothing decisive has been said. That you are innocent I know without evidence being given, but as to the Purcanes——" He hesitated.

"Well?" asked Juve sharply, and still keeping his inquiring eyes on Godwin’s face, "what about them?"

"I have my doubts. Their witnesses might have been bribed, although I would not say that to any one but to you."

"I agree with you," said Mendel promptly, and recalling the whispered warning. "Depend upon it, Godwin, when the truth becomes known, those men will be found to know more about the matter than appears at present."

CHAPTER VIII
BAD NEWS

JUST as a boy throwing a stone into a pond sees the ripples die away to leave the waters once more placid, so did that tossed by Fate into Carrowell affect
the villagers. If the goddess expected her attempt to stir them up to a more bustling life by way of contrast to their former easy-going existence, she must have been woefully disappointed. Within a week or ten days from the burial of Madame Valeria all excitement subsided, and if the tragedy was discussed at all it was spoken of with a calmness which amounted to indifference. As the crime did not touch their very own selves individually and collectively, its importance, if any, was lost in talk of their private interests. Basser's contention that the fact of the murder having taken place in the vicinity was a slur on the village, did not trouble them in the least. That Carrowell should gain a bad reputation in this way could not take away their earnings, or harm their relatives, or disturb their nightly rest, so they philosophically concluded that there was little use in worrying over the matter. The jury had given the only possible verdict, which seemed to settle the matter, once and for all. Also the victim was now under the turf, and it seemed impossible that her death could be avenged. Therefore, "Let bygones be bygones" said the villagers, and settled down again to a Rip Van Winkle life, which was the kind of existence they approved of.

Certainly some minds remained active and their owners hinted that of the three men on whom suspicion had been cast, one, if not two, might be guilty. But after the evidence given at the inquest, they could bring forward no proofs to justify their suspicions. And in time, for want of fuel even these fires ceased to burn. It seemed ridiculous to invent fiction which could not become fact: to go round and round in a circle, which prevented sensible progress in any given direction. Without doubt, was the opinion of all—and this was plain common-sense talk—the murder of the strange woman from America would have to be relegated to the list of undiscovered crimes. Where the police had failed no one else could hope to
succeed. This was Quinton’s opinion, and he returned very thankfully to his less difficult duties at Tarhaven. As to Mr. Basser, he regained his cheerfulness, and notwithstanding the slur on the village, which had troubled him so greatly, declined to talk further about the unpleasant matter. On the whole it was certainly remarkable how readily the population, high and low, rich and poor, agreed to forget the uncomfortable incident. Even the unpopular Purcanes were left alone, and every one smiled on Juve. The boy, being highly sensitive and a near relative of the victim, expressed his amazement to Mother Monkey.

“One would think that nothing had taken place,” he said, marvelling at the density of the rural mind. “It isn’t even a nine days’ wonder.”

“What can you expect from a pig, but a grunt?” commented Hetty, speaking vulgarly, but very much to the point, as she invariably did. “Earthquakes and volcanoes wouldn’t wake ’em up, though the Judgment Day might. Just as well, deary. We don’t want any more worry on your grandma’s account. She was bother enough when she was alive and kicking, without our being ragged to fiddle-strings now she’s gone to heaven,—if she’s gone there, which I ain’t so sure of as I’d like to be.”

“Let us hope she has, Monkey. She had her good points.”

Hetty sniffed. “Never saw ’em myself, lovey. Still, it’s just as well to talk kind-like of them as is gone, and I never did see a tombstone as didn’t. Anyhow, she’s dead and buried, so there’s no more worriting coming from her.”

Mother Monkey was wrong in saying this, as she learned to her cost a few days later, when a ring at the front door announced unexpected disaster. It was again Sunday afternoon, and Juve had retired for his usual hour’s rest. The boy was inclined to shirk it and go to the Grange, but Hetty insisted that he should recu-
perate as usual after his week of toil, saying, to clinch her argument, that he had peaked and pined considerable of late. The old woman was therefore by no means pleased when the bell rang out its shrill summons, and tripped along the passage with a feeling of irritation on Juve's account. She believed that the penetrating sound would waken him, which was by no means unlikely.

"Drat you," said Mother Monkey, apostrophizing the unseen person who so impatiently demanded admission. "Why can't you keep yourself to yourself?" and she pulled open the door violently, quite prepared to give the visitor a piece of her very capable mind. "Oh, it's you?" she stared aghast.

"It's me," said Mr. Wench, unmindful of his grammar, and stepping into the narrow passage, since Hetty seemed inclined to shut him out. "You didn't expect to see me!"

"I didn't, that's a fact, but you never know your luck," said Mother Monkey, scenting trouble, "and I wish you were at the bottom of the sea, I do."

"Why?" grinned the money-lender, taking off his hat to show his egg-shaped baldness streaked with grey wisps of hair.

"'Cause you've got to do with her," retorted Miss Hale, "and anything to do with her always meant trouble, drat it."

"Meaning Madame Valeria?"

"Meaning Ursula Hedge, if you like."

Wench started. "Oh, you know that much, do you?"

"I know lots," nodded Hetty shrewdly, "but least said soonest mended."

"There's a deal of mending to be done," said Mr. Wench after a moment's silence, "and you may have to say more than you bargain for."

"Who's going to make me?" demanded the little
woman, at once becoming pugnacious. "Not you, Mr. Silas Wench."

"Oh! You know my full name. How?"

"I have ears," said Hetty curtly.

"And listen at keyholes. I expect you know why I have come?"

"I don't, and I wish you'd take yourself away."

"Your ears are less sharp than I thought," said the man dryly. "If you will take me into some room, I can explain why I have come."

"There's the room in which she was done to death, if you like."

"No! No!" Wench shrank back from the door to which Hetty pointed. "I don't want to see her ghost sitting in that chair, handsome though it 'ud be."

"Conscience makes cowards of us all," quoted Mother Monkey. "That's Hamlet, that is. You didn't know I was on the stage, did you? The music-hall, not the legitimate. Hetty Hale, the Pride of the Halls."

"I remember. You and I were young much about the same time. Your great song was——"

"Fancy you remembering," interrupted Hetty, pleased and excited. "Good chorus it had, hadn't it?" And in a thin shrill voice, she sang, dancing a few steps in the direction of the kitchen:

"Come, girls, don't be frightened,
Get your ringlets curled,
If you're out of fashion,
You'd better leave the world.
Of lovers you'll have plenty,
On that you may depend,
If you wear a Dolly Varden hat,
And do the Grecian bend."

With the last line she arrived out of breath in the kitchen, followed by Mr. Wench, and fell exhausted into a chair to look at him with approval. "You ain't a bad old sort," said Hetty, recovering with a gasp.
“I didn’t have anything to do with you in them days, did I?”

“No.” Mr. Wench took off his overcoat, placed his hat on his umbrella and his umbrella in the corner, before replying. “But I had something to do with Ursula Hedge.”

“There was nothing wrong anyhow,” cried Hetty sharply. “I’ll take my davy to that, so don’t lie.”

“I’m not lying,” retorted Wench impatiently. “I would have married her, only—”

“She married Nicky Graves,” interrupted Mother Monkey. “I say, you do know a lot as others don’t know.”

“So do you.” The money-lender, who was warming his hands, glanced over his shoulder at the shrewd wrinkled face with the lively black eyes. “And now I suppose the whole world knows.”

“It don’t, my Old Parr. Ursula never told her grandson anything, and I know when to hold my tongue. Madame Valeria picked me up while charing in London and brought me down here to housekeep ’cause she got me cheap. That’s all I know and you know, if you’re wise.”

Wench nodded approvingly. “You’re clever. I kept away from Carrowell until now, so as to avoid being asked questions. Was there any mention of my visits to Madame Valeria?”

“No! People forgot, I s’pose, and you didn’t come often, you know. I say”—Miss Hale rose and skipped across the floor to his elbow—“as you think it’s sense to hold your tongue about the past, as I do, tell me if you think that her death has anything to do with the past?”

“I can’t say. I was as much surprised at Ursula’s death as any one. She never gave me to understand that she was in danger.”

“Oh, she never said anything, she didn’t,” remarked Mother Monkey with her bright eyes fixed intently
on the man's face. "You didn't do it yourself?"

Wench wheeled round fiercely from the fire. "Of course I didn't. I haven't been in Carrowell since a week before she was killed."

"Oh, folk can come and go quiet-like, Mr. Wench."

"But I had no reason to kill her."

"Oh, folks never give reasons, Mr. Wench. Least-ways in murder cases. They don't chuck away the show: not they."

Wench shrugged his shoulders and again warmed his hands. "I never argue with a woman," he said contemptuously. "It only means talk and talk and talk, ending where it started. If you think that I killed Ursula, write to that ass Inspector Quinton, who was in charge of the case. A pretty hash he made of it, from what I read in the papers."

"Could you do better yourself, old dear?"

"Perhaps," nodded the man ambiguously, "but it's best to let sleeping dogs lie," he ended, ignorant that Marcus Purcane had quoted the same proverb. If he had known this, it might have given him food for reflection.

"For your own safety," said Hetty in answer to the quotation.

"Ah, that's for you to prove. Write to Quinton."

"Not me," said Mother Monkey lightly. "I've enough troubles of my own without taking yours on my shoulders. I don't know anything about you, though you did say I listened at keyholes. You are Silas Wench, for I heard Ursula call you so." She spread out her hands and tossed her old head. "That's all."

"I like you," said Mr. Wench suddenly, and drew up a chair to the fire. "You have a head on your shoulders, old as you are."

"Ditto, ditto, brother Smut, so far as talking about age goes," said Hetty rather offended, for even an octogenarian woman objects to be reminded of her
many birthdays. "As to liking, I don't want to be liked, 'cept by Juve, bless him. He's as fond of me as a parrot is of sugar."

"Ah!" Wench raised his head and became more alert. "The grandson. I wish to see him."

"Well, you can't," rejoined Miss Hale tartly. "He's asleep."

"As he was when Ursula was murdered," commented the money-lender, with a side glance at the old woman. "Call him down."

"I shan't!"

"You'd better. I've come on business."

"Ho!" Mother Monkey rubbed her nose and became excited. "P'raps you're the lawyer come about the will. Did she leave much money?"

Wench smiled to himself. Evidently the housekeeper knew nothing about the financial difficulties of Madame Valeria, and was not such an eavesdropper as he thought her to be. "We'll talk of that when I see the boy."

"Mr. Juve Mendel, if you please, sir," said Mother Monkey haughtily. "He's a gentleman, remember."

"Oh, is he?" Wench recalled Juve's pauper mother, who died of starvation, and gaol-bird father, who was still doing time for forgery. "Well, well, let him be so, if it pleases you. But I will say," he added with real enthusiasm, "that he's a genius, and that's better than gentility."

Hetty was mollified. "Only you and me and Miss Basser know what a one he is for the fiddle," she said with great amiability. "He don't get a show to let the public see what he can do."

"I may be able to help him."

"Oh!" Hetty flew towards the old man, as if she were about to embrace him. "You are a good sort. Is that what you've come about?"

"No!" Mr. Wench chuckled as he thought of his reason for paying this visit.
"Then what's your game?" demanded Hetty, changing her attitude immediately. "It ain't no good one, you yellow-faced old bag of rags. You don't pull wool over my eyes, I can tell you. I wasn't born under the Adelphi Arches for nothing. And if you mean any harm to Juve, I'll scratch your wicked old eyes out—they ain't much to look at anyway."

"Juve has a brave defender," said Wench approvingly and looked at the old woman, who resembled an angry rabbit, and in her excitement hopped about like one.

"I'd defend him against the Pope of Rome and a railway engine," snapped Miss Hale. "He's my baby, the only thing as I've got to love. Why can't you leave us to live quietly here and shove your oar into other people's affairs."

"Ah!" Wench glanced round the kitchen. "You have arranged to live here."

"And why not. Whatever money Urusla had must come to Juve, as he's her only relative. And if there isn't money, there's this house and the furniture and the land, all of which I know belonged to Ursula, 'cause she told me so."

"Ah, she told you so. Well, well, well."

"Don't go on with your well, well, well," said the little woman angrily. "I want to know what you're up to."

"Call the boy and I'll tell you."

Mother Monkey saw that Wench meant what he said, and that her only chance of obtaining information, which she required very badly, lay in waking Juve. Grumbling at the condition imposed she went up the stairs and shortly returned with the boy at her heels. Mendel looked much better in health and less worried, for the sleep had done him good. His usually pale face was rosy, and his eyes were bright, so that he presented an uncommonly handsome appearance in spite of his disordered hair, which he had not waited
to brush. Hetty’s announcement that a lawyer was waiting downstairs made Juve too eager to pay any attention to his toilet.

"Have you come about my grandmother’s estate?" asked Mendel, as soon as he saw the supposed lawyer.

"No!" Mr. Wench grinned, "and yes."

"What do you mean?"

"Sit down and I’ll tell you. I suppose"—the man fixed his cunning eyes on Hetty, who was all ears—"I can speak in the presence of Miss Hale."

"Dear me, how grand we are!" said Mother Monkey tartly. "Of course you can speak when I’m here. I ain’t going to leave my deary like a lamb with a wolf prowling round. Wolf, I say wolf. I know what lawyers are. Sharks."

"Your zoological knowledge is somewhat defective," said Wench, for his own ends assuming the character she supposed him to be. "Sit down and hold your tongue, while I speak to your master."

"Hetty isn’t my servant," said Juve, flushing angrily, as he saw the look of pain on the little woman’s expressive countenance. "She’s my very dear and kind friend."

"Deary boy." Mother Monkey seized his hand to pat it: then turned with a sudden change of manner to speak ferociously to Wench. "Now then?"

"I must ask a few questions first," said the presumed lawyer cunningly.

Juve frowned. "I hope it’s not about the murder," he said with open annoyance. "I’m tired of being asked about that, as I know nothing of the truth."

"Nor does any one else, Mr. Mendel. I have read the case in the newspapers, and I don’t believe that the truth will ever be discovered." He glanced in a stealthy way at Hetty, who immediately took fire.

"Why are you glaring at me?" she asked angrily.

"Think I polished her off?"

"No! No! You are too hasty."
"I wish you'd be, Mr. Silas Wench. You've been talking all round the shop for the last hour. Come to the pint, drat you."

The man nodded and addressed himself to Juve. "Did you find any money in the house?" he asked.
"Five pounds."
"And that's gone to pay the tradesmen's bills," burst out Hetty. "She hadn't no jewellery either, and didn't have anything to do with any banks. If there's money for Juve, you, as her lawyer, must know all about it."
"I'm not her lawyer."
Juve glanced at Mother Monkey. "Hetty said—"
"I know what I said, my ducky. And I said it 'cause he"—she pointed an accusing finger at the stooping figure in the snuff-coloured clothes—"told me he was as a lawyer."
"I certainly did not," answered Wench distinctly. "You suggested that I was a lawyer and I didn't contradict you."
"Then why did you come creeping into our house under false pretences?"
"Your house." The man laughed harshly.
"Juve's house, and what's his is mine and what's mine's his. Who're you getting at, you dried up old mummy?"
"Hush! Hush!" Mendel put his hand on Hetty's arm to stop her flow of language. "What's the use of talking like this? Who are you?" he asked Wench.
"I'm the owner of this house, of the land upon which it stands and of the furniture," said the old man dryly and very calmly.
Mendel started to his feet, while Mother Monkey uttered a subdued screech and glared fiercely at the speaker. "It's a lie," she said viciously, before the boy could say a word.
"It's the truth," rejoined Wench composedly.
"Beyond your clothes and personal belongings, everything in and out of this house is my property."
"But how?" gasped Juve, utterly amazed by this startling information.
"Madame Valeria mortgaged the furniture and the land and the house to me some time ago. Of course if you like to pay the money I advanced——"
"What are you?" asked Mother Monkey with sudden suspicion.
"A money-lender!"
"Thought you was an old rascal of that kind," she cried triumphantly. "Oh, I know your breed, you silly old Shylock. Getting me to sing me celebrated song and dance too. Ain't you black ashamed of yourself?"

Mendel put Hetty aside again and addressed himself to the bearer of such bad news. "Of course you can substantiate your claim?"
"Willingly! When you are in Town, come to my office in Golden Square, Soho, and I can show you the papers."
"Then my grandmother died poor?"
"More than poor. She died in my debt."
"I thought she was rich. She certainly had money in New York."
"She had. But as you were with her there, Mr. Mendel, I dare say you know that she made her money by fortune-telling, as Madame Valeria."
"Yes, I know that," said the boy mechanically, "and I know that her real name was Ursula Hedge."
"Oh, she told you that much, did she?"
"No. I told him," put in Mother Monkey sharply.
"More fool you. I hope you haven't mentioned that name outside this house?"

Juve, who was addressed, shook his worried young head. "No. My grandmother is known in Carrowell as Madame Valeria."
"I should continue to let her be known as that," said Wench meaningly.

"Why?" Juve looked very directly at the old man.

"Madame Valeria is dead and buried, and it is impossible that the truth about her murder will ever be discovered. But if it becomes known that she was Ursula Hedge, the case may be reopened."

"Why should it not be reopened?"

Wench hunched his shoulders and spread out his hands. "Please yourself; I give you a friendly warning, that is all. There was that in Ursula's past which had to do with the present of some few weeks ago. Take it or leave it, as you please."

"We don't want your meddling with our business," said Mother Monkey shrilly. "We'll do what we like and won't ask your leave either. All you've got to do is to prove as things is all yours, and then me and Juve will clear out to look after ourselves."

"How will you live?"

"Our business, I believe," said Hetty with her nose in the air. "Ask no questions, Shylock, and you won't be told no lies."

"Cackle! Cackle! What an old hen you are!"

"Gently," said Juve frowning. "Hetty is my friend."

"Deary boy," said Mother Monkey again and snuggled up to him.

"As to you," went on Mendel addressing Wench, but putting his arm round the forlorn old woman, "I shall not dispute your claim, if, as you say, you can prove it by documents."

"I dare say you won't, young man, because you can't."

"To-morrow when I come to Town I shall call at your Golden Square office and learn the truth by personal inspection. If things belong to you, as you say they do, then Hetty and I will remove from this house and you can take possession as soon as you like."
"And much good may it do you," said Mother Monkey, bursting into tears. "But I never did hear any good of Jews."

"I'm not a Jew," protested Wench, rising to get his hat and umbrella.

"I know you ain't," sobbed the little woman. "You're a Christian, which is a jolly sight worse. Jews is gentlemen to your kind. Get out with you."

"Oh, I'm goin'." Wench shuffled towards the door, rather shamefaced, for in spite of his hard heart, the forlorn looks of the pair moved him. "But although I'm a man of business and want my own according to law, you mayn't find me such a bad man as you think."

"I don't think you're bad," said Juve politely. "After all, you are only doing what is legal. If my grandmother mortgaged everything to you, then you have the right to take everything."

"If I take, I can also give," said the usurer significantly, "and knowing that as a musician you are a genius, I may be able to help you."

"Don't you be taken in by him, Juve," cried Hetty; "he'll bind you down to play for nothing a year, and when you're a success you'll be paying him through the nose. I've been had that way myself."

Wench grinned. "When you are calmer I'll speak further on this matter. Mr. Mendel, I shall expect to see you at my office to-morrow and to leave this house within a week."

The little old woman and the worried boy heard him shuffling along the passage and leave the house as the bang of the door signified his exit. "We must begin the world again, Monkey," said Juve sadly.

Hetty dried her eyes. "Of course, deary, and make a fortin', bless you. Never say die. There's life in the old gal yet, my sweet," and she kissed him tenderly.
CHAPTER IX

A FRESH START

JUVE MENDEL being a violinist of genius was naturally cursed with the artistic temperament, which is not always easy to live with. His many quarrels with his grandmother were not invariably due to her initiative, although she was uncommonly disagreeable when crossed and could not brook contradiction. If the boy had been less thin-skinned and highly-strung, life at the villa would have gone more smoothly, when Madame Valeria was alive. And even though the old lady was dead, Mother Monkey did not expect the millennium to arrive when all would be peace and amiability. She knew Juve too well to look for miracles, and was well aware that only by dexterous management of his peculiarities could she hope to avert constant storms. A less devoted woman would not have endured the musician's whims and fancies, but Hetty adored her darling so lavishly that in her eyes he could do no wrong. All the same, she was sufficiently clever and sensible to use her feminine wit for the correction of his faults when possible. But this diplomacy did not always succeed by reason of the boy's obstinacy.

For instance, when Mendel learned that Wench took everything, and that he had to start life afresh, Mother Monkey suggested that they should go to London. Being a born Cockney, she had never taken kindly to the country, and, like Lamb, preferred streets, however dreary, to meadows, however inviting. Only necessity and the weight of her years had compelled her to accept Madame Valeria's offer to become a country house-keeper. Now that she was "on her own again," as she phrased it, Hetty was all on fire to return to the Metropolis, and be Juve's handmaid in some garret. Mendel persistently refused to consider the idea and
nipped it in the bud. It was his intention to remain in Carrowell, he said, but declined to give his reasons, other than that the country suited him, and he enjoyed the daily train journey. That these reasons were untruthful Hetty was tolerably certain, since Juve took no interest in rural scenery and had frequently complained of the railway travelling, which fatigued him greatly. Mother Monkey decided in her own mind, although she did not confess this to Mendel, that he remained, so as to be within speaking distance of Lesley Basser, and in her heart she did not blame him. Old as she was, Mother Monkey had a wonderfully fresh nature, and was as romantic as a girl in her teens about love and marriage. Therefore, she accepted the situation cheerfully and resolved to forward Juve's aims in every way. It said volumes for Hetty's self-denial that she was prepared to surrender her darling to another, so that he might be thoroughly happy even though his gain was her loss. But Juve, wrapped up in his own concerns never guessed how unselfishly the little woman was acting.

"Very well, deary," said Mother Monkey, when the boy announced that it was his will and pleasure to remain in the village. "You leave everything to me and attend to your fiddling."

"But what are we to do?" asked Juve childishly, for the prospect was so black that his spirits were at zero.

"Find a cottage and furnish it," said Hetty briskly. "Then I'll look after things and we can live on what you earn."

"Can we?" Juve was doubtful, for as yet he had little experience of abject poverty, since his grandmother had always been fairly generous with money.

"Ho, yes!" Hetty rubbed her nose gaily. "I can scrimp and screw with the best, lovey, and know better nor most how many pence go to a shilling. Don't you bother your head, Juve. I'll run the circus."
"But we have no money, and my salary isn't due until next Saturday."

"That's all right, my sweet pet. I have a tenner saved up against my burial, as I never did want to die on the parish, and kept it so as I'd lie decent-like in my coffin."

Juve frowned. "I don't like taking your money, Monkey."

"I never did see such an infant as you are, deary boy. Ain't I your mother and sister and grandma and aunt? Who's got a better right to help you than old Monkey. She's only got you to hang on to, though I should have been married long ago to one of 'em, if I hadn't been a flirting success."

"Married to whom?" asked Juve puzzled.

"One of them young swells as used to hang round the stage doors. But they are all dead and done with: angels of a sort, I expect, though they never was fond of churches and Bibles."

"I don't know how to thank you, Monkey."

"Who asked you to thank me? You look after the three pun a week and I'll see to the rest. Can't I have me own way for once in me life, and give meself a treat with house-furnishing just as if I was a gal again getting ready for the honeymoon, which thing I never did see and don't expect to?"

So Hetty had her way, and Juve went about his business, privately determined to repay the kindly loan fourfold, when his ship came home. But that argosy laden with golden grain was a long time making for port, and the boy, with the usual ups and downs of the artistic temperament, was always believing that she would come, or disbelieving that she ever existed. At the present moment he was particularly doleful in being turned out of house and home; but Hetty's cheerful spirits encouraged him to look for better days. Meanwhile, although he did not know how she was going to manage on so small a sum of money, he had
every confidence that she would, in some way, find a roof to cover them both. Once established in a new home, however humble, they could wait after the fashion of the famous Mr. Micawber for "something to turn up!"

Mother Monkey went about the business with brisk assurance, and announced in the village that as the villa was too large for her and Mr. Mendel, they had serious intentions of giving it up. The house and land were to be sold and the furniture would be auctioned, as was arranged by Mr. Mendel’s lawyer, who was coming down in person to look after things. So Mr. Silas Wench, the lawyer in question, was given due rank in a profession more respectable than his own. Hetty explained things to the usurer, who was so tickled with the way in which she was keeping Juve’s name clean and Madame Valeria’s memory respectable, that he agreed to support the fiction. Wench indeed had quite a fancy for the little woman and highly approved of her cleverness.

"You’re a sharp one," said the money-lender, when Hetty related how she had arranged to disarm gossips in the village. "I might have done worse than married you."

Mother Monkey tossed her head so haughtily that the cricketing cap fell off. "Wouldn’t have you at a gift for all your money," she said with shrill contempt. "I was always one to pick and chose fastidious-like. The High Miss Hale they called me in the old days. But I say, old codger," she went on in a more friendly way, "do you really mean as you’ll help Mr. Mendel?"

"Yes, I do," said Wench positively. "Music’s the one thing I’ll unloosen my purse-strings for, and if I can shove that young man on I’ll do it."

"Where did you hear him play?"

"In his bedroom one day when I was sitting with Ursula," explained the old man. "His door upstairs was open and I opened the sitting-room door. I
think he is one in a thousand for violin-playing, and told Ursula so. Long ago I would have helped him, but to that she wouldn't agree."

"I wonder why?" asked Hetty in a pondering way, questioning herself rather than the speaker. "But she always hated him."

Wench nodded and his sharp eyes twinkled. "She visited the sins of the father on the son," he said in his grating voice. "The father was a scamp I dare say, but the son's a genius I'm certain."

"Juve don't know anything about his pa."

"Just as well," said the money-lender grimly. "It is best he should remain in ignorance."

"What about me?" asked Hetty, as sharp as a new pin.

"Ask no questions and you'll be told no lies," said Wench dryly. "You quoted that proverb to me the other day, you know."

"Close old file you are, Mr. Wench. If I married you," Hetty giggled, "you wouldn't let me manage things, I swear."

"I'd let you run the whole business," said Wench honestly. "You're as clever as they make 'em, and why you aren't a woman with money I don't know."

"Too much of the give-away about me to save the quids," said Mother Monkey with a shrug. "I chucked the dibs about considerable in my time, but they were always my own dibs I will say. Now I'm thrown into the street by you, you avaricious old pig, with only a tenner to keep me off the parish."

"And that tenner you'll use to help young Mendel?"

"That ain't your business anyhow," snapped Hetty, up in arms at once.

"I'm going to make it my business," said Wench meekly, which was surprising in him. "Somehow you've got round me, you old bag-of-bones."

"Here! Here!" Mother Monkey bristled. "Fair words, Mr. Shylock."
"You called me names, so I return the compliment," retorted Wench coolly. "We understand one another, you and I: our bark is worse than our bite. But, as I say, I've taken a fancy to you and I'm going to give you twenty pounds."

"At fifty per cent. I think I see myself taking it," said Hetty derisively.

"For nothing," said the usurer firmly. "You can pay it back when you like, and I don't even ask for a scratch of the pen."

"Twenty punds with my tenner make thirty," murmured Mother Monkey. "I could get things somehow straight on that. But"—she looked suspiciously at her proposed benefactor—"what are y' doing this for?"

"It's old age and I'm getting senile," retorted Mr. Wench. "Here's the money in notes. Take it, or leave it."

"You ain't buying a fire-insurance after death, are you?" asked Hetty, still suspicious, "and you won't go swanking, about lending this to yours truly."

"I shan't say anything. It's a whim of mine."

Mother Monkey's lean fingers closed on the notes convulsively. "You're not such a wicked old skin-flint as you look, I will say," she said in her usual complimentary way. "I s'pose you wouldn't like the only thing I can give, and that's a kiss. Two if you like."

"No! No! No!" cried Wench and retreated in horror, while Hetty laughed at her little joke, but afterwards heaved a genuine sigh.

"Seems I'm really getting old," said Hetty, surveying her wrinkled face in the dingy little mirror, near the cuckoo-clock. "Men don't hanker after me as they once did. Ah well, old bones always go on the rubbish heap"—and with this philosophical reflection, she went briskly about her business.

This in the first place had to do with the renting
of a cottage, and Hetty found an empty one down a crooked lane at the back of the Grange. It had white-washed walls and a thatched roof; consisting of four rooms, two below and two above, with a small lean-to at the back, which could be converted into a respectable kitchen. In her mind’s eye Mother Monkey arranged matters more with a view to Juve’s comfort than to her own. One room downstairs he could have for his den, and the other could serve as his dining-room, to be used by herself to sit in during the evening. Each of them could have an upstairs bedroom, and of course the kitchen would belong to her alone. There was a small strip of ground in front of the cottage, parted from the lane by a dilapidated fence; and at the back a garden of some size, although sadly in need of cultivation. Mother Monkey decided to make the place self-supporting as much as was possible. Flowers and vegetables could be sold; she could keep bees, and perhaps when things grew better a pig could be obtained. Fowls and rabbits were not out of the question, and Hetty having the slums-of-London instinct for striking a bargain was very sure that in some way she would get a lot off the land.

“I’ll enjoy it too,” said Mother Monkey, when walking round the estate. “It’ll make me a kind of squire like that play I saw in St. James’s Theatre. Juve can play the gent, wearing nice clothes and eating the best I can cook for him, while I run the show. Oh, we’ll live like fighting-cocks,” ended Hetty cheerfully. “I never did see such a one as meself for falling on me feet.”

She might have ascribed this to her indomitable courage and bee-like industry, but self-praise did not form part of Hetty’s character. She always thought more of others than of herself, and although sharp at a bargain and sturdy in defending what she considered her rights, was always generous and considerate. Her treatment of Juve proved that. And she got a rich
reward out of her sacrifice by contemplating the cottage and grounds, which she secured after two hours' talk for three shillings and sixpence a week, payable in advance. The proprietor, a stingy old farmer, with more money than manners, held out for five shillings, and only consented to take the lesser sum because the cottage had stood empty for so long and Hetty agreed to repair the same at her own expense.

There was very little expense about the matter. The busy little woman did everything herself. She whitewashed the walls again and papered the rooms; scrubbing the floors and brushing away the cobwebs between-times. In a few days the cottage was trim and weather-proof, looking so desirable an abode that the stingy farmer regretted renting it to Mother Monkey at so low a figure. He suggested a rise, on the plea that he had been taken in; but Hetty produced the agreement she had cajoled him into signing, and he went away, consigning her to perdition. Much Mother Monkey cared for his curses, having got the better of him, and being busy buying furniture, so that Juve should lack nothing in the way of comfort. Hetty used her money to the very best advantage, visiting auction-rooms in Havering and Tarhaven with an occasional look round Carrowell to see if she could pick up some unconsidered trifle. By the time Wench took possession of the gimcrack villa and sold its contents, Mother Monkey led her darling boy in triumph to the cottage home, and displayed its splendours with justifiable pride. Mendel could scarcely believe his eyes, when, one sober grey October morning, just as he was about to start for Town, Hetty took him to their new abode.

"You're a wonder, Monkey darling; you're a witch," he kept on saying, as they walked round on a gratifying tour of inspection.

"Might be the last," said Hetty chuckling, "if
them old gals in Macbeth was the same, which they was, and I'm as ugly as they are."

Juve gave her a warm hug. "You have a heart of gold."

"That don't improve my looks. But there, deary boy, don't make me vain, for I always prink up when praised, and there ain't no time for dressing gay till the cash comes along. But I must say," she folded her arms with great satisfaction and surveyed the sitting-room in which they were now standing, "as it's a fair treat."

"It's marvellous. How have you managed it on ten pounds?"

"Oh, it's a way I've got," said Mother Monkey with another chuckle, and holding her tongue about the extra money. "When you've got to make both ends meet you tug 'em together somehow. And everything's as cheap as cheap."

It was, although Mendel did not know much about the cost of things, but Hetty's taste and Hetty's notorious industry had done wonders. There was Chinese matting on the floor, with two really good rugs she had induced Mr. Werich to spare, when he sold the contents of the gimcrack villa. A rosewood bookcase for Juve's music and any books he might think of buying, along with some he had already bought, stood in one corner, and before the window, which was draped with chintz curtains, was a long table for writing. Also there were two arm-chairs on either side of the fireplace, and an ordinary couple of chairs for visitors. The walls were papered a pale green and adorned with photographs and pictures transferred from the boy's old bedroom to this place. And Hetty had contrived to pick up some really good china oddments, which made the mantelpiece look pretty. On the whole Juve found the room comfortable and cosy in its looks—this aspect being enhanced by a bright fire burning briskly in the old-fashioned grate.
We only need a cat to make it quite like Home, sweet Home," said Hetty with great satisfaction. "Wonderful how cats do make homes look homes and not tap-rooms. I'll pick up a kitten somewhere, for mice 'ull come as sure as the rent."

The cottage, of course, was furnished sparsely, as even with her thirty pounds Mother Monkey could do little. The tiny dining-room, papered a deep orange for cheerfulness, only contained a round table, three chairs and a short hard sofa, all standing on chequered oil-cloth. The bedrooms were blue and pink, carpeted with drugget, grey in colour, and each possessed a bed, a washstand and a chair. Mendel's indeed had an extra piece of furniture in the shape of a large mahogany wardrobe, which Hetty explained she could do without.

"Ain't got much to bless meself with," said Mother Monkey cheerfully, "though I did talk of prinking a time ago. I'll hang up what I've got behind the door, and put a sheet over it. Not as we've many to spare, sheets and mattresses, table-cloths and such like is wonderful dear. Anyhow we've got enough to go on with, and the Lord sends rain when least expected."

"Will He rain table-cloths?" asked Juve, not understanding this cryptic allusion.

"I mean as He'll look after us, deary boy. Don't you think as I'm not religious, 'cause I don't sing hymns and read tracts. I've got me own way of depending on Him, and He's done me and you well in giving us this home. We must be grateful for our blessings, honey."

"I am grateful and I do thank Him," said Juve in a low voice, for his sensitive nature responded at once to the little woman's serious talk; "and most of all for giving me such a good kind friend as you are."

"There, go along with you," cried Hetty with fictitious gaiety, for her eyes were wet. "You'd best be getting your bike and going about your business or
they'll be sacking you and a nice thing that 'ud be, I don't think."

"Won't I stay and help you to get the rest of my things here?"

"No, you won't. I'll get 'em meself. They're already in the old place and I'll tot them over on a handcart with Tavy to help. When you come back tonight I'll have a nice supper ready, and you'll eat and sleep in your very own house, bless you, my sweet pet."

With a heart too full for words the boy rode off, really grateful for the great blessing in having so good and practical a friend. And, indeed, without Mother Monkey the inexperienced lad would have come to grief very quickly, as there was no one to help him or advise him, and he had all the spendthrift generosity of the Bohemian. Hetty was one also, it is true, but she had learned to be just to herself in a hard school, and with her at the helm the little skiff which contained the oddly assorted pair was in no danger of shipwreck. Hetty was quite sure that she could keep Juve out of mischief, so long as no stronger influence came to thwart her own, but in her heart she did dread such an influence, and gave it a name. "Gals will make a mess of him, if they get hold," said Mother Monkey to herself, as she waved her hand to her disappearing darling. "He's handsome and kind and clever, and just the sort of angel as they'll try to ruin. I know gals, having been one meself, though I never ruined any one, to my thinking. I dessay Juve's all right when he ain't famous; but if he do strike oil, like that American drama I sawr, the gals 'ull be after him like flies round a honey-pot. Then there'll be the devil to pay."

With this strong asseveration, Miss Hale disappeared into the cottage and spent the afternoon in adding perfume to the violet. That is, although everything was neat and clean, spic and span and spotless, she polished and re-polished, dusted here and dusted there,
and went through every room at least five times to make sure that things were in their right places. This was the fussy pride of the proprietor, for although Hetty looked upon the cottage as Juve's property, she also, deep in her heart, regarded it as her home, the first she had managed to secure for many a long day. She was mistress here; there was no one to order her about and she could do as she liked. As she busied herself here, there and everywhere, she felt her heart so light that she began singing old songs, and her ancient feet began to trip in old dances.

Thus it happened that Miss Lesley Basser entered the cottage, having knocked in vain for some time, to find the shrunken little figure capering about the kitchen waving a duster and proclaiming that she was "the gal as knew the boys and doubled their joys, and—Lord bless me, miss, what a turn you did give me!"

"I knocked three times, but you did not hear me," said Lesley apologetically.

"Must have been singing, miss," replied Mother Monkey, actually blushing in her old age. "There ain't no fool like an old fool, you know. Fancy me cutting capers and hollering, only to be found by a real live lady. Do sit down, miss, and lemme guve you a cup of tea. You're our first."

"First what?" asked Miss Basser, accepting the invitation.

"Our first visitor, Mr. Mendel's and mine, and I do hope, miss, as you'll bring us luck. We could do with a ton of it, miss."

"I wish you all possible good luck," said Lesley, who knew Mother Monkey's strange ways and loving old heart from frequent descriptions from Juve. "I do think you have made this old place pretty. But—Lesley shook her finger—'you should have asked me to help you.'"

"We didn't want any help, thank you, miss," said
Hetty stiffly. "Me and Mr. Mendel have our pride, and do everything for ourselves. 'Sides," added Miss Hale untruthfully, "the money from the sale of things with the land and the house as belonged to Madame Valeria have made Mr. Mendel as rich as Cresses, whoever he was, not being on my visiting-list."

"Well, anything I can do——"

"There's one thing you can do, miss," interrupted Mother Monkey, suddenly serious. "Be kind to my boy."

"To Juve?"

"Yes. I call him my boy, although he ain't got nothing to do with me in the way of blood. But he's a kind lad and a sweet lad and a clever lad. I don't want him to come to grief, he being the only thing I have left to love in my old age."

"Why should he come to grief?" asked Lesley, somewhat bewildered.

"Well, you know, miss,"—Hetty plaited her apron,—"boys of that age, when they do fall in love, go head over heels to the bottom, wherever that is. And Mr. Mendel's that set on you, as he'd break his heart if you turned him over."

"Oh, I'm not going to turn him over. I like Juve very much; we all do."

"There's likings and likings, miss."

Lesley coloured. "My dear old lady," she said, patting Hetty's hand kindly, "what you mean is——"

"Wedding bells and orange flowers, rice and slippers thrown after the carriage, miss. Yes, miss. Juve loves you."

"I hope he does not love me in that way," said the girl seriously, "for I only think of him as a sister might. Perhaps you are wrong. Juve is very young, you know, and boys of that age are always falling in and out of love."

"That's a fact," said Mother Monkey, nodding. "I remember dozens of 'em. I dessay you're right,
miss; but don't go letting him think as you love him and then break his heart."

"I won't I assure you."

From another woman Miss Basser would have resented this plain talk, but the genuine affection of the little creature for the boy touched her. She knew beyond question, both from Juve's conversation, from village gossip and from many meetings with Hetty herself, that the old woman had a heart of gold. For this reason she made every allowance for Hetty's somewhat uncomfortable familiarity, and after giving the assurance that she would not break the boy's too-susceptible heart, turned the conversation. "I came to invite Juve to supper to-morrow night," she said, while Mother Monkey was showing her over the cottage. "Mr. Godwin is coming also."

"Oil and water," muttered the little woman. "They won't mix, both wanting the same thing."

Lesley coloured again, knowing what was meant, but took no notice of the hint to revert to the earlier subject of conversation. "Oh, I think Juve and Mr. Godwin get on excellently together. I hope they will continue to do so, for I wish them to search into this matter of the murder."

"Lord save us," cried Mother Monkey in consternation, "you ain't in earnest, Miss Basser, are you?"

"Yes, I am. Why should I not be?"

"'Cause there ain't no call for further fiddling with that case, miss. She's dead and done with, so let her have the rest in her grave as she never got in her life. Be wise, my dear, and leave things alone."

"No," said Lesley firmly, "the criminal must be caught and punished."

"He never will be caught and punished," said Hetty in a surly tone.

"How do you know?"

"'Cause I don't see how you'll find out."
Lesley caught Hetty's wrist. "Do you know anything?" she asked sharply.

"No, miss. I know nothing. How should I know anything? All I say is that if you're wise you'll let the matter rest where it is."

"And if I'm not wise?"

"Then you'll be sorry for yourself."

"What do you mean?"

"Gammon and spinach," retorted Mother Monkey, and not another word would she say on the subject, although for the next ten minutes Lesley plied her with questions.

CHAPTER X

AT THE GRANGE

Juve was very delighted to receive Miss Basser's invitation, pointing out to Hetty that if the girl did not love him she would not wish to be in his company. Knowing the true reason why the boy was asked to supper, the little woman shook her head and became rather tart. Without betraying her knowledge she advised him seriously to stay away, and gave him a hint that there was danger. This took the form of a one line parable.

"Spiders do ask flies to walk into their parlour, I believe," said Hetty, clearing away the breakfast things, "but flies as go is mugs."

"Lesley is not a spider. How dare you!" cried Mendel furiously.

"I'd dare a lot to keep you out of mischief, deary. Miss Basser—a sweet gal, I don't deny—is set on that parson's son. I sawr that in two ticks when she came yesterday."

"He shan't have her," said the boy, and turned white.
"Bit of a weather-cock, ain't you, Juve? T'other day you said as you'd have to give her up to him in the long run. Now——"

"In the long run I said," broke in Mendel; "but that doesn't mean I'm to give up trying my luck. Godwin's a good fellow, clever and handsome, and all the rest of it, but I'm not such a bad sort as to be out of the running altogether. Unless" — he faltered — "unless the death of my grandmother comes in the way."

Mother Monkey, with the tray in her hands, halted at the door and looked back in amazement over her shoulder. "What on earth has that got to do with you, I'd like to know?"

"Well, people thought I had something to do with it."

"Rubbish," said Hetty decisively, and disappeared into the kitchen. The next minute she was back, full of indignation. "All that was settled at the inquest, and no one can say anything against you, lovey. 'Sides, even if folk did go on talking silly-like, that gal isn't the sort to chuck you over, if she really did love you same as you want to be loved."

"I believe she does," said Juve positively, and looked at her yearningly in the hope that she would endorse his opinion.

She did not. "It's a kind sisterly love," she quoted, mindful of a previous conversation. "The truth come home to you when you saw her on the day after your grandma's death. So you told me."

"I have changed my mind."

"She hasn't," said Hetty, uncomfortably laconic.

"Do you mean to say——"

The little woman straightened herself and placed her thin arms akimbo. "I do mean to say," she declared emphatically. "You ain't got half a chance with her, because of that parson's son. 'Said so yourself when you was more sensible than you are now.
What's the use of weather-cocking?" demanded Hetty irritably. "First it's one thing, then it's another, only to end up in a third and go on to a fourth. I ain't got no patience with you."

"Who asked you to have any patience?" asked Juve ungratefully, and fretting himself into a rage. "I wish you wouldn't meddle."

"Oh, I don't want to meddle." Hetty folded up the table-cloth composedly, well used to these bursts of passion, which she knew from experience were due solely to the excitable artistic temperament; "but I do say as you ain't got nothing to offer Miss Basser, 'cept this cottage, which ain't a Buckingham Palace, whatever you may think."

"I'll make a name for myself which she will be proud to accept."

"Dessay," said Mother Monkey caustically, "when you make a name, and when the kettle do bile. 'Seems to me, Juve, as you'd best hurry up. Go and see that Wench cove and get him to do what he said he'd do."

"I don't wish to accept anything from that man," said Mendel, drawing himself up haughtily with the imprudent pride of youth.

"More fool you, when he can give you a chance of showing off with your fiddle, he having influence and money."

"Why should I be indebted to a man who has robbed me of everything?"

"Silly stuff you talk, deary. 'Twas your grandma as robbed you, and not even her, since she'd a right to do what she wished with her own. Wench was only acting in a business way, and he ain't such an out-and-out bad 'un as you think. Take this offer, Juve, and be thankful he gives it."

"With my talents I can do without his help," said the boy angrily, for the common-sense of the little woman irritated him greatly.
'Oh, I dessay as you'll be famous on your own some day, but it ain't much use going round when you can go straight. Old Money-bags is crazy about your fiddling and will put you on the way to forting.'

'But you said he'd trick me, and bind me down, when unknown, to make me pay through the nose when famous. You know you did.'

Mother Monkey nodded. 'I did,' she admitted. 'Bought me own experience in that way. But going by that, there needn't be any binding or paying through noses. Use the old cove, through his one weakness, and make it up to him if you come top. That's fair, ain't it?'

'I'll consider the matter,' said Mendel, really agreeing with her, but much too fretful to acknowledge that he was wrong. 'It's my business, remember.'

'Your business,' assented the little woman, preparing to go. 'Lord, deary, I don't want to meddle with that. I've got quite enough to do in looking after the house.'

'Hetty,'—Juve was seized with compunction when he remembered how much she had done—'I'm sorry.'

'What for? Lord, deary, I don't take no more notice of your tantrums than I did of hers. You're only chucking a lot of worry which don't matter orf your chest. All I say is don't go hanging after that sweet gal.'

'I shall,' cried Mendel, flashing up into another rage.

'As you will,' said Mother Monkey philosophically. 'You'll only burn them fingers of yours, and that won't do your fiddling much good.'

All that day Juve was sulky: his worst mood of egotism was uppermost, and he pitied himself profoundly. No one loved him: no one even cared for him—he was all alone in the world, and every one's hand was against him. He had never had a chance, so sordid
and cramped had been his surroundings. It was quite time that he asserted himself and showed this one and that he did not intend to be called to heel any longer. Monkey was all right—a good enough sort, if she'd only mind her own trivial business. But she didn't understand him: she had no nerves; she was not a genius. And if she was kind she demanded strict obedience in return. That he certainly would not give her, as he had suffered enough from slavery under his grandmother's whip. He'd show Monkey that she must remember she was a servant. And so throughout the long hours Mendel fed his vanity with flattering speeches and thought that Mother Monkey was ashamed of herself because she stayed in the kitchen. As a matter of fact Hetty was giggling privately over her darling's love-sick folly, and yet sympathizing with him for the pain she knew it was causing. Her knowledge of why he behaved so ungratefully and her sense of humour did away with any pain she might have felt.

"Poor little chap," thought Hetty to herself, while she went about her work. "Crying for the moon, he is. I never did see how these greenhorns take on when they first feel the ticklings of love. Juve 'ud sacrifice me and himself and the whole blooming world, if she raised an eyebrow to arsk. I'm glad I'm parst the foolishness. But there," she sighed, "it was jolly fun all round the shop while it larsted. Wonder if he'll make it up afore he goes to the Grange."

Juve did not. Retaining the belief that he was the worst treated person who ever existed, and deserved the pity and applause of thousands, this aggressively young gentleman went off to church, intending to walk home afterwards to supper with his angel. Mother Monkey waved him a farewell, of which he took not the slightest notice, and then retired indoors to shed a tear, which would fall in spite of her philosophy. She felt very lonely while sitting over the fire and mending
Juve's undergarments, although she persisted in excusing the boy's crass ingratitude on the plea that he was only a young thing who didn't know any better. And this was a very true excuse, for if Juve had been enlightened he would have been horrified at his own behaviour. But, for the moment, he was blinded by calf-love.

The poor lad, ignorant how to deal with the unruly feelings which tortured him so keenly, did not feel any happier when in church. He joined in the service mechanically, sang hymns and psalms, made the responses, and did his best to understand the prayers and follow the sermon. But as Archie was sitting beside Lesley in the Grange pew, Juve felt miserably certain that the bottom had fallen out of creation. He was jealous when Godwin found the place in the hymn-book for Lesley, and once actually caught them smiling at one another, when the churchwarden, a light and airy grocer, pirouetted up the aisle with the oblation. The furious boy, insane with a passion he could not understand, felt inclined to kill both because of that smile. If Lesley was not for him, he certainly would kill her rather than she should become the wife of his rival. He bit his lip and clenched his hands and ground his teeth in the endeavour to subdue his wrath, succeeding so far that he was fairly calm when the congregation came out of church. But the fire of anger still smouldered so strongly that Juve could not bring himself to walk home with Lesley. Godwin was beside her and he knew that Godwin, for that very reason, was in danger of losing his life. Had Juve been an English boy he might have been calmer and more self-possessed, but as his blood was mixed Hungarian and Romany, it ran so hotly as to incite him to desperate and senseless deeds. The very passionate imaginative nature, which made him a genius, rendered him impossible in sober every-day life. And in this he was to be pitied rather than to be blamed, as
Hetty instinctively knew. It was for this reason that she overlooked what she called "his tantrums." The little woman, for all her want of education, understood the complex nature of Juve more than he did himself.

Mendel, overlooking politeness, but hugging selfishness in his wrath, came to the Grange in a disagreeable frame of mind. Usually he was singularly charming and sweet-natured, courteous to all and amusing in many ways. But on this night he was simply a bad-tempered, ill-mannered boy, who should have been turned out of the house as unfit for social intercourse. And he certainly would have been by Mr. Basser, after one or two rude remarks to that irritable gentleman, but that Lesley smoothed matters over.

"He isn't well," she whispered to her father, as they went into supper. "The strain of his grandmother's death is too much for him."

"He needn't behave like a bounder all the same," retorted Paul indignantly, and scarcely taking the trouble to lower his voice. "We've all had a bad time, so far as the murder is concerned."

"Yes! Yes! Yes!" said Lesley, coaxing him to patience as usual. "But he'll be all right soon. Juve"—she raised her voice—"you sit by me. Archie, you can sit between dad and granny."

This arrangement calmed Juve's wrath to a considerable degree, and he shot an exulting glance at his rival, which puzzled the young gentleman considerably. Certain that Lesley loved him, Godwin thought she would not take any trouble to deal with Juve's inexplicable moods. Why the boy should behave so rudely he could not understand, and so was puzzled by the triumphant stare. Archie could be jealous himself, and was on many occasions, after the fashion of youth deeply in love: but he did not in the least mind—for the moment at all events—that Lesley should make a fuss over the violinist. Mendel was a day after the fair, for Lesley loved him—Godwin—and
was not likely to change her mind in favour of a baby. For that the nineteen-year-old Juve was—a good-looking, clever, agreeable baby, who could be fractious occasionally, as in the present instance. Thinking thus, Archie smiled in his friendly way, whereupon Mendel's exulting look was changed to a scowl. Mrs. Basser saw it, quiet but observant old tabby as she was, and having noted Juve's previous lapse from good manners, determined to give him a hint to behave himself. Selfish herself, she was quick to espy selfishness when shown, and always remarked on it, with an audible expression of thankfulness that she was not as others.

"I am always sorry for Mrs. Wagner," remarked the old lady unexpectedly, while supper was in progress.

"Mrs. Wagner," echoed her son. "Who is she?"

"Who was she," corrected Mrs. Basser. "Why, the first wife of Richard Wagner, who had such a lot to put up with. Fancy living with a man who wrote impossible music and refused to write anything that would sell."

"His music has sold since," said Mendel defiantly, and with a red face, for he guessed why these remarks were being made.

"I daresay, but that didn't keep the first Mrs. Wagner's pot a-boiling," retorted Mrs. Basser sweetly. "Then there was Dr. Johnson, you know: a most impossible person; and Chopin, who was always ill, and De Musset who indulged too much in absinthe."

"And Villon and Verlain," added Paul, supporting his mother maliciously, for he was still cross with his guest. "Oh, genius is impossible to live with. Don't you marry a genius, Lesley."

Juve refused to take the speech as levelled at himself and continued to eat sulkily, but the girl laughed. She knew people who were impossible without the smallest spark of genius to redeem their troublesome natures.

"No, dad,"—she stole a glance at Archie—"I won't."
Mendel intercepted the glance and from hot rage became suddenly cool. All at once he smiled at Mrs. Basser, and she could not deny but what his smile was singularly charming. So was Juve immediately, since he all at once saw a way of ridding himself of his rival. "Human nature is very imperfect," he said to the old lady. "I'm an awful rotter myself on occasions."

"Oh, no, no," murmured Paul with polite irony. "Why should you be?"

"Nerves, I suppose," said Juve with a shrug. "To make people feel my music as I want them to feel it I have to feel it twice to their once."

"What do you mean exactly?" asked Mrs. Basser doubtfully.

"I understand," put in Archie. "Juve means that he has an extra set of nerves, not always under control, and small blame to him."

"Jolly good of you to say that," remarked the boy, smiling gaily—and he really did mean that smile, for the plan that had entered his head had brought back his long-lost humour.

"Oh, it's only common-sense, Mendel. Literary marriages never do turn out happy, since the one who writes is always difficult, by reason of a too vivid imagination for every day use. Which," added Godwin with emphasis, "is the chief thing one has to consider in marriage."

"Yet you are a literary man," suggested Mendel, unable to refrain from the sly dig.

"Me!" Godwin laughed. "Oh no! I am merely a putter together of things: a gatherer up of other people's experience and adventures. Being neither a poet nor a novelist, but merely a hard-working journalist, I would never bother my wife with taking flights on Pegasus."

"Consequently," said Basser importantly, "your marriage is bound to be a happy one. I quite agree
with you. To have no imagination is to be singularly fortunate."

"Oh," said his daughter dryly, "then the more stupid a man is the more lucky you consider him to be."

"I do," said Paul firmly, "for the stupid man is not the prey of his own fancy, which makes shadows real."

Juve looked at the speaker oddly. "They get a local habitation and a name, I suppose you mean," he said after a pause. "Shakespeare says that, although I have not quoted correctly."

"I mean that certainly," answered Mr. Basser, but his eyes fell before those of the boy, and his voice faltered. "I, personally, would prefer to dispense with imagination."

"Why then," said Mendel cynically, "you would merely be a cabbage."

"Cabbages have their use in this world," bleated Mrs. Basser hurriedly, to avert an angry reply to this impertinent remark, "though I never did care for them myself. Give me some more of that jelly, Lesley, and then we can return to the drawing-room. I hope Mr. Mendel will give us some music."

"Oh, I shall be delighted—that is, I should be delighted, only I have not my violin with me."

"A pity," murmured the old lady; "your music always soothes me to sleep."

"What a compliment, granny," said Lesley with a laugh.

"I think it is, dear. Didn't Orpheus do something of that kind?"

Archie, on whom her eye rested, shook his fair head. "Oh, no. He wakened his listeners so thoroughly that even stones and trees danced to his fiddling."

"Dear me, what a nuisance he must have been!" said Mr. Basser sleepily. "Well, then you can all talk, but not too loud. The murmur of your voices will do me good."
"If you are sleepy, mother, why not go to bed?" asked Paul abruptly.

"My dear child, I always read in bed, and have a most exciting story to finish. As I want to know the end, I shall be awake for hours. There, don't argue, dear, but give me your arm."

Paul did so, and conducted this amiable old egotist to the drawing-room, where she chose the most comfortable chair, and ordered every one to sit round her, for the purpose of affording her what entertainment they could. As Lesley wished to take the two young men to her own private den and converse with them on the matter of the murder, she was impatient at this selfishness. Also neither she nor Archie were able to talk to order, and Mr. Basser, seemingly too restless to sit still, walked up and down the room, in a fretful state of mind. For all her sweet old ways, Mrs. Basser had the art of making every one extremely disagreeable. Juve saved the situation, for he talked incessantly, and described life at the music-hall so brilliantly that the old lady was thoroughly amused. The boy had a ready wit, a clever tongue and an observant nature, so gradually every one came under the spell of this monologist. Even Mr. Basser paused in his pacing to listen. It was close upon ten o'clock before the hostess signified that she intended to retire to bed.

"And thank you, my dear boy, for a very amusing hour," she said, taking Juve's hand to pat it affectionately. "I take back my words about genius being impossible to live with. You are a delightful companion. Lesley, ring for Maria to take me to bed."

And when the elderly maid entered, stiff and prim and resentful of late hours, Mrs. Basser toddled off in a state of high good-humour to enjoy the sleep she had postponed,—or perhaps to read the exciting story.

"And now we can smoke," said Paul, when his mother retired.
"In my den," cried Lesley gaily. "Come, Archie; come, Juve."

"Not just at this moment," said the boy, smiling also. "I wish to speak to your father, if I may."

"To me?" Basser wheeled on his way to the door, and started. "Anything particular?"

"Oh, dear no," said the boy airily. "At least, you may not consider it so. I want your advice—that's all."

"I shall be delighted to give it, my dear lad." Mr. Basser was always cordial when placed in a position of authority. "Lesley, you can take Archie to your den. Juve and I will join you presently."

The girl was puzzled to think why Mendel, who had such a mean opinion of the old man's capabilities, should wish to consult him. After a moment's reflection she departed with Godwin under the impression that the boy, by flattering her father's vanity, wished to make amends for his bad manners. Nothing was further from Juve's thoughts. His intention was to match himself against Archie as a suitor for Lesley's hand with the full approval of her weak-minded parent. He was tolerably certain that such approval had not been requested by the rector's son. It was this determination which had made the boy turn suddenly amiable at the supper-table.

"Well, my boy," said Basser, when they were in the library, a red-papered room of great size, with carved cases of black oak holding many books, "and what can I do for you?"

Mendel came to the point at once with a simplicity that was markedly audacious. "I wish you to approve of my asking Lesley to be my wife, sir."

His host, who had dropped into the chair before his writing-table, rose again and stared at the daring speaker. "Are you in your right senses?" he asked, plucking at his chin, and speaking angrily.

"Quite, sir. Why should I not be?"

"You are too young to marry my daughter."
"Oh, I don't think so. I both look and feel older than my years."

"You have no money; no position," was Mr. Basser's next objection.

"I shall have both sooner than you expect, sir. There is a friend of mine who is arranging for me to have my chance of showing what I can do as a violinist,"—Juve meant Mr. Wench, but did not tell his listener this—"and of course I believe that I shall make a success."

"I believe you will," admitted the older man, stalking to the hearthrug and taking up his position with his back to the fire; "but I don't consider that you are a fit husband for my daughter."

"Your objections?" demanded Juve curtly.

Basser, looking more elegant and frail than ever, flushed indignantly. "I have stated them," he said just as curtly.

"I see!" Mendel said no more, but apparently dejected by his lack of success let his eyes stray round the luxurious room. "It's a pity; but I suppose it can't be helped."

"No," said Basser, becoming bold as the boy became, as he thought, timid. "There is no more to be said. You understand?"

"Oh, yes." Juve rose listlessly and moved slowly round the room, looking at the many volumes, and at various trophies of arms which adorned the dark red walls between the tall bookcases. "Delightful room this, sir, but rather puzzling with its mixed student and military aspect."

"Oh, you mean the bows and arrows and swords and daggers," said Basser uneasily. "They belonged to my father. He collected such things. As you see, they are arranged in patterns."

"Yes, I see. Very interesting," said Juve, moving from trophy to trophy. "Why, that's strange. Here is one of the patterns incomplete."
"Oh, I think you are mistaken," said Basser nervously, and looking pale.

"Oh, no." Mendel pointed with his finger. "There's a dagger missing from this one. What a pity! It spoils the look of order in the pattern."

"Some one's been meddling with things," said the host crossly, and stepped forward to assure himself of the fact. "Yes; a dagger is missing."

"Or a knife of sorts," said Juve indifferently. "Ah, well!" He yawned and shook his head. "I'll join Miss Basser and Godwin."

"But my advice?" said the elder man, striving to look cool and composed.

"You have given it to me, sir," said Mendel, pausing at the door. "I wish to pay my addresses to your daughter, but you advise me not to."

"Ah, well!" Basser returned to the hearthrug and balanced himself on his toes, smiling weakly. "After all, I don't know why you shouldn't try your luck. As you say, your future is promising."

"Then you advise me to try?"

Basser looked down at his smart evening shoes, and so did not notice the ironical smile on the boy's face. "Certainly," he said heartily; "you took me rather by surprise, you know. Your bomb-shell—ha! ha!—rather knocked me out of time. I never thought that a lad of your age would wish to marry."

"I am older than my years, as I told you," remarked Juve dryly. "Then I have your approval?"

"Yes." Basser cleared his throat and straightened himself, this time looking very directly at Mendel. "I think you are a wonderful violinist, and when the chance you say is coming does come, I am sure you will gain a world-wide fame. And then my—er—friendship for your grandmother, who was a charming lady, inclines me to—er—look favourably on your suit."

"Thank you, sir," said Juve sedately, and came
forward to shake hands with a grave face. "You are very kind. I misunderstood you, I think."

"You did; you did," answered the elder man hurriedly. "Ask Lesley to marry you by all means. But I may tell you that—er—you have a—er—rival Richmond in the field."

"I guessed that, sir. Has Godwin asked for your approval also?"

"No," snapped Basser, suddenly becoming cross. "He has not had the grace to do that, Juve. Therefore you may be sure that I shall support you rather than him. After all, you have a brilliant future. Godwin has not."

"But Lesley may prefer him to me," hesitated the boy.

"She may. I can't tell. But as a dutiful daughter I don't think she will marry without my consent. That consent, Juve, will be given to you; not to Godwin. I like him, of course; but as a suitor for my daughter—" Basser broke off with a shrug of his elegant shoulders.

"Thank you, sir; you have made me very happy," said Mendel, beaming all over his handsome face. "Have every confidence in me as—I hope—your future son-in-law," and still beaming he went lightly from the room.

Basser collapsed into a chair and shivered. "How much does he know?" was the question he asked himself with dry lips and bated breath.

CHAPTER XI

THE CONFERENCE

HAD Juve overheard the conversation between Lesley and his rival, while he was scheming in the library, he would have recognized the futility of
his appeal for Mr. Basser's good offices to forward his
wooing. Feeling genial after an excellent supper, and
impressed by the vision of Lesley's beauty in the
mellow radiance of the lamp-light, Godwin was natur-
ally in a tender mood. Not so the girl. Objecting
to any philandering as being out of place at such a
moment, she twisted impatiently away from his
proffered embrace, and shook her head rebukingly.

"We must be serious to-night," said Miss Basser,
leaning an elbow on the mantelpiece, smoothing her
hair and shifting a morsel of coal on the edge of the
grate with her foot—doing all these things to keep
Archie at arm's length.

"You're always serious," protested the young man
unjustly, and adopting an injured tone. "When a
fellow is as much in love as I am, he doesn't want to be
serious. For heaven's sake, Les, let us take the usual
Saturday half-holiday this evening."

"To-day is Sunday and the holiday is ended,"
replied the girl lightly. "You forget that Juve may
come in at any moment, my dear boy. Sit in yonder
armchair and light your pipe. We have much to
talk about."

"I'd rather hold my tongue and look," grumbled the
disappointed lover, obeying orders with some reluct-
ance.

Lesley laughed, but did not change her position.
In a gauzy evening frock of azure to match her eyes,
and accentuate the glorious tint of her hair, she looked
less business-like than in her tailor-made dress. The
frivolity of chiffon, with the rosy whiteness of bosom
and arms, enhanced by glittering jewellery, made her
seem essentially feminine and alluring. At the moment
she was rather Venus than Diana, more gracious, less
unapproachable, and Godwin, being very much a man,
found it hard to prevent himself from kneeling in ador-
atation at the feet of this splendid goddess. He looked
at her with immense appreciation and drew so hard at
his briar that he saw her enveloped in smoky clouds like a Homeric deity.

"No one would think you were a clever woman, Les," he remarked with a sigh.

"Thank you. And why not?"

"Oh, I mean a compliment. You're too lovely to have brains in addition. That would be adding sugar to honey in my opinion."

"Rather an enigmatic compliment, isn't it?" asked Miss Basser, rather dryly, "and I don't see why passable good looks should mean stupidity."

"Passable good looks. Oh, Les!

"Don't be too sentimental, Archie, or I shall think you look upon me as a mere toy. And goodness knows, I'm not that; I have my share of cleverness."

"You are as clever as you are beautiful."

"A honey-added-to-sugar woman?"

"Very much so, to my grief."

"Thank you again. You are full of pretty speeches to-night."

"Oh, it's all very well talking." Godwin snuggled down in the capacious armchair and sucked at his pipe mournfully. "But if you were less lovely and less clever, fellows would leave you alone."

"Meaning Juve?" Lesley arranged herself gracefully on the sofa, looking more provokingly pretty than ever.

"Yes, da—, I mean hang him."

"Don't swear," she said severely; then laughed. "Pooh! He's only a boy."

"A very dangerous boy for my peace of mind," said Godwin grimly. "He is handsome and talented and, —I think, pertinacious."

"Why that last word?"

"Because he'll never give up trying to make you love him."

"I do love him—as a sister—as a mother."

"Oh, tosh!" said Archie, with calm rudeness.
"Go and look at yourself in the glass. Sisterly and motherly affection is bunkum."

"It's all I can give Juve, anyhow."

"It isn't all he expects, my dear girl. See here, Les." Archie rose and stood up, looking very straight and handsome and strong. "I haven't got ice in my veins, but good red blood. And the way in which that confounded boy looks at you——"

"A cat may look at a king," she interrupted, smiling.

"You aren't a king and Juve isn't a cat," said Godwin coolly; "so the proverb doesn't apply to either of you. I shan't stand any more of that boy's impertinence in hanging after you. And you encourage him."

"Me?" Lesley sat up indignantly.

"Yes, you. Juve sat next to you at supper: at your request."

"My dear, the poor boy was all nerves, and no wonder after what he has gone through lately. I didn't think that my attempt to soothe him would make you so jealous."

"I'm not jealous."

"Oh, aren't you? Only a little ruffled, I suppose?"

"I object to your encouraging Mendel," said Archie sulkily.

The instinctive mother which lurks in all women came uppermost in Miss Basser, and she saw in her lover nothing but the bad boy streak which is in all men. "I wish you'd talk sense and see sense," she said tartly. "It isn't necessary for me to tell you that I love you."

"No—o—o," drawled Godwin doubtfully; "all the same I like to hear you say it," he added briskly.

"There must be a feminine streak in your character, my dear," she retorted disdainfully. "That is a woman's speech." She rose to cross the room and kneel beside him coaxingly. "I like you better when you are a rough, manly bear. Our sex likes strength, you know."
"I suppose if I knocked you down you would adore me," said Archie, thinking of Daudet's heroine in *Sappho*. "Queer natures you women have."

"It's our queer natures which fascinate you men," said Lesley, sitting on the carpet and hugging her knees. "You mustn't be hard on Juve. He is an unfortunate genius cursed with super-sensitive nerves."

"Why can't he control them?" said the man, who was not a genius, obtusely.

"Because they get the better of him unawares. Juve, I am sure, has a strong will, and in a good way, or a bad way, would go far. But either way, being governed by his nerves, he would act impulsively."

"What's the use of his will, then?"

Lesley looked impatient, for her finer sense could grasp much that the young man's duller perceptions could not reach out to. "His will is at the mercy of his nerves," she repeated, putting her remark in a different form. "Those make him act impulsively without calmly considering the whole. He only sees one point at a time, and very often, owing to his impetuousness, that point is wrong. Juve would do a wrong thing one moment and would be sorry for it the next. At the same time—no, don't interrupt, please—he would make a great and noble sacrifice, without expecting any praise."

"Rather an uncomfortable kind of nature, Les."

'Yes, poor boy,' she said sadly; "uncomfortable to himself and to all those who have anything to do with him. If he had any one to guide him—but there!"—she jumped up and went to poke the fire—"he won't be guided: his will is too strong and his nerves are too unruly to be guided."

"But if you——?"

"No, I can do nothing. What I can do I will, because I like the boy and am extremely sorry for him. You would be sorry also if you could see him as I do, Archie."
Oh, Juve isn't a bad sort of chap," admitted Godwin handsomely.

"Back up that opinion by showing yourself less jealous," retorted the girl, nodding vigorously. "Don't be all talking and no doing."

"You are hard on me, Les."

"If I didn't love you so much, I shouldn't take the trouble to be hard. Do try and be a man and not a silly child, Archie."

Godwin laughed and coloured and wriggled uneasily. There was much common-sense in what Lesley said, although he could not altogether grasp her meaning.

"Well, you're cleverer than I am, Les," he said awkwardly. "I don't deny that. I'm only an ordinary sort of chap, who loves you."

"I am content with that," she said decisively. "An extraordinary sort of chap, such as Juve is, wouldn't make life easy. All the same, I am fond of him."

Archie nodded. "Now that I know the kind of scientific fondness you mean, I am not jealous," he said quietly. "You can put him under the microscope as often as you like, my dear girl."

"It's not that," she answered, looking into the fire; "it's—but you would not understand. We'll let it stand at that Archie." She laughed, for the limitations of Godwin's really kindly mind appealed to her sense of humour. They were so very crude.

"Why do you laugh?" he asked heavily.

"My dear old bear." She came behind him and placed her arms round his neck tenderly. "I don't believe there ever existed so stupid a bear."

Godwin caught at her hand. "Bears are fond of hugging," he said seductively.

"This particular bear won't get any hugging just now," said Lesley, and disengaged herself, still laughing. She returned to sit primly on the sofa, and not a moment too soon, for just as she settled down Juve walked into the room. Godwin gave an understanding
grunt and lighted his pipe again. He guessed that Lesley’s sharp ears had caught the sound of the lad’s approaching footsteps. Her sudden terminating of their happy moments was thus explained.

"Well, here I am," said Juve in a rather banal way. "I couldn’t get away from the library any earlier."

"Have you and the dad been having an interesting talk?" asked Lesley, not troubling to think what the talk was about, as she had by no means a suspicious nature.

"Very interesting." Mendel showed his white teeth in a pleasant smile, when he recalled the subject of conversation. "He gave me very good advice."

"Oh!" Miss Basser sat up and really did become suspicious. "I never knew you to go to the dad before for advice."

"It’s never too late to mend," said Mendel blandly. "You see, what with the death of my grandmother and the sale of the property, and the poverty, which makes it difficult for me to get my chance, one does need advice."

"And what advice, if I may ask, did the dad give you?"

"He advised me to accept the offer of the lawyer who acted for my grandmother. He is going to finance me—that is, he’s going to arrange for a concert at St. James’s Hall where I can play. I would rather have done it myself," said Juve, anxiously concealing the real reason why he had sought Mr. Basser, "but what with getting a new cottage and furnishing, the money which came from the sale wasn’t enough. And my grandmother had very little money, as I found after her death."

"I thought she had that plantation in New Orleans," said Godwin, who was intently listening to Juve’s observations and explanations.

"Oh, that was sold long ago. My grandfather, Achille Dubourg, sold it, and I understand that grand-
mother came to England to live on the rags and tatters of her former prosperity. But there,"—Mendel shrugged his shoulders—"I never did know much about my grandmother and her affairs."

"You don't know who killed her, I suppose?" asked the other young man.

"No. Why should you think I know?"

"Well,"—this time Godwin shrugged his shoulders—"there might be something in Madame Valeria's past life which—"

"I know very little about her past life," interrupted Juve sharply. "I have said that once: I have said it twice: I'll say it three times if you like."

"My dear boy," put in Lesley, who saw that Mendel was getting impossible again, "Archie only wants to help you."

"In what way?"

"He wishes to learn who killed your grandmother."

"I don't see how that will help me," replied the boy coldly. "She's dead and buried, with all I don't know and all I do know, packed away with her body. We never got on together and I'm not keen on putting myself out to avenge her."

"Juve! Juve! She brought you up. You owe her something."

"How did she bring me up?" demanded Mendel fiercely. "By blows and bitter words and constant unkindness. I'm not an angel to forgive that. She's dead. Let her rest. I've turned over a new leaf since leaving the villa, and I don't propose to write my grandmother's name on that leaf."

"Well, I don't blame you," said Godwin, sympathizing with the boy, since he knew to some extent how cruelly Madame Valeria had treated him; "but don't speak more ill of the dead than you can help. It isn't—isn't sporting, you know."

"I don't want to speak of the dead at all," said
Juve indifferently; "it was you, Lesley, who started the subject."

"It was," she replied determinedly, "and I'm going to talk more about the subject. It was for that reason I asked you to come here."

"Oh!" Juve remembered his exultation when Mother Monkey gave him the invitation, and his spirits were damped now that he knew the reason for the same.

"Well, I don't wish to talk about the matter." He rose, as if to go.

"No! No! No!" cried Miss Basser, stretching out her hand. "Sit down. For my sake you must talk about it. I want Archie to learn the truth."

"Why?" asked Mendel bluntly, and sitting down again.

"Because my father"—Lesley hesitated, as she wished to explain without revealing her true reason for re-opening the case—"well, my father feels that your grandmother's death is a slur on the village, which will not be removed until the truth becomes known and the criminal is brought to justice. You understand?"

"Oh yes, I understand." Mendel smiled, but not pleasantly. "I understand very well indeed what you mean," and, after his conversation with Basser in the library, there was no doubt that he spoke honestly enough.

"Well, then," went on Lesley, deceived as to his meaning, "I want you to help Archie to discover the assassin."

"How can I?"

"By telling all you know."

"But I know nothing," persisted the boy doggedly. "If I did, I would certainly bring the murderer to justice."

"You said you wouldn't ten minutes ago," said Godwin, removing his pipe.
"Not if it meant going out of my way," retorted Juve angrily. "My grandmother never put herself out for me, so why should I put myself out for her? What I meant was to seize the criminal if I had a clue to his identity. But I'm not going to hunt for that clue."

"Oh yes, you are," said Lesley promptly, "for my sake."

"Oh, I'd do anything for you," said Mendel hurriedly. "I'd be an ungrateful beast if I didn't, considering how you have treated me. Few English ladies would have troubled themselves about a foreign fiddling brat."

"Old man! Old man!" protested Archie quickly.

"Don't talk like that, Juve," said Lesley, much pained by the boy's bitter tone. "You know we all like you and admire you. Come! Come! We are getting no nearer to the point. Archie told me that after the inquest you said to him that my cousins, the Purcanes, knew more about the matter than they admitted."

"Yes." Juve nodded. "I said that."

"And you hinted to me some time ago that my cousins were my enemies, advising me to be on my guard."

"Yes, I did that."

"Also," put in Godwin, rising to stroll towards the fire, "you agreed with me that the Purcane witnesses might have been bribed."

"You never told me that you suspected my cousins," said Lesley, turning towards her lover, before Juve could do more than nod his assent.

"I didn't want to, for, after all, they are your cousins," said Archie, with some hesitation, "and I really have no true grounds for suspecting them."

"Tavy and Maggie Salt were very uncertain that they saw my cousins, as they declared so positively
immediately after the murder," remarked Miss Basser swiftly.

"Those witnesses were disqualified, I know, Les, but they might have seen the men as they said."

"But the evidence of the Wrest family——?"

"They might have been bribed, as I suggested to Juve here."

"It seems to me," said Juve dryly, "that you believe the Purcanes are guilty."

"Yes and no." Godwin looked perplexed, and turned from the fire into which he had been looking. "I can't see any motive for their committing such a crime as murder, and yet—and yet——"

"Well?" asked Lesley impatiently.

Archie passed his hand across his forehead and frowned. "I can hardly explain myself; I can't put my suspicions into words. Why did Tavy and the housemaid bring the Purcanes into the matter at all unless they had really and truly seen them?"

"Imagination."

"But they might have imagined a dozen other people," persisted Godwin. "Why those two in particular?"

"We're talking in a circle," said the girl, meditatively. "For the moment let us assume that the evidence of the Wrest family exonerates my cousins, as I hope it does."

"It did at the inquest, worse luck," said Juve bluntly.

The others turned to stare at him. "Worse luck," echoed Godwin. "Why do you say that?"

"Because I don't like the Purcanes," said Mendel coolly, "and they don't mean any good so far as Lesley is concerned. I wish they had been arrested and tried and condemned to be hanged. Only death will make them stop making mischief."

Miss Basser stared aghast at this outburst. "What do you mean?"
"Can I speak plainly?" Mendel looked rather at Godwin than at the girl when he asked this pointed question.

"Of course," said the other young man.

"Well then, I love Lesley!"

"Oh!" said Archie, and "Oh!" said Lesley.

"You said I could speak plainly," retorted Juve, with his eyes on the carpet, "and I can't explain myself unless I do. I love Lesley, and I am always thinking how to guard her from harm."

"I can do that," snapped Godwin, whose temper was rising.

"You aren't officially entitled to, are you?" asked the boy, looking up with a flushed and angry face; "that is, you aren't engaged to Miss Basser?"

"Don't ask about things which don't concern you, Juve," said Lesley, looking indignant. "I shall be angry with you if you talk in this way. Besides, I am in no danger."

"Indeed you are," said Mendel grimly.

"What is the danger?"

"You may have a third suitor. I love you; Godwin loves you; and Joseph Purcane loves you, or your money."

"Juve!" Lesley caught her breath and looked furious, as did Godwin, at the mere suggestion of such a thing.

Mendel paid no attention to the anger of either, but went on coldly, "Do you know anything about your grandfather's will?"

"I know that he left the property to my grandmother, afterwards to my father, who will leave it to me," said Lesley sharply.

"He can't leave it to you," said Juve coolly; "that's where the Purcanes come in. Once, when they were leaving my grandmother's house after an evening at cards, I overheard the father say to the son that the
money should never have gone to your grandfather, but to him."

"To Cousin Marcus?"

"Yes. He also said that Joseph might get back the money if he married you."

"Oh!" Lesley looked angry,—"I wouldn't marry Joseph for the world."

"So Joseph seemed to think, and said so. Marcus said if the money couldn't be got in one way, it might be in another."

"What were his precise words?" asked Godwin, who was white with rage.

Juve repeated them. "The old woman will die soon, and Paul is so sickly that he can't last long. An accident might happen to the girl, and then the money would come back to us."

"An accident," said Lesley, amazed. "What kind of accident?"

"Any kind that your cousins could arrange so as to get you out of the way."

"Oh, you are dreaming."

"So I thought and afterwards made it my business to go to Somerset House and examine the will. The property was left to your grandmother for life; afterwards to your father for life; then to you. And if you died," ended the boy slowly, "Marcus Purcane was to inherit."

"Do you mean to say that he would kill Lesley to get the money?" demanded Godwin incredulously.

"I'm sure of it. And for that reason I suspect he and his son may have murdered my grandmother. Oh, I can't give any other reason. I cannot see any motive for their doing that for nothing. But if they plotted one murder, they are quite capable of plotting another."

Lesley looked at the boy's flushed face and feverishly bright eyes. "I think you must be crazy," she
said faintly, for even her strong nerves had received a shock.

"I may be," said Mendel quietly; "but that's what I think. Joseph may come here and ask you to marry him. I can't be sure if he will, or will not. But if he does and if you refuse, why then there is danger."

"Nonsense," said Godwin vigorously. "Joseph Purcane is not the man to——"

Juve turned on him fiercely. "He's the man to do anything to get money and there is nothing mean or sordid, or dirty or dangerous he would not do to get what he wants. I have made inquiries in London and the man is a beast out and out: a dangerous beast, and will stick at nothing to gain his ends."

"But the law?"

"Oh, the law. The law," said Mendel contemptuously, "what does a rogue-in-grain like Joseph Purcane care for the law? He'll manage to get rid of Lesley in some way without putting his neck in danger. You may be sure of that, Godwin. Lesley is in danger, while he lives, while his father lives; for the old man is being worked upon by the young one. Lesley is in danger, and I am guarding her. I shall continue to guard her. Whether those two creatures killed my grandmother I don't know, but they are capable of any crime."

"But there is no reason why——"

"No. There is no reason and the moon is made of green cheese," said Juve, rudely walking to the door. "But now you know what I think, and can take it or leave it as you choose. Leave off hunting for my grandmother's murderer and watch over Lesley's safety. Good night."

"But Juve—Juve!" Lesley ran towards the door with outstretched arms, only to find it closed sharply in her face. With a helpless look, rare in one usually so clear-headed and strong-minded, she turned to her
lover. "What does it all mean?" she asked beseechingly.

"It means that Juve is mad, I think," said Archie grimly, and caught her in his arms as she fell. For the first time in her life the girl had fainted.

CHAPTER XII

A FULFILLED PROPHECY

Lesley speedily recovered from her faint, without any one in the house being the wiser. This was due to Archie's strong common-sense, as he foresaw that troublesome questions would be asked as to its cause, and those would mean some explanation, however vague, of Mendel's astounding conversation. Godwin, and Lesley also when she revived, decided that it would be best to say nothing about the matter, lest things should become even more complicated than they were. The young man would have discussed the problem that Juve had set them, but that Lesley dismissed him. Worn out with anxiety, she could not summon sufficient strength to continue the conversation.

When Godwin departed the girl saw the two old people before bed-time according to her usual custom. Mrs. Basser, sleepy as a dormouse, did not trouble herself about Lesley's wan looks, but Paul noticed them and, mindful of his interview with Juve in the library, anxiously asked what was the matter. His daughter merely said that she was tired and wanted to go to bed without delay. With this explanation Basser was forced to be satisfied, as he could not press for any further reason without revealing his own terrified state of mind. Had he then and there told of Mendel's hints, Lesley might have found some clue
out of the maze in which she was wandering. But as it was, she felt too weary to ask questions and sought repose as soon as possible. That is, she went to bed—for repose was out of the question.

And indeed how could she sleep after hearing what the boy had to say about the Purcanes and their plotting? Lesley, tossing and turning, sitting up and lying down, during the slowly crawling hours of darkness, told herself that she did not believe one word of the vague accusations. It seemed monstrous that her relatives should scheme so wickedly, and little as she liked them, it appeared foolish to credit them with such midsummer madness. If any one was mad it was Juve himself, who without rhyme or reason declared the existence of a conspiracy, which sounded more like fiction than fact. Moreover, the perplexed girl could not see the connection between the Purcane plots and the murder of Madame Valeria. Juve certainly hinted that the one had to do with the other, which, on the face of it, was ridiculous. The death of the old woman certainly brought her cousins no nearer to the end Mendel insisted they had in view, so why should they commit a useless crime? The girl’s head ached in trying to solve the problem.

Then again, as she had told Archie, she had an idea that her father knew something about the crime. If such was the case, had his knowledge anything to do with the Purcanes’ machinations? Did he know that they were scheming for the money, and was it necessary for Madame Valeria’s death to take place in order that the plotters should obtain the fortune? For the life of her, Lesley could not see the connection, and did her best to dismiss the subject. But it would not be dismissed, and the more the poor girl turned over matters in her distracted mind, the more bewildered did she become. Finally, towards the small hours of the morning and after much groping in mental darkness, Lesley determined to go to the fountain-head for
information. That is, she made up her mind to lay everything before her father and ask for his opinion;—if indeed she was right in assuming that he knew something of the truth concerning the murder. Having come to this conclusion she went to sleep as the dawn was breaking, being quite worn out with thoughts of terror and trouble. When her maid came to waken her with the morning cup of tea Lesley decided to take an extra hour for recuperation. She felt that it was impossible to discuss matters quietly with her father until her body was more rested and her mind was clearer.

On leaving her bedroom, Miss Basser found that she had worried herself unnecessarily about a possible scene with her troublesome parent. He had gone to Town by the nine-twenty express from Havering, and had left a message for her that he would not return for two days, as he had business to attend to. Mrs. Basser, for all her amiable selfishness, or perhaps for that very reason, gave the message with a troubled air. After all, Paul was her only son, and his sayings and doings were certain to affect her tranquil life in one way or another. Self, as usual, was at the root of her complaining.

"Your father is never any the better for these journeys to Town," she said more seriously than was usual with her. "He always returns looking ill and behaving in an absent-minded manner, as if something was on his mind. It is very hard on me, dear, as I am too old to be worried."

"Oh, the dad won’t worry you more than I can help," said Lesley, kissing the sweet old egoist, "and next time he goes to Town I’ll make him take me with him."

"Well," said Mrs. Basser with a sigh, as she settled again to her book, "I think a change would do you good, my dear. You don’t look well, and for goodness sake, Lesley, don’t fall ill, for then all the worry of
household matters would fall on me. I can't do without my little helper," ended the old lady as a playful excuse for her selfishness.

Lesley laughed in a rather forced way, for she knew that this old child took everything and gave nothing in return save barren thanks. But things were too serious for her to worry over such defects in her grandmother's character, and she went away to busy herself with domestic affairs. Only by physical work, and interest in petty every-day things, could she evade thinking about the conversation of the previous night. But during the afternoon a remembrance of its terrors was brought home to her in a most astonishing way. So much so, that Lesley very nearly fainted again. For Juve proved himself to be an unconscious prophet, inasmuch as Joseph Purcane paid her a visit in order to make her a proposal of marriage.

The dark-complexioned little gentleman, dapper and neat in his dress as though he had stepped out of a band-box, presented himself in the long drawing-room with an ingratiating smile. Miss Basser was dismayed by his unexpected appearance, which followed so strangely on the conversation of Mendel, and could hardly bear to shake hands with him, when she thought of what the boy had said. She remembered the warning words plainly, and even as she invited her cousin to be seated, they rang in her ears.

"Joseph may come here and ask you to marry him. I can't be sure, if he will or will not. But if he does and you refuse, why then there is danger." Those were the words, and now that Joseph had presented himself, there seemed to be more truth in them than she had believed. Later, when the visitor explained why he had come, Lesley was thoroughly impressed by the wisdom of Juve's unconscious prophecy. But, as yet, her cousin was merely breaking the ice, so as to establish a warmer feeling between them, and Miss Basser, although she dreaded the worst, did not expect
it to happen. All the same, she was on her guard and received Purcane's attentions rather coldly.

"I don't often come here, you know," said Joseph volubly, "for somehow I don't get on with your father. It isn't my fault, so much as his, with the 'keep-off-the-grass' air he adopts."

"Did you come here to talk about my father?" asked the girl stiffly.

"No, my dear girl, I didn't." Joseph cleared his throat and hitched his chair closer to that of his hostess. "There are more pleasant things to talk about. You, for instance."

"I don't want to talk about myself," she answered, flushing with annoyance, for Joseph, being accustomed to free and easy society, spoke with covert insolence.

"Ah, you take after your father, who might have been born with a poker for a back. I never saw such a stiff old gentleman. I wish you'd treat me in a more cousinly way, Lesley."

"Why should I?"

"We are relatives," said Purcane with a sly look.

"And strangers," she flashed out, returning his glance with one which should have made him hold his tongue for very shame. But Joseph was too confident in his own powers of attraction to notice the silent rebuke. He became more free and easy and more voluble than ever.

"We won't be strangers any longer. You see, owing to the will of my governor's uncle, the two branches of our lot have been at loggerheads. I want to make things up and bury the hatchet. It's silly for us to be at daggers drawn, when there's no reason for it."

"What do you mean?" More and more did Juve's warning impress itself on the girl, as she asked this question.

"Well, it's this way," said Purcane, swinging one leg over the other and lying back in a loose-limbed
attitude. "My great-uncle Basser left his money to your granddad, who was the son of his sister, on condition that he took the family name."

"I know all this," said Lesley quietly. "My grandfather's real name was Graves, and he changed it when he got the money. Why tell me what I know?"

"I wish to make things clear," replied Joseph, rather disconcerted by her coolness. "Changed his name from Nicholas Graves to Nicholas Basser. Yes, I rather think he did, and any one would, to rake in five thousand a year, a whole village and this top-hole house. It was a shame."

"Why?"

"Because my governor should have had a half-share," said Joseph sulkily. "He was old Basser's nephew also—the son of the other sister."

"As I wasn't born at the time," said Lesley, with a shrug, "you can't expect me to take the blame. Mr. Basser had a right to dispose of his money as he liked, I suppose."

"No, he hadn't. My governor should have got half."

"You mean that you should have got half," she said, contemptuously.

"Oh, I wasn't born at the time any more than you were," said the man airily and once more confident. "But had the governor got the cash, I'd have collared it in the end as his son. But as he hasn't got it, I want to see if we can arrange things."

"So that you may get it?"

"Exactly. You've got a clear head, Lesley. It's this way, you see. The money comes to you after the old girl and your father go under, so, to bring the disunited branches of the family together, I thought we might marry."

"Oh, did you?" Lesley preserved an unsmiling countenance, but quailed inwardly, as she thought of Juve's warning. What he said was coming true word
by word. "And my view of the matter counts for nothing, I presume?"

"Oh, it counts for a good deal," said Joseph impudently. "Of course you've got to make up your mind. But apart from the justice of the arrangement which I propose, I'm sure you can't say that I'd make a bad husband. Just look at me." Purcane rose and revolved slowly before her, with a self-satisfied smile. "I'm nearly forty, but age won't stand in the way, even though you're just two-and-twenty."

"Oh, thank you," Lesley laughed. Now that the first shock of the fulfilment of the prophecy was over, she saw the humour of the situation. "So all you have to do is to command me to follow you to the altar?"

"Oh, you needn't come if you don't want to," said Joseph, his vanity hurt by the laugh and the speech. "There's many a girl would jump at me."

"Well, cousin, and why don't you let them jump?"

"Because I love you."

"Or my money."

"Well, money isn't a bad thing," said Purcane, sitting down in his former easy-going way. "I never did believe in love-in-a-cottage. Besides, all that romantic rubbish is over and done with. Nowadays a man wants a pal, a chum, a comrade—a sensible sort of mate, you know."

"Very nicely put," said Miss Basser sarcastically, "very tactful indeed. But I fear that as a pal, a chum, a comrade, or a mate you wouldn't suit me."

"Oh, I say, my dear girl, don't be hasty," protested Joseph, jumping up again, and again, preening his plumes like the peacock he was. "What better husband can you find than me? I'm a gentleman; I ain't bad-looking; I'm your cousin and if you want romance"—he sank on one knee and kissed her hand before she could snatch it away.—"I'm your slave."

"Get up, sir, and don't make a fool of yourself,"
cried Lesley, rising in great wrath at this fresh piece of impertinence. "Nothing would induce me to marry you even if you were the only man in the world."

Purcane's jaw dropped, and he got on his feet slowly, looking as foolish as a man well could look. "You don't mean that," he said piteously.

"I do. Twenty times over I do. How dare you come here and make a business proposal to me the benefit of which is all on your side!"

"A business proposal." Purcane began to look ugly, and stared greedily at this beautiful haughty nymph of the chase, who spurned him so scornfully.

"Yes, merely that. You are to marry me and take my money when it comes to me, and be my lord and master for your own pleasure. Where do I come in, Cousin Joseph? What do I get?"

Purcane smiled fatuously. "You get me."

"You! A man who gambles and drinks and bets and runs after married women."

"Come! Come!" Joseph grew red and angry at this plain speaking.

"If you address me in that manner, Mr. Purcane, I'll have you turned out of the house," cried Miss Basser, thoroughly enraged.

"You'd better not." The man's manner became dangerous and sullen, so much so that Juve's warning again rang in the girl's ears. "If you won't come to the arrangement I speak of, and marry me within the year, I'll——"

"You'll what?" demanded Lesley, furiously angry and advancing towards him with crimson cheeks and angry eyes.

Joseph retreated. "I'll be very sorry," he said lamely, and admired her more than ever in her royal rage.

"You didn't mean that," she said fiercely, and clenching her hands. "You uttered a threat. Do you think that I care for threats? Say another word
and I shall drive over to Tarhaven and place myself under the protection of Inspector Quinton."

"As if I cared for Quinton!" jeered Joseph, but rather nervously, as Lesley perceived.

"Care for Quinton! I should think you did, seeing that you only escaped by the merest accident from being arrested by him in connection with the death of Madame Valeria."

"I had nothing to do with that," said the man, looking as black as night. "At the inquest my innocence was made clear. I wasn’t near the house, neither was my father."

"Tavy Tern and that housemaid say otherwise."

"And Wrest along with his wife and child contradict them," sneered Joseph with a scowl. "How dare you bring such an accusation against me, when I have been cleared by the law? Both I and my father left the Court without a stain on our characters."

"I said what I said because you dared to threaten me," retorted Lesley, suddenly becoming calm. "Whether you are innocent or guilty matters nothing to me. Go away and don’t dare to come here again."

"I’ll come as often as I like."

"I shall order the servants not to admit you."

"Oh!" sneered the man slyly, "and suppose your father orders them to let me in?"

"My father won’t."

"Oh yes, he will. Accusing me and the governor!" cried Purcane, virtuously indignant. "How do we know if your father hasn’t had a hand in the business?"

Lesley felt suddenly faint, but with an effort pulled herself together. This speech of Joseph was confirming her worst fears, but she was not going to give him the advantage of seeing that he had made any impression. "What do you mean?" she asked indignantly.

"What I say. I speak plainly, don’t I? Your father was as often at that old woman’s house as my
governor and I were. If we gambled with her, so did he. There isn’t a sin you can lay to my charge you can’t lay to his. Aye and more, I don’t smoke opium anyhow."

"Smoke opium?"

"Yes! Why does your father go to Town and come back looking like a wash-out wreck? Why did he stop going to Town and take up with that old woman? Answer me those questions, if you please, with your high and mighty virtue."

"Do you mean to say that my father smoked opium?"

"No, I don’t. I mean to say that he does smoke opium. That’s why he goes to London. You’ll find him when he does go, in a Chinese den at the Docks. And Madame Valeria, finding out his weakness, pandered to it. She smoked herself, and along with your father used to have gay times."

"Stop! Stop!" Lesley grasped the back of a chair, so weak did she feel. That her miserable father should indulge in such a vice had never crossed her mind. That he should smoke opium was bad enough; that this leering scoundrel should know was worse.

"I won’t stop!" cried Purcane, seeing that he was quickly getting the upper hand and rejoicing in his strength. "And you accuse me and my governor of murder. What about that stiff-backed father of yours? How do you know he didn’t stick the old woman, seeing that often when he was at her house he didn’t know what he was doing."

"It’s a lie," said Lesley, so fiercely that the man recoiled; "and you shall face my father with your lie. He has gone to Town——"

"Ah!" Joseph sneered and laughed, "to the Chinese den by the Docks. I thought the old buffer couldn’t keep off it, after Madame Valeria’s death. Failing her, he goes to Lo Keong for the black smoke."

"It’s a lie," reiterated Lesley feverishly. "You
say this in order to force me to marry you."

"No, I don't. I wouldn't have said a word about it, if you hadn't hinted at me and the governor being mixed with the murder. Face your father! Oh yes, I'll do that. He won't dare to deny the truth."

"We'll see about that," said Lesley, with a confidence she was far from feeling. "I don't believe a word you say."

"Others may."

"You wouldn't dare to tell any one that ——" The girl broke off. She saw from the expression of Purcane's face that she had placed a weapon in his hand by acknowledging her fears. "Oh yes, I would, my dear," he said with insolent familiarity, "and I will unless you marry me"; and thrusting his hands into his pockets, he straddled before her in a swaggering manner.

This attitude had a different result to what he intended. From being nervous and angry, his cousin became cool and quick-witted. Knowing instinctively that what this scoundrel said was true, she guessed that any yielding would only bring out his blackmailing propensities. For the sake of her weak miserable father, she would have to control herself, and did so with an effort, which cost her dearly hereafter when her strained nerves relaxed. Also she saw the necessity of gaining time, so as to enlist the services of Godwin and Juve in order to get at the root of things and spoil the malignant game which Joseph was playing. For a few moments she was silent, collecting her wits and arranging her plan of action. Purcane stared at her victoriously, weighed her up and finally—beaten by her cold silence, was the first to speak.

"Come now, old girl," he said vulgarly, "don't you think we might pull together very nicely in double harness?"

Lesley could have killed him, so like a leering satyr did he look. In the face of what he knew, it was useless
to show anger. She wished to gain time, and could only do so by acting in a cool and business-like manner. "Let us understand each other," she said with a com­posure which rather baffled the blackmailer. "You wish to marry me, not for love, but to get the money."

"Oh, I dare say love will come," said Joseph with another leer. "I know a pretty girl when I see her."

"We'll put that on one side," said Miss Basser, who now knew how a woman could kill a man without compunction. "You wish to marry me."

"Yes, I do," said Purcane, annoyed that his gallan­try was not appreciated.

"Very good," said Lesley coldly. "I'll give you my answer on the first day of the New Year."

"I want your answer now."

"You won't get it, then. I concede this point—that I will consider the advisability of marrying you to save my father's name. But I shall reply to your question at my leisure."

"And marry meanwhile!" he said with an evil smile.

"If what you say is true, how can I?" asked the girl, with feigned indifference. "For your own sake you won't say a word about my father's weakness. Knowledge of that is your only chance of getting the fortune you claim as your right."

Joseph nodded in a sullen way. "You've got a clever head, I will say that, and put the matter in a nutshell. I'll hold my tongue sure enough, if you will promise to marry me."

"On the first day of the New Year you will get your answer. Not before."

Lesley spoke steadily and was quite determined to delay her reply until the time stated. Joseph, having gained so much, wanted to gain more, and tried in every way to make her change her mind. He coaxed, he stormed, he threatened, he cajoled, but all to no purpose. Lesley stuck to her guns, and after twenty
minutes of fruitless persuasion he surrendered. "Have it your own way, then, my girl," he growled, picking up his hat with an angry snatch. "I'll give you the time, hang you for an obstinate jade. But no tricks, mind you."

"Leave the room." Lesley stamped her foot.

"Oh, I'm going." He strolled leisurely towards the door. "But no tricks, I say. That young Mendel and that puppy Godwin dangle after you. I won't have it. Remember you're my property now."

"Not until the New Year, and then perhaps not," said Lesley between her teeth in quite a transpontine manner.

"We'll see, we'll see." Joseph placed his hat jauntily on his head. "Ta-ta for the moment. Best of love." And kissing his hand he sauntered out of the room, out of the house, leaving Lesley tearful with shame and fear. And all for the sake of her grown-up child, who laid his burden so cheerfully on her young shoulders.

"Think I tickled that haughty damsel up a bit," thought Mr. Purcane complacently, as he walked homeward. "She won't ride the high horse with me again, I guess."

He lighted a cigarette, and in his smart dapper manner tripped out of the village towards the square gloomy house wherein he lived with his miserly old father. Dreaming of ample money and new pleasures, Joseph unlocked the door—it was generally kept locked by his suspicious father—and walked into the dreary room usually occupied by Marcus Purcane. Looking like a student of the Middle Ages with his white beard and skull cap and flowing dressing-gown, the old man glanced up as his hopeful son entered.

"Well?" he asked, rubbing his lean hands and speaking impatiently.

"Done it, governor."

"Will she marry you, Jos?"
"You bet, old son. The whole married business will be settled by the New Year."

"Good," said Marcus, rubbing his hands again. "Then there's no need for the other business." He shivered. "I'm glad of that, Jos. It's dangerous."

CHAPTER XIII

AN AMAZING ACCUSATION

SINCE taking over the management of things in her teens, Miss Basser had undergone more petty worry than usually falls to the share of youth. It was her duty—one which had been thrust upon her—to look after a couple of old people, troublesome, thoughtless and invincibly obstinate. Although in their idle hours, which were many, they did nothing particularly blameworthy, they manufactured mischief in many trifling ways and kept the girl always on the alert to undo what they had done. Yet, so far, neither the old lady, nor her weak son, had done anything specially dangerous likely to cause a commotion outside the four walls of home. Lesley was well used to these tea-cup storms, but although these tried her temper, they did no harm in the long run. Every family, great or small, rich or poor, has these puny household disturbances, since parents and children are human beings and not angels.

But now things were different: more disagreeable, more serious, more far-reaching in results. Lesley was less irritated at Joseph's impertinence in proposing marriage than frightened by the information he had given her concerning her father's weakness. The girl knew nothing about the black smoke, but had some vague idea that the use of opium induced men to unconsciously commit crimes which consciously they would
never think of doing. It was just possible in a moment of aberration that her father might have murdered the old woman, and Lesley felt sick at the mere idea. She had got her irresponsible parent out of many scrapes, but it seemed impossible to extricate him from this one. Opium, or no opium, the girl could not bring herself to believe that so kind-hearted a man as her father assuredly was could, or would, have stabbed a defenceless woman. She began to think that Joseph was a liar, and had much cause to do so, for her cousin had an unscrupulous nature, and stopped at nothing to gain his ends. So much she believed from personal knowledge and from the sinister hints given by Juve. Yes! Joseph was certainly a liar.

Yet—here she changed her mind on reflection—in this instance he might really be indulging in the luxury of speaking the truth. Lesley remembered her father's agitation immediately after the crime had been committed: his unwillingness to discuss the matter: his pointed wish that neither Archie nor herself should look into things connected with it. Then again she recollected how jubilant he had been when an open verdict had been brought in at the inquest, and how he had persistently looked upon the matter as being ended once and for all. Now these vague doubts of something hidden and dangerous had been crystallized into a definite shape of dread. Think as she might, it was impossible to get away from the appalling idea that her weak foolish father was in some way entangled. He had not struck the blow himself: even had he been under the influence of the drug, Lesley could not bring herself to believe that: but it might be, that he knew something of the truth, and could name the real criminal. That he did not do so, if indeed he knew, was probably owing to his dread of being arrested as an accessory after the fact.

The girl longed for the comfort of Godwin's advice, and felt that even his mere presence would strengthen
AN AMAZING ACCUSATION

her, and make the outlook less ominous. But Archie had been summoned by his editor to go North for a few days to report on an unexpected strike in the Manchester manufacturing districts. There was no chance of seeing him for some time, yet it was necessary for her to take immediate action. She was on the point of seeking the rector, but a moment’s reflection told her that she would gain nothing by telling him of her trouble. Mr. Godwin was a kind-hearted, well-meaning man, but had the Levitical narrow-mindedness of the ordinary parson, and was more likely to look at the matter from a moral point of view than in any practical way. There was Juve, of course. She might see him and ask questions. But then she was not sure of the boy. He meant well and she was assured that he loved her sufficiently to do anything she requested and to assist her in every possible way. But he was an unsafe counsellor, since she never knew what his unruly nerves would urge him to say, or do. Mendel, she felt sure, was not the person to consult. But who was? Lesley had just reached this point in her meditations when she recollected what Mother Monkey had said. The old woman had warned her to let things rest, and had declared that if she did not she would be sorry for herself.

The moment this memory returned to the girl, she started to her feet and began to walk up and down the library. Thither she had gone, after the troublesome conversation with Joseph, for no particular reason that she knew of. Most of the afternoon, she had shunned the childish company of her grandmother and had wandered vaguely about the house, passing from one room to another, searching mentally for what she could not find. Now it seemed that she had found it in the library whither her apparently aimless steps had led her. Pacing the room, Lesley glanced at the clock and saw that it was now close on four, and that as the light was still strong, she would just
have time to run to the cottage and ask Mother Monkey for a cup of tea. In the course of conversation she hoped to learn exactly what the old woman meant by her warning. It certainly had to do with her father, as Lesley thought. Hetty had been in the house when the death took place, and had entered the dismal sitting-room shortly after Madame Valeria had been struck down. Was it possible that she had seen anything, any one—Mr. Basser for instance? The girl groaned and shivered at the very idea and then comforted herself with the reflection that her father had come on that day, at that time, to this very library to sleep, as was often his custom on a Sunday. Yet if Mother Monkey did not connect her father with the crime, why did she say that she—Lesley—would be sorry if she didn’t let things rest as they were?

Walking up and down, and round about the vast sombre room, Lesley asked herself the question over and over again, but without getting any answer. Sometimes she would stop and stare unseeing at the books, at the trophies of arms, at the busts of great students and out of the windows, but in an unseeing manner, for her brain was trying to work out the problem which Joseph had brought for her solution. Then a strange thing occurred: so much so that Lesley believed she had been brought into the library to learn what she did learn. It was certainly a clue, and one which seemed to confirm her worst fears. The knowledge came while she was gazing in a dreamy way at the cluster of weapons, civilized and uncivilized, which adorned the crimson wall between two bookcases opposite to the fireplace. Previously, although she did not know this, Juve, gazing at the same trophy, had seen what she now saw.

The trophy of arms was incomplete; the symmetrical effect of the pattern was marred by the absence of a knife. No, it was not exactly an ordinary knife. Lesley, who had often examined these things and
possessed an accurate memory, recollected that the
missing object was an Eastern dagger. Not a very
large one truly, but one likely to be deadly if wielded
by an expert. It had—the girl could see it in her
mind’s eye now—a slender blade, keen enough to be
used as a paper-knife, with a silver handle and a circle
of small rubies round the haft. For the moment, the
girl could not realize the discovery which she had made
and which Juve had made before her. She stared and
stared thunderstruck, then with a low moan reeled
back to fall into the deep arm-chair near the writing-
table. The Eastern dagger was missing. It was
really a small Afghan knife she remembered. Why was
it missing? Who had taken it? Madame Valeria
had been killed by a knife which could not be found.
Her father might have—but it was impossible. With
her hands in her hair, looking white and feeling sick
with fear, Lesley leaned her elbows on her knees and
tried to do away with the horrid vision her discovery
had so vividly conjured up. It was impossible: impossible: impossible. Yet there was her father’s
agitation to be accounted for; Hetty Hale’s hint and
Joseph’s almost direct accusation. It really did seem
as if—no—no—no! “I can’t believe it. I won’t
believe it.” Lesley rose and resolutely smoothed her
disordered hair before a near mirror. “If he did it
under the influence of opium, he would not have taken
the knife from that trophy. Only when he got to
Madame Valeria’s would he smoke and become irre-
sponsible. It is impossible that he could have taken
the knife to her house to kill her for no reason at all.
The knife is lost. I don’t believe it has anything to
do with the murder, or with dad either. Yet if—
oh—” She broke off with a frown at her own
foolish chatter. “What’s the use of talking to myself?
I’ll see that old woman and find out what she knows.”

Having made up her mind after this lengthy hour
of vacillation, Miss Basser went to her room and dressed
herself to pay the visit. On the way to the cottage she resolutely put behind her all horrible thoughts of sudden death, criminal courts and sinister gallows, striving to interest herself in commonplace things. As the cottage was down a lane at the back of the Grange, Lesley took a short cut through the kitchen garden, out of a narrow gate set in the encircling wall of red brick and across the meadows, which stretched up to almost leafless woodlands. In the sober light of the late October afternoon, the landscape looked dull and grey: mists lay over the fields and trees and hedgerows, and the yellow leaves she trod underfoot were lax and damp with moisture. The girl shivered, although it was not cold and she was warmly wrapped in expensive furs. The surroundings suggested all too surely the mental outlook of her own life, for that was dull and grey and dreary and depressing. Unwilling to linger amidst such sadness, and anxious to get her visit over that she might learn the worst, Miss Basser walked swiftly to the stile and climbed over it into the lane. There, as luck would have it, she saw Juve coming along leisurely on his bicycle, evidently on his way to Havering to catch the London train. For a moment the girl shrank back, as she did not wish to converse with the boy at the moment. But he, catching sight of her in the misty greyness, shouted and quickened the pace of his machine. Lesley braced herself for a few careless words, intending to cut short the interview, lest she should say too much. Her meditations in the library recurred to her worried mind, and she said again to herself that Mendel was not a safe counsellor. And to that view she held throughout the conversation which followed. And indeed Juve talked on quite another subject than that which occupied her thoughts.

"I say," said the boy, jumping off his bicycle and smiling gaily, "who would have thought of seeing you out-of-doors on this dull day?"
"You are out," said Miss Basser, not particularly graciously, for it was an effort to be social and civil. "Oh, me!" Juve leaned his machine against a thick bush and rubbed his gloved hands. "It is necessary for me to go to Town and earn my grub, else I wouldn't be careering along this dismal by-way, I assure you."

"Well, don't stand in the damp," said Lesley, making an effort to pass him. "Ride on quickly, or you'll be late."

"No, I won't." Mendel glanced at his watch. "I have ten minutes to spare, and can say all I want to in that time."

"I hope what you wish to say is more agreeable than what you did say last night," said Miss Basser acidly. "You were very rude."

"Was I?" The boy stared; in his selfishness it had not occurred to him that any one would take notice of his wilful moods. "I'm sorry. You see I am bothered a good deal with things."

"Other people have their bothers also."

"Well, I can't help that."

"You can help making yourself a nuisance," said Lesley wrathfully, "or you should try to help. Why did you behave so badly last night?"

The boy coloured and looked huffy. "I didn't mean to behave badly."

"I don't know what you meant, but you certainly did," she retorted with an angry look; "even my grandmother noticed it."

"Yes. She gave me one for myself. I suppose I was rather a worry."

"Then don't come to the Grange again unless you can behave properly."

"Oh, I say, Lesley, you don't mean that?"

"Yes, I do," said Miss Basser resolutely. "You are growing up, Juve, and should put away childish things."
"You are hard on a chap," coaxed Mendel, assuming a charming smile. "After all, I don't mean anything. I'll be as good as gold, and as agreeable as an angel when I come again. Please don't be angry; please," and he folded his hands together so meekly that Lesley laughed.

"I can't be angry with such a child," she said, shrugging. But there was some contempt in her words and shrug, which pierced through the lad's inborn vanity. His smile disappeared and he looked cross.

"It was your fault that I made an ass of myself," he declared, fuming.

"Mine?" Lesley looked at him, frankly amazed.

"Yes. Yours. It's that Godwin——"

"Juve,"—she spoke with great severity—"leave him alone."

"I won't. I object to his dancing at your heels," said the boy doggedly.

"Oh, do you? And why? What business is it of yours?"

"I love you."

"So you told me and told Archie last night. But that is no excuse for your behaving like a bear with a sick head."

"I don't." Juve grew red again and became petulant. "I can behave myself quite as well as Godwin, and I would, if you didn't encourage him so. And you call him Archie," he ended childishly.

"Why not? I have known him all my life: much longer than I have known you, Juve. Yet I call you by your Christian name."

"That's different."

"Very different. I love Archie and I don't——"

"You don't love me." Juve looked like an angry child who has been refused sweetmeats. "Oh, Lesley, you are hard on a chap. You always said you loved me no end."

"Indeed I didn't," said Miss Basser impatiently.
"I told you that I was fond of you. That's a different thing. I look on you as my brother, and in doing so I am treating you better than you deserve with your naughtiness."

"I don't want to be your brother," said Mendel sullenly. "I wish to marry you and be your husband. I want you all to myself."

"You won't get me, then." Lesley was thoroughly angry by this time and turned to pass her persistent suitor. "I object to Sabine weddings."

"There isn't any Sabine wedding about it," said Mendel, blocking her path, "for your father has given me permission to ask you to be my wife."

"Oh, indeed. And when did he do that?"

"Last night when I saw him in the library."

"Really. And this was the advice you asked for?"

"Yes, it was. Oh, Lesley, really and truly I love you with all my heart and soul. Godwin doesn't love you a quarter so well. There is nothing I wouldn't do for you. I'd die for you, and——"

"And go through fire and water and shed your heart's blood," she mocked. "Oh, yes, Juve, I have heard all that kind of thing before. As to my father consenting,—she looked into his eyes and came a step nearer to do so—"how did he come to give you permission? He likes you, but he does not think you suitable for a son-in-law."

"I know. He told me so."

"Oh! Then how did he—"

"I argued him into seeing sense. He is quite willing that I should marry you, Lesley. He told me so."

"After your argument, I suppose. Juve,—she looked at him gravely—"there is more in this than mere argument, for my father is not the one to be moved when he makes up his mind. He never did approve of your being in love with me, and this sudden change on his part argues some coercion on yours.
What means did you take to make him agree to your wish?

"I only said that I had a chance of making a name and would soon be famous and rich." Juve looked down at the sodden grass as he explained. "Then your father said he would be pleased to see us married."

"Oh!" Lesley thought for a few minutes. "Well, then I'll speak to my father about the matter and point out that his views and mine are different."

"Oh, Lesley, you won't do that?" implored the boy, almost in tears.

"Yes, I will. And I think you'd better ride on. Your ten minutes are now quite fifteen."

"But, Lesley—"

"I won't listen to another word, Juve." She stamped and turned away angrily. "Please don't repeat your ill behaviour of last night. And don't mention the subject of marriage to me again."

"Yes, I will! Yes, I will," cried the boy pettishly, and in a towering rage; "and what's more, you will have to marry me, unless—"

"Unless what?" She turned on him furiously.

"Ah!"—Juve swung himself on to his machine—"I'll tell you that after you have seen your father." He rode on for a short distance and then called back loudly, "He may tell you himself."

"Tell me himself," echoed Miss Basser, staring after the bicycle and its rider disappearing through the fast gathering mists. "What does that mean?"

To her it sounded like a threat, and after the interview with Joseph she did not wish to hear any further threats. Walking on to the cottage, she wondered if the interview with her father on which Juve had laid such stress had anything to do with Purcane's hint about the opium-smoking leading to crime. But it did not appear to her possible that Mendel knew anything of the tragedy, seeing that he was clearly proved to have been asleep all the time, and that, on the
positive evidence of both housekeeper and housemaid. Having quite enough to think of as it was, Lesley put the meeting with Juve and his covert threat out of her head. An interview with her father would soon inform her of the method employed by this troublesome youth to secure the old man's support. Meanwhile, she knocked at the cottage door, arranging in her own mind how to induce Mother Monkey to speak plainly. But what with Mendel and Joseph and her father and the death of Madame Valeria, which seemed to concern them all more or less, the poor girl felt quite bewildered. Capable as she was in many ways, the perplexing state of things was too difficult for her to deal with.

"Laws, miss," said Hetty, opening the door, only to throw up her hands in surprise. "Fancy seeing you here, and on such a day as never was."

"Juve said much the same thing when I met him in the lane," answered Miss Basser, entering the cottage and accepting a chair near the fire in Mendel's den. "But I wished to see you particularly, Miss Hale."

"Oh, did you, miss?" said the old creature, folding her hands under her apron and looking suspicious. "Well, it ain't anything as 'ull do you good as you wish to talk about, I'll be bound."

"Why do you say that, Miss Hale?"

"Oh, don't call me that, my dear young lady," protested Hetty, obviously to gain time and sort out matters in her mind. "Give me me fust name, or Monkey 'ull do, as Juve's always made a joke of my being like Sally in the Zoo."

"Oh, I don't wish to be rude."

"There's rudeness and rudeness," said Hetty sententiously. "If one person called me Monkey, I'd scratch his eyes out; if another did, why I'd smile in this way," and she showed her one tooth in a pleasant grin. "Bless you, miss, you must get used to
being friendly with me, since you're going to marry my boy."

"Who said so?"

"Why, he did, bless him, and pleased I was, seeing as he's been eating his young heart out. Your dear pa said as Juve could ask you to be Mrs. Mendel, with his blessing."

"I was not consulted, Hetty," said Miss Basser, choosing the more polite name.

Mother Monkey looked at her very directly. "No, miss," she said timidly, "but you torked about it with Juve in the lane. And he——"

"Talked nonsense," said Lesley with an angry flush. "Hetty, I am fond of Juve, as I told you the other day, but I have no intention of marrying him."

"Then he'll break his dear heart, miss."

"Not he. You should know boys better than that, Hetty. Juve will soon forget me, and make love to some one else."

"No, he won't, miss." Mother Monkey shook her old head wisely. "He ain't the one to change, say what you like. And if your pa gives permissing——"

"How did he get my father's permission?" interrupted Lesley sharply.

"I don't see why Juve shouldn't," replied the old woman with dignity, "him being handsome and decent and clever, and like to make money and a name."

"I grant all that, Hetty. But,"—she leaned towards the housekeeper—"these things all together would not have induced my father to sanction Juve's wish."

"Then whatever——?"

"Ah, I am coming to that. Hetty, you gave me a hint last time we met that if I looked into the matter of this murder, I would be sorry."

Mother Monkey looked worried. "I did say that, miss, and I meant it."

"And your reason for meaning it?"

"I shan't say a word more." Hetty spoke vehe-
mently and threw her apron over her head. "Don't arsk silly questions, miss."

"I shall ask this one," said Lesley firmly. "Did you tell Juve anything which he used as a threat to make my father consent to his marriage with me?"

"No!" Hetty pulled the apron off her head and spoke with renewed vehemence. "As Heaven is my judge, I didn't say no word to my boy. He's as innercent as an unborn baby of knowing anything, him being sweetly asleep throughout."

"Oh, so your information has something to do with the murder?"

"No! No! No!" Hetty flung out her gnarled hands and backed towards the door.

"It's no use saying that," remarked Miss Basser composedly. "You know something detrimental to my father, or you wouldn't have given me the hint you did the other day."

"I don't know anything," protested the little woman tearfully. "I'm sure, miss, it's very unkind of you to come bothering me when I've just got the house in order, and me and Juve's as happy as kings."

"I'm sorry to trouble you, Hetty," said Lesley with great determination; "but I must get to the bottom of things. You knew that my father smoked opium."

Mother Monkey changed colour and twisted uneasily. "Laws me, miss, whatever makes you say that?"

she murmured evasively.

"Joseph Purcane makes me say it. He came today and told me."

"Ah well, if he did, miss, it ain't none of my business."

"You must make it your business," insisted the other woman. "Tell me honestly, Hetty, did my father go to Madame Valeria's to smoke opium?"

"Yes, he did. She used to do so for her rheumatic pains, and gave some to him when he felt like it."
“Was my father”—Lesley’s voice faltered—“in
the house when—when—”

Mother Monkey broke in hurriedly, “I don’t know,
miss. I swear I don’t.”

“Oh!” Lesley was relieved, and asked another
question. “Do you know what kind of weapon was
used to kill Madame Valeria?”

“No,” breathed Hetty, looking away and with a
scared expression, which revealed so much to the girl
that she spoke out.

“Then I can tell you. It was a small Eastern
knife with a band of rubies round the handle.”

Hetty uttered a loud cry. “Laws me, miss, however
did you know?” she gasped.

CHAPTER XIV
CONFESSION

LESLEY started to her feet and grasped Hetty’s
lean arm, with so pale a face and such startled
eyes that the housekeeper was scared. In a moment
she realized that she had said too much, and strove
to excuse her hasty speech with mumbled words of
not knowing what she was saying. Miss Basser
deprecated to believe this and shook Hetty vigorously.

“You meant what you said,” cried Lesley, trembling
with eagerness. “You do know something about
that murder, and you must tell me everything before
I leave this cottage.”

“And if I don’t?” quavered the little woman,
thoroughly frightened.

“Then I shall ask Inspector Quinton to come and
see you.”

“You daren’t do that, miss. Your pa would get
into trouble.”

Lesley dropped the arm she was holding and fell
back into her chair, looking whiter than ever. "True! true!" she said, more to herself than to Mother Monkey; "and yet it is best to face the worst at once."

"Leave things alone, miss," advised Hetty, recovering her presence of mind.

"I shall not." The refusal came so fiercely that the other jumped. "Do you think that while my father is under suspicion I can rest."

"Folk don't know as he's under suspicion."

"Joseph knows, as I can see from the hints he gave. Juve suspected, and as I truly believe made use of his suspicions to induce my father to approve of his marrying me. And there may be others. Things can't remain as they are. You have said much; you must say more. Better to bring everything to the light of day than to let it remain in darkness."

"Your pa will get into trouble," said Hetty again.

"He is in trouble as it is. It is best for him to face the worst, so that matters may be arranged. Either he is guilty, or he is not guilty."

"Which way do you believe your'self, miss?"

"Can you ask his daughter that?" demanded Lesley indignantly. "Of course I believe him to be innocent. But I know that my father is not a strong-minded man, and is apt to lose his head on occasions. He went often to Madame Valeria's house, and, as it appears, was in the habit of smoking opium there. It is possible that he saw something which implicates him innocently in the matter, and for his own safety he is afraid to speak out. But he must speak out, and so must you."

"I don't know anything," insisted Mother Monkey doggedly.

"You do. You know of the existence of that knife. You recognized it from the description I gave."

"And how are you able to describe it?"

"I shall tell you, because we must be frank with one another. Hetty,"—Lesley touched the house-
keeper's hand entreatingly—"be my friend. Heaven knows that I need one. I believe you are a kind-hearted woman, honourable and decent in your own way. You will not see the innocent suffer."

"But I don't know, miss, who is innocent and who isn't," said the little woman, not unmoved by this appeal; "and you haven't told me about the knife."

Lesley drooped her head and spoke in a low voice.

"It belonged to my father."

"No," said Hetty, and started back, amazed at this confession.

"It is true. The knife is an Afghan weapon, which formed part of a trophy in the library—formed a pattern, you know. To-day I saw that it was missing, and it occurred to me that it was the knife used to kill your mistress."

"Why should that occur to you, miss?" asked Hetty, neither denying nor affirming. "It mayn't be the knife used to stick her."

"It is," insisted the girl. "I am sure. Joseph Purcane hinted that my father may have committed the crime while under the influence of opium. I don't believe that, and yet—the knife is missing. Also Juve, I am sure, suspects my father, and perhaps he also saw that the knife was missing from the library wall. Yes, I am certain. He was in the library on Sunday night, and there somehow gained my father's permission to ask me to be his wife."

"You can't be sure of all this, miss," said Mother Monkey, whose shrewd wit saw that most of this talk was guess-work.

"I can't be sure of anything," said Lesley wearily, passing her hand across her eyes. "Save one thing,"—she dropped her hand and looked intently at the housekeeper—"that you have seen that knife."

"I have more than seen it, miss. I have it."

"You have it?" asked Lesley breathlessly.

"Where did you find it?"
"Lying on the floor near Madame Valeria's dead body. Wait!" And Hetty disappeared so rapidly that Miss Basser had scarcely time to take a breath.

Lesley passed a purgatorial five minutes before the little woman returned with the weapon. If indeed this was the knife used to kill Madame Valeria, then it would seem that her father knew a great deal about the matter. He only could have taken the knife from the trophy of arms, as no one who entered the library would dare to commit so barefaced a robbery. And if her father took it to the gimcrack villa, why did he do so? Lesley was still asking herself this leading question when Mother Monkey came back. A glance at what she held in her hand made Lesley quiver.

"Yes, that is the knife, sure enough," she said in an odd strangled voice, and took the weapon from Hetty—"the Afghan knife. I would know it amongst a thousand. And you found it—?"

"On the hearthrug beside Madame Valeria. There was blood on the blade, and you can see the stains for yourself, miss. I expect he dropped it there after sticking her."

"Do you mean my father?"

"No, I don't, miss," cried Mother Monkey vehemently. "Whatever your dear pa is, he ain't a murdering mug. If he did want to kill her, he wouldn't be such a silly fool as to use a knife as could be spotted."

Lesley nodded, much comforted by this defence. Her brain was in a whirl. She could not understand the meaning of all these dreadful things, and in a mechanical way she stared at the weapon, now lying on her lap. There it was, a slender blade as keen as a razor, with a silver handle encircled with a thin band of small rubies. Such a knife could easily be used to kill any one, even though originally it must have been made more for ornament than for use. "How did this come to be in the room?" she asked.

"That I can't tell you, miss," said Hetty promptly;
"and I wouldn't have told you anything but for your asking. I said as you'd better let things rest and you'd be sorry if you didn't. Well, you wouldn't, miss, as you know very well. So now you do see what I've been keeping from you, for your own peace of mind, and much good may it do you."

"Don't speak like that, Hetty. You have proved yourself my friend by giving me your confidence, so continue to be my friend. I am glad I know, as with this"—she touched the knife, shuddering—"I shall see my father when he returns from London and ask for an explanation. Then I can help him. Tell me exactly what you know."

"Nothing more than what I said at the inquest, and what I've told you and shown you now, miss," said Mother Monkey frankly. "As Maggie didn't return to the kitchen after taking the tea up to Juve, I went to his room and saw him sleeping. Then I peeped into the sitting-room, worse luck, and saw her lying dead, with Maggie in a fit near the door. I looked round to see who'd killed her, and saw that knife, which I picked up. Then I heard a rustle behind the screen, and thinking as the murdering villain might be there I legged it for all I was worth. I dare say," ended Hetty, rubbing her nose, "as he skipped out of the open window while I was hollering for the police."

"But, Hetty,"—Lesley rose, and leaning on the old woman's shoulder spoke in a whisper—"my cousin said that behind the screen there was a mattress and a quilt used by Madame Valeria and my father when they smoked opium."

"That's true enough," Hetty whispered back. "I've shook up quilt and mattress scores of times when dusting the sitting-room. Well, miss?"

"Madame Valeria, you say, was dead?"

"As a doornail, and the knife as did it 'longside her. Well, miss?"
"Was my—my—father—behind the—" Lesley could not go on.

"I don’t know, miss, I can’t say. I didn’t dare to look, thinking as I might be stuck meself. But you know, miss, if your pa went to the house that day."

"Did you see him, Hetty?"

"No. I didn’t see no one."

"My father went that afternoon to have his usual sleep in the library."

"Just like Juve," murmured Mother Monkey to herself. "He slept too, and I wish I’d been asleep meself to save trouble. But I wasn’t, me being busy with my box thinking of old times."

Lesley slipped the knife into her pocket without any opposition on the part of Hetty. "Do you think my father, while under the influence of opium—"

"No, miss, no," interrupted the little woman, forestalling the question. "Your pa wouldn’t kill a fly; he ain’t got the nerve for murders, let alone he ain’t the kind to hurt any one. ’Sides, as I said before, your pa surely ain’t such a mug as to use a knife as could be spotted. He’s as innocent as an ape in the African desert."

"Oh, Hetty, I am so glad you believe that."

"But I don’t say, miss, as what your pa ain’t in a dangerous persition. The knife’s his by your own showing, and he was always at her place, though there ain’t nothing to tell as he was there when the murder was being done. If that policeman gets hold of—"

"He won’t," Lesley interrupted in her turn and vehemently. "I have changed my mind about that, Hetty, since you have told me what you know. I shall hear what my dad has to say and then think of what is best to be done. The suspicions of Joseph and Juve may be based upon nothing tangible."

"About that precious cousin of yours I don’t know nothing, miss, but what I do know don’t make me think as he’s up to much. I dessay you’re clever enough to
give him one in the eye, if he makes a fuss. As to Juve, my dear young lady, he don't know anything. All your talk about his having forced that pa of yours to give permising’s nonsense. Juve don't need to force any gal to marry him, as have got eyes in her blessed head."

"Still——"

"There ain't no 'still' about it, miss," cried Mother Monkey crossly. "Don't go on talking about my boy, or I'll be sorry I told you. Juve's as straight as straight and would much rather harm himself than you. He loves you."

"I wish he didn't," sighed Lesley wearily, drawing her furs round her. "It will only lead to trouble, and I have quite enough as it is. You'll say nothing to him about the knife?"

"No. I haven't say anything to any one and I don't intend to. If I'd perduced that knife at the inquest I'd have been drawed into things, and I want to keep out of 'em. Now, miss, I don't want to be unkind, but please don't come bothering me any more about murders and knives. I have the house to look after and my boy: quite enough too."

"Hetty,"—Lesley took the little woman by both hands and shook them—"you have been a kind friend to me, and I shall not forget it. Unless I am forced to I shall not talk of these matters again. But I can come and see you sometimes, can't I?"

"I shall be honoured, miss," said Mother Monkey, dropping a curtsey, but all the same she spoke stiffly. "Good-day, miss, bless you."

Miss Basser went away, fully convinced that she would get no further hints in that direction. Hetty was evidently in deadly fear lest she should be mixed up in the case and wished to say as little as was possible in order to keep out of it. Her experience as a gutter-girl had given her a wholesome dread of the law, and the mere sight of a uniform put her on her
guard against interrogation by the police. Lesley sensed this inborn fear, and quite understood why the little old woman had been so reluctant to speak. The girl was only too thankful to have learned so much, for Hetty might have held her peace and defied everyone. And had she not produced the Afghan knife it is difficult to see how she could have been accused of possessing it. So, on the whole, Miss Basser was very satisfied with the result of the interview, even though it increased her fears about her father. He certainly was in great danger, especially if Joseph Purcane guessed that the knife was missing, although how he could guess, not having been in the library, Lesley could not imagine. And it was useless to trouble her brains about the extent of her cousin’s evil knowledge. All she could do was to question her father and force him to be frank, so that she could help him. That she could do only when he returned from town, and that would not be for two days.

So the message he left behind him said, and Lesley believed that if he had gone up, as was probable, to seek the black smoke, he would remain absent for a longer period. However, things in this way did not turn out as she expected, for while she was sitting in her den about ten o’clock, Mr. Basser appeared. The girl had passed a dreary and troubled evening thinking over matters and was so absent-minded a companion that her grandmother had retired early to bed out of sheer disgust. The selfish old lady did not care for the society of one who looked ill and held her tongue; who refused to play cards, or to read the newspaper aloud, or to do anything sociable.

“It’s little enough you do to make me comfortable, my dear,” said Mrs. Basser, ungratefully oblivious to the notable fact that Lesley was her slave. “But the young are always selfish. Thank Heaven I was never that myself. When you say your prayers, my
THREE

dear, ask that you may be given a more amiable and self-denying disposition."

With this pious recommendation Mrs. Basser, assisted by the weary Maria, had sought repose. Unwilling to stay alone in the vast drawing-room, Lesley had gone to her den. Here she took a book and tried to read, but soon threw it aside with a sigh. Then she attempted to play a game of Patience, and that failed to enchain her attention. There was nothing for her to do but to sit by the fire and think and think and think, until her brain grew weary and her head ached. After a time she fell into an uneasy sleep, which was haunted by many disagreeable dreams, in all of which her father figured as a fugitive from justice. She came to her senses on hearing his voice plainly and near at hand, to find the fire out, the lamp burning low and the speaker at her elbow.

"Dad," she cried, rising hastily, and amazed at his unexpected appearance.

"Yes, it's me," retorted Basser, who looked dishevelled and spoke in an excited manner. "What do you mean sending spies after me?"

"Spies?"

"Yes. That confounded Joseph found me—it doesn't matter where he found me—but he did, and bothered me to come home, as I was in danger." Basser looked fearfully round the room. "I don't know what he meant. I got home all right and saw no—no—policemen, so—so—I say, so, Lesley—"

"Gently, father, gently." The girl removed his overcoat and pushed him into an arm-chair. "Wait until I light the other lamp, as this one is going out. Then we can talk. Do you wish me to get you something to eat and drink?"

"No," growled the man fretfully, resting his elbows on his knees and clutching his disordered hair. "I wish to be left alone. I am ill."

"Can you expect to be otherwise, dad?" asked
Lesley bitterly when the other lamp was lighted.

"Why should I not expect to be well?" he asked, raising his head and speaking defiantly.

"You smoke opium and——"

"Ah!" Basser rose hastily and raised his arm in so threatening a manner that Lesley quite expected him to strike her. "Then it was you who sent Joseph to spy on me and make me come home."

"No!" Lesley caught his arm and again pushed him into the chair. "Dad, you are not yourself, or you wouldn't talk like this. It was Joseph who told me you smoked opium, but I did not know he was going to seek you in Town. He said you had gone there and he guessed where you went—to some Chinese opium shop, near the Docks."

"I may as well make a clean breast of it," whimpered Basser, yet with a certain air of recklessness. "I was at the Docks—in Lo Keong's den."

"Joseph said that you would be there."

"Oh, did he. What business is it of his, and how dare he come up and drag me home again like this?"

"Is he with you?"

"No," said Basser, sullen and savage. "He came down in the train with me, and we walked here from Havering. Then he went to his own house and I came home to see what the danger was." He again glanced round the room, obviously nervous and unstrung. "Joseph said that I was in danger."

"Did he tell you what the danger was?" asked Lesley keenly.

"Don't speak so sharply," cried her father in a peevish temper. "Your voice goes through my head. No, he couldn't say what the danger was, but it is here."

"Why should you expect there to be any danger, dad?"

"Oh, I—I—don't—I don't know," stuttered Basser, clasping and unclasping his hands in an agitated
manner, "but I thought it best to come—to come home at once. I—feel—feel safer—at home."

"From what?"

"Oh, don’t bother me with questions, girl. Go to bed and leave me to my misery."

Lesley saw that the wretched man was in a dangerous state of excitement and required soothing. Evidently he had been smoking when dragged away by her cousin, for his face was drawn, his eyes were feverishly bright one moment and glazed over in a curious way the next, while there were dark circles under them, which spoke of mental trouble. Usually Basser was careful in his dress, but now he was remarkably untidy, with his collar rumpled, his neck-tie askew, mud on his boots and trousers and with a general air of a man suffering from a debauch. What he would have looked like had he remained for the two days the message spoke of, in the Chinaman’s den, Lesley trembled to think. The short time he had been indulging in his vice had made a wreck of him. As he shivered and shook, plucked at his undecided chin, and cowered miserably in the arm-chair, his daughter pitied him profoundly. Her bad old child had never behaved quite so badly before.

"Dad!" Lesley knelt beside him and took him in her arms with filial tenderness, "don’t worry about what Joseph says. You are quite safe here."

"With you, Lesley; with you," he sighed and then began to cry as if his heart would break. "I can’t help it," he sobbed, burying his face in Lesley’s shoulder. "Things are more than I can bear."

"Let me get you some brandy, father. That will revive you and we can bear them together."

"No! No!" Basser shuddered. "I don’t want brandy. I have been smoking opium, and brandy would make me sick."

"The opium has done that, dear. Why do you smoke it?"
"It makes me forget my troubles. I'm as happy as a king when the pipe is in my mouth. And why shouldn't I smoke if I choose?" cried Basser, raising his haggard face defiantly. "This is a free country."

"Yes! yes!" whispered his daughter soothingly. "Let me take you to bed and we can talk over things in the morning."

Basser resisted pettishly. "I won't go to bed until I know where the danger is," he cried incoherently. "Carp hasn't been here, has he? You haven't let Quinton into the house, have you?"

Lesley quailed at these words, as they seemed to confirm her worst fears. She recognized that now if ever was her chance to arrive at the truth, since her father was so terrified and unstrung that he would probably confess everything in the hope of being saved from arrest. That was what he seemed to expect, and even while Lesley soothed and fondled him, kept casting nervous glances over his shoulder. The girl would have preferred the explanation to come when he was more sane, but then he might prove obstinate and nothing would be learned. Lesley therefore took the bull by the horns.

"Dad," she said, capturing his hands and kneeling before him, "tell me everything."

"About what?" he inquired, turning even paler than he was and trembling.

"About your visit to Madame Valeria's about the time she was killed: about the missing Afghan knife and——"

Basser sprang up with an hysterical scream, and it took all his daughter's strength to prevent his flying from the room. "Let me go! let me go!" he cried in a frenzy of terror. "Do you wish to see me caught?"

"You won't be caught," said Lesley, keeping her voice calm and low; no easy task, considering how
desperately her nerves were being tried. "Sit down again, dad. You are safe with me."

Like a child he obeyed, and rambled on wildly, "Yes, I am safe with you, Lesley. You love me, don't you? Don't let them take me, will you?"

"No! No! After all, dad, you have done nothing wrong."

"I haven't, but things look black against me. Oh!"—he threw his arms round the kneeling girl so roughly as to cause her pain—"I can't stand it any longer, Lesley. I must tell you all."

"Do!" she said decisively, "and I'll save you."

"You will!" cried Basser joyfully. "Oh, Lesley, you are kind," and he again began to weep copiously.

"I am innocent—innocent. I swear I am."

"Yes! Yes, dear. Only tell me what you know as shortly as possible and then I can take you to bed. Come now, dad; I'm listening."

The distracted man grew quieter and with his face buried in his daughter's shoulder spoke hurriedly, but sufficiently plainly for her to understand the confession. Sometimes he gasped; sometimes he choked, but in the end always stumbled on somehow. The fact is that Basser had so tortured himself with going over the same thoughts again and again in heart-rending terror, that he was as nearly crazy as a man well can be and yet preserve sanity. Fearing lest his poor wits should wander from the track of the direct narrative, Lesley interrupted the recital as little as she could.

"I visited Madame Valeria to smoke opium, as well as to play cards," babbled the weak old man. "Before she came I used to go to the Docks to indulge in my pleasure. I learned to smoke when I went to Cairo on a trip a long time ago, when you were a little child, Lesley. The habit grew upon me so that I found it hard to give it up. But I was breaking myself of it gradually and went to Lo Keong's den as few times as possible. Then Madame Valeria came."
"And she gave you opium," murmured Lesley, stroking her father's head.

"Yes. She smoked herself, as she found it soothed her rheumatic pains. At her villa she had a store of opium and a mattress behind the screen upon which she used to lie when indulging herself. One day I happened to see the mattress, and she then told me about her weakness. I admitted that I smoked also, and in this way we understood each other better. I went to her house to play cards, you know, Lesley, but very often I went to enjoy the black smoke. There was no need of me to go to the Docks then, and it was for that reason that I stayed at home and became such a friend of Madame Valeria's."

"She was a wicked woman," said the girl indignantly, "leading you astray."

"Oh, I was led astray in Cairo long before I saw her," said Basser dreamily. "She was kind enough, and only sought to please me. I used to give her a good many little presents, as she refused to take money. One day when she was in the library, while paying us a visit, she saw the Afghan dagger and asked me to give it to her, saying it would make a good paperknife. I presented it to her and never saw it again until I peeped out from behind the screen, and noticed it lying near her dead body."

"You were behind the screen, then?" asked Lesley in a low voice.

"Yes. If you remember I went on that Sunday afternoon to the library to have my usual sleep. I found I could not, and having a craving for opium on me, I slipped out without your seeing me to visit Madame Valeria. When I tapped at the French window, she opened it and gave me the pipe. I lay down as usual behind the screen and was soon lost in beautiful dreams. How long I remained insensible I cannot say, but when I came to myself, it was with a half-dazed memory of hearing something fall."
"Madame Valeria, perhaps?"

"No. Maggie Salt, I think. When I looked out from behind the screen I saw her lying near the door, but heard nothing. Thinking both the women were dead, especially as I saw the knife, I was terrified for my life and liberty, thinking that I might get into trouble. My head grew quite clear all at once and I would have run away, but that I heard some one enter the room."

"Mother Monkey?"

"I don't know. I remained in hiding trembling. When the person left the room—I heard footsteps running away you understand—I crept out and would have taken the knife only it was missing. That frightened me dreadfully. I managed to slip out of the French window, left it open and got home quietly without suspicion. So I am innocent. Lesley," he implored, "say you think that I am innocent!"

"Of course you are, dad," she said quietly, "and your innocence will be proved beyond all doubt. Meanwhile come to bed."

"To bed." Basser's eyes glazed over again and he spoke confusedly. "Yes, wish I could sleep for ever." His head fell again on his daughter's shoulder, and he murmured sleepily, "There was the other—other man, who—"

"What other man?" asked Lesley quickly.

"There was the other—other man, who—" said Basser again, and then fell fast asleep, worn out with the agony of thought.
CHAPTER XV

ON THE WAR-PATH

FOR the next four or five days Lesley did nothing in the way of using the information supplied by Mother Monkey and her father. All her time was taken up with nursing the latter, who remained in bed, a complete wreck from the effects of physical and mental fatigue. Basser proved to be a most unruly patient, wishing to be up and about when he was scarcely fit to move. However, the girl called in Dr. Brent, who prescribed rest and administered sedatives, so the old man gradually grew calmer, and became more manageable. Afraid lest out of sheer terror he should give a clue to the origin of his illness, Lesley would allow no one but herself to attend to him, and did not even permit the doctor to stay in the bedroom longer than she could help. It was a very trying time, the more especially as Mrs. Basser was selfishly afraid of sickness, and had to be pacified almost as much as the invalid. The poor girl, bearing this very heavy burden solus and alone, sometimes felt that it was more than she could endure.

Indeed at times she felt inclined to write and ask her lover to return, since she could then lean on his masculine strength, and get advice from his common-sense experience. But here her love came in, to prevent her from giving way to seeking such support. Archie had his work and his career to consider, so it was not fair to fill his brain with her own troubles, and thus divert him from his task. Moreover, Lesley, ever mindful of possible accidents, did not wish to commit what she knew to paper, since the knowledge was dangerous to her father's liberty and perhaps to his life. Certainly she believed what the distracted creature had told her, and quite understood how innocently he had become
involved in a tragic web of circumstance. But strangers might not accept such an excuse, and then steps would probably be taken to make things public. Such a course in Basser's weak state of health would very likely unseat his reason, so the girl decided that it would be best to speak to no one, to write to no one, and keep what she had learned to herself. Of course she corresponded with Godwin on trivial matters and described the longing she had for his company, since they were lovers, but the young man, far away in the North, had no idea of what was going on in the South. And failing him, there was no one to whom Lesley could unburden her overloaded mind. Hetty had asked her to speak no further on matters connected with the murder, and the girl shrank from confiding in Juve. She was beginning to think that Juve had played the part of a Judas.

Lesley's chief reason for supposing this was, that her father had told her all about the scene in the library and had explained why he had yielded against his will to the boy's urgency. Miss Basser received a shock when in possession of the facts, for she never would have credited Mendel with such treachery. Not that his baseness would bring him any reward, for Lesley was determined not to encourage his suit. She had never done so, and had never intended to do so, therefore she had only to keep to her original line of conduct to prevent his troubling her. Being in this frame of mind when the boy called to inquire after Mr. Basser's health—for the fact of the illness speedily became known—she refused to see him. And very wisely, for knowing that Juve was brilliantly clever, impulsive to a degree and insanely in love, it was possible that in an interview he might trap her, as he had trapped her father. Not that she had done anything wrong likely to give him an opportunity of enforcing his will, but he might make use of her father's dangerous position to extort a promise. After hearing
Basser's story, the girl thought this was extremely likely.

During her father's illness, Lesley, bit by bit, extracted from him many details which were lacking in his hurried explanation tale on the night of his return. Basser dwelt much on the fact that the knife had been missing, when he had taken flight from the dismal sitting-room, and lamented lest it should have fallen into the possession of any one who might produce it as evidence against him. But Lesley was able to assure him that Mother Monkey had picked it up and had been the intruder, when he was hiding behind the screen. Also she confessed that the knife was in her possession and that Hetty would hold her tongue. Basser begged his daughter to restore the knife to the trophy, saying that when the pattern was complete again, neither Juve, nor any one else, would be able to swear that the weapon had been out of the Grange. Lesley saw the wisdom of this course, and restored the knife accordingly.

It was on the afternoon of the fifth day that she did this, and when the pattern of the trophy was once more complete, Lesley went to the window to get a breath of fresh air. Being very weary with remaining constantly indoors and with keeping her vigil beside the sick-bed, she now longed to go for a walk. Between the two long windows of the library there was a door, and this the girl opened to step out on to the terrace. For a time she walked up and down, enjoying the sunshine and stimulating freshness of the breezy day. A keen wind was blowing across the park, shaking the remaining leaves from the trees, but the sky was tolerably clear of clouds, and frequent gleams of sunlight made the autumnal landscape more cheerful. From the steps of the moss-grown terrace of time-worn red bricks spread the lawns right up to the many trunks of encircling trees, and looking down the avenue, which curved widely to the left, Lesley could
see the square tower of Trinity Church and the red-tiled roof of the rectory. Everything was peaceful and soothing, so, in spite of the falling leaves and the want of flowers, to give colour to the greyness of the season, Miss Basser enjoyed the change of scene. After the close confinement in the sick-room, it was indeed heartening to walk in the wind and sun, in wide spaces and natural surroundings. The girl, exhilarated by the change, felt that her heavy cross was lifted from her weary shoulders for the time being.

But this happy enjoyment did not last long. Round the corner of the terrace was the front door of the old building, and as Lesley paced slowly to and fro she became aware that Juve was seeking admittance. Backing behind a buttress so that he might not see her, she overheard his request that he should be admitted, heard also the refusal of the servant. Then the door was closed and the boy, as she thought, went away. But to her surprise and silent indignation, she heard him coming round the corner, and sure enough he shortly passed along the terrace, walking slowly and with a frown on his face. More or less concealed, Lesley determined in her own mind to wait behind the buttress until the intruder departed. But when Juve actually halted in front of the library and entered by the door she had left open, Miss Basser could no longer remain quiet. With an angry look she followed swiftly at his heels, and stepped into the library to find him looking round the room in an inquiring way. His face lighted up when he saw her and he held out his hand in no ways abashed at his detection.

"What are you doing here?" asked Lesley, ignoring the proffered hand and speaking in anything but an amiable voice.

"I came to see you."

"I don't want to see you. Surely the message I gave Thomas was sufficient to send you away."

"It hasn't, then," said Juve with a shrug; "and I
don't see why you should be so cross. If you knew the
state of my feelings—"

"I don't want to know them," she flashed out with
a stamp. "I know the state of my own."

"I wish I did," he said coolly.

"Then you shall. I don't wish you to come bothering
me while I am nursing my father. And let me
tell you, Mr. Mendel, it is not considered honourable
to poke and pry round strange houses."

"Mr. Mendel? Why not Juve?"

"Because when I give you an inch you take an ell."

"Every wise man does," said the boy carelessly,
smoothing down his overcoat of heavy brown frieze
and playing idly with his cap.

Lesley stared at him indignantly, yet even so could
not help admiring his remarkable good looks. His
dark complexion was flushed with excitement, his black
eyes were eloquent, and he showed his white teeth
smilingly. As a dashing attractive lover, well-groomed,
well-bred, well-clothed and brimming with eager life,
he left nothing to be desired, and nine girls out of ten
would have been enamoured by so gallant a figure.
But Lesley was the tenth. Archie was less superla-
tively handsome, not so young and by no means so
brilliantly clever. But she loved Archie and she did
not love Juve. For this reason she was wholly mistress
of her feelings in spite of the appeal which his youthful
beauty made to her feminine appreciation. "I think
you had better go," she said coldly.

"I don't," said Mendel and still stood where he was,
obstinately rooted to the ground, smiling audaciously.

Lesley, whose temper was none of the best, stamped
her foot and turned on him in a whirlwind of fury.
"If you think to gain anything by behaving in this
way, Juve, you are quite mistaken. How dare you
defy me and behave so badly? I tell you I won't put
up with this persecution any longer."

"Ask your father to turn me out, then."
"You know my father is ill and can do nothing."
"If he were well he couldn't," retorted Mendel mean­ingly. "He likes me and wants me to marry you."
"Oh, indeed!" Lesley stepped back and pointed to the now completed pattern of the trophy. "Look at this and then dare to tell me that he likes you.
Juve tossed down his cap on the table, unbuttoned his overcoat, and walked leisurely to the opposite end of the room. If he felt any surprise at the restoration of the knife, he certainly showed none, although the girl was watching him closely. "Well," he said calmly, "I am looking, and I still dare to tell you that your father likes me and approves of my marriage with you."
Miss Basser was so taken aback by this assurance that she gasped. "Is that all you have to say?" she asked, advancing towards him.
"Why, what else can I say?"
"This, that you blackmailed my father into consenting to do what he did not wish to do."
"You say so," retorted Mendel, still undisturbed. "My dad says so. He told me all that happened in this library on Sunday night. And how dare you——?"
"Dare what?" asked Juve with feigned surprise. "I swear I know nothing of any blackmailing. I don't do such things, Lesley. You ought to know me better than to think that I do."
"Ifancy I am beginning to know you better than I ever did before," she said bitterly. "Look at that trophy."
"I'm looking."
"Isn't the pattern complete?"
"It is."
"Well?" asked Lesley.
"Well?" asked the boy.
There was a silent contest of wills, and that of the woman was the first to give way. "Are you my enemy, or my friend?" she faltered, while asking the question.
"Your friend; your lover," he cried impetuously.
"I don't want to have you for my lover. You know quite well that Archie—"

Juve broke out into one of his crude rages. "Always Archie," he cried in a pet. "I wonder what you can see in him."
"I can see in him my future husband," said Lesley stiffly; "and you will be good enough to say nothing against him."
"He shan't marry you."
"That is my business, not yours."
"That I love you makes it my business."
"I think not," said the girl superciliously; "it takes two to make a bargain, and in this instance I am not of your way of thinking."

Juve was rather disconcerted by this frankness, in spite of his audacity and determination to get his own way. "You know that I love you," he said somewhat weakly.
"I know nothing of the sort. Is that love which persecutes a woman into giving you a heart which is in the keeping of another?"
"All is fair in love and war."
"That proverb doesn't explain things," said Lesley coldly. "I am very much disappointed in you, Juve, as I thought you were honourable and honest."
"I can't see myself otherwise," he retorted with an angry flush.
"Then you must be blind. Was it honourable to threaten my father?"
"I didn't."
"You did and in this very room. Oh, I know what you would say"—the girl threw up her hand to prevent his answer—"that you said nothing. Of course not. Dumb show was all that was needed to intimidate my poor weak father."
"Perhaps you will be more explicit?"
"Certainly. There is no need for me to hide any-
thing. What I mean is that a glance at the trophy—and that glance you gave more than once—showed my father what you knew."

"What did I know?"

"Don't fence, and pretend ignorance," she retorted fiercely. "You are well aware what I mean. When you last saw that trophy, the knife was missing."

Lesley ran forward and tapped the weapon in question. "Now it is back again."

"So I see," answered the boy with a shrug. "Your father, I presume, thought it wise to restore it, and is ready to swear that it was never out of this room. Is that what you mean?"

"It is what I mean, as you know very well," said Miss Basser scornfully, "and I also am ready to swear that the knife was never taken from the trophy."

"That's perjury."

"Oh," flashed out the girl quickly, "then you do know that the knife was used to murder your grandmother; you did look at that trophy to intimidate my father."

"Yes," said Mendel coolly. "Monkey picked it up somewhere. I didn't ask her to explain how it came into her possession."

"She never told you anything about the knife," said Miss Basser, remembering Hetty's solemn denial.

"No, she did not; nor did I ask her anything. While looking for something I came across her box of old relics, which she keeps under the kitchen table, and there found that knife."

"Perhaps you thought that Hetty was guilty."

"No. I never thought that, although I was puzzled to guess how she got the knife. I can only imagine that she picked it up when she was in the room and discovered the murder."

"Then you imagine rightly," said Lesley, rather astonished at the boy's keen deductions, "and Hetty gave it to me."
"And you gave it to your father, who restored it to—" Juve glanced at the trophy with a smile.

"No, I didn't. I placed the knife there myself, and I am ready to commit perjury, as you call it, to save my father from suffering for a crime which he did not commit."

"How do you know he didn't—while under the influence of opium?"

"Oh, you know that also. Well, listen, and I'll tell you."

Lesley, without counting the cost of giving away her secret to one whom she believed to be treacherous, poured forth the whole story. "So you see," she ended triumphantly, "that my father is innocent."

"So he says," rejoined Mendel cautiously, "but you have given me no proof, save his word that he is not guilty. A judge and jury might think differently."

"There is no chance of any judge or jury being asked to think," said Miss Basser emphatically. "My father is innocent and I intend to stand up for him."

"Yet you have told me the story and I might—"

"Yes, you might, and after your conduct in this room I dare say you will. Go your ways, Juve, and say what you like. I don't care."

"But I do," answered the boy quietly. "I don't wish to see your father arrested and you plunged into trouble. I quite realise that you disbelieve in me because I got your father's consent to our marriage by hinting at what I knew about the knife. But I am not so black as you think I am."

Miss Basser stared searchingly at the boy, who spoke with unfeigned emotion and really seemed anxious to restore himself to her good opinion. "I can't understand you," she said briefly.

"No, you wouldn't, Lesley. I don't expect you to. However you may love Archie, you cannot comprehend what an overwhelming passion love is, and how it drives a man to behave in a way which he condemns in his more sober moments. I don't excuse myself for
having acted,—wrongly I admit, save that love drove me to do what I should not have done."

"Well, if it was done in a moment of insanity—"

Juve's expressive face lighted up. "That's it," he said eagerly, "love is a madness. What I did was, as you say, in a moment of insanity and against the standard of honour which I have set up and endeavour to follow. Love, Lesley,"—he looked at her strangely—"drives men to do deeds which the world would blame, but not those for whom the deeds were committed."

"I don't understand you," said Lesley again, and truly she did not. Forgetting the boy's mixed parentage, knowing nothing of the Romany and Hungarian natures, she could not understand how love could inflame racial passions so greatly. Fanaticism in love and religion was incomprehensible to her cool reasonable Anglo-Saxon instincts. "I don't understand you," she said for the third time, after struggling vainly to do so. "We will let it remain at that."

"And you will trust me again?"

"When you give me cause to trust you, yes!"

Juve heaved a sigh, seeing she was right in saying that she could not understand him. Argument and explanation would only confuse her still more, so he bowed to her decision. "I hope to deserve your trust," he said gravely.

Lesley came forward impulsively and laid her hand on his arm. "Juve, you know that I am fond of you, appreciating your many good qualities and admiring your talents as a musician. I don't wish to send you away, and if you will promise not to behave again as you have done, things can be as they were before. I can never marry you, for I have not that love for you which a woman should give a man who wishes to be her husband. Even if Archie were dead, it would make no difference in my feelings."

Mendel listened with bowed head and a listless look on his face. When she ended, he kissed her hand.
"As you say, Lesley, we will let it remain at that, since we do not see eye to eye and never can see. But you will allow me to help you."

"In what way?" She drew away her hand, which he was still holding, and sat down, worn out with emotion. "In the way of helping you to prove that your father is not guilty."

"You believe him to be innocent."

"Yes. And anything I can do——"

"For one thing, you can remain silent," interrupted Miss Basser swiftly. "I got the knife from Mother Monkey, who promised to hold her tongue. No one but you and I, she and my father need know of the matter. In this way dangerous things—I mean things that might be misinterpreted—will not come to the ears of the police."

"I shall say nothing, Lesley. And the other thing?"

Miss Basser rose unexpectedly and placed her hands on his shoulders to look into his eyes. "Close Joseph Purcane's mouth."

Juve stepped back a pace and her hands fell from his shoulders. He was plainly astonished by her request. "What has he to do with the matter?"

"He knows something. What it is I am not sure. But he is aware that my dad went to Madame Valeria's for the black smoke, and hints that he may have been at the villa when the crime was committed. Of course he was, but how does Joseph know?"

"Because he was there himself," said Juve boldly. "Oh, I know all about the evidence of the Wrests, which exonerated him and his father. But I believe they have been bribed. I overheard Marcus Purcane advise his son to let sleeping dogs lie when he would have made a disturbance about a libel action. He said also that he and Joseph were well out of it."

"Do you believe that my cousins are guilty?"

"Yes, I do."
"But their reason?"

"Ah, I can't tell you that. Perhaps if they are arrested, they may be forced to disclose their reason. I believe in the evidence of Tavy and the housemaid; not in that of the Wrest family. Joseph is trying to throw the blame on your father, as he must be aware that behind the screen——"

"Yes! Yes!" Lesley clutched her hair, as was usual with her when excited. "I dare say you are right. But if you are, would Joseph risk the matter being reopened? Wouldn't he take his father's advice and let sleeping dogs lie?"

"That depends upon what he wants," said Juve after a moment's reflection; "and I really cannot see why he should come to you with this hinted accusation against your father. What is his aim?"

"To marry me," said Lesley boldly.

Mendel's face assumed an expression of anger which was so fierce as to resemble the wrath of a tiger in the jungle. All his uncivilized instincts came uppermost at the moment, and had Purcane been in the room, it is probable that the passionate boy would have fallen upon him. "He dared to ask you to marry him?" he demanded hoarsely.

"He did more than dare. He threatened."

"Threatened!" Juve was so furious that only movement relieved his feelings and he stamped about the room savagely. "Threatened!"

"Yes." Lesley thought that it would be a bad hour for Joseph, the dapper and well-groomed, when he met this powerful young animal. "He said that unless I married him, he would go to the police and tell all he knew."

"And what did you say?" Juve wheeled to face the girl, only restraining his fury by a strong act of will. "I promised to give him an answer on New Year's Day."

"Why did you? Oh, why did you?"
"Because I wished to gain time. I don’t know what information my cousin is in possession of. But I do know that if he sees Inspector Quinton and brings my father into the matter, there will be trouble. My father is not a strong man and such trouble would make him ill—send him out of his mind. Time—time is what I wanted," cried the girl feverishly, "and time I have got at the sacrifice of my self-esteem. But between now and the New Year we must learn the truth; learn who really did kill Madame Valeria."

"We’ll learn that somehow," said Mendel, nodding grimly. "As to Joseph—?"

"Yes!"

"You can safely leave him to me."

"What would you do?" asked Lesley, catching at his sleeve as he walked towards the door.

"I shall do what you asked me to do—close Joseph’s mouth. This”—he turned at the door with a look of resolution—"will give me a chance of regaining your trust in me. Those Purcanes are your enemies, Lesley. I told you so long ago. But I’ll crush them. Joseph first; his father afterwards."

He went away with a furious gesture, leaving the girl open-mouthed with amazement. She understood the boy less than ever.

**CHAPTER XVI**

**THE PHILANTHROPIST**

MR. SILAS WENCH occupied a dingy office in a dingy house on one of the less conspicuous sides of Golden Square. With his knowledge of human nature the money-lender knew that it was best to weave his web on a retiring bush in a quiet neighbourhood. People who wish to borrow money are not fond of advertising the fact to the public at large, unless any
member of the same is likely to be a lender, so the more private the parlour, the more flies walk into it at the spider's invitation. This particular Shylock did not send notices to the newspapers explaining his whereabouts and willingness to part with money on no security and at a small rate of interest. He had a sufficiently large number of clients to do without publicity, and reserved his information for the ears of this one and that. And of course Mr. Wench's babble of no security and small interest was a pleasing fiction which those who came to him either believed, or disbelieved. After an interview they invariably departed thoroughly sceptical, and sometimes with curses deep, if not loud.

In order to see the papers which gave the money-lender legal authority to sell Madame Valeria's property, her grandson had been obliged to call at the dingy office. Afterwards, when Wench had exercised his right, Juve continued to call, chiefly to discourse sweet music to the old man, so that the money-lender could decide as to his talents. Not that there was any need for such exhibitions, as Silas had long since settled in his own mind that the boy was a genius. But having a passion for the violin, as a speaking instrument in Juve's hands, he enjoyed the lad's playing, whenever it was possible to lure him to Soho. That was not often, for Mendel, with the usual carelessness of the artist, never troubled himself to keep appointments, or to answer letters, or to sacrifice himself in any way. But that he saw a chance of appearing at a concert, got up for his especial benefit by his would-be patron, he would not have come at all. Certainly he would not have brought his violin to play to an audience of one, and vexed Silas not a little by his many caprices. In no one but a musician would Wench have put up with such whims and fancies, but he regarded Juve as slightly mad, and one whom it was necessary to humour because of his great gift. Both the boy and
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the old man frequently wrangled, but it was the former who always came out victorious in their quarrels. In order to get Juve at his mercy Wench often offered to lend him money, but the boy was acute enough to preserve his independence. So Silas, a slave to harmony, had to bow down and worship one of the few persons who could delight his ears.

Shortly after Mendel's interview with Lesley, he made his appearance in Golden Square, mounted the narrow dark staircase, and pushed open the door on the second floor, inscribed with the money-lender's name. It gave admittance to a dark box of an outer office, which was furnished with a desk, a stool, and several chairs for the convenience of clients. A miserably lean clerk turned from the desk to wash his hands and smile and bow and welcome the visitor. Slater—that was his name—knew well that Mendel did not come to borrow money, and along with his master had enjoyed the heavenly music of the violin. Therefore he ducked and scraped, rubbed his hands and explained that Mr. Wench would be disengaged in a few moments.

"You haven't brought your fiddle to-day, sir," said Slater in a thin small voice.

Juve shook his head, sat down, tilted back his chair and yawned. "I have some business to do with Mr. Wench that doesn't require the fiddle."

"Not borrowing," said Slater in a frightened whisper, for he admired Mendel's boyish insolence and good looks and heaven-born genius. "Don't let him get hold of you, sir. He got me, when I was a young fool on the razzle-dazzle, and look at me now. Oh, he's a bad one, but don't say I said so."

Mendel nodded in a patronizing way. "I know when to hold my tongue, Slater, and also when to come in out of the way. That old blood-sucker won't get me. You can be sure of that."

"I'm glad of that, sir. He'd ruin you as he's ruined me and dozens of others I could tell you of."
"Oh, I don't want to hear of those kind of things. Mr. Wench has got all he is likely to get out of me." Juve was thinking of his grandmother's property. "His philanthropy is going to give me a chance, but he won't make so much out of it as he expects." 

"Don't trust him; don't trust him."

"I won't. I'll trust myself. Hullo! He's disengaged now."

This was true, and Juve jumped off the chair to salute Mr. Wench, who had opened the door of the inner office sufficiently to peer through it and see if another fly had blundered into his web. The one he had been engaged with—a female fly—had been shown out by another door. In his tightly-fitting snuff-coloured clothes the money-lender looked leaner and more cadaverous than ever, welcoming Mendel with a grin which creased his wrinkled face into still more wrinkles. Even as Wench opened the door widely to admit his young friend, Juve thought what a wicked old rascal he was, and how necessary it was that he, the young friend in question, should be on his guard.

"Oh, it's you, my dear boy," said Wench, washing his hands with invisible soap and water after the manner of his clerk, who had indeed copied him. "I am glad to see you and the—the—" He broke off abruptly, "Have you left it with Slater?"

"My violin, you mean?" said Juve, carelessly seating himself. "No. I have not brought it."

"Oh!" The corners of Mr. Wench's mouth turned down, and he went to his desk to fumble amongst many papers with an irritated look. "You should have brought it. I don't welcome you without it."

"I daresay. I can go if you like and not come back any more."

"No! no! no! my dear young friend." Wench shot out a yellow claw as Juve got on his feet. "Don't be hasty. You know what I think of you."

"Yes, I know." Mendel inspected the old scoundrel
contemptuously. "You take me for what Mother Monkey calls a mug and think that I'll go on for everlasting playing to you in this office for nothing. And a nice hole it is."

Mr. Wench scowled, tugged in his chair to his writing-table with a jerk and looked round the shabby room. Mendel was right: it was a nice hole; one for a rat but not for a human being. The faded green paper on the walls was dusty and torn; the windows had not been cleaned since the days of Adam, and the floor, innocent of carpet or rug, was decidedly dirty. It was furnished as sparsely as the outer office, with the addition of a large green-painted safe in one corner and a shabby bookcase crammed with business folios in another. Fond of luxury and colour, light and cleanly surroundings, the boy surveyed the usurer's den with frank disgust. Wench, knowing that sharp words had no effect on this insolent boy, smiled in a wry fashion and broke into a cackling laugh.

"The hole is good enough for me," he said with the wide grin of a death's-head on a tombstone. "I make money in it—plenty of money."

"Why don't you use it, then, to live decently?" retorted Juve, lounging to the window and leaning idly against the wall with his legs crossed and his hands in trousers pockets.

"I live as I choose. That's my business. Come to yours."

"Right." Mendel nodded carelessly. "I have no more time to lose than you have. What about my concert?"

"I am arranging for that," said Wench shortly. "So you have said a dozen times, but I never see any signs of the arranging. If you don't make good, as the Americans say, and deliver the goods, my dear old friend, I'm off."

"Don't you talk to me in that way, you young monkey."
Juve buttoned up his overcoat, put on his hat and sauntered towards the door. "You'll have to apologise for that."

"I do; I do." Wench rose in a hurry and re-closed the door which Mendel had already opened. "You're such a volcano. Do sit down." He dusted a chair and placed it near the writing-table with a crabbed bow. "Let us talk."

"Right oh, if you talk sense," said Juve, accepting the invitation. "What about this concert?"

"I have seen Signor Bellini," said the money-lender, becoming business-like and dry, "and at a great cost to me, he has got three artists, who will be on the platform along with yourself."

"And their names?" asked Mendel, who knew all that went on in the musical world.

"Madame Coralie; Signor Lido; Mr. Walter Derrick."

"Soprano; tenor; pianist," mused the boy, nodding approvingly. "Yes. All good names. And the Hall?"

"The Princess's Hall, my dear young friend," said Silas, washing his hands.

"The date of the concert?"

"Some time during the first week in December."

"Right oh!" Mendel nodded again, then leaned forward with his elbows on the table. "And your share?"

"Half your salary when you make a success—for a year or two."

"Or three, or four, or five at fifty per cent., you old sinner," sneered Juve coolly. "Do you take me for a fool? Pooh! I'll give you ten per cent., and that for one year. Afterwards I am free."

"No. It can't be done."

"It must be done." Juve rose and again buttoned his coat. "Do you think that I have learned nothing
in my grandmother's hard school? Those are my terms. You can take them or leave them."

"If I do, you won't get your chance," snarled Wench, biting his nails.

"I am young and can afford to wait; you are old and can't. When you are dead and buried I'll get my chance."

"Say forty per cent. on your earnings for a year. There, I don't ask two years."

"You wouldn't get them if you did," retorted the boy calmly; "but you are getting more reasonable."

"Forty per cent., then."

"Ten."

"No, it isn't worth while. Come—say thirty."

"Ten!"

Wench rose and cursed Juve by all his gods; but the boy, who had sat down again, simply pared his nails and laughed in the furious old face. "You're a young beast," fumed the usurer. "I'd lose on only thirty per cent. of your year's earnings."

"No you wouldn't, if I became famous, as I certainly will. I'll meet you half way, Mr. Wench. Twenty per cent. Four shillings in every pound, Monsieur Harpagon."

"That isn't half way." Wench cursed again, and then sat down to accept the inevitable. "I'll draw up an agreement now and you can sign it."

"Oh dear, no. Write out one and I'll get my lawyer to look over it."

"Your lawyer," sneered the money-lender, baffled by the boy's business instinct. "Dear me, how grand we are!"

"We'll be grander yet," said Mendel good-humouredly. "Well, do you agree?"

Wench nodded, and, for him, became quite good-humoured in his turn. "I'll give you a draft agreement when you next call," he said grudgingly, "and you can have it looked over by the Lord Chancellor if
you like. I’ll be straight; only I tell you that I’ll lose money.”

“Not you,” retorted the boy yawning, “and if you do—what you call losing money, I mean—you can console yourself with the reflection that you are suffering in the cause of Art.”

“I have a good mind not to do it,” grumbled Wench viciously.

“Please yourself. And now that we have settled things, bring out some cigarettes and a bottle of fizz.”

The usurer, who had really made a better bargain than he expected, produced these articles, together with a couple of wine-glasses from the lower part of the shabby bookcase. “I never met such an avaricious young shark,” he grumbled, uncorking the wine.

“Ah, if I wasn’t a musician you might take me as a partner.” Juve selected a cigarette, lighted it and sipped his glass of wine. Both the tobacco and champagne were excellent, being of the kind Wench gave to difficult clients who required extra diplomatic management.

“Not such a fool,” mumbled Shylock, grinning. “You’d get the better of me with your cunning ways. I wish you’d brought your violin. We might have had some music. I’m sure I deserve it after the way in which you’ve cheated me.”

“I have something else to do than to play to you for nothing,” said Juve, his face suddenly becoming grave. “I say,”—he leaned across the table again and brought his mind to consider what he had really come about—“do you know Joseph Purcane?”

“Yes!” Wench raised his bushy eyebrows and wrinkled his wicked old face into an expression of polite inquiry. “He and his father were concerned in that murder of Ursula, weren’t they?”

Juve nodded. “Though I don’t know how deeply they were concerned.”
"The evidence of their servants and the little girl exonerated them," said Wench after a pause.

"The evidence of Tavy and Maggie Salt didn't," retorted the boy; "but answer my question. Do you know Joseph Purcane?"

"I have answered. I do."

"As a client?"

"What's that to you?" asked Silas, becoming suddenly suspicious.

"I'll tell you when you explain how much he owes you."

Wench bent his brows, and disordered his sparse grey locks by rubbing his dome of baldness. In his turn he leaned towards Mendel. Their faces nearly touched. "I wish I knew what scheme you've got in that head of yours," he said with a searching look.

"I don't believe you're a boy at all, but an old man, who can cheat with the best of us."

"Thank you for the compliment," said Juve, lightly flicking off the ash of his cigarette. "My scheme is to save Miss Basser from the persecutions of her cousin. He wants to marry her."

Wench flung himself back, and a recollection of his conversation with Ursula Hedge came to his mind. "I am not surprised," he said meditatively; "it's the money, of course."

"What do you know about the money?" demanded Mendel, suddenly all ears.

"It's my business to know something about everything," said the usurer in a dry tone, "and I couldn't hob-nob with your grandmother without learning something about the Bassers. She was much interested in that family."

"Why?" Juve, looking more alert than ever, shot out the question sharply.

"Ah!" Mr. Wench stroked his chin and grinned. "Now you wish to know too much, my dear boy. Some day I may tell you."
"When?"
"When we learn who killed Ursula."
"What has my grandmother’s death got to do with the Basser money?"
"I don’t know." Silas hunched his shoulders.
"How should I know?"
"You said it was your business to know everything," said Juve reflectively.
"True! True! But some things are dangerous to know. Better not ask too many questions, my dear boy."
"As you please. Only answer me this one. Is Joseph Purcane deeply in debt to you?"
Silas scowled and drank what remained of his wine.
"Two thousand pounds."
"You are a fool," said Mendel politely. "How on earth do you expect to get back two thousand pounds, together with heaven knows what interest?"
"Seventy-five per cent.," grinned the old man, rubbing his hands. "I didn’t take less from Purcane, as I knew he wasn’t so safe an investment as I would like. But he’s safe; he’s safe," Wench chuckled evilly. "I learned that when I came down to Carrowell to see your grandmother. His father is a miser and has plenty of money. When he dies——"
"He die," said Juve, interrupting contemptuously.
"Why, he’ll live for ever."
"Oh, will he? Well then, why shouldn’t I force on this marriage with Miss Basser, so as to get my money sooner?"
"Because you won’t, if you know the will," said Mendel coolly. "Mrs. Basser has the money, after her comes her son, and finally her granddaughter."
"Not finally, my dear boy, not finally. Failing the girl, there are the Purcanes, father and son. Oh, my money’s all right"—and he rubbed his hands again.
"So right that you are going to help me to stop Joseph’s persecution of his cousin," said Juve, with so
fierce a frown that the self-satisfied smile died out of Wench’s face.

"I want my money," he said sullenly.

"Your two thousand at seventy-five per cent.," retorted Mendel with a sneer. "Well, you can get it when the old father dies. Lesley—I mean Miss Basser—must have her own money to her own self when the others of her family are dead. Joseph won’t get it. You may be certain of that."

"Ha!" Wench grinned. "Perhaps you intend to get it yourself by marrying this charming young lady."

"Perhaps I do," said Juve coolly, and keeping his own counsel. "Anyhow, I want you to put the screw on Joseph."

"What for?"

"Because I wish him to get into a tight corner over money. When he is I shall know how to deal with him."

"You must make your meaning clearer," said Wench, becoming very cool and business-like. "I don’t care for mysteries."

"Do you consider that Purcane is the husband for a decent woman?"

"No. Nor for an indecent one. He’s a low beast," said the usurer with conviction. "If you knew what I know about him——"

"Oh, I know a great deal," interrupted Mendel quietly. "I made it my business to know. He has been twice a co-respondent in divorce cases: he cheats at cards and has been turned out of every respectable club in London. He drinks like a fish and gambles on the turf like the lamb he isn’t, and altogether is about as bad as they make them."

"Is that all you know?" said Wench, with a jeering look. "Oh, I could tell you heaps more. Enough to place Joseph in the dock."

"Tell me; tell me," said Juve eagerly. "That’s
where I wish to see him. If you know of something already, I needn't carry out my scheme."

"What scheme?" asked Silas suspiciously.

"The one I have in my head to prevent this animal from troubling Miss Basser any longer. He has forced a promise from her to marry him on the first day of the New Year—at least she has to give him his answer then. I won't have it, Wench." Mendel started to his feet, profoundly moved. "Do you hear me, man? I won't have it."

"I don't see that it is any of your business," said Silas tartly.

"This much, that I love Miss Basser and won't see her married to a blackmailing, drunken profligate such as Joseph truly is."

"You intend to marry her yourself?" asked the usurer again.

"Perhaps I do and perhaps I don't," said Mendel, making his former enigmatic reply. "Anyhow, will you do what I want and put the screw on Joseph?"

"I don't see why I should," said the old man crossly.

"I want my money."

"So you said before. What's the use of your behaving like a parrot with one silly saying. But I tell you what. Unless you do as I ask you, I'll see that you lose the money."

"Pooh! Bah! Tush!" snarled Silas contemptuously. "You can't do that."

"As you please," retorted Juve indifferently; "anyhow, I'll try my best. Old Marcus Purcane and his son fight constantly, and it wouldn't take much to get Joseph cut off with a shilling. I have only to tell the father that his precious son is in debt to you and other money-lenders to do that. Purcane senior has a horror and hatred of Shylocks."

Wench was still contemptuous, although a trifle uneasy, for he recognized how unscrupulous and clever Mendel could be if necessary. "I'll risk it."
Juve jumped up briskly, and put on his hat. "Don’t say I didn’t warn you."

"You think a great deal of yourself," vociferated the old man angrily; "but I’m not going to be ordered about by a brat like you. I shall put the screw on Joseph Purcane in my own time and in my own way."

"It will be too late then, Mr. Wench. Miss Basser won’t marry the beast, as I know how to prevent that, and I shall do my best to spoil your chance of getting old Purcane’s money through your confounded client. Then Joseph will be left high and dry to bolt to America."

This last remark had more effect on Wench than any other, and he positively screamed his denial. "He daren’t do that; he daren’t do that."

"Why?" asked the boy negligently. "Unless you lay him by the heels immediately, it’s his best way out of his difficulties. There’s the murder, you know," drawled Juve, drawing on his gloves. "Our dear friend isn’t so safe in that direction as he imagines. A word from me and he’ll bolt."

"But I say, my dear boy, you mustn’t make mischief. Think what I’m doing for you. Don’t work against me."

"What you’re doing for me is for yourself, Mr. Wench. There isn’t any philanthropy about it, although you try to make me think so. I can turn old Purcane against his son and put Joseph’s wind up."

Wench bit his nails, with a perplexed look. The boy seemed so certain that he could do what he said that the money-lender was worried. "If I could believe you, I’d get a writ out at once."

"Ah, now you are talking sense," answered Mendel in a patronizing manner.

"Shut your mouth," growled the other viciously.

"Right oh." Juve strolled towards the door with an agreeable smile. "You can take my offer or leave it."
"What offer?"

"I promise that you shall have your money if you put the screw on Joseph."

"Tut! Tut! That's talk. You can't promise anything."

"Very good. Then I'm free to queer your pitch. Good-day."

"Wait a bit; wait a bit," rasped out the usurer, now thoroughly alarmed. "After all, if I writ Purcane I can withdraw it again, if you're playing the fool."

"Of course you can. And if you think that I'm playing the fool——" Mendel broke off with a shrug.

"I believe you're the devil."

"His son, Mr. Wench. I am too juvenile to be the father. You think that wisdom only comes with grey hairs. It doesn't. Experience brings it, and my respected grandmother has given me heaps of opportunities to learn experience. I'm young, but I know a bit, and that bit I shall use to mess up your business, since you won't do what I ask."

"I will do what you ask," said the money-lender suddenly. "At the worst I can withdraw the writ."

"Oh!" Juve smiled, knowing that he had gained his point. "It's a bargain."

"Yes," growled Wench savagely. "It doesn't matter if I writ Purcane now or later. I'm bound to get my money in the end."

"Of course," said Mendel delicately. "It's only your confounded pride that is up in arms in being dictated to by a boy."

"I'm not taking any of your dictation. Of my own free will I'm going to take steps to get my money. Get out."

Juve laughed and departed whistling. His plan was succeeding excellently.
THE wary old money-lender was in no hurry to proceed against Purcane, as the "confounded pride" alluded to by Mendel urged him to deal with the matter in his own way and at his own time. He knew much about his slippery client, but it seemed, from Juve's hints, that there was more to know, so Mr. Wench sent out a jackal, who served him for pickings, to make inquiries. The result of these was highly unsatisfactory, for undoubtedly Joseph was getting deeper and deeper into the mire of financial trouble instead of using economy to extricate himself therefrom. Things, for the moment, were so bad with him that it was not impossible—although the jackal did not learn this—that he might cross the Atlantic. But Silas was informed by his spy that Joseph boasted continually of his immediate marriage with a wealthy bride, and after the conversation with Mendel, had no difficulty in guessing the lady's name.

This being so, it was unlikely that Mr. Purcane would leave England before the first day of the New Year, when the dice of Fate were to be thrown, so Wench temporized. Instead of issuing a writ as Juve advised, he wrote a sharp letter demanding the principal and interest immediately, otherwise the matter would be placed in legal hands. In his epistle Mr. Wench suggested that his debtor should call on him and settle, but he was doubtful if Joseph would attend to the request. His doubts proved to be well-founded, for Purcane kept out of the way, and although Silas went on an exploring expedition he was unable to find the man. For quite a week he hunted zealously for his prey, and for exactly the same period his prey escaped him. Never of an amiable disposition, Wench grew angry and afraid, so much so that he made up his
mind to issue the summons. But before he could instruct the shady lawyer who attended to his shady business to do this, the visit of a comparative stranger changed the money-lender's plans. Captain Lerch was the name inscribed on the card Slater brought in to his employer, and it was that of a comparative stranger, because Wench had heard of him, although until this moment he had never set eyes on him.

"Captain Lerch," said the money-lender, when his clerk ushered in a tall handsome man, perfectly dressed and with a languid manner. "Sit down, if you please. I know you by reputation."

The visitor, who was fair-haired, clean-shaven, and stolid, screwed a monocle into his right eye, and stared blandly. "I return the compliment," he said in a slow drawling voice, and accepted the proffered seat. "Our mutual knowledge of each other, Mr. Wench, will do away with much explanation."

Silas grunted in a non-compromising way, while he watched Captain Lerch lay down his silk hat and gold-topped cane, peel off his gloves and light a very expensive cigar. The truth is, he was puzzled to know why this dandy fly had walked uninvited into his parlour, and was very much on his guard, since Lerch was reported to be a spider as he was himself, and a larger eater-up of flies. "Well, well, well," said Wench, becoming annoyed by his guest's silence and leisurely preparations. "Don't waste my time."

"Oh, I shouldn't mind doing that," said Lerch, tilting back his chair and placing one leg over the other to caress his ankle, "but I don't wish to waste my own. Like yourself, I am a busy man."

"Come to the point," growled Silas testily.

"Well," drawled the Captain, smoothing a loose leaf of his cigar, "a friend of yours is the point."

"I have no friends."

"What! Isn't Mr. Joseph Mortimer Purcane a friend?"
“Oh!” Wench blinked suspiciously. “You come from him?”

“I do and I don’t, I don’t and I do,” said Lerch enigmatically. “We have to understand one another before I can speak plainer.”

“We do understand one another. You are a man on the market and I am a money-lender. I don’t suppose on your record and mine any decent person would give us a character worth mentioning.”

“Scotland Yard might.”

“Oh, I’ve kept clear of that place so far, Captain. And you——?”

Lerch shrugged his shoulders. “I am at liberty, as you see. I needn’t give you your biography, as it would be waste of time for me to tell you what an implacable old shark you are. But”—he leaned across the table, as Juve had done, and his voice became sharper—“what do you know of me?”

“Everything,” croaked Silas, rubbing his hands and leering.

“No! No!” corrected Lerch gently, “not everything. You know my bad points, but not my good ones.”

“I never heard that you had any of the last.”

“You wouldn’t, Mr. Wench. In the shady society in which you and I move, we all seek to hide our lights under bushels. But tell me what you know? It is so interesting to hear one’s obituary notice while still in the flesh.”

Wench rubbed his hands still harder, speaking with cruel frankness in order to hurt this “swell” as he called him: “Your name—at least the one you go by—is Roland Lerch. You are a gentleman, a public-school boy and a Sandhurst cadet.”

“I was,” murmured Lerch lazily. “Speak in the past tense, not in the present, Mr. Wench. Go on.”

“You were heir to a large fortune and wasted it.”
"With the aid of gentlemen of your profession, Mr. Wench. Yes?"

"You entered the Army and were kicked out for cheating at cards."

Lerch nodded without wincing, "And then—?"

"Then you got married and your wife divorced you."

"She did."

"And then—"

"Then I fell down on the floor and became what you term a 'man on the market,'" finished Lerch, leaning back again and speaking absolutely without bitterness. "You need tell me no more."

"Oh, I think I must, if only to establish perfect confidence between us."

"The confidence of thieves," murmured the Captain; "the ties of common funk."

Silas chuckled. "You put things in a nutshell, sir. Oh yes, you fell on the floor, and made your living anyhow, but still kept within the limits of the law. Now,"—Wench bent forward with a snarl—"you are in the cellar; you have fallen still lower, as you steal things, you blackmail women, you pick pockets, if you get the chance. Oh, I know, I know." Silas tapped the table with his lean yellow fingers. "You have committed every crime."

"Save murder," interrupted Lerch, who had listened to this pretty category of his doings wholly unmoved. "I haven't gone so far as that. Nor has Purcane, although his record is as bad as mine,—and yours, my dear Fagin—Shylock—Jabez Balfour—Crippen."

"Not that last," grinned the money-lender. "Like yourself, I am free from murder. I only hope our friend Purcane is also."

"Oh, that Madame Valeria case," said Lerch with a shrug. "Jos says he is innocent, but of course he would. He may be guilty, but that has nothing to
do with me, Mr. Wench. I have come to see you on Joseph's behalf."

"Where's the money, then?" asked Wench, stretching out a rapacious hand.

"In Cloud-Cuckoo Land at present," said Lerch coolly, and making an Aristophanic reference, which he knew was literally Greek to his companion, "and it will remain there, if you take steps to force payment."

"But this marriage——"

"Ah! Jos isn't so certain of Miss Basser's answer as he pretends to be. I am not a soft-hearted man," added the Captain leisurely, "but I'd rather see the poor young lady dead than married to such a blackguard."

"Why do you associate with him, then?" snarled the usurer.

"Why do I associate with you,—you fence?"

"I'm not a fence."

"Yes, you are. I wouldn't have come to see you otherwise. Jos told me how you have disposed of many a piece of jewellery he has stolen. But for his report ages ago that you were such a gripping old scoundrel, I should have come to you myself. Well, I have come now—about a pearl necklace and several other things."

"Jewels." Wench sat up and listened breathlessly.

"Yes! The property of Miss Basser and her grandmother. Jos tells me that the collection is worth five thousand pounds."

"Aha!" Silas rubbed his skinny hands gleefully.

"So you propose to steal the jewels and bring them to me."

Lerch nodded. "On conditions. I'm not going to let you have the lion's share, Mr. Wench," he said dryly. "Jos is in a funk about the business, but I can persuade him to do it along with me, if you come to terms."

"And the——wait." Silas scratched his chin.
"What put you and Purcane on to this way of making money?"

"Well, it was more accident than anything else. Do you know a clever young violinist called——"

"Juve Mendel." Wench started and sat up, trembling with eagerness. Could it be possible that Juve was mixed up with the thieves and was thereby likely to place himself in his—Wench's—power. It seemed too good to be true, and, as the next speech of Lerch's showed, such was really the case.

"Oh, he hasn't anything to do with the matter," observed the Captain pointedly. "You won't get that boy into your clutches, Mr. Wench. He's much too clever."

Silas bit his nails. "I know that," he retorted crossly. "Well?"

"I was asked to supper the other night by a lady friend of mine, who sings sentimental songs at the music-hall where Mendel plays in the orchestra. He was at that supper and during its course began to talk about jewels."

"Oh, he introduced the subject, did he?" said Silas, asking himself the question, rather than putting it to Lerch.

"Yes. Although I can't even say that. It came up in the course of conversation, as my lady friend is fond of jewels. Mendel talked about the collection of the Basser family, who live in the same village as he does. In fact, he got a trifle elevated with drink, and boasted about the value of the jewels."

"Five thousand pounds?"

"More or less, as was confirmed by Jos afterwards."

"He was not at the supper?"

"No. But when I learned from the information which Mendel let fall, that these jewels were in a safe in the library of the Basser mansion at Carrowell, none too carefully guarded, I suggested to Jos that we might make a haul."
"Oh!"—Silas shot a keen glance at the Captain—
"and he——"

"Kicked at the suggestion. He wanted to marry Miss Basser and get hold of the family jewels in the proper way. Then your letter came along and that induced him to fall in with my scheme."

Wench nodded and chuckled. He was beginning to see how Juve was arranging matters. The discussion about the Basser jewels at the supper had been intended by the boy to place Lerch on the track of the valuable swag. Juve knew tolerably well—especially since he had made it his business to know—that Purcane and Lerch were birds of a feather, who worked together in various nefarious enterprises. By inveigling Joseph into committing the burglary, it was pretty certain that the marriage could be prevented. Of course, the Basser family would not prosecute Joseph since he was a relative, but his crime, if executed, would enable Miss Basser to refuse him.

"And I don't see exactly where I come in," mused the money-lender, nursing his chin and pondering deeply.

"What's that?" drawled Captain Lerch softly and screwing his monocle into his eye again. "You were saying——"

"Nothing! Nothing!" Wench thought again, then suddenly addressed his visitor somewhat tartly. "I think this idea is silly," he said vehemently. "If Purcane waits, he can get Miss Basser to marry him at the New Year. Then he will get her money and the jewels and can put me straight, without danger."

"I daresay," retorted Lerch contemptuously; "but in that case I'm out of it, my dear Mr. Wench, which I don't intend to be. Miss Basser isn't likely to marry Jos."

"He can force her to do so."

"How do you know that?"

"I don't know," said Wench testily. "I only
surmise. Unless it was a case of force, the girl wouldn't be such a fool as to entertain the idea of marrying the scoundrel."

"I don't think she does," observed Lerch gently.

"Oh, yes. Else why has she promised to give him her answer on the first of January. Young Mendel told me that such was the arrangement."

"Oh, did he!" This time it was the Captain who sat up. "And what's young Mendel's game, may I ask?"

Wench shook his head and refused to answer. Not because he could not, but for his own ends, he would not. "I don't know."

"Well," observed the other after a searching look, "it doesn't matter to me, you know. What I wish to learn is if Jos and I can bring the swag to you?"

"That depends upon the terms, and if the affair is carried out in such a way as won't compromise me."

Lerch nodded, quite understanding how things looked from the money-lender's point of view. For fifteen minutes they haggled over the matter, both keen to get the best of the bargain. In the end Wench scored, and had it all his own way, a triumph which made him chuckle and jeer at the Captain. Yet even as Lerch was drawing on his gloves to take his leave, Silas was seized with qualms. Not as to the righteousness of his doings, but as to the possibility of his making a mistake. Was this bird in the hand worth the two in the bush?

"You say that it was my letter which made Pur­cane agree to this business, Captain Lerch?" he asked irritably, and rubbing his bald head.

"Yes! Up till then he hesitated. But when you threatened to put him into court, he climbed down and fell in with my plans. You see," drawled Lerch, staring at the money-lender through his eye-glass, "Jos is an undischarged bankrupt, a fact which would complicate matters for him if the case got into the
newspapers. Then all his other creditors would be down on him, and would ask nasty questions. I can assure you," added Lerch, walking slowly towards the exit for departing clients, "that if you stir up muddy water in Jos's case, he runs a considerable chance of being drowned."

"Well, well, well, let matters stand as they are," rasped out the usurer, not altogether satisfied.

"Then I can take back a message from you saying that the letter was bluff?"

"It wasn't bluff," cried Wench angrily. "If you hadn't come on Purcane's behalf, I would have issued the writ."

"And queered your own pitch," the Captain assured him. "Bring Jos into open court and you have every chance of losing your money. Your only opportunity of getting anything is by assisting in this little job."

"There's the possible marriage."

"It won't come off."

"It may, if I prevent this burglary."

Lerch's eyes grew narrow, and he stepped back from the door to bring his face within an inch or two of the money-lender's yellow visage. "This little job is coming off, for my own benefit," he said softly. "Do you understand, Mr. Silas Wench? If you give the show away, I can put several spokes in your wheel, which will ruin your business and get you into prison."

Wench, in his own wicked mind, ran over several shady transactions of which he had been guilty, and silently admitted that the speaker could harm him considerably. Still he bluffed. "You don't know——"

"I know quite enough to do what I say," retorted Lerch, putting on his silk hat and smiling sweetly. "Don't you meddle with my affairs, or it will be the worse for you. A nod's as good as a wink to a blind horse, you know."

The ex-military visitor departed, looking smart and affable and gentlemanly, as if he had not a care in the
world, leaving Mr. Wench perspiring with dire anxiety. He cursed the hour that had brought Lerch to his den: cursed Juve for giving him the hint which brought him, and Purcane for employing him as his messenger to gain time. But for the threat Wench would have refused time, or at least would have compelled Purcane to insist upon an earlier reply from Miss Basser. The old man would have preferred to get his money, or what he could of it, in a less dangerous way than by a burglary. As a rule, he did not trouble about crimes of this sort, and was well known to London thieves as a useful "fence." But somehow the robbery of the Basser jewels stuck in the money-lender's throat. Yet he had been forced to agree and play Juve's game, not so much on the boy's presentations, as on the look and speech of his late visitor. Lerch for all his suavity was a disagreeable person to cross, and it was possible that he might prove dangerous. On the whole, Silas, biting his nails and cursing every one, had to abide by the bargain he had been made. His only consolation was that he had arranged his own terms with Captain Roland Lerch, and his share was tolerably large.

Had Wench followed his ex-military friend, he might have been still more anxious to get back his money in a less compromising way. Lerch walked out of Golden Square and entered a shabby foreign restaurant down a side street. Here he was introduced by the obsequious Italian proprietor into a small private room at the back of the house. Here Mr. Purcane sat at a deal table, smoking sulkily and sipping an occasional glass of Chianti. He was carefully dressed, as usual, but looked anxious and care-worn, jumping up with nervous apprehension when Lerch entered. Indeed he was in such a state of terror that he could only ask a question with his eyes and dig his nails into the palms of his clenched hands to control his rising hysteria. The new-comer did not hurry himself. He removed his hat, took off his gloves, cast a dis-
gusted glance round the sordid room, and seated himself at the deal table to pour out a glass of wine. Purcane could bear the strain no longer, and came behind the Captain to clutch his shoulder.

"Well?" he asked hoarsely, "and what—what—?

"Take your hand away, Jos," drawled the other man. "I don't want my clothes spoiled by your pawing."

Purcane did as he was asked and returned to his side of the table in order to sit down. "What does Wench say?" he asked with a gasp.

"What did you expect him to say?" said Lerch contemptuously. "Of course he agrees to take over the swag."

"But the letter about the writ?"

"Oh, that's all right. He won't do anything in that direction. But if I hadn't gone with this proposition, Jos, the old scamp would have put on the screw."

"I can't afford to risk that," murmured Purcane, his face white and perspiring with terror. "Wench knows too much about me."

"Well, you know something about him."

Purcane shook his sleek head. "Nothing that could place him in the dock."

"Oh!" Lerch looked at his companion curiously. "He can put you there."

"I think so, only I'm not sure."

Remembering what Silas had hinted at, the other man leaned forward to ask a question which made Purcane turn even paler than he was. "Is it murder?"

"No! No!" Joseph shrank back, huddled up in his chair. "Why do you say that?"

"Well, old Wench talked of Madame Valeria's—"

"I am innocent of that. I swear that I am innocent," cried Purcane, jumping up. "Why, that old hag's death was the worst thing that could have hap-
pened at the time it did. Had she lived, there wouldn’t have been any need for all this cursedness. I would have been rich—rich.”

“Oh, would you?” Lerch put up his eye-glass and looked at the quivering face before him. “At the cost of—murder,” he sank his voice at the ominous word.

“Perhaps.”

“Then it is just as well that the woman died,” said Lerch sternly. “I am as bad as they make ‘em, Jos, just as you are, but I draw the line at murder.”

“But this could have been done—”

Lerch flung up his hand. “I don’t want to hear details. Either this woman wished to murder your father, so that you might get the money, or to slaughter the whole Basser family for a like purpose. It’s lucky for everybody that someone unknown”—Lerch shot a glance at his friend—“murdered her.”

“I am quite innocent,” said Purcane sullenly, “and we’ll leave the matter alone if you please.”

“Certainly. You brought the subject up. I didn’t. But you understand the situation, Jos. Wench won’t move against you if we get these jewels and take them to him to dispose of.”

“He’ll nab all the coin,” remonstrated Purcane.

“No, he won’t. I have arranged everything. I must say he did get the better of me, but not very much so. You’ll be able to wipe off the greater part of your debt, if you refuse to give him the interest he demands.”

“Oh, I’ll do that,” said Joseph, becoming calmer, and drinking some wine. “If he takes the swag I get a pull over him, and he’ll have to let me off lightly, you bet. And you, Lerch?”

“Oh, I’ll go to the States with my share,” said the Captain with a nod, “as things are getting a trifle warm for me here. You and Wench will have to stand the racket if anything serious comes of the burglary.”
"I have a good mind not to attempt it," growled the other man nervously.
"I don't see what else you can do, unless you wish Shylock to pounce."
"I can act straightly and ask him to wait until my cousin agrees to marry me," said Purcane restlessly and biting his lip.
"Do you call that acting straightly?" inquired Lerch, raising his eyebrows and quite undisturbed, "to force an innocent girl into a marriage with a blackguard such as you are?"
"And what are you, Lerch?"
"Oh, I'm tarred with the same brush. But I don't force a girl into marrying me against her will."
"We all know what a saint you are, I don't think, Lerch. Leave my business alone if you please."
"So long as it doesn't interfere with mine, I shall do so."
"You mean the burglary?"
"Yes. I have to clear out of England and I want enough cash to start again in America. The sale of these jewels to Wench will give me what I want."

Joseph was usually afraid of his cool companion, knowing how dangerous he could be if crossed. But this last speech made him furious. "I get nothing out of the business," he raged. "You do and Wench does. All I get amounts to nothing."
"You pay part of your debt to a man who can, as you acknowledge, put you in the dock. Is that nothing?"
"Well, I'm of two minds about the business," said Purcane, ignoring the question.
"I advise you not to be, my friend."
"I shall do what I like."
"Better not; better not." Lerch finished his wine and rose to go. "Keep on the right side of me, if you are wise, Jos. You're a dirty scoundrel and only dire necessity compels me to have anything to do with
you. Faugh!" and the more daring scoundrel walked out of the sordid room.

Purcane showed his teeth as the door closed. "I'll pay you out for this, my fine fellow," he muttered, and began to think how he could do so.

CHAPTER XVIII

A FORLORN HOPE

MR. JOSEPH PURCANE was learning very thoroughly the truth of the text upon which the rector had preached a sermon one Sunday evening. Having no religion, save a profound worship of the Golden Calf, the rascal rarely went to church, and only did so on certain occasions to gain some particular end by assuming a virtue which he did not possess. In order to assure Miss Basser that he had turned over a new leaf, and so smooth the way to his acceptance as her husband, Joseph advisedly sought the family pew. Mr. Godwin, having announced that "The way of transgressors is hard," commented thereon very freely. Purcane quite agreed with his remarks, as experience was teaching him the truth of the saying. Not that Joseph regarded himself overmuch as a transgressor—his moral standard was not sufficiently high for that—but he recognized only too bitterly that his way of life was hard—very unjustly he thought. His one idea was to eat his cake and have it, which is, of course, a manifest impossibility.

There was no doubt that he was between the devil and the deep sea. On the one hand, Wench wanted his money and threatened to bring the matter into open court if it was not paid immediately: on the other, Captain Lerch insisted upon annexing the Basser jewels in an illegal manner. Only by procuring
without delay a large sum of money could Mr. Purcane hope to silence the usurer, and escape from the domination of Lerch. There were two ways of gaining his ransom from utter ruin. One was to persuade his father to give him what he wanted, out of fear lest the family name should be blackened: the other to offer Lesley a chance of escape from a marriage she objected to on condition that she paid him the sum he required. After some cogitation Joseph decided to see the girl before he interviewed his father, since he believed that he could manage her better than he could the gripping old miser. With this idea in his head, he presented himself at the Grange, demanded to be led into the library and sent up his card to his cousin, who was nursing her father. Miss Basser winced when she read the name of her tormentor, and had half a mind to refuse an interview. But knowing Joseph's capacity for making trouble, she decided that it would be best to see him, and learn what new rascality he was plotting. She delayed going downstairs immediately, since she wished to collect her thoughts and brace herself for a disagreeable time. But had she known what Purcane was doing while he waited, she would have descended at once.

The fact is, that Joseph, anticipating a refusal of his request, was making ready for the emergency. The jewels were in the library, safely bestowed in a strong-room of no great size, the door of which was hidden behind a large bookcase. That door could not be opened unlawfully save by the ingenious Captain Lerch with a set of burglars' tools which he possessed and could use very skilfully. But there was another door opening out on to the terrace, through which admission could be gained into the library, presuming the key was forthcoming. As two secret visitors were not likely to get the key after midnight, Joseph employed himself in taking an impression of the same in wax. He had ample time to do this carefully, and knew that a
skeleton key could easily be manufactured by a scampish locksmith in London, who made a speciality of such nefarious work. With such an instrument there would be no difficulty in gaining admission into the room, and Joseph was very well satisfied when he tucked away the wax impression in his pocket. Just as he did this Lesley made her appearance, and her cousin assumed the look of an apologetic visitor, who was sorry to trouble her at such an hour. The girl looked worried and worn, for her father was not an easy patient to nurse. Also, although certain that he was innocent, she dreaded lest his folly should come to the ears of the police and be made public. Mindful of Joseph's threats, and doubtful of the extent of his knowledge, Lesley feared that he would make mischief. And that was exactly what Purcane had come to do, if he did not get what he desired. It was no wonder that Miss Basser had a wan look, and that her eyes were filled with apprehension. She had, up to the present, fought very bravely, but the strain was telling on her, and she did not think she could hold out much longer. Fortunately Archie was returning from the North during the week, and then she hoped he would bear a part of her burden, if not the whole. Meanwhile, unassisted, she had to face this unpleasant visitor.

"Well, Joseph, and what do you want?" asked Lesley, making her greeting as hard and cold as possible with a view to discouragement.

But Purcane was much too desperate to object to her distant manner. "I have something serious to say to you."

"That means something unpleasant."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Purcane, pulling down his cuffs and smoothing his perfectly fitting coat.

"You may think otherwise."

Lesley looked at him searchingly, wondering why he was smirking so complacently. "What mischief are
"you up to now?" she demanded abruptly. "Come to the point at once."

"Won't you sit down," said Joseph blandly, and offering her a chair.

"Thank you, I prefer to stand. It is necessary for me to be with my father and I cannot give you more than ten minutes."

"That will be sufficient."

"It will, if you will state the reason for your visit without delay."

"Of course. My time is as valuable as yours, Lesley. By the way, how is your father?"

"Is that what you have come to ask?"

"No. But common courtesy——"

"Don't talk nonsense, Joseph. This is no visit of courtesy. You have come because you want something."

"I do!"

"Then you won't get it," burst out the girl, flaming up with the courage of despair. "We understand one another, as everything was arranged at our last interview. You wish to marry me, and as the price of your silence I agree to give you your answer on the first day of the New Year. It is only November now, so there is no reason why you should come and bother me."

"There is this reason," said Purcane, wounded by this inhospitable reception: "that I wish to make things easier for you."

"In what way." Lesley took up her position on the hearthrug and surveyed the dapper little scoundrel in disgust.

"You don't wish to marry me!"

"No, I don't," said the girl roundly; "and so far there is not the slightest reason to believe that I intend to marry you."

"Take care," he threatened. "I know——"

"What do you know?"
“Much that you would rather was kept from Inspector Quinton.”

Lesley laughed and her eyes wandered to the completed trophy whence the knife had been taken. Now that it was restored to its place and it would be difficult to prove that it had ever been removed, she was less afraid of her visitor’s threats. “I don’t think you know much.”

“Oh, don’t I.” Joseph was taken aback by this defiance.

“No. You hint that my father had something to do with this murder. Well, then—prove it.”

“At the proper time and in the proper place, which will be at Tarhaven in Quinton’s office.”

“That’s stage thunder,” said Miss Basser contemptuously and feeling more and more that what she said was true. “Beyond the fact that my father used to smoke opium at Madame Valeria’s house, you can prove nothing.”

“He was in the house when she was killed,” said Purcane viciously.

“So you say. But I deny that. My father was in this library on that Sunday afternoon taking his usual nap.”

“You can’t prove that.”

“I can,” said the girl, lying bravely on behalf of her father; “and others can prove it also.”

“If that is so, why did you agree to marry me and so purchase my silence?”

“I haven’t agreed to marry you,” rejoined Miss Basser coolly. “To prevent your saying that my father smoked opium, which naturally I don’t wish known, I promised to consider about marrying you.”

“If you don’t marry me, I’ll tell everything to Quinton.”

“As you please.” Lesley shrugged her shoulders. “You can only say that my father indulges in a vice.”

“Oh, well, I can only say that,” said Joseph un-
pleasantly, "and if you think so, why you think so. I know my own knowing. Your father was better acquainted with the woman who called herself Madame Valeria than you think, and had every reason to get her out of the way."

"Oh, indeed." Lesley felt a qualm, as he spoke so confidently. "And what is the real name of Madame Valeria."

"Ask your father, and then you will see if I haven't something to tell the police. But enough of this." Purcane waved his hand in a lordly manner. "I have more important things to talk about. I say that I can make things uncomfortable for your father, and you can only buy my silence."

"By marriage?" sneered Lesley, fighting for every inch.

"By money."

Miss Basser uttered an exclamation of surprise. "I prefer that arrangement to the other," she said, looking at him hard. "How much do you want?"

"Five thousand pounds."

"You are modest in your demands."

"I am, considering that your father has the same amount yearly. It is either money to that amount or marriage. And I want the sum in notes this week."

"Oh, do you? And where am I to get it? My father has not five thousand a year. He is entirely dependent on grandmother until she dies."

"To save his skin, your father can get the money from his mother."

Lesley shook her head. "You are mistaken. My grandmother will not part with so large a sum as that without knowing all."

"Then tell her all," said Joseph curtly.

"I shall do nothing of the sort. At her age, any knowledge of these things might cause her death."

"And then your father would get the money," hinted Purcane.
Lesley looked at him coldly. "Neither my grandmother nor my father will pay you the sum you ask."
"You do it then?"
"I?" Lesley started in surprise. "How can I?"
"You have a pearl necklace worth more than a thousand, which you can give me. Yes, and there are other jewels also which will come to you."
"They have not come to me yet and will not until my father and granny die, so it is impossible for me to give them to you. As to the pearl necklace, it is a family treasure, which only belongs to me for my life. I have to pass it on to others."
"Pass it on to me."
"No. I certainly shall not do so."
"Then I hold you to your promise of marriage, Lesley."
"There is no promise of marriage. I have told you that several times. All I said and all I say now is, that I shall consider your offer and will give you an answer at the New Year."
"How much better will you be off then than you are now?" asked Joseph, who was fuming at the bold way in which she denied his modest request.
"Oh, Time works wonders," retorted Miss Basser with a lightness she was far from feeling. "By the New Year I shall probably know much which will enable me to refuse you."
"I don't think so."
"I do. You are not going to have things all your own way, you blackmailer."
"Oh, I say." Joseph looked as fierce as his dapper appearance would let him. "You mustn't talk to me like that."
"I shall talk to you as I choose." Lesley started forward and going to the door opened it. It was the door opening on to the terrace, and through this she pointed. "Leave the house, Joseph. If you don't, I shall order the servants to throw you out."
"You defy me?"
"Yes, I do. You have not such a clean past that you can make your own terms in this way. Say a word against my father and I shall say something about you. There are such people as inquiry agents, Joseph," she ended significantly.
"That's bluff."
"You stay here and you'll see. Go!"

Lesley, being taller and stronger than the little man, advanced on him in so threatening a manner that he hastily retreated towards the door. "I'll make you pay for this," he cried, looking black with fury.
"Oh, no, you won't. You'll wait until the New Year."
"I may, or I may not," said Purcane ambiguously, and stepped out on to the terrace; "but mark me, Lesley—-" He could get no further, for the door was suddenly shut in his face.

For the time being Mr. Purcane was baffled, and not knowing anything about the replaced knife he was puzzled to think how Lesley came to defy him so boldly. She had been meek and mild enough at their last interview, and had been willing to make terms. Now she was absolutely vicious, and it was evident that there was no money to be got in that direction. Joseph walked slowly out of the Grange grounds, through the village, and home to his own house. He had passed through one unpleasant interview: now he was about to undergo one still more uncomfortable. Lesley had refused him both the money and the jewels, so nothing remained but to apply to his father for sufficient cash to avert bankruptcy. So Joseph concluded, until he remembered the lump of wax in his pocket with the impression of the key. That remained at all events to indicate his chance of breaking into the strong-room in Lerch's useful company, so even if his tight-fisted parent refused, there would be still that
chance of silencing Wench. But, as has been said before, Purcane did not wish to take this dangerous path, unless he was absolutely driven to do so. Therefore, since his cousin had flouted him, he could only hope to have better luck with his father. But of this good fortune he was not particularly hopeful, since the old man was as hard as granite, and held on to his money like a limpet.

The miser lived in a large square mansion of dingy yellow brick, which was surrounded by neglected grounds and many trees of great size. Mr. Wrest was supposed to be the gardener, but only cultivated vegetables, since that was cheaper than buying them. Marcus Purcane really kept him as a kind of guard to look after him and the house, when Joseph was enjoying himself in London. With his wife—who acted as housekeeper—the man lived at the back of the great mansion, and as a great concession old Purcane allowed him to have his little girl along with him and her mother. But had not Esther, the little girl afore-said, been a good watch-dog with the sharpest of ears and the most inquiring of natures, the miser would not have conceded so much, since it meant another mouth to feed. As it was, he paid the smallest of wages to his underlings and gave them but scant food and fire. Only because Wrest (who had been a poacher) could get nothing else did he stay on. But he did not like the situation, nor did his wife, and no wonder, considering how stinted they were by their grasping master.

Joseph looked up frowningly at the grim mansion, most of the windows of which were closed with inhospitable shutters, and unlocked the front door petulantly. No more than the Wrest family did he like this nightmare abode, and often had dreams of selling off the place when his father died. But old Marcus had no intention of dying, and was a vigorous man of over seventy, silent, suspicious and vigilant. He loved
money as much as his son did; only each loved it in a different way. Joseph wished to buy pleasure with gold and silver, while his father found no greater joy than in keeping the same in a strong box and gloating over it at intervals. Of course the old man had many investments and much property in land, but he always kept a large sum beside him in cash, just to fondle it and enjoy the gleam of its beauty. He was a true miser, starving himself and all those over whom he had power so that he might worship Mammon as a miser should.

Ascending the gloomy stairs Joseph entered the sitting-room, which was on the first floor for safety, and found his father playing with a small bag of sovereigns. On hearing his son's footsteps, the miser hastily clawed the gold together and shoved it back into the canvas bag. Pretending not to notice this, the new-comer walked to the dirty window and raised the sash.

"Why don't you let the fresh air in?" he demanded crossly.

"It's so cold," said old Marcus in a surly manner.

"That's your fault. A fire——"

"A fire costs money, and I can't afford to have one."

"You'll kill yourself with your money-grubbing."

"That's my business," snarled the father.

There was no need for courtesy between the two, as they both had the utmost contempt for one another. Marcus considered Joseph to be a spendthrift, while Joseph looked on his parent as a sordid miser. Both were right, and therefore were like two different-tempered dogs chained together. Marcus would not have endured Joseph in the house, but that he received a weekly sum of money for the privilege; and Joseph would not have stayed, but that he thought it wise to keep an eye on his inheritance. Absolutely a stranger to paternal affection, old Marcus was quite capable of leaving his money to others, and Joseph, guessing this,
stayed doggedly in a house which he detested, and led a life abhorrent to one of his luxurious habits. Glanc­
ing at his father's venerable looks, at his flowing beard and shabby dressing-gown, the schemer abruptly spoke of the subject nearest to his heart. Diplomacy was useless with the old man, and therefore there was no need to be polite.

"I want some money," he said sharply.

"Then go and get it," retorted his father, gripping the bag of gold.

"I'm trying to. Give me five thousand pounds."

"Five thousand devils," screamed Marcus, aghast.

"One is enough, governor. Come now," Joseph coaxed, "with five thousand I can get twenty."

"Speculation, speculation," grunted the miser disdainfully. "No; no. I keep my own. I have never speculated. It means risk. No risk for me."

"Look here, governor. I'll have your money when you're dead, and you can't live long. Why not let me have some now?"

"No," snarled the other defiantly; "and don't be so sure of getting my money, Jos. I may leave it to some one else."

"If I thought you'd do that, I'd tell all I know."

"It's at your own risk, then, Jos. Better let sleeping dogs lie."

"You said that before," retorted Joseph sulkily, but recognizing that what his astute parent said was correct. "Will you give me the money I ask for?"

"No! I'll see you dead first!"

"It means danger if you don't."

"I'll keep my money if I die for it."

"You will die, you old nuisance, if I'm driven to get rid of you," muttered Joseph savagely. "You won't do what I ask?"

"I won't," said old Marcus firmly, and with this answer his son was forced to be content. Nothing remained but to agree with Lerch, and steal the jewels.
WHEN Archie Godwin returned to Carrowell, he asked his chief to give him a week's holiday, and, as he had done good work in the North, this was readily granted. The reason for the journalist's request had to do with his promise, when Lesley had asked him to be her knight-errant. So far, owing to pressure of necessary work, he had not been able to act in this capacity, but now determined to give seven days wholly up to the task. He was more anxious than ever to do this, when he heard Miss Basser's account of what had transpired during his absence. There was no doubt that things were very uncomfortable, and that the sole chance of quieting the girl's mind was to find the guilty person. Until that was done there was always a chance of trouble.

At the same time, Godwin pointed out that things were not so black as they appeared to be. Save by Basser's own confession, no one could ever learn that he had been behind the screen in a stupor when the crime took place; and now that the knife had been restored to the trophy, there was little likelihood that it could be brought forward as tangible evidence. Both Mother Monkey and Juve would be silent, as they had promised to say nothing, and in any case had no enmity towards Basser which would urge them to get him into trouble. As to Purcane's attitude, the young man laughed at his vague threats, assuring Lesley that if the man really knew the truth, or part of the truth, he would have long since revealed it to gain his ends. On the whole, as Godwin said several times, there was little cause for alarm. But there was no doubt—he admitted this—that it would be just as well to learn the name of Madame Valeria's
assassin, so that all threats, vague or otherwise, should be done away with once and for all.

Lesley was much comforted by this view, and recognized that it was a reasonable one to take. There was no doubt that, owing to the excited state of her nerves, infected by her father's agitation, she had been making molehills into mountains, and fighting shadows which could do no real harm. The common-sense of Archie reduced the mountains to their original molehills, and did away with the shadows very speedily. And when Godwin explained himself to Basser, the effect was the same. Paul ceased to worry himself sick, although he could not do away with his nervousness altogether, and made an effort to pull himself together. He slept better, he ate better, he was less peevish and disconcerting in his demands, so his health naturally improved rapidly, and he left his bedroom for the library. This more bearable state of things was a mighty relief to Lesley, and she was thankful that Archie had returned so opportunely. And, naturally, as he had proved a tower of strength in her time of need, she loved him more than ever.

Having healed the father and soothed the daughter, Godwin refused to discuss the case further, saying—which was true enough—that constant harping on the unpleasant subject only made things worse. But inwardly he considered the matter with due care, so that he might find out some way of arriving at the truth. For two or three days he looked at things from every point of view, but could see no way of making a start. Madame Valeria had been murdered, sure enough, but there was no evidence to show why she had been slain. Given that evidence the young man believed he would be able to trace the criminal, but in its absence he did not see how to solve the mystery. And it was a mystery—a very deep one, as Godwin ruefully acknowledged to himself.

It was when he came to a stone wall blocking his
path that Archie thought of Juve. Of course, as the boy had been asleep all the time, it was unlikely that he knew of anything which would throw light on the darkness. And it was only natural to suppose that, in spite of Mendel’s quarrels with the dead woman, he would bring the murderer to justice if he was aware of any clue. That he had said nothing seemed to prove that he knew nothing, and yet Godwin’s mind was perpetually haunted by the thought that Juve could help him in some way. Then he suddenly recollected that the boy had several times hinted at his doubts of the evidence brought forward to exonerate the two Purcanes. Also there were Joseph’s threats which, vague as they were, still appeared to intimate that he had more knowledge of things than he chose to reveal. Certainly it was ridiculous to believe that Marcus or his son had killed the old woman, as, on the face of it, there was no reason why they should risk their necks for nothing. Nevertheless Archie’s suspicions, suggested by Mendel’s hints, became stronger each day. Finally he made up his mind to go to the fountain-head and bluntly demand an explanation from the boy. If Juve knew anything and would say anything, what he did admit might afford some starting point of a path into the maze.

Then Godwin received a surprise, for scarcely had he made up his mind to interview Mendel, when one afternoon the boy made his appearance at the rectory. He declined to enter, but asked that Archie should come to the door. Wondering why Juve should have come, pat to the moment as it were, Godwin went out to speak to him. His appearance was greeted by the visitor with a look of relief.

“I heard you were back,” said Juve, taking off his cap and wiping his hot face—hot although the day was somewhat chilly; “and I am glad you are, as I have much to say to you.”

“Come in and say it.”
"No. We can talk better in the open air. It's only a whim of mine, but walls have ears, you know."
"If you think that anything you say will travel beyond the four walls of my room, you are quite mistaken," said Godwin rather tartly.
"I daresay. All the same, I wish you to come for a walk—to the Grange."
"Why to the Grange?"
"I'll tell you that as we walk along."
Godwin, although perplexed by Juve's refusal to enter, accepted the situation, put on his cap, took his stick and lighted his pipe. When the two were clear of the rectory grounds, he glanced sideways at his companion, who was, as he perceived, greatly excited.
"Well?" he asked curtly.
"It isn't the Grange exactly," said Mendel, as if there had been no lapse of moments between this speech and the last, "it's outside the Grange I am taking you to. There is work for you and me to-night."
"Oh! What kind of work?"
Juve reflected for a few minutes. "You know that I always suspected the Purcanes of being rascals," he said unexpectedly.
"Yes," assented Archie, trying to conceal his surprise that the boy should of his own accord begin on such a vital subject. "Do you mean rascals or murderers?"
"As to that last word I can't be sure, although I never did believe in the evidence which saved their skins. The work I have for you to do is not in any way connected with my grandmother's death. But it proves that Joseph is a villain, whatever his miser of a father may be."
"Hum! You are rather mysterious."
Mendel said nothing, but, as they were now passing through the Grange gates, led the way up the avenue for some little distance and then turned aside into the damp, dripping woods. Threading his way rapidly
under the almost leafless trees, he halted at a spot amongst them, only a stone's throw from the terrace in front of the library. A bank of moss and stones concealed them from view, which was fortunate, considering that the summer foliage was over and done with. "Do you see that door?" asked Mendel, when he and his puzzled companion halted.

"The door of the library? Yes."

"Through that Joseph Purcane and a blackguard pal of his will enter to-night in order to break into the strong-room."

Godwin started back with a look of amazement. "You don't mean that?"

"Yes, I do. I have brought you here, during the daytime, as we must come to this place to-night in order to capture the scoundrels. It is necessary for us to see the lie of the land, and judge what is best to be done."

"Let us tell Carp," suggested Godwin after a pause, during which he was recovering from his astonishment. "No." Juve shook his head. "Joseph is the Bassers' cousin, and they won't wish to see him in the dock for burglary, even though he is guilty, as I hope to prove. Had I spoken to Carp I could have done without you. But for the reason I have given it is just as well to keep things as quiet as possible."

"But I say. Are you sure?"

"Yes! Yes!" said Mendel impatiently. "Would I say such a thing if I were not sure? Come away now. You know that this is the place you have to meet me at to-night—say about eleven o'clock."

"But you will be in Town," said Godwin, as they returned to the avenue and walked down to the gate.

"Not this evening. I have got a holiday in order to help you catch these two scoundrels."

"Joseph Purcane and—"

"And Captain Lerch. At least that is the name he goes by. Listen," said the boy, taking Godwin's arm
and leading him along the road towards the rectory.

"You wish to know why I am certain of—"


"Well then, some time ago a girl who sings at the music-hall was asked to supper by Captain Lerch. Knowing what a bad lot he is—a thief himself and the associate of thieves—I asked the girl not to go. But she was wilful and would. I went with her, as I knew Lerch would get her into trouble if he could. During the supper the girl—I shan't mention her name—talked of jewels, and in the excitement of the moment I told her about Lesley's necklace of pearls and other family heirlooms."

"And Lerch, whom you knew to be a scoundrel, was present," said Archie disapprovingly.

"He was. I regretted what I did afterwards, but the fact is I was excited with wine, and so said more than was safe.

"It's not like you to be so silly."

Juve smiled to himself and laughed softly. "No, it isn't," he admitted frankly. "I was silly, for the mere mention of the jewels set Lerch on the track of getting them. I guessed that I had made a fool of myself, so I watched Lerch and followed him up when he had a confidential conversation with Joseph Purcane. I learned—it is too long to tell you how I did—that Purcane and his pal intend to commit a burglary to-night between eleven and twelve."

"But how did you find out?"

"Never mind." Juve shrugged his shoulders. "I am much older than my years and am more experienced in the ways of the under-world than you would believe. But I'll tell you something to assuage your curiosity. You know that man Wench, who had to do with my grandmother's property after her death?"

"Yes. The lawyer."

"Lawyer be hanged. Mother Monkey only called
him so to save my pride, and for the same reason I supported her. The man is a money-lender, to whom my grandmother mortgaged everything she had. He sold up the house, the furniture and the land, when she died, and I was left penniless, save for what I earn in the orchestra. Mother Monkey got that cottage and—but there, I am talking all round the shop."

"What has this money-lender to do with the business?"

"He's a fence, and Lerch is going to take the jewels to him to dispose of."

"How do you know that?"

"Wench's clerk, a friend of mine, listened at the door and overheard the agreement come to between Wench and Lerch."

"Nice friends you have, Juve."

"Useful friends, at all events," rejoined the boy with a shrug.

"Isn't Wench the man who is financing this concert which is to give you your chance?"

"Yes. I make use of him, even though he is a dirty tool."

Archie shook his head with a frown. "You'll get into trouble."

"I think not," said Mendel very decisively. "You are older than I am and believe yourself to be an experienced man of the world. But I could make your hair stand on end if I told you the extent of my knowledge. And that knowledge is directed towards saving Lesley from Joseph."

"He threatened her, I know, but—""

"He will do more than threaten her, unless we lay him by the heels," broke in Juve positively. "He and his father are dangerous, but if we nab Joseph, as we can to-night, the old man will be easy to deal with."

"But why should the Purcanes wish to harm Lesley?"
"Because she finally inherits the money, which they think should come to them," said Mendel impatiently. "Joseph wants Lesley to marry him, and as he jolly well knows she won't, he'll get rid of her somehow. And I may tell you that Joseph is in Wench's power, as he owes him tons of money. Only because Wench threatens to make trouble has Joseph consented to join Lerch in this business. And of course Lerch came to him, as Joseph knows the plan of the Grange and can help no end to collar the swag."

"How do you know that these two blackguards intend to enter the library through the door? Wouldn't the window——?"

"No. Not while the door is handy. Joseph called to see Lesley the other day to press his offer of marriage and was alone in the library for some time. When I heard that I examined the key of the outer door and found some morsels of wax adhering to the wards. I then knew that Joseph had taken an impression, so that a skeleton key could be made."

"Upon my word, Juve, you are very clever," said Archie, with open admiration.

Mendel laughed rather sadly. "All my cleverness will not gain me my heart's desire," he said, thinking of Lesley. Then he moved away abruptly. "Meet me at the spot I took you to-night at half-past ten."

"Won't we warn Lesley?" called out Godwin.

"No. We can deal with the men ourselves."

This was a cunning subterfuge of Juve's, as he had already warned the girl and had told her to enter the library when she heard the signal of a whistle. She was to bring her father also, so that Joseph and his friend might be duly trapped. And Mendel had warned Lesley to say nothing to her lover, just as he had denied the right of Archie to speak to her. The boy did not wish any one to manage the business but himself, and feared lest the anxious lovers, if they got talking, might upset his plans. Moreover, Lesley would
have quite enough to do in soothing her father over
the projected burglary without having to waste her
energy in discussing things with Godwin. Finally,
Juve wished to show the girl that he was better able
to protect her than was the man for whom she had
rejected him. This was a boyish piece of vanity,
pardonable enough, as Miss Basser afterwards admitted.

Godwin was ill at ease for the rest of the afternoon.
He very much desired to talk the matter over with
Lesley, so that she might not be too startled when
the scoundrels made their attempt. But recognizing
that the affair was in the hands of Mendel, he decided
to obey and keep away from the Grange. It was
lucky for his peace of mind that Miss Basser had not
told him of Juve's conduct towards her father with
regard to the knife. Had Godwin been aware of this he
would have mistrusted the lad and would have broken
his promise. As it was he kept it, although he could
not help admitting to himself that Mendel appeared
to know much more about the seamy side of life than
was altogether good for one of his tender years. At
the same time, if Juve had been an ordinary boy, with
the limited knowledge of such a boy, he certainly would
not have been able to protect Lesley and her jewels.
Godwin, with the Englishman's ingrained dislike of
publicity for his womenfolk, hated to think of Lesley
being tainted with this criminal pitch. But as he
could see no way out of the unpleasantness save by
following young Mendel's lead, he made the best of a
bad job, and accepted the post of lieutenant with the
best grace he could.

At the appointed hour Godwin was at the rendezvous,
and found that Juve had already arrived. The night
was dark, moonless and tolerably misty; quite the
kind of night which would favour the plans of the
burglars. Indeed, had not Mendel learned all about
their schemes, and if he had not arranged for himself
and Archie to counteract them, it is probable that the
projected robbery would have been successful. As it was, forewarned was forearmed, and the young men crouched watchfully behind the mound of moss and stones, dead leaves and fallen boughs, quite confident that they would capture the criminals. They had brought electric torches to light their way through the woods, no easy task considering the gloom. Mendel had brought something else, which he mentioned in a whisper to his companion.

"I have a revolver. Have you got yours?"

"No. I didn't think it would be necessary. I can use my fists."

"Against two desperate men." Juve chuckled dryly.

"How very English! As I am from the States, you will find me very melodramatic with my little gun."

"Oh, I don't suppose they will show fight," said Archie easily.

"Joseph won't; he'll collapse; but Lerch will. He's a brave scoundrel, and if a war had been on he would be a hero instead of a criminal. Hush!"

Mendel said the word because the church clock had just chimed half-past eleven, and his keen eyes had caught sight of a blurred light moving across the terrace. To show through the fast-gathering mists, the robbers must have carried an unusually powerful dark lantern, and certainly were singularly audacious in using it. Archie would have sprung out of ambush at once, as he was on fire with suppressed excitement, but the more wary boy prevented him from risking too early an attack.

"No! No!" he whispered vehemently, and holding back his friend. "Wait until they are in the library—in the strong-room. We must catch them red-handed." Godwin, impatient as he was, recognized the wisdom of this advice, and waited anxiously, while the thieves broke into the house. There was no difficulty in managing this, for very shortly a stream of misty light poured through the open door. Joseph
had evidently used his skeleton key, and his pal in the job had boldly lighted the lamp. Both the young men rather wondered that the burglars were not more careful, but surmised that the lateness of the hour, the darkness of the night and the loneliness of the situation gave them confidence. Such was really the case, as they learned later.

For a time the watchers stared at the dull yellow light radiating through the half-open door into the misty night. After ten minutes or so had elapsed, they stole swiftly across the lawn, and crept noiselessly up the terrace steps. The light became clearer and stronger, so they slid along, hugging the wall until able to peer into the room. There they saw that Joseph had already shown his companion how to move back the bookcase from the strong-room door, and Lerch was already busy with his burglar’s tools. Beside him squatted Joseph, holding the dark lantern to assist in the work, and on the large writing-table the lamp was burning brightly. Both men were masked and wore overcoats down to their heels, for the sake of disguise. But Juve recognized Joseph because he was of lesser height and slighter build than his brother-scoundrel.

"Now?" whispered Archie in Juve’s ear.

"No," breathed the boy, "wait till they have the jewels."

For quite half an hour they waited in dead silence, their limbs cramped with the crouching position they were forced to assume. In that thirty minutes Lerch worked hard, with the perspiration pouring down his masked face, and uttered a sigh of relief when the lock yielded to his efforts. Indeed, he had accomplished his aim in a remarkably short space of time, which showed how dexterous he was in handling the job. He and Joseph pulled open the heavy door and passed immediately into the strong-room. In five minutes they emerged, carrying an iron box between them.
Juve recognized it as that which held the jewels, and knew that it was not locked, as Lesley had mentioned how her father had long since lost the key. With a grim smile the boy remembered that at the supper he had let slip this useful piece of information.

"We'll shove the things into our pockets," said Joseph softly, as he and Lerch placed the box on the table. "No use carrying too much."

Lerch nodded and flung back the lid to take out a handful of glittering gems, which he handed to his friend. He had just fished out the pearl necklace, when Juve touched Archie's arm and the two young men dashed into the room with a shout.

"Hands up!" cried Juve, whipping out his revolver melodramatically.

Purcane uttered a terrified cry and shrank timidly against the bookcase, but the bolder scoundrel produced a weapon in his turn and leaped to the hither side of the table. He still held the necklace in his left hand, and noting this Mendel fired, hitting his wrist, so that he dropped the spoil. With an oath Lerch swung round, made an attempt to overturn the lamp, and tried for the door. Godwin spread his arms to stop his exit, but Lerch, darting under them, disappeared into the darkness. Archie raced after him immediately, leaving Juve to deal with the remaining scoundrel, whose hands were up, as he was covered by the revolver, and it was at this moment that Lesley and her father ran into the library.

CHAPTER XX
VALUABLE INFORMATION

BAD as Purcane found his position, seeing that he had been taken as a red-handed burglar, this was rendered worse by the unexpected entrance of
his cousins. With a cry of dismay he dropped on all-fours like a cowed animal, and uttered another cry—this time of rage—when Juve bent to twitch away the mask dexterously. Shame and terror and sheer anger, together with the shock of so sudden a downfall to his hopes, unnerved him completely. Being a coward, as well as a bully and scamp, he had nothing to sustain him in the hour of adversity, and collapsed entirely, as Mendel had prophesied. All he could do, and did do, was to burst into tears of humiliation, while crouching in an ignoble attitude. Lesley surveyed him with open disgust, while her father, almost as staggered as his enemy by the turn of circumstance, gazed at the detected scoundrel with unfeigned dismay. He half wished that Joseph had not been pushed to such an extremity, for he had not yet overcome his fear that the man possessed some dangerous knowledge. However, it was too late to consider matters. Purcane was in a corner. It only remained to see if he would fight like the rat he was.

"It is true, then," gasped Paul, who looked bent and much older than his years in a grey camel's-hair dressing-gown.

"Of course it is true," said his daughter, who was the more composed of the two since she had expected this climax. "I never doubted but what it would be after what Juve——"

Here she broke off with an attentive expression and a raised finger, as there was a scuffling and a murmur of voices outside the door. It was evident that the sound of shots had alarmed the servants, and that they had come up to see what was the matter. Miss Basser, unwilling for the sake of the family to expose her cousin's rascality, went out to quieten them, and with the excuse of a false alarm managed to induce them to retire. Lesley disliked telling untruths, but she was compelled to do so in order to avert scandal. White with anger she re-entered the library to address
Joseph, who had been dragged to his feet and thrust into a chair by Mendel.

"I have to tell lies in order to save the credit of the family," she cried wrathfully. "It's a case of touching pitch and being defiled. I only wish we could punish you as you deserve."

"You—you wouldn't be so—so unkind!" whimpered Purcane, and would have gone on abasing himself, but that Godwin returned, panting and excited, with the news that Lerch had got safely away.

"But he didn't get the necklace," added Archie, stooping to pick it up on the hither side of the writing-table. "That was a ripping shot of yours, Juve, for you broke his wrist and he dropped the pearls like a red-hot potato. We may be able to trace the scoundrel by his wound."

"There will be no need to trace him," said Lesley sharply. "Thanks to his choice of a companion, this Captain Lerch—is that his name, Juve?—will get off scot free. His arrest means Joseph's arrest, and we don't want a scandal, do we, father?" She looked significantly at Mr. Basser.

"No, certainly not," replied Paul in a weak voice, and sinking into a convenient chair. "There has been enough trouble without making more. And if the jewels are safe—"

"Oh, they're safe enough," said Juve, shaking Joseph by the shoulder. "Turn out your pockets, my man. Look sharp. I'm a good shot, as Godwin says."

"You won't murder me," said Purcane, still whimpering, and producing the loot which Lerch had handed to him. "I have taken nothing."

"It wasn't for the want of trying," remarked Archie grimly, and carried the spoil to the girl. "See if anything is missing, dear."

Lesley replaced the necklace and the other heirlooms in the box, and glanced over the contents of the same with satisfactory results. "It is all right," she said
with great relief. "You were just in time. Close the outer door, Archie, and let Joseph explain himself."

Godwin obeyed with alacrity, and then sat down beside the girl. Along with Mr. Basser they faced the prisoner, who was guarded by Mendel. But when the door was closed, Juve thrust his revolver into his hip-pocket and joined the trio. Thus Purcane, huddled uncomfortably in his chair, found himself looking into four pairs of accusing eyes, unable to see any sign of mercy or sympathy, or even any softening. In spite of Lesley's action with regard to the servants, and Basser's desire to hush up matters, the miserable creature felt uneasy about his future. He knew that in the event of possible publicity Lerch would cross over promptly to New York, and therefore trembled at the thought of facing results by himself. He wisely held his tongue until forced to speak, which was the best thing he could have done.

"Well?" questioned Lesley severely. "What have you to say for yourself?"

"Nothing!" Joseph passed his tongue over his dry lips and spoke with meek despair. "You've got the pull over me this time."

"That's so," said Mendel in a way suggesting the typical American. "You're in a considerable hole, you crook, and won't get out of it in a hurry."

"It's none of your business," snarled Purcane, furious with the boy for having captured him. "I appeal to Cousin Paul. He doesn't want the family to be disgraced."

"No, I certainly do not," said Mr. Basser faintly, for the dread of what might come out still made him nervous. "Lesley agrees, I think."

"Lesley doesn't," contradicted that young lady promptly. "There must be an end to threats and hints and vague accusations. You must make a clean breast of things, Joseph."

"Of what things?"
"Don't prevaricate," she said angrily. "You reached the limit of my patience long ago. You came here to steal the jewels and you have failed. Now it is a case of your going to prison, or explaining all you know relative to the murder of Madame Valeria."

"I don't know anything about that," said Joseph doggedly and with his eyes on the ground.

"That's a lie," cried Miss Basser forcibly and roundly. "You hinted that my father was in danger of being accused. There, dada, there!" She put her arm round the old man's shoulders, feeling him wince and shiver. "It's all right. I can protect you from Joseph's lies. Come now," she spoke sharply to her cousin, "what do you know against my father?"

"Nothing," admitted Purcane with a sullen look.

"I only said what I did to force you to marry me. The worst I know of Cousin Paul is that he smoked opium with Madame Valeria."

"And what has my smoking opium got to do with the crime?" demanded Basser, gaining courage, now that the man began to show signs of weakening. "Was I in the house when that woman was murdered?"

"I never said you were. And as I was in my own house along with the governor, I couldn't be expected to know what you were doing."

"I believe you know more than you choose to admit," said Godwin, asking a leading question. "What became of the knife with which Madame Valeria was stabbed?"

Lesley and her father held their breath, and the former gave a side-glance towards the trophy to which the weapon had been restored. Archie had innocently enough asked the one question to which they desired a straight answer. It came in the style of a denial. "I know nothing about the knife," said Joseph. "I wasn't near the villa when the crime was committed, as the evidence of Wrest, his wife and child proves."
"The evidence of Tavy and Maggie prove otherwise," remarked Lesley dryly.
"I believe I can explain why they gave such evidence."
"Explain. You are here to make a clean breast of everything."

Joseph rose desperately from his chair and took a step towards the outer door. "I'll do nothing of the sort," he cried indignantly. "I'm not going to be forced into the witness-box."

Godwin sprang to his feet, seized Purcane by the shoulders and pushed him back into the chair. "You must go either into the witness-box or into the dock, my man. We can all prove that you broke into the house."

"Oh!" Joseph wept anew at his impotence. "If that young beast there"—he indicated Juve with a look of fury—"hadn't spied on me, I shouldn't have been in your power, hang you all!"

Mendel rose and stood over the man with a cruel laugh. "I did much more than spy on you, Purcane. Your present position of which you complain is of my making from beginning to end."

"What for? What have I done to you that—?"
"I'll explain afterwards why I got you into this trouble," interrupted the boy coolly. "Meanwhile you may as well know that it was I who induced Wench to threaten you with a writ. It was I who induced that singer to ask Lerch to supper, and there put him on the track of the jewels."

"Oh!" Godwin looked up startled, remembering how he had rebuked Juve for talking about such things. "You meant to tell?"

"About the jewels. Yes. I knew that Lerch was an accomplished thief and that he was hand and glove with this beauty." He struck Purcane lightly on the shoulder. "I knew also that Lerch would enlist Joseph to help him in the burglary owing to his know-
ledge of the whereabouts of the strong-room. From the time of that supper I have watched both and have had both watched by others. I learned when the attempt was to be made, and so——" He broke off with a smile and sauntered back to his chair.

Joseph listened to all this with an open mouth and the others were equally surprised to hear what was said. "Why did you do this, Juve?" asked Lesley.

"For your protection," said the boy seriously. "I told you long ago that Joseph and his father were your enemies."

"That's not true," broke in Purcane angrily.

"Oh yes, it is, my friend. You and that old miser meant mischief to Lesley—what kind of mischief you know best."

"I wanted to marry Lesley, so I couldn't have meant mischief," protested Joseph, whose eyes had dropped while Mendel spoke.

"Yes, and why? You wanted her money."

"It isn't her money," growled Purcane.

"No," said Paul unexpectedly; "it belongs to my mother and afterwards will belong to me. Both my mother and I have to die before Lesley inherits. Did you wish to murder the three of us?" demanded Basser with a flash of anger.

"Something like that," said Mendel significantly.

Joseph rose to protest vigorously. "That's a downright lie," he said with great vehemence. "The governor and I did want the money; we do want the money, for it rightfully should belong to us."

"How do you make that out?" asked Basser, who was rapidly growing bolder.

"Old Basser," explained Joseph volubly, "who made the fortune, left it all to your father Graves on condition that he took his name. Graves was the nephew of Basser, but my governor is a nephew also and should have had his share. Of course the five thousand a year, or half of it, should belong to us. You can't deny it."
"I do deny it. The money was left to my father as Basser's nephew on the conditions you mention. He left it to my mother, afterwards to me, afterwards to Lesley, and then, if we all die, to you. But you forget that proviso in the will about Lesley marrying. If she has children, the money goes to them."

"I know," said Purcane crossly; "so I wished to marry her and settle things."

"Quite so," put in Juve, signing that Lesley should be silent; "and failing getting your cousin to marry you, you plotted how to get the money in a way which you can confess if you like."

"I didn't plot, neither did the governor," retorted Purcane. "If any one plotted, it was that confounded grandmother of yours."

Lesley opened her eyes in surprise. "What has Madame Valeria to do with us, I should like to know?"

"Ask your father?"

"Why ask me?" said Basser indignantly. "I cannot explain."

"Oh yes, you can," said Joseph impudently. "You know quite well that Madame Valeria's real name was Ursula Hedge."

Paul stared and rose automatically. "Ursula Hedge!" he muttered.

"Who is she?" asked Lesley impatiently and wondering that the mention of the name produced such an effect on the old man.

"Ursula Hedge," said Basser again. "I remember now. The dancer, who had a lot to do with my father."

"He decoyed her into a false marriage and then deserted her, when he changed his name from Graves to Basser," said Purcane, brutally frank. "With her daughter she went to America, and returned from New York to Carrowell to make you pay up."

"She had no claim against us," said Paul with great dignity. "I am aware that she wrote both to
my mother and myself after my father’s death. We consulted our lawyer and he declared that the woman had no claim.”

“She thought she had,” said Joseph coolly, “and intended to make things hot for you. Graves—your father who took the name of Basser—left her to starve with her child. That child in America married a musician called Mendel, and he”—Purcane pointed to Juve—“is her son.”

“Her son!” Lesley looked bewildered, for the flood of information which the man was pouring out stunned her. “Then Juve is a kind of—”

“Cousin,” finished Joseph with a sneer; “and I hope you are proud of the relationship.”

“I am,” cried the girl, rising to walk to Mendel and take his hand. “You are a cousin to be proud of, Juve, as you are honest. But you”—she turned on Joseph—“are a scoundrel. I am not proud of the relationship with you.”

Godwin, who had been listening intently, now addressed himself to Purcane with deliberate sharpness. “If you knew all this,” he said, “why did you not tell Mr. Basser?”

“It was none of my business.”

“It was. According to your own showing this woman Hedge came to Carrowell to make trouble. Mr. Basser, his mother and Lesley should have been warned.”

“Not by me. I should have been glad had she succeeded in making trouble.”

“Oh!” Lesley clenched her hands. “Send him away. I can’t stand his insolence any longer.”

“Oh, I’ll go.” Purcane rose with alacrity. “I’m only too glad to go.”

“I dare say”—Godwin grasped his arm—“but you are not going until you say more. What intentions had this woman?”
"She wished to make the Basser family pay for her sufferings."

"The Basser family are not to blame for those."

"Ursula thought so. Graves was dead and she couldn’t strike at him, so she intended to ruin the rest."

Paul started. "Was that why she induced me to smoke opium, when I was trying to overcome my weakness?"

"Yes." Joseph nodded carelessly. "When she had made a wreck of you, she intended to turn her attention to Lesley."

"And what was to be done to me?" inquired the girl nervously, for the revelation of such malignity shook her nerves.

"I don’t know. She never told me. But you would have had a holy time had she lived. I wished to save you by asking you to marry me. I hinted that I wanted you to be my wife several times while Ursula was alive."

"I would never have been saved at that price," flashed out the girl in a haughty voice. "And you talk as if this woman could have done what she wished."

"So she could."

"Don’t talk stuff," said Godwin contemptuously. "There is law and order in this country."

Purcane laughed. "I don’t think Ursula cared much for law and order. She hated the Basser family and she had every reason to hate them. It was a lucky thing for you that she was murdered," added Joseph, addressing Paul, "and it was that luck which made me think you might have polished her off."

"I never knew that her name was Ursula Hedge," cried Basser indignantly, "nor did I know that she had any cause of hatred against me or mine."

"You had the begging letters she wrote to you and your mother."
"True. But we did not pay much attention to those."

"It would have been better if you had done so," said Purcane significantly. "Had you made Ursula an allowance to keep her from starving, Madame Valeria would never have appeared in Carrowell to make things hot for you and your family. And if she had ruined you, I and the governor should have been glad because you possess the fortune which should be ours."

"I wonder you didn't assist Madame Valeria in her wicked schemes," said Lesley, scarcely surprised at this frank display of the man's evil nature.

"She was quite able to manage by herself. But you can see that I had no reason to murder her, nor had the governor. Her death was your gain, but our loss. Understand."

"Not quite," said Juve, who hitherto had been silent. "However much Tavy and Maggie may have been deceived, there is no doubt in my mind that you and your father were at the villa on that Sunday."

"You contradict yourself," retorted Purcane. "How could the witnesses have been deceived if we really had been seen? But we were not. It was some one masquerading as the governor and myself who murdered the old woman."

"And who is that some one?" asked Lesley. "You hinted that you could explain why Maggie and Tavy gave such evidence."

"I am explaining. I believe that the man masqueraded as myself and the governor, so as to make the police believe we were concerned in the crime."

"Who is the man?"

"I don't know. The only thing I can say is that Madame Valeria received an unknown visitor the week before she was murdered. Who he was, she refused to say, merely stating that he hated her. I saw him."

"You saw him," said Godwin quickly. "Then you can——"
"I can do nothing," interrupted Joseph sulkily. "I only saw his back. He wore a green hat and a green overcoat."

Juve started and so did Basser. "Why, Mother Monkey said that she saw the back of a man dressed in green."

"Yes," added Paul nervously, "and I saw him also—the back of him."

"Oh!" Joseph faced round suddenly. "Then how did you come to see him, unless you were at the villa when Ursula was killed?"

"My father saw him the week before, when he called on Madame Valeria," put in Lesley quickly, as her father seemed tongue-tied.

"Oh!" said Purcane again, and very doubtfully. He believed that Basser had seen him at a later hour, and regretted that it was impossible to use the information.

"Well, then," remarked Juve briskly, "the best thing to do is to look for the man in the green coat and have him arrested."

"I should if I were you," said Purcane with an evil smile.

"No one asked for your opinion," retorted the boy with a shrug, "and as it is growing late you had better go. Remember that if you stay in Carrowell or in England, you will be arrested."

"Cousin Paul——"

"I speak for my father," broke in Lesley. "Leave the country and cease to trouble us, or you will be handed over to the police."

"Oh, I'll go," said Joseph, seeing that he could get no better terms. "But the day on which you arrest the green man"—he spoke to Juve—"will be the worst hour of your life." He laughed again in an evil way and vanished into the darkness as Lerch had done.
CHAPTER XXI
JOSEPH'S REVENGE

AFTER the storm came the invariable calm. With the disappearance of Purcane from Carrowell, all trouble ceased for the time being. Certainly there were rumours of a burglary—spread by the Grange servants, who doubted Miss Basser's excuse—but no one connected Joseph with the same. For years he had given the village little of his company, so his absence caused no surprise. What explanation he gave to his father, those who knew of his daring attempt never knew. Perhaps he gave none, but simply returned to Town in the ordinary course of things. Anyhow, Marcus Purcane said nothing and did nothing, but shut himself up in his gloomy house as usual to indulge in his sordid fancies. And even if the old miser knew the truth, it mattered little, as there was no love lost between father and son. So the attempt to steal the jewels caused little commotion.

Yet there was some talk of the matter, for Joseph left some lying information behind to save his own precious skin, should his name be mentioned in connection with the robbery. He told the Wrests that an expert London thief, who usually wore a green overcoat and a hat of the same colour, had been seen about the village, and was probably the same who had haunted Madame Valeria's villa about the time she was murdered. A few shillings induced Mr. Purcane's gardener to mention this in the tap-room of the Pink Pig, and the gossip of the neighbours did the rest. The Green Man, as this vague personage came to be called, was said not only to have attempted to rob the Grange, but to have murdered the woman at the gimcrack villa while endeavouring to commit a burglary there. So widely did rumours of this sort spread that they reached Tarhaven and Quinton came
over to investigate. He did not wish to reopen the case, which had given him so much trouble and which had resulted in such disappointment. Nevertheless, he thought that if there was a chance of laying hands on the criminal, it would be as well to do so. What struck him as strange was that no mention had been made of the Green Man at the inquest. Only when the rumoured burglary at the Grange had taken place did people speak of this suspicious stranger. Inspector Quinton would have been less surprised had he known that Joseph Purcane,—the real burglar,—had started the gossip to hide his own iniquity.

The Inspector sought out Mother Monkey at the cottage, as being the person most likely to afford him information. Hetty admitted frankly enough that she had seen the stranger in question.

"But only his back, sir, and you can't tell what folks is like from that."

"He wore a green coat and hat?" asked Quinton, who was taking notes.

"As green as the grass," replied Mother Monkey, nodding vigorously. "I was digging beside the house when I sawr him going out of the gate."

"Had he been paying a visit to Madame Valeria?"

"I 'spose so, but she let him in and let him out without my knowing."

"And she said——?"

"Nothing. She never did say anything, being one of them who could keep her tongue quiet. Who he was, or where he came from," said Hetty positively, "I dunno. Shouldn't have noticed the cove but for his green clothes."

"When did you see him?"

"Lemme see." Miss Hale pondered and screwed up her wrinkled face. "It was the week after that there Wench called."

"Who is Wench?"

"Oh, a money-lender as Madame Valeria did business
with. He sold up everything after her death, and I said as he was her lawyer, to save Mr. Mendel's face. But he wasn't, although I don't want you to say so."

"Wench! Wench!" Quinton had heard rumours of the gentleman in question. "I have heard that name. I'll look him up. But this Green Man? You saw him a week after Mr. Wench paid a visit to the villa?"

"Not quite a week, sir. I saw him three days before her goose was cooked. I jus' remembering saying something about him to Mr. Mendel on the day when we had all that trouble of her being stuck like a pig. Four days after Wench come, and three days afore she died."

"Why didn't you tell me this before?" asked Quinton sharply.

"Bless you, there wasn't no use in telling. I never thought anything about that green cove coming and going."

"It seems he is concerned in the attempt to rob the Grange."

"Ah, I dunno anything about that."

"Do you think that this stranger murdered your mistress?"

"Can't say. I never set eyes on him after that one time."

"And Madame Valeria said nothing to you about his visit?"

"Not a word."

"And you haven't seen him about here lately?"

"No. I've said as I didn't a moment ago," retorted Hetty impatiently. "If you'll take my advice, mister, you'll leave things alone. Nothing will ever be found out, to my way of thinking."

But Inspector Quinton thought otherwise, and having extracted all he could from Hetty went over to the Grange. Lesley got an unpleasant shock when he sent in his name, as she had hoped that any business
with the authorities was over and done with. Fortunately her father had gone to London and her grandmother was asleep, so she was able to attend to the officer herself. This was what she desired to do, since Mr. Basser did know something about the matter, which it was as well to keep quiet. So Lesley braced herself to face things, hoping that she would not be compelled to tell too many untruths. Some she would have to tell, if the facts of the attempted burglary were to be kept from the police.

"I have called, Miss Basser," said Quinton when she entered the drawing-room, "to ask what you know of these rumours in connection with a stranger dressed in green, who is said to have attempted to rob this house."

"There was such an attempt," admitted Lesley, uncomfortably aware that it was necessary to prevaricate once more; "but I can tell you very little about it. My father thought that he heard a noise in the library and woke me. We came down, but could see nothing."

"Could you hear anything?" asked Quinton meaningly.

"Footsteps," said Miss Basser, making the best of things—"footsteps on the terrace. My father fired a shot with the revolver he had with him and we opened the door, only to hear the footsteps retreating. We were too nervous to follow. Then the servants, hearing the shot, came up to see what was the matter. I told them that it was a false alarm and sent them away. But I suppose they spread this rumour of an attempted robbery."

"You have admitted that it was more than a rumour, Miss Basser," said the Inspector dryly. "Did you see the burglar?"

"No. I only heard his retreating footsteps."

"Then your father—?"

"He heard the same, but saw no more than I did."
He is in Town to-day, or he could explain this himself."

"I suppose you have heard that the Green Man, as he is called, paid a visit to Madame Valeria three days before she was murdered?"

"I did hear some gossip about that," said Lesley carelessly, "but I did not pay much attention to it. Why?"

"This stranger might have murdered her."

"He might, and he might have attempted to rob this house. But I can't say for certain that he did either."

"Did Madame Valeria ever say anything about him to you?"

"Certainly not," she answered decisively; "neither I nor my father nor my grandmother were on such confidential terms with Madame Valeria as to induce her to mention her private affairs."

"Then you knew very little about her?"

"Next to nothing," said Miss Basser, suppressing the information which her cousin had given. "She came here with a letter to Mr. Godwin and——"

"Yes! Yes!" interrupted the officer, disappointed at the scanty evidence he had obtained, which really amounted to no evidence at all. "So you can tell me nothing of moment?"

"Exactly. More trouble has been manufactured out of this burglary than is necessary. There was an attempt; my father fired a shot and—and——" Lesley shrugged her shoulders, standing up to dismiss the Inspector.

Quinton went away very disheartened, for he was as unsuccessful as ever in getting to the bottom of things. But he would not have returned to Tarhaven with the idea that nothing could be done had he overheard what Miss Basser said to her father when he came back from London.

"Inspector Quinton was here to-day, dad," she said
when alone with Paul. "He came about these
rumours of the Green Man robbing this house."

"Oh!" Basser turned pale. "More trouble."

"No, I don't think so. I told him"—Lesley related
the cautious way in which she had dealt with the
officer. "So you see that nothing will come out about
Joseph, and the credit of the family will be saved."

"But the Green Man." Basser looked anxious.
"You did not tell him that I saw the Green Man when
I was leaving the villa on the day of the crime?"

"No, certainly not. And I was glad that you were
absent, as you might have said too much. You did
see this man?"

"Yes, I told you so. When I was slipping out of
the room after the housekeeper went out to give the
alarm, I saw the man in that little wood of stone-pines
between the villa and the village. He was dodging
behind the trees and seemed anxious to conceal him-
self."

"Did you see his face?"

"No. He wore a long green overcoat and a green
hat with a white muffler round his neck. The hat was
pulled down over his eyes and the muffler was above
his mouth, so I saw nothing by which I could identify
him save his peculiar clothes, or rather," ended Basser,
"the peculiar colour of his clothes."

Lesley pondered. "I wonder if he murdered
Madame Valeria?"

"I believe he did," said her father decisively, "but
I did not mention that I had seen him, lest my presence
at the villa about the time that woman was killed should
be discovered."

"That was wise," nodded his daughter. "I wonder
if Juve knows anything of this man. Joseph certainly
does, else why should he have told Juve that it would
be the worst hour of his life if the Green Man was
arrested."

"Joseph will say nothing," said Paul, comforting
himself, “and by this time he is probably out of the country along with Lerch. Why not ask Juve?”

“I did, but he swears that he knows nothing of the Green Man and never set eyes on him. Besides,” added Lesley lightly, “just now Juve is so anxious about his concert which is to take place next week, that he can think of nothing else.”

“Next week,” said Mr. Basser meditatively. “Dear me, how time passes! It was the middle of November when those scoundrels broke in and now it is the first week in December. I thought”—the old man was restless—“that we had heard the last of the burglary and the murder. Now Quinton comes and reopens the last and meddles with the first.”

“He won’t learn much about either,” said Lesley soothingly. “I told him we knew nothing.”

“You did not mention Madame Valeria’s true name?”

“Ursula Hedge. No. That’s our business. But I wonder,” went on the girl musingly, “what hurt she intended to do to me.”

“It is hard to say. But there is no doubt that she intended mischief, my dear. I don’t wish to rejoice over her terrible end, but I can’t help feeling glad that she is out of the way. I don’t see why my father’s sins should be visited on the second and third generation.”

“Yet the Bible says they are visited on the fourth also.”

“Then it’s not fair. I am not responsible in any way for my father having deceived this woman. I never wish to hear her name again.”

“You never will, unless—unless the Green Man is found.”

“I hope he never will be, and as it is such a long time since the murder I expect no one will lay hands on him.”

“I agree.” Lesley nodded and smoothed her father’s
hair. "And do try and forget all about these matters. I don't suppose we shall have further trouble. Let us think of ourselves and of Juve's concert."

"I hope it will be a success," said Basser heartily, and looking as though a weight had been lifted from his shoulders. "He did us a service in laying Joseph by the heels. The scoundrel! I believe he was working with that woman to do you and me a mischief."

"I believe that also. But she is dead and Joseph is an exile. Don't think anything more about the matter, dad."

Basser took this sensible advice, for now that the danger was less insistent, his fears in a great measure ceased to trouble him. He had wonderful recuperative power, and although his nerves never became strong, he recovered sufficient composure to enjoy life as formerly. And his health became better, since the death of Madame Valeria had frightened him so thoroughly as to make him give up the use of opium. There was no doubt that the danger had been great, for if the real history of Ursula Hedge was told, and if it became known that he had been behind the screen when she was stabbed, things would have gone hard with him. In fact, it would have been impossible to have proved his innocence, especially if the Afghan knife had been found and identified. Altogether Paul Basser was very thankful for his escape, since circumstantial evidence might have placed a rope round his neck. He was thankful also to Juve, both for holding his tongue about the knife and for so cleverly rendering Joseph harmless. For these reasons Paul was anxious that the concert should be a success and intended to take his daughter up to London on the great night. Unfortunately on that evening he was unable to go, having contracted a bad cold, and so allowed Lesley to travel to London with Archie as her escort. Mrs. Basser rather objected to this, having primitive ideas as to young people being with-
out their elders to look after them. But Lesley, very much up-to-date and very desirous of assisting in Juve's triumph, laughed away her grandmother's objections. Archie motored her to Havering and went with her to Liverpool Street by the six o'clock train. After the concert they arranged to return with the hero of the evening.

Mendel himself was in the best of spirits. He never troubled about Purcane's hint regarding the mysterious Green Man, believing that it was given simply to make him uncomfortable. Archie, as also Lesley and her father, believed that the man was the criminal and had murdered Madame Valeria for some reason connected with events of earlier days, but Juve refused to commit himself to any opinion. If the accused stranger was innocent, nothing mattered: if he was guilty, the boy declined to hunt him down, since his grandmother had treated him so badly. In fact, Juve put everything disagreeable behind his back and gave himself up to constant practising on his violin. He was sure that he would make a success, and when he did, he cherished a hope that Lesley would respond to his love. Of course, the boy had—in words—surrendered his desire since the girl had told him so very plainly that she wished to marry the rector's son. But Mendel, hot-blooded as usual, decided to make one last attempt to win her affections. Had Lesley been aware of this persistence, she would not have come to the concert, but she quite believed that Juve had overcome his folly, and was content to leave her alone.

The hall was crowded when Lesley and her escort arrived, for Signor Bellini, to whom Wench had entrusted the arrangements, had advertised the boy largely. Not only did the newspapers speak of this great genius who was about to make his bow to artistic London, but there were many whispers in clubs and drawing-rooms of the wonderful violinist. Wench was
certainly sore about Juve's interference in the burglary, which had prevented him from reaping a rich harvest, but he judged it wise to patronize Mendel still. There was no doubt in the money-lender's mind—and he was no mean judge—that this marplot would make a great success, so Silas hoped to recoup himself by exploiting the genius he had discovered. What he had lost with Joseph and Lerch he would make up out of his percentage on Juve's salary for the next twelve months. So Wench was at the concert also, smiling and bowing and washing his hands with invisible soap and water, quite certain that everything happened for the best in this best of all possible worlds. The old rascal hated Mendel as a human being, but he adored him as a musician.

The pianist played his piece with great applause, for Derrick was a great artiste and a favourite with the public. Then Signor Lido sang as he alone could sing, likewise receiving his tribute of praise from his many admirers. But every one wished to hear the much-heralded violinist, and although the audience welcomed Madame Coralie, who trilled gay little French chansons, yet all ears were anxious to catch the magic tones of the magic instrument in the hands of one who, as rumour said, could make it speak. So when Juve, calm and smiling, made his appearance he received a hearty welcome, and Wench rubbed his hands nervously, thinking that the clapping might upset the boy. He need not have been afraid. Mendel was never more composed in his life and played his first piece with supreme art. It was applauded greatly, but the second piece received even more applause. And truly the same was well deserved, for Juve proved himself to be a veritable musician of the bow. He did what he liked with his audience, swaying those present at will, and when the first part of the programme ended, it was admitted that a new star had risen in the artistic sky. Wench went about, during the
interval, receiving the congratulations of his musical friends, who did not know that the old virtuoso was a notorious money-lender. Or if they did know, they suppressed their dislike as some return for the gift of the wonder-boy whom he had presented to them. Archie and Lesley knew Juve's playing well, but even they were astonished by his marvellous art.

"He'll never stay in Carrowell after this," whispered the girl, while applauding enthusiastically. "I only wish Hetty was here to witness the triumph of her boy."

"Oh, Juve told me that she is preparing a supper at the cottage against his return," replied Godwin, smiling; "and if Juve eats well that will be Mother Monkey's triumph."

Juve's second appearance evoked thunders of applause, which brought out the best that was in him. He did what he liked with his instrument, and with his audience also. Such execution, such fire, such brilliancy had rarely been heard before, while the thrilling tones Mendel drew from his violin when playing a Russian dirge brought tears to the eyes of many present. It seemed that there was nothing the boy could not do. An Hungarian battle hymn suggested the galloping of wild steeds, and the shouts of victory: a seashore meditation interpreted the sound of the waves, red in the dying sunset; and then this magician evoked Versailles and the Sun-king in delicate music, which rippled and laughed. Finally Juve played the old, old Carnival piece, which became new with its sparkle and glitter and fantastic decorations. At the last stroke of the bow the audience rose, shouting with delight. All applauded with hands and feet, waved handkerchiefs, threw flowers, cried approval. Henceforth Juve Mendel was no longer the unknown violinist of the music-hall orchestra, but a lad who would soon have a world-wide fame. His position was more than assured, and as he came on to the platform again and again to bow his thanks he
shot a glance at Lesley. It was for her he played, it was for her that he won the laurel wreath of fame, and he longed to have her to himself so that he could lay it at her feet. Unconscious that she was the inspirer of this wonderful artiste, the girl exhausted herself in applauding him. Although she now recognized him as a great musician, Juve, to her, was still the rather difficult boy she mothered and was so fond of. No one could have been more pleased than Miss Basser at his success, and no one could have been less ignorant of what use he intended to make of the success. That Juve made no use of it at all was due to what happened immediately he returned from bowing his farewell thanks. An event took place in the artiste's room which proved to be the germ of the unexpected.

Mendel was received with open arms by the singers, the pianist and by Signor Bellini, who then and there wished to make a contract with the boy. Juve put the excited Italian aside for the moment, smiled at the congratulations, and waited impatiently to see Lesley. It was her praise that he wished to hear, as the sweetest that could be given. Along with Archie, it had been arranged that she should join Juve, so as to drive to Liverpool Street Station and thence take the train to Havering. So the boy, weary of strange applause, waited anxiously for the girl he worshipped. Then the door opened and he started forward with a smile. It died on his lips, as he beheld Joseph Purcane.

"I have come to congratulate you on your success," said Purcane with an evil smile, "and to tell you that he is outside."

"Who is outside?" asked Juve, surveying Joseph's spick-and-span evening dress with disdain.

"The man who murdered your grandmother—the man in the green overcoat."

Mendel started and shivered. It was terrible to be reminded of the dreadful tragedy in the hour of
his triumph. "Why have you brought him here?" asked Juve faintly.

"To introduce him. Come." Purcane drew the boy outside the door without resistance, as Mendel was too stunned to make any.

A slender, lean, sad-faced man in a green overcoat was waiting. "Allow me to present to you the murderer of your grandmother," said Purcane, chuckling wickedly, "your father—Hans Mendel."

CHAPTER XXII

TRAGEDY

In a reserved compartment of a first-class carriage Lesley and her lover were seated looking much bewildered. And this was excusable enough, for opposite to them was Juve, holding the hand of the Green Man, who was supposed to have murdered Madame Valeria. After his sensational introduction Joseph had disappeared hurriedly, and the elder Mendel was fiercely repudiating his accusation when Archie arrived with the girl on his arm. There was no time for congratulations, for Juve, who had swiftly regained his self-control, swept the entire party into a taxi, declaring that all explanations could be given in the train. Only when the midnight express was on its way to Havering did he open his mouth. So it was no wonder that the lovers were bewildered, for they could not understand the presence of the suspicious stranger, much less Mendel’s admission that the man was his father.

"Now," said the boy, when the train was steaming out of the Liverpool Street station, "tell us all about it."
"All about what?" asked the old man in a weary voice, for he was exhausted by his late outburst.

"About my grandmother's death, and——"

"I am innocent of that," interrupted Mendel fiercely, and with momentarily recovered strength.

"Had I known that your friend intended to accuse me of murder, I should not have come to the hall."

"He is not my friend," said Juve quietly, "but my bitterest enemy. How did you come to know him? How did he induce you to come to the hall?"

"Wait for a few moments," murmured Mendel weakly. "I am very tired and my health has been bad since I was let out of prison."

The lovers started at this admission and glanced at one another, but the boy remained unmoved. Patting his father's hand, he looked at him thoughtfully and sighed as he saw how ancient and broken-down in looks was his newly-found parent. Hans Mendel was not unlike his son, being of slender build and dark complexion. But his black eyes lacked the fire of youth and energy; they were filled with sadness and apprehension; the eyes of one who expected trouble, and not in vain. Arrayed in a long shabby overcoat of the noticeable colour, which had so greatly attracted attention, the old man plucked absently at the straggling beard which clothed his chin. This was grey with trouble, as also was his hair, although the latter was still thick and plentiful. It seemed as though Juve had found his father only to lose him, for the poor creature looked so ill that it suggested death very speedily. Indeed, Archie wondered if he would have strength enough to explain himself and his doings.

Juve's thoughts were evidently the same, for he was tender with the derelict—for that Hans Mendel was—and gazed at him anxiously. It was a strange home-coming after the triumph of his genius. But for the interference of Purcane the journey would
have been a jubilant one for the boy, with congratulations from Godwin and smiles from Miss Basser. The unexpected appearance of Mendel had changed the situation from comedy to tragedy. Not a word was said about the success of the concert, or the certainty of Juve's world-wide fame. The lovers sat silent, the boy sat silent, and all three looked sadly at the cause of their silence. Apparently Juve did not believe his father to be guilty, and neither Archie nor Lesley could think differently. Mendel was much too frail a man to have mastered and slain a vigorous old woman such as Madame Valeria assuredly was. The boy waited in silence for his father's confession, but neither by look nor word requested the same. Indeed, he did not think that the tired man was strong enough to speak at length, and the lovers were of the same opinion. But the elder Mendel did speak after resting for a few minutes, and surprised the three listeners by the astonishing and unsuspected strength which he possessed.

"Do you know anything about me?" asked Hans Mendel, suddenly addressing his son. "Did Ursula—your grandmother, you know, who called herself Madame Valeria—did she tell you that I was in prison?"

"Yes. For forgery."

Mendel laughed shortly. "I thought so. But she did not tell you that I was innocent, and that she wove the net which got me into the trouble."

"No. She said nothing about that. But I quite believe you. Grandmother was a wicked old woman, as I know."

"You don't know," said Mendel with energy and seizing his son's wrist. "No one but myself knows how wicked she was. I loved your mother, Juve, and Ursula parted us out of jealousy. She declared that I left my wife to starve, which was a lie. She sowed dissension between us, by swearing that I was married
to another woman and had committed bigamy. That also was a lie. But my wife—your mother, Juve—believed the lie and parted from me. Still I would have held to her, but that Ursula, in a way which would take too long to explain, managed to get me arrested for forgery. I was in prison for years, and during that time my wife died. I came out to find that Ursula had taken you to England. I followed, and being a musician, as you are, my boy, I played in the streets and on the ship so as to gain money to search for you."

He stopped, breathing hard, and wiped the perspiration from his haggard face with an air of exhaustion. Juve saw this. "Don't go on talking, father; you will tire yourself out."

"I must explain that I am innocent, even though I die," said Mendel, with a weary sigh, and went on with his story at once, as if he feared he should never be able to finish it. "I learned—it matters not how—that Ursula was at Carrowell. I went down there three days before she was murdered. No one knew that I came, as I did not wish to be known, for your sake, Juve."

"For my sake?"

"Yes. I was a jail-bird and did not wish to bring disgrace on you, innocent as I knew myself to be. I went up to the window. Ursula was seated in a big chair and let me in. She did not dare to keep me out. I told her that I intended to clear myself and demanded that she should help me. She refused, and told me that if I revealed myself to you I would ruin your life, my boy. I did not wish to do that," ended the man with a sob. "Heaven only knows that I wished you to be happy."

"I should have been happier had you come to me," said Juve softly and caressing his father's hand. "I am not surprised at what you tell me. Grandmother was evil from head to foot."
"She was," said Mendel with conviction. "Well, as I could do nothing with her I went away. I returned on the very day she was murdered to make another appeal. I stole up to the window, as I had done before, and then saw that Ursula was lying dead near the fire. Also I saw that man, Purcane, struggling with a girl."

"You saw that?" asked Archie suddenly.

"Yes. Why he has not been arrested I don't know. His father also."

"Why his father?" questioned Lesley, remembering Tavy's discredited evidence.

"I saw him also: leaving the house. When I noticed that Ursula was dead, I grew afraid, thinking that I might be accused, and considering how heavily she was in my debt, I should have been accused. I drew away from the window and hid myself in a little wood."

"Yes! Yes!" said Lesley eagerly. "The stone-pine wood, which parts the villa from the village. Go on, Mr. Mendel."

The man glanced at her in surprise, wondering at her anxiety. "I waited in that wood until I could get away. Then an old man came from the village."

"Tavy," said Archie.

"And after he entered the garden an old man came out."

"Mr. Purcane," said Lesley.

"Yes. I believe from the description Ursula gave me of him that it was Mr. Purcane," admitted Mendel languidly. "Shortly after he passed, a woman ran out."

"That was Monkey," said Juve with a nod.

"I don't know who she was, but as I thought I was safe, I walked away across the fields. Then I saw another man—a younger man."

"My father," said Lesley, "and he saw you."

"Your father," said Mendel in surprise. "What
was he doing in Ursula's house, for he came from there?"

"Smoking opium. Madame Valeria was trying to ruin him."

"She ruined every one and everything," said the man bitterly. "Never was there such a wicked woman. Jezebel was an angel to her. Well then, that is all. I returned to London and concealed myself. I feared to venture back to Carrowell when I saw that Ursula had been murdered."

"Who by?" asked Lesley suddenly.

Again Mendel looked at her in surprise. "By Purcane and his father," he said positively. "I saw them both about the place. One in the room and the other in the garden. Why were they not arrested?"

"They proved an alibi," said Godwin, considerably puzzled, for here was a third witness who corroborated the evidence of the other two. "A man, his wife and their child declared that the Purcanes never left their house."

"That is untrue," insisted Mendel positively. "From the description Ursula gave me of the old man I recognized him when he passed me coming out of the garden. A long grey overcoat, a cap with ear lappets and a lengthy white beard."

"That is Marcus Purcane, sure enough," said Juve, glancing at Lesley.

"And Joseph?" she demanded, still looking eagerly at Mendel.

"Oh, when he came to see me in London I recognized him at once as the man I saw in the sitting-room striking the girl. He denied it when I accused him of the crime. But of course he would," ended Mendel with a shrug which reminded Archie of Juve.

"It is a most remarkable case," said Lesley, shaking her head. "I wonder if Joseph and his father are guilty after all."

"It seems so," said Juve alertly. "Now that my
father has given evidence it is three witnesses against three. But we can discuss this later. What I wish to know, is, how Joseph found you out."

"It was through Wench," explained Hans Mendel.
"Do you know him?"
"Yes. Ursula wanted me to get away from Carrowell, and indeed from England, so that I might not denounce her. That would have spoilt her game."
"What was her game?" asked Godwin, remembering what Purcane had said.
"Ah, I cannot tell you that, sir. But you may be sure it was something wicked. Ursula was a woman who would not stop short of murder if it suited her to commit it. Anyhow, she urged me to go away and said that although she had no money, if I went to her friend Silas Wench, he would give me some. I did go to him and on Ursula's authority—she gave me a note—he handed me some money. I required it badly, as my health was not good enough to earn my bread by playing in the streets."
"And then?"
"Then Joseph Purcane, a week ago, saw me leaving Wench's office. He recognized me by this green coat; which I picked up cheap in New York. It was part of a theatrical wardrobe, and although rather startling in real life I had to take it because I had so little money."
"Well, father," said Juve impatiently, "and Joseph?"
"He followed me to where I was hiding in Lambeth, and there told me you were about to give a concert and wished to see me. On the night of the concert I came—to-night," said Mendel with rather a bewildered look, as if his weary brain had forgotten time altogether. "Yes, to-night. He came for me and he took me in. Juve"—the old musician seized his son's hands—"you are a genius. I thought that I could play, but you go far beyond me. I was so proud of you, and cursed Ursula for having parted us. But
Purcane said that you wished to see me, so I thought Ursula had told you the truth and that you had forgiven me."

"For what, in Heaven's name, father?"

"For having been in prison," said Mendel timidly.

"Father! Father! Never think that such a disaster requires forgiveness. You were innocent, and even if you were guilty you are still my father."

"Oh, my son! my son!" cried Mendel, with the tears streaming down his face. And in an impulsive foreign fashion he kissed his son fondly on either cheek. "What you say makes up for all my sufferings. We shall travel together round the world, and I will look after your concerts and——"

"But, father," said Juve, cutting short this excited speech, "did Joseph accuse you of the murder before?"

"No," said Mendel with a look of indignation, "only when he brought us together did he say such a thing. He is a liar. I am innocent."

Juve ground his teeth. "I'll twist his neck," he said, looking at his strong slim fingers, which had that night drawn such magic music from the violin. "I wonder where I can find him?"

The answer to that question came very speedily, for just as Juve ended his speech, the train slowed down at Havering. As the four alighted a man rushed past, but so dimly illuminated was the platform that none of the four recognized him. Only when they left the station and found the chauffeur on the ground trying to rise unsteadily, did they learn the truth. The Basser motor-car had been sent to the station to meet the train and the chauffeur explained its absence, while feeling a very sore head.

"I heard the train coming," he said, "and started the machine, so as to get a move on the moment you came out, miss. Then Mr. Purcane dashed——"

"Mr. Purcane," echoed Juve, and indeed the lovers also.
"Yes, sir; yes, miss. He pulled me out of the seat, hitting me on the head, and before I knew where I was, he was in the motor flying down the road. I think he must be mad," said the man, rubbing his head ruefully. "I never did see such a go."

The explanation was clear enough. Joseph had travelled down to Havering by the same train, and in order to get to Carrowell before the party had taken possession of the motor. Why he had done this, it was hard to say, just as it was difficult to understand why he had come to Carrowell.

"And I thought he had left England," said Archie, stamping in anger at his own credulity.

"Evidently he had no money to get away," said Juve, who was thinking deeply, "and I shouldn't be surprised to find that he had come to Carrowell to get money in order to clear out."

"From my father?" asked Lesley, frightened of the effect a sudden visit from the scamp might have on the invalid.

"No. From his own father. I know that Marcus Purcane keeps much cash in the house. Joseph has gone there to get some. He is afraid to face me after the accusation he has brought against my father."

"Me also," cried Mendel, drawing himself up and looking stronger. "Bring me to this man, my son. I shall deal with him and prove that he is guilty."

"Ah," said Godwin starting, "that is what Joseph is afraid of. We must get some conveyance to Carrowell. If we walk, it will take so much time that Joseph may escape."

"There is Mrs. Selwyn's motor, miss," said the chauffeur, touching his cap to his young mistress. "I can get that."

"At this late hour?"

"Yes, miss. The chauffeur is a friend of mine and has a room over the garage at the bottom of the
garden. He'll lend me the motor quick enough when I tell him what Mr. Purcane has done."

"Go, then. Be quick. I shall explain to Mrs. Selwyn to-morrow why we have borrowed her car so unceremoniously."

The man departed immediately to arrange matters as best he could, and the stranded quartette sat down on a convenient bench outside the main door of the station. No one talked, since there was nothing to say, for naturally it was useless to speculate about a future full of possible surprises. Undoubtedly Juve was right in surmising that Joseph had stolen the car in order to reach his father and obtain money without delay, so that he could fly the country. But Godwin smiled to himself in the darkness, as he reflected that it would be no easy task for the fugitive to get money from his miserly father. Besides, what with threatening and persuading, arguing and fighting, he believed that Purcane would be detained for some time—probably until it was too late to escape. Nevertheless, in spite of these comfortable thoughts the young man grudged the enforced delay, and jumped up to pace restlessly to and fro, fuming over the prolonged absence of the chauffeur. Juve himself was calm and, strange to say, rather drowsy, perhaps because the excitement of the evening had worn him out. His father, however, was tremendously excited, as he saw a chance of compelling Purcane to withdraw his abominable accusation. As to Lesley, she was so certain that Joseph would be brought to book, that she was content to wait. Why she should be positive of this it is hard to say. She could not explain the feeling herself, but some sixth sense told her that the villain had reached the limits of his trickery, and would have to surrender.

The moments passed slowly, but the borrowed car finally made its appearance, moving slowly up the road. The quartette did not wait for its arrival at
the station, but ran forward to board it at once. Somehow the three men and the girl scrambled in, and the chauffeur gave the machine every opportunity of showing what it could do. The man did not spare petrol, as he was anxious to get back his own motor and to punish Purcane for his unprovoked assault. In common with the rest of the villagers, the chauffeur detested Joseph, and while driving at top speed, mentally vowed to knock his head off. Considering his feelings and the feelings of the others, there were bad times ahead for Joseph.

Travelling at a reckless rate along a perfectly straight and empty road, the car arrived in Carrowell sooner than might have been expected. A word from Juve to the chauffeur brought the machine to Purcane's house, and it slowed down beside the high wall, which guarded the miser's neglected domain. Leaving the chauffeur to look after the car—much to his expressed regret, for he longed to face Purcane—Lesley, with the three men at her heels, entered the gate and walked up the weed-grown path between the leafless trees. To their surprise they found the door of the house as wide open as the gate, with their own motor purring monotonously at the foot of the steps. Knowing how jealously old Marcus bolted and barred and locked up his premises, they were astonished at this apparent negligence. Juve suggested an explanation, which probably was a true one.

"Joseph intends to rob his father, if he can't get the money otherwise," said the boy quickly, "and has left the door open and the machinery of the motor running, so as to bolt before we can arrive."

"Then there is no time to be lost," cried Lesley, springing up the steps.

Archie followed and laid a detaining hand on her shoulder. "Not you, dear, not you. Joseph is at bay, and there may be danger."

"I don't care," said the girl recklessly, "and it is
necessary that I should lead the way. I know the house: you don't. Come along."

Under her guidance the three men entered the sinister mansion and followed her up the dark stairs. Miss Basser had sometimes visited her cousin the miser, and knew where to find the room he usually sat in. But for her guidance valuable time would have been lost in searching for the room, as the house was in complete darkness. However, Lesley, knowing what she was about, led the way unerringly, and turned down a wide passage leading at right angles from the first landing. At the far end of this a stream of light poured into the gloom from an open door, and in another minute the unexpected visitors were through that door. They entered the room so quickly as to take Purcane by surprise, and for a moment or so there was a silence more ominous than any noise could have been. On the floor old Marcus was stretched insensible amidst many scattered coins and the table was overturned. Evidently his son had stunned him with a blow, before proceeding to rob him. This he was now doing, for the safe was open and Joseph was stuffing sundry bags of gold and bundles of banknotes into the pockets of his overcoat. When he saw that he was cornered, he uttered a stifled cry and pulled out a revolver.

"You will have it," he shouted, pointing the weapon at Lesley. "You won't let me alone. Then take it. I'll kill you."

He fired immediately, but his few words of warning gave Juve time to throw himself before the girl as a shield. The bullet hit the boy fair in the chest and he sank down at Lesley's feet in silence. Purcane fired a second shot, which went wide of Archie, at whom he aimed, and then he darted forward to escape in the confusion. Mendel seized him, but with desperate strength the man wrenched himself free, and ran along the passage. Archie followed, as did Juve's father,
and in the darkness the pursued and his pursuers tumbled headlong down the stairs. Lesley was left on her knees beside the wounded boy, whom she held in her arms. A rapidly widening stain of blood on his shirt-front showed that his condition was serious. The girl was distracted, as under the circumstances she did not know how to stop the bleeding and save the hero, who had given his life for hers. With a deathly white face, closed eyes and scarcely breathing, the genius, who had been applauded so frantically earlier in the evening, was dying.


The boy opened his eyes and smiled faintly. "Not yet!" he said and closed them again.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE TRUTH AT LAST

NEXT morning, before Inspector Quinton could leave his house for the day's work at the Tarhaven police-office, he received a wire, which puzzled him immensely. It was sent by Godwin, and requested him to lose no time in coming to Carrowell. Like most telegrams, its few words served rather to irritate than to help, as they simply signified that there was trouble without intimating what it actually was. While travelling by the early train to Havering, the Inspector wondered so much about the unexpectedness of the summons that he could not read the morning paper. Of course he guessed that the communication had something to do with the late murder and possibly with the later burglary, but was unable to think precisely what had happened to stir up the muddy waters.
He was greatly relieved when he saw the sender of the wire standing on the platform. In his eagerness for an explanation Quinton jumped out of the train before it stopped.

"Oh, here you are," was Godwin's greeting, as he seized the officer's arm and drew him towards the exit. "Come along. We must hurry. Quick, please!" and before Quinton could put a single question of the many he wished to ask, he found himself in a motor-car, spinning towards Carrowell. "I thought it best to drive myself," said Archie, explaining his handling of the wheel, "as it is no use our having any one here to listen."

"What's up?" asked the Inspector, rather annoyed that this masterful young man was, as he phrased it, leading him by the nose.

"A good deal. Listen." And slowing down the speed of the car, so as to give more attention to his speech, and to afford Quinton the opportunity of listening more conveniently, Godwin related all he knew.

"Hum!" said the officer, when he heard everything from the meeting of Mendel and his son in London down to the struggle in Purcane's house. "It seems to me that things have come to a climax. By Jupiter, I shouldn't be surprised if we learned the truth at last."

Archie nodded hopefully. "I agree with you. Young Mendel wishes to see you and explain things. That is why I wired you so early."

"He is alive, then?"

"Yes. But the poor chap hasn't long to live. His father and I carried him to his cottage after he was shot, and called in Brent. The bullet passed through the right lung, and there is internal hemorrhage according to the doctor."

"Hurry up, then. We have no time to lose."

"Oh, he'll last out the day," said Godwin, nevertheless increasing the speed of the car. "Miss Basser
is with him, and that clever old housekeeper who loves him so is nursing. Everything that can be done is being done."

"What about old Mr. Purcane?"

"He is in bed. His hopeful son merely stunned him and he'll pick up in a few days. There's no need to worry about him."

"And the son?"

"He got away, as I told you. Mendel's father and I chivvied after him down the stairs, but he knew the house and we didn't. Everything was as dark as pitch. Where he got to I can't say; but he vanished, and we returned to look after Miss Basser and the boy."

"Stop at the telegraph office," said Quinton, as they passed through the village. "I must send a wire to notify the Tarhaven police to look out for the man. We can arrest him straight away."

The Inspector sent an exhaustive wire not only to his own headquarters, but to Scotland Yard, notifying the assault and describing Joseph's appearance. "There," said the officer when this was done, "he can't have got far yet, and we'll nab him shortly."

"I'm not so sure of that," remarked Godwin when the car was again in motion, "for Joseph has as many tricks as a fox. But I hope he'll be caught and punished for shooting that poor boy."

"Oh, if young Mr. Mendel dies, his murderer will be hanged sure enough," said Quinton cheerfully; "and in any case he'll swing for Madame Valeria's death."

Archie turned to look at his companion. "Do you think he is guilty?"

"Why not? Remember what Mendel's father says. His evidence fits in with that of Tavy Tern and the housemaid. This new witness saw the struggle in the room where the dead woman was lying, and saw also old Mr. Purcane leaving the villa. I suppose,"
added the Inspector, with a side-glance at Godwin, "he did not see any one else?"

"Only Mother Monkey running for help," replied Archie, who for obvious reasons suppressed Hans Mendel's mention of Basser's presence. "You don't think that the boy's father is guilty?"

"No. He evidently got cold feet and ran away. But his evidence substantiates that of the other witnesses, so I believe that what he says is true."

"And the evidence of the Wrests in favour of——"

"Bribed," interrupted Quinton curtly. "I always had a suspicion of that."

"Then you believe that both the father and son are guilty?"

"It would seem so, and I am inclined on this new evidence to think so. However, I'll hear what young Mr. Mendel has to say. I shouldn't be surprised," —Quinton chuckled and nodded.

"What?"

"To find that old Silas Wench was guilty. I made inquiries about that man after my interview with Mother Monkey. He's a money-lender and a fence and a pure rascal, mixed up with thieves and rogues of all kinds. He may have murdered the old woman so as to get back his money."

"But I say," argued Godwin, "Wench engineered Juve Mendel's concert and gave him his chance. This being so, do you think Juve will give him away?"

"I think when a man's dying he will tell the truth," said the Inspector. "It is usually at the last gasp that people do generally tell the truth. Besides," he added cynically, "young Mr. Mendel has nothing more to gain from the man, so why shouldn't he give him away, if only to revenge his grandmother's death?"

"I don't think Juve wishes to revenge her death, Inspector. He detested her, and judging from what the elder Mendel says, he had every reason to do so. Madame Valeria, or Ursula Hedge if you like to call
her so, was a thoroughly bad lot, and it was lucky she was got rid of."

"Upon my word, Mr. Godwin, one would think you were the guilty person," said Quinton with a shrug. "However, we can discuss this later. Here we are. I wonder what this statement will be."

"The truth," said Archie, as the car stopped at the top of the lane wherein Juve's cottage was situated, "though how young Mendel knows it, considering he was asleep all the time, I don't know. I believe Purcane and his father are the guilty people."

"Or Wench," said the Inspector, sticking to his point. "There isn't anything bad that old blackguard wouldn't do."

The door was opened by Mother Monkey, in tears, although she had wept so much that it was wonderful she was able to continue exhibiting her grief in this way. The poor old woman was broken-hearted, and had every cause to be. Her darling boy, whom she worshipped so devotedly, had made a tremendous success and at one jump had gone to the top of the tree, only to be toppled down by death. For death was at hand, as Hetty freely confessed with many tears. "Can't last more'n an hour or so," she wailed, leading the Inspector into the sitting-room. "He'll go, and then what's left for me? And so clever as he is, with every one clapping their hands and cheering like mad. I'm sure I dunno why he's taken and so many silly folk is left."

"At all events he's done something great before leaving the world," said Quinton feelingly, for he was moved out of his official composure by the story of the boy; "although it's hard to make a success and not to have the benefit of it."

"Oh, drat the benefit," lamented Hetty, still crying.

"So long's I'd Juve to meself, I wouldn't have cared for any benefit. But he's dying—oh, my Lord, ain't
things hard in this world!" and she flung her apron over her head.

"If he is dying there is no time to be lost," said Quinton alertly. "Who is with him?"

"Miss Basser," moaned Hetty from under her apron; "and that Carp is in the kitchen, and Mr. Godwin's coming with Mr. Basser—the rector, I mean."

"Well, I don't want all these people about," said the Inspector sharply. "You can tell Carp to remain in the kitchen until I summon him. Ask Mr. Basser and the rector to await me here. I wish to speak to them. And if Mr. Archie Godwin comes in, he can wait for me also. Come now, take me to Juve."

"To Mr. Mendel," said Hetty, twitching away her apron, and saving Juve's dignity even at this critical moment. "He's a gentleman, and don't you forget it. His pa is with him, poor dear."

"The man in the green coat."

"As green as the grass. Yes. That's him," said Mother Monkey, and led the way upstairs to the bedroom where the wonder-boy lay dying.

When Quinton entered the room, Juve, who was propped up with pillows, and was holding Lesley's hand, turned a haggard face towards him. In a weak voice he asked the girl and his father to leave the room. "And if you have writing materials," said Juve, addressing the new-comer faintly, "bring them with you. I wish you to take down my statement."

"Are you going to clear up things?" asked Quinton keenly.

"Yes! There will be no further trouble when my statement is signed and witnessed."

"But, Juve, can't I stay?" pleaded the girl.

"I also, my son," said Mendel anxiously. "You may die while we are absent."

"No. I won't die until I make my confession to the Inspector," said Juve in a stronger voice. "Afterwards I wish to see Lesley alone."
With some reluctance the girl and the old man left the room, while Quinton, always ready for any emergency, produced several sheets of paper from his pocket and took out his fountain pen. He closed the door after the pair and then returned to Juve's bedside. After looking at him for some time the boy began to speak, and what he said so amazed the officer that he could hardly write down the words.

Meanwhile the rector had arrived with Mr. Basser, and the small sitting-room was quite crowded when Lesley and Hans Mendel entered. Archie remained outside looking after the motor, while Mother Monkey went to the kitchen and moaned in the stolid company of Constable Carp. He was not much comfort to her.

"You mark my words, missus," said the big man gravely. "I've allays had an idear that them Purcanes was wrong 'uns. They killed the old gal and that young feller you think so much of helped."

"Juve!" cried Hetty fiercely; "it's a fie. He was asleep all the time."

"So you says, missus," said Carp, still stolid. "But I say as there's three consarmed in this murder. Him and them two Purcanes."

"If you say a word against Mr. Mendel, I'll have the lawr of you."

"The law 'ull deal with him if he lives," said Carp majestically, "and I only hope as I'll be there to see the three strung up."

"You brute!" sobbed the little woman.

"I'm for law and order, missus. If folk stick other folk with knives, they've got ter pay. I'm sorry for your young master, though; he ain't a bad sort, and I dessay was made to do things by them Purcanes."

"You're a liar!" screamed Hetty, standing up and again shaking her fist. "I'll never speak to you again. My Juve's as innocent as a baby, whosoever else is guilty. I shouldn't be surprised if you did it yourself," ended Mother Monkey furiously, and disappeared into
the coal-shed, where she remained, seated on an upturned bucket, weeping profusely and rocking to and fro in an agony of grief.

Quinton was not longer than fifteen minutes taking down Juve's confession. The people in the sitting-room sat waiting in silence, for they were all too much moved and anxious to speak. The curiosity they felt as to what Juve had to say to the police-officer accounted for their anxiety; and genuine sorrow because a brilliant career had been cut short naturally caused them to mourn. If the boy had not made such a huge success things would not have been so bad: but it seemed cruel that such a genius should be struck down just when the world became aware of his existence. Also Hans Mendel had a great and private sorrow of his own. He had found his son, only to lose him, and after his years of anguish in prison, the burden seemed greater than he could bear. He wondered why he was so afflicted when all his life he had been a harmless creature ready to help any one and without a thought in his heart of evil. He certainly had hated Madame Valeria, but then he was justified in doing so. All these troubles were the belated outcome of her wickedness.

"Is the rector down there?" called out Quinton from the head of the stairs, and on receiving an answer in the affirmative he went on: "Come up, please, sir. I wish you to witness this confession along with me."

Considerably surprised, Mr. Godwin climbed the narrow staircase, and left behind him three people still more surprised. Mendel could not conjecture what his son had to reveal any more than the others could. Lesley and the old man looked puzzled, but Basser was frankly nervous.

"Oh, dear me! dear me!" he murmured, twisting his long white fingers. "I do hope there is not going to be further trouble."

Lesley looked at his white face in dismay and
wondered for a moment if her father was guilty. It looked as though he feared lest Juve should inculpate him in the crime. "Why should there be further trouble?" she asked anxiously.

"Oh, I don't know," mumbled Basser. "There seems to be no end to trouble connected with this murder. Who knows what Juve may say?"

"Can he say anything likely to hurt you, dad?"

"Who knows? Who knows?" And Basser, with a broken-down look, shifted restlessly in his chair.

Hans Mendel intervened. "I do not know what you fear, sir," he said, addressing Mr. Basser with great dignity; "but I may tell you that my son loves your daughter too much to hurt her father."

"I know, I know," Basser went on, twisting his hands nervously; "and of course I have done nothing I need be afraid of. But when people are dying they say foolish things."

Before Lesley could deny this indignantly, and ask further questions to quieten her apprehensions, the Inspector and Mr. Godwin came down the stairs. Both of them looked pale and grave, but, as Lesley noticed with relief, neither paid any attention to her father. Whatever Juve might have said, it was evident that there was no need for Paul to fear in any way. The rector looked sadly at the girl, and anticipated Quinton, who was about to speak.

"Allow me, Mr. Inspector," he said gravely. "Lesley, my dear, go upstairs and listen to what that poor lad has to say. Be gentle with him."

"Of course I shall. Why shouldn't I be gentle?"

Mr. Godwin sighed. "We are all sinners, Lesley, and we all need to be forgiven for the evil we do."

Lesley looked at him in astonishment, unable to grasp his meaning. But the queer expression on the officer's face and the pity in Godwin's eyes startled her. For a moment she stood still, then swiftly left the room and climbed up the stairs. Juve was still
lying propped up by pillows, and looking exhausted and white. He turned his eyes on the girl with an imploring sigh, beseeching her pity and forgiveness. Lesley could not altogether understand this attitude, although she had a dim idea of what he meant. But the poor boy seemed so sorrowful and broken down that she ran swiftly to the bed to kiss him.

"Oh!" Juve took her hand in his weak grasp, as she fell on her knees. "Then you do forgive me, darling heart?"

"For what, Juve?"

"This sorrow and trouble I have brought upon you. But I did it for the best, Lesley, I swear I did. It was my love for you that nerved me to act."

"But what have you done?" Lesley, as far from guessing the truth as ever, stared at the boy with large wondering eyes.

"Didn't they tell you about my confession?"

"No. What is your confession?"

Juve lay back on his pillows to stare at the ceiling, but although he did not meet her eyes, he still held her hand. "I murdered my grandmother."

"What!" Lesley took away her hand and stood up with a gasp of terror. Of all the things she expected to hear this was the last. "You are raving."

"No, my dear, I am not. I have stated why I killed my grandmother, and how I killed her, in the confession which Quinton and your father have witnessed. There will be no more trouble after I am dead, Lesley. Ursula Hedge cannot harm you now. Joseph will be hanged for shooting me, so you will be safe from him. Marcus Purcane can do nothing now that his accomplices are thus put out of court."

"Juve! Juve!" Lesley twisted her fingers in her hair and looked down at him, pale with horror. "Don't say that you murdered her."

"But I did, and for your sake."
"For my sake?" Lesley stepped back a pace in sheer bewilderment.

"Ah!" said the boy bitterly, "you shrink from me, even though I did it for your salvation at the cost of my own."

"Juve!" Lesley dropped on her knees beside the bed and took his hand gently in her own. "I don't shrink from you. Whatever induced you to commit this awful crime I don't know. But I am fond of you: I always was, so whosoever shrinks from you it will not be me."

"Thanks! I have your pity at all events, if not the love I longed for. But I must tell you about the matter and——"

"No! No!" implored the girl. "Juve, turn to God and ask for forgiveness. Let me call my father and——"

This time Juve interrupted. "Don't call any one. I only wish you to be beside me when I die. If I have sinned greatly, it is because I have loved greatly. Don't cry, Lesley, only listen, I won't keep you long."

The girl bowed her head on the quilt and sobbed as though her heart would break. And it was very near breaking, for she could not grasp the awful fact that this boy, whom she regarded with such affection, who was so brilliant and wonderful, had committed so dreadful a crime. "Why did you do it?" she wept. "Oh, my dear, why did you do it?"

"For your sake," said Juve softly, and laying his hand on her head. "You know that my grandmother's real name was Ursula Hedge. Because she was deceived by your grandfather, she came over here to kill you."

"But why?"

"I have told you. She suffered and wished to make Mrs. Basser suffer. She intended to kill your father and you, so that your grandmother should break her heart. Of course," added Mendel humorously
"knowing how wrapped up Mrs. Basser is in herself, I think Ursula was mistaken. Perhaps she saw that also, so waited three years before doing anything. But she saw a chance of ruining your father with the opium-smoking, Lesley, and did her best in that direction. You may thank Heaven that I did kill her, else your father would have been ruined—he would probably have become insane, or paralytic. You, Ursula Hedge intended to poison with the connivance of the Purcanes, who wanted your money."

"But how could she poison me?"

"Oh, in some way she would have done so. She possessed a West Indian poison of a most deadly nature, which she got from an old negro. I overheard her plotting with the Purcanes how to invite you to afternoon tea, or go to the Grange for afternoon tea, in order to slip the powder into your cup. If you only knew what a cleverly wicked woman my grandmother was—my father will tell you much about her devilments—you would understand that it was impossible for me to guard you from death save by killing her. I gave her three warnings that I would do so, if she persisted in her wicked schemes against you and yours. That was why we quarrelled so often. I warned the Purcanes also, as they were quite willing to benefit by Ursula's wickedness."

"But I have done no harm to them," said Lesley, sitting back on her heels and listening aghast to this dreadful recital.

"You had the money which they coveted, and that was quite enough for them to wish you out of the way, my dear. Joseph certainly would have married you, but as you refused he was quite willing to help Ursula Hedge with her revenge. It was money with the Purcanes: revenge with her. And as I could not induce any one of them to give up their devilments I determined to kill my grandmother in such a way as would implicate the Purcanes"
“Oh!” Lesley was suddenly enlightened; “so you masqueraded as Marcus and Joseph.”

“Yes,” said Juve with a weary sigh, for he was growing tired with so much speaking. “At the music-hall where I played in the orchestra there was a quick-change artist with whom I made friends. He showed me how to make up and supplied me with the wigs and beard and clothes I required. Afterwards he went to America, else he would have told the police, and so I should have been arrested. I arranged to go to bed for an afternoon’s sleep on that Sunday, and told Monkey to send up the tea, so that she might see I was really lying on the bed. I had to provide an alibi you know.”

“Yes,” said Lesley in a whisper, and staring at him with fascinated eyes.

“I made up a dummy figure and put it in the bed with the quilt over it. I then dressed myself up as Joseph and went down to my grandmother. With me I had that Afghan knife, and I gave her the choice of leaving you alone or of dying immediately. At first she thought I was Joseph, but I soon undeceived her. She refused and tried to get to the door. I stabbed her to the heart and dropped the knife—”

“Oh, don’t tell me more!” cried the horrified girl.

“I must,” panted the boy. “There is little time to spare. I am dying, and you must know all before I go. I was about to pick up the knife again when Maggie entered. Of course she believed that I was Joseph, and before she could learn that I was not, I struck her down to prevent discovery. Then I ran up to my room, and changing to the make-up for Marcus Purcane I slipped out of the house to meet Tavy. I had sent him purposely to the Grange and knew that I could meet him as he came back. When he entered the house I got back again and became myself. So when Monkey learned about the death, she never dreamed that I was guilty. Maggie saw me
lying on the bed, as she thought, and so did Monkey. But it was only a dummy figure. And then—here his voice grew faint—"then I—ah, you know the rest."

"It is terrible—terrible," murmured Lesley, clasping and unclasping her hands.

"Say that you forgive me," sighed Juve. "Remember I did it for you. Oh, my dear,"—he sat up with an effort in bed and spoke loudly and shrilly—"say that you forgive me. It was the only way in which I could save you."

"Juve—don't—lie down—"

She tried to push him back, but he clung to her fiercely, with a strength of which she would not have believed his frail body was capable. "Say that you forgive me," he cried feverishly. "Quick! Quick! I am dying."

"Oh, Juve"—she took him in her arms.

"Yes! Yes! Juve, who was going to move the world. Juve who did move the world last night. Does Godwin love you as much as I do? I who took a sin on my soul for your sake, and now die for your sake. Lesley! Lesley, love me!"

"Oh, my poor darling! I forgive you," sobbed the girl, pressing him in her arms.

"Kiss me, then—kiss me. You forgive me, you love me,—you—"

He choked as Lesley kissed him tenderly, and fell back on the pillow with a tired sigh. The hemorrhage—but Lesley could bear no more. As Juve died she fainted outright.

CHAPTER XXIV

PEACE

THE commotion which the tragic death of Madame Valeria made in the village was nothing to the wild excitement which became general at the discovery
of the truth. And not only in Carrowell did the excitement prevail, but throughout England. Reporters from far and near came flocking to the place, like eagles attracted by a carcass, and Archie's editor was thoroughly annoyed with him because he refused to write about the event. Of course Godwin could have done so, and knowing so much of the inward workings of the affair could have out-distanced his brother-journalists in producing sensational copy. But he flatly declined to do what he was asked and thereby not only lost much money, but gravely jeopardized his future in Fleet Street. "But I couldn’t do it, Lesley," he confessed, when seeking refuge at the Grange from the persecutions of inquirers at the rectory. "The whole thing is too horrible for words." He paused, then added unexpectedly: "All the same, I am intensely sorry for Juve."

"Your sorrow is nothing to mine," said the girl listlessly. "As he did it for my sake, I almost feel as though I were an accomplice."

"Oh, that's nonsense. You knew nothing about the matter. Of course I don't in the least approve of Juve's crazy act, but he meant well."

"I don't think that was any comfort to his grandmother," said the girl drearily.

"Oh, his grandmother. Look here, Lesley, I have heard the whole story from Hans Mendel, and if ever there was a wicked old witch it was that woman. She is better out of the world than in it."

"But she really couldn't have harmed me, Archie."

"She could," he said decisively, "and what is more she would. This nigger drug she had was used by her in New York to oblige one of her fortune-telling clients, only the police couldn’t bring home the death to her."

"But if Juve had told the police, instead of taking the law into his own hands, Archie—"

"My dear, the police could not have guarded you
from that woman or from a secret poison. Crazy with her wrongs—and I confess that she did have a bad time—she would have managed to get rid of you somehow. It is just as well that she is dead.”

Lesley sighed. "It is a relief, I admit, now that we know how evil she was, dear. And she certainly tried to ruin my poor weak father. But I wish Juve hadn't killed her—and it was done so deliberately. I thought he was an impulsive boy, but it seems he was not."

"You can't judge Juve," said Godwin after a pause. "I have been talking over things with my father, who is a most tolerant man. We both think that Juve's mingled gipsy and Hungarian blood, his cruel up-bringing and his mad passion for you, rendered him insane for the moment."

"I don't think it was insanity. I wish I could, Archie. Lunatics don't act with such deliberation."

"Oh yes, they do." Godwin was anxious to help the girl to bear her grief by arguing away the boy's crime. "When a man is mad he becomes very cunning. Juve was obsessed by the idea that his grandmother intended to murder you, and from what Mendel says she really did so intend, with the help of the Purcanes."

"What does Mr. Quinton say about that?"

"He can't say anything. Juve's confession is mostly concerned about Joseph and tells little about the father. Marcus declares that he knows nothing about the matter, so it is difficult to get him arrested. Of course, if his son is found he may give the old man away, but so far Joseph has escaped, although every port and railway station is watched and every police office has his portrait. But what I wish to point out to you, Lesley, is that the masquerade of Juve to bring in Joseph and Marcus Purcane shows that he had the cunning of the insane."

"Poor Juve! And he did it for love of me. No
wonder, Archie, he said that he loved me better than you did."

"My dear,"—Archie took her in his arms—"you are talking nonsense, and you know you are. Would you respect me if I committed a murder for your sake?"

"No,"—Lesley shuddered; "and yet—"

"And yet"—he kissed her. "Don't say any more. We are too close to the catastrophe to see things clearly. Wait for a time, and then we can make up our minds."

There was nothing else for it but to wait, and truly the time passed swiftly enough. The whole story had to come out, and Lesley, along with Mother Monkey and others concerned in the matter, were pestered for their portraits and for their views of the event. The girl had one comfort in the midst of all this turmoil of sorrow and trouble, and that was the exclusion of her father from any suspicion. It was supposed that Juve, being a constant visitor at the Grange, had abstracted the Afghan knife, so no one ever dreamed how it had actually come into Madame Valeria's possession. And although it was stated on the authority of Carp, Quinton and others that Mr. Basser had been in the habit of smoking opium at the gimcrack villa, no one came to know that he had been behind the Indian screen when the deed was done.

"It's all very terrible, you know, Lesley," said Mr. Basser to his daughter, "but I am glad that the worst came to the worst. No one dares to say a word against me. And even if Joseph is captured he can say nothing now that the truth is known for certain."

"Poor Juve!" said Lesley with a sigh.

"You are always saying that," retorted her father crossly; "and what's the use of saying it? If people will go murdering other people, they have to be punished. For my part, I think it is a lucky thing that the boy is dead, otherwise he would have been hanged."
So Mr. Basser spoke in his crass selfishness, for so long as he was safe he cared nothing about any one else. Yet, as Lesley admitted to herself, he was right. Juve had committed a deliberate murder, and had he lived would assuredly have been hanged. Not even his success at the concert would have saved him, although the musical world might have clamoured for his acquittal. The only thing which could have saved the boy's neck would have been the plea of insanity, and in Miss Basser's opinion the act was committed much too deliberately for that excuse to hold good. She ceased to talk about her dead lover, who had sinned so greatly for her sake, since both her father and grandmother had no pity for him.

"And indeed," purred Mrs. Basser, when made acquainted with the facts, all save those which had to do with her son, "I think it's a very good thing he is dead, Lesley. I never could have received him again."

"I thought you liked him?"

"I found him amusing and his playing gave me great enjoyment," admitted the lady in her usual cautious fashion; "but of course, dear, one must draw the line somewhere. If Juve wished to commit crimes he should have gone elsewhere. I don't like detective stories in real life."

"Blame Madame Valeria and not Juve," said Lesley, annoyed with this narrow view of an event which had shaken her to the foundations of her being.

"Oh, I blame her. A horrid woman. But her grandson was just as bad."

"No. Oh no, granny."

"Oh yes, my dear," purred the old tabby composedly. "Bad blood. Of course I don't think Nicholas treated her well, but then these creatures—dancers and people of that sort, Lesley—have no nerves. If I had known that Madame Valeria was the Ursula Hedge who bothered me and Paul so much with her silly letters, I should have told the police to watch her."
“You were safe enough, granny,” said Lesley, wondering at the extremely personal view her aged relative took of the matter.

“Oh, you never know, my dear. After she had murdered you with the poison and Paul was ruined in some way, I’m sure I don’t know how, she would have tried to get the money by killing me.”

“She didn’t want the money; only revenge.”

“Horrid woman!” murmured Mrs. Basser; “so melodramatic. I hope all this trouble is over, Lesley. I really can’t be bothered talking about it any more.”

“Oh, it is over, granny, with the exception that Joseph is still at large, and, so far as I can see, is likely to remain at large. Juve has been buried; all the papers have exhausted the interest of the case, and the nine days’ wonder is at an end.”

“I am glad of that,” said Mrs. Basser placidly, and took up her book.

From the attitude of Paul and his mother, it will be seen that Lesley had small chance of gaining sympathy from her family. Indeed, both the elder people seemed inclined to blame her for the trouble, since Madame Valeria had come to kill her, and Juve had slain the old woman to save her. If Lesley had not been born, was their opinion, nothing unpleasant of this sort would have taken place. It was small wonder that the girl was heartily sick of their selfishness and wished to marry Archie as soon as possible. But her lover had no money and no position, so marriage was out of the question for the present. Lesley therefore remained at the Grange while Godwin went about his journalistic work in London. It seemed that things would never mend.

Then unexpectedly they did. One day Archie returned from Town with the best of news. An offer had been made to him of the editorship of a newspaper in Hong Kong at an excellent salary. Explaining to his father that he intended to accept the post and
marry Lesley forthwith, the young man walked over to the Grange to tell her of his good fortune. To his surprise he found Inspector Quinton in the library talking to Miss Basser, who looked pale and upset. Archie shivered when he saw them together.

"More trouble?" he asked nervously.

"The end of it, I think, Mr. Godwin," said the Inspector cheerfully. "We have found Joseph Purcane."

"Oh! And you call that the end of trouble?"

"Considering he is dead I do."

"Dead."

"Drowned—dead, as Mr. Peggot says," answered the officer, who knew his Dickens. "It seems that when escaping from here, Purcane cut across country in the darkness of the night, intending to reach Tarhaven and pick up a ship. But in the gloom he must have missed his way and have fallen into one of those big ditches which drain the marshes. There was plenty of water in it to drown him, and I expect he got entangled amongst the weeds."

"So he is dead," said Archie with a sigh of relief, and unable to feel any regret for such a scoundrel.

"What about his father?"

"Oh, I have seen him. He takes it very calmly, and I think is glad to get rid of a son who knocks him down and robs him. The old man hasn't any feelings, as all his idea is to hoard gold. I returned the money the son stole."

"You can't arrest Marcus Purcane?"

"No. There isn't enough evidence. And really, between you and me, Mr. Godwin, I believe the old man had little to do with the matter. It was a put-up job between that woman and young Purcane. However, he's dead and she's dead, so that ends things in that direction. As to young Mendel"—Quinton shrugged his shoulders—"you may believe me or not, as you like, but I am sorry for his death—
yes, even though he risked hanging had he lived.”

“‘It’s better as it is,’” said Lesley in a low voice.

Quinton looked at her curiously and took up his cap. He remembered how Juve’s confession stated that he had committed a crime for the sake of the pale girl. “‘I suppose it is, Miss Basser,’” he said brusquely.

“‘Anyhow, I am sorry, and I expect you are also. However, when you marry Mr. Godwin I daresay you’ll soon forget all this trouble.’”

“I don’t think so,”—Lesley rose, looking indignant—“‘and I certainly shall never forget Juve. He did wrong, I admit, but it was for love, and for love also he gave his life.”

“As I say for the third time, I’m sorry for the boy,” said Quinton awkwardly. “‘Anyhow, things are all right now, and I don’t suppose there is anything else to come out. I take my leave,’” the Inspector bowed to the lovers, “‘and I hope I, as representing the law, shall never cross your path again.’”

When Quinton departed the girl heaved a sigh of relief, for the sight of the man was hateful to her. Anxious to tell his good news, yet fearing to do so in the atmosphere of the library, Godwin induced the girl to come out, saying he wished to see Mother Monkey. Lesley obeyed with alacrity, for she loved the old woman, who was heartbroken by the death of her darling.

“I’ll come, Archie. We must console Hetty.”

“I don’t think we can, my dear. Nothing can replace Juve in her life.”

“Of course not. But I have arranged with my father that Hetty is to have a pound a week pension, so at all events she won’t starve.”

When the lovers were out of doors, walking along the path which led to the poor little cottage Mother Monkey was so proud of, Archie told his good news. Lesley was delighted, the more so when she learned that it meant immediate marriage, and immediate travel.
"I shall become your wife next month," she said, clasping her lover's arm, "and then we can go to the East."

"Darling, I am so glad. I thought you might hesitate on account of your father and grandmother."

"I would have done so once," said the girl with some bitterness, "but now they are very little to me. Both of them condemn Juve so thoroughly, and are so selfish, that I see they regard me as nothing but a housekeeper. I can arrange with our family lawyer to take charge of things and keep my dad and granny out of mischief. Then I can go away. And oh, Archie,"—Lesley stopped to lay her hands on the man's shoulders—"love me; love me; love me, for there is no one else in the world who cares for me."

"My dearest, what does that matter so long as we have one another? Let us go to Mother Monkey's house and have tea. There we can talk over things."

Lesley wept a little, for she felt sad because of the behaviour of her nearest and dearest. But Archie petted her and made much of her, so by the time they reached the cottage she was smiling and as happy as mournful memories would permit her to be. Mother Monkey opened the door for the two and threw up her hands in delight on seeing them. She always had a soft side to Godwin, and since Juve had loved Lesley so much, adored the girl, as a kind of legacy from her boy to be looked after and cherished.

"Well, I never," said Hetty, wiping her poor red eyes, which had wept so often for Juve. "I am glad to see you. Come in. You'll have tea. And oh, miss,"—she laid a skinny claw on the girl's arm—"I am thankful for that pound a week, as I didn't know however I was going to live."

"My father gave it to you."

"Oh no, he didn't, miss," said Hetty energetically when they were in the tiny sitting-room. "It was
your kind heart as did it. Don't tell me." Hetty poked up the fire vigorously.

"Well, your pension is safe," said Lesley, not arguing the point. "I have arranged things with our family lawyer, Hetty, so when I am away from England you won't starve."

"I won't." Hetty poked the fire again. "And I'm glad of it, me knowing what a perish is. I'll keep on this cottage and have fowls and ducks and bees and geese, besides the flowers and vegetables. And then there's old Mr. Mendel, you know, miss."

"Juve's father." Lesley looked surprised.

Mother Monkey winced at the name of the boy and put a corner of her apron into her eye. "Yes, miss. He's got the position Juve had in the orchestra of the very self-same music-hall, if you'll believe me. And he's going to live here, as my boy did, and help me along with the cottage. Somehow," said Hetty, with her voice breaking, "I feel as if Juve had left him to me as a legacy like. And we can think of the dead with love together, and—and——" poor Mother Monkey broke down entirely and stumbled out of the room to get the tea.

"She will be happier with the father than with any one else," said Lesley, touched by the little woman's honest grief; "and I'm glad that the poor old man has found such a good home. How strangely things turn out, Archie!"

"Strange indeed, my dearest," he replied. "Who would have thought that the coming of Madame Valeria to this village would have brought about that crime and those deaths? She has gone, Juve has gone, Joseph has gone, and we in a different way are going."

"Going where, miss?" asked Hetty, bringing in the tea tray and the tea, hastily made.

"To the East—to Hong Kong. We are to be married next month."

Mother Monkey reflected a little. "Well, I'm sorry
you’re going, miss, as I looked on you as a legacy from Juve, like his pa. But it’s the best thing, as you’re both young. You’ll forget about this in them furrein parts."

"We’ll never forget Juve," said Lesley, answering the little woman in much the same way in which she had answered Quinton.

"No, I don’t suppose you will, miss, bless you. If he did do wrong, and I’m not the one to say as he didn’t," added the old creature tremulously, "he did it for love, anyhow. And love’s everything. But laws bless me,"—she had started to pour out the tea and pass the bread and butter—"what’s the use of talking, as I said to that there Wench."

"Wench. What about him?" asked Archie, amazed.

"Oh, he come here," said Hetty, tossing her head, "to say as Juve had lost him his money along of that Joseph, who I never could abear. And then he was angry for Juve dying and stopping him making money out of his success. But I sent him orf with a flea in his ear," ended Hetty triumphantly, "and told him straight."

"Told him what?"

"That I’d repay the money he lent me to furnish this cottage."

"I’ll do that, Hetty," said Godwin impulsively. "Bless you, no, sir. I can manage. And—drat it, there’s a knock at the door—the back door. It’s the milk," and she hurried out.

For some time the lovers talked about their plans, and then rose to go when Mother Monkey returned. She saw them out of the house and leaned over the gate as they departed. The sun was just sinking in a glory of golden light and the two dark figures seemed to be walking directly into it. Hetty, who believed in signs and omens, was quite pleased and nodded. "They leave the black behind them and go into the
light," she murmured in quite a loud voice, and her saying was overheard by the burly Carp, who was strolling his rounds.

"And lucky they are," said Carp with his thumbs in his belt, nodding towards the disappearing lovers; "but, that young Mr. Mendel confessed, there would have been heaps more trouble for them."

"I'm not denying that," said Hetty sharply, "but now they marry and go to furrein parts, so that's all right."

"And I was right also," said Carp, seizing on the very last word. "Didn't I say as there was three consarned in this murder?"

"There was only one," retorted Hetty tartly.

"One who was three, jus' like a kind of trinity. I twigged the whole thing straight away. You know I did."

"I don't want to hear no more about it," said Mother Monkey crossly, and ran into the cottage to shut out this interfering policeman. "I don't believe any one will think of my Juve but me and his pa," said Hetty sadly. "But, laws me, sorrer is for the old, not for the young, and I hope as them two will be as happy as grigs."

And they were happy, walking hand in hand towards the golden sunset, away from sad memories and towards a pleasant future. Archie drew Lesley's attention to the good omen which Mother Monkey had already noted. The girl smiled and then sighed.

"I am glad, dear one," she said, taking her lover's hand. "Heaven only knows we both wish for peace and happiness after these many trials. And yet—Juve?"

"Well, and what about Juve?"

"I can't help thinking how wrongly he acted because he loved me over-much."

"My dear, it is useless to try and decide the matter. Let us leave it alone."
"I suppose we must," said the girl disconsolately; "and yet I cannot forget that he loved me so much that he not only sinned for my sake, but gave his life to save mine."

"Let us hope that the last deed wipes out the first," said Archie tenderly; "if he sinned greatly, he loved greatly."

"You are not jealous?"

"No, indeed. I should be a poor creature if I grudged the place which the boy has in your heart. And I know you loved me from the first."

"Yes, I did. I never did want Juve, I always wanted you, and yet——"

Godwin stopped her mouth with a kiss. "Don't say any more, Lesley. Juve and his sins and virtues are in the hands of One Who understands better than we do. Let us walk towards our golden future."

The sunset glowed still more brightly as they crossed the meadows, and the omen cheered the girl greatly. She seemed to be stepping out of darkness into light and beside her was the man she loved and honoured, at whose side she hoped, and with every reason, to spend many happy years. But in the churchyard lay the remains of the wonder-boy, so brilliant and wilful and petulant and loving. He had taken a life, but for that he had given a life.

"And we can leave it at that," said Lesley.

"Amen," said her lover.