

"You know my father, then?"
"I have that pleasure, and I am very pleased at this opportunity of meeting his daughter."

"And I'm very glad to meet you," said Mary ingenuously, "for a dreadful thing has happened. I'm quite sure you'll think I'm dreaming, or that I'm crazy myself, but—there's a lunatic in the house!"

The stranger smiled, but looked, as she had almost expected, rather incredulous.

"A lunatic! You don't mean it?"
"Indeed I do. A man rushed into the house by the window, not more than ten minutes ago, with a knife in his hands. And—"

"A knife! Did he attack you?"
"No; I took care not to give him the chance. I got him into the cellar by pretending there was a bell there that he could ring to summon the gardener, and then I bolted him in."

"Well done! And in the meantime, of course, you've sent for further assistance?"

"Not yet. I've only got one maid in the house, and she's locked herself in the top room, and is too much frightened to come out. The other two are both out, and so is my aunt, so I'm practically alone."

"Dear me! A serious position for a young lady. Isn't there anything I can do?"

"Oh, if you would! I should be so deeply grateful if you would go to the constable's house for me, and ask him to come and to bring someone with him to help."

"I'll go with pleasure. But I don't like the idea of leaving you alone in the house with the fellow. Couldn't we put something before the door, so that he can't get out till I come with the constable?"

As he spoke he stepped into the room, crossed to the door, and stooping, looked at the lock.

"Pity there's no key!" said he. "He would find it difficult to force a second door, even if he should manage the first."

"Oh, I don't suppose he'll do that. Only I couldn't help feeling frightfully nervous."

"Of course not. I consider your courage simply wonderful. And now for the constable."

He smiled at her, and crossing the room again on his way to the window, when he stopped abruptly, and looked at a little water-colour drawing that hung on the wall on the right-hand side of the mantelpiece, exclaimed—

"By Jove!"

Then he looked quickly over the pictures that hung near—a little collection of paintings, some in oil and some in watercolour—of which the Vicar was very proud. The visitor admired them enthusiastically.

"Ah, I see you are connoisseurs here!" he cried as he examined a charming landscape which was one of the Vicar's treasures.

Mary almost forgetting the madman in the cellar in her delight and relief at the unexpected finding of a friend, told him the history of that particular picture, and of the discovery it had been—one of the great events, indeed, of the Vicar's simple life. The visitor, still intently examining the picture, laughed and nodded enthusiastically.

"Ah, I know the fine frenzy of a find like that!" said he. "How one gloats over the recollection afterwards, and wonders whether another such piece of luck will ever come one's way again!"

But Mary standing a few steps behind him, and nearer to the sideboard, made no comment or reply. She was, indeed, in a state of sick dread and scarcely able to breathe. For on the sideboard on her right hand was the bread-platter, as she had noticed it a few minutes before on entering the room from the hall; but the big bread-knife which had been lying upon it was no longer there!

As it could not be the excited young fellow with the disordered hair and the flushed face who had taken it and hidden it somewhere, was it the mild-mannered, blue-eyed man now in the room with her?

And, one terrible thought flashed through her brain quickly after the other she remembered what she had heard about the mad Mr. Brewster and

his interest in art, and asked herself, while the blood seemed to run cold in her veins, whether she had made an awful, ghastly mistake, and whether the man whom she had admitted as a friend and a welcome guest were really the escaped lunatic after all.

Scarcely had the idea entered her mind when the visitor, apparently noticing her silence, turned so suddenly that she started back and uttered a little cry. And then, looked him full in the face, she wondered how she could ever have doubted the truth that he was mad; for the blue eyes now seemed to stare with an unnatural glare, and slim white hand which he began to caress his light brown beard seemed to her fascinated eyes to move, with a strange, uncanny, stealthy motion, as if the long fingers were feeling for something—something deadly.

Their eyes met in a gaze which was like the last look exchanged between hound and hunted hare. Mary felt that nothing on earth could have made her turn away, as if the wild, blue eyes had a power in them which made her weak and helpless and at his mercy.

And then, while still stroking his beard with those horrible white fingers, that she saw without looking at them, he smiled at her and suddenly said, in a voice which sounded to her like that of a man who was hungry, starving, so eager, so hoarse was it—

"Look at that!"

At the same moment he pointed with the forefinger of his right hand to the door behind her. She was about to obey his command instinctively; but suddenly remembering that it would be fatal to turn her back to him, she said in a whisper—

"What is it you want me to look at?"

He frowned impatiently.

"Look behind you, look behind you!" he said fiercely.

But she would not.

"Tell me what is it you see," said she, in a hoarse voice.

He stamped on the floor.

"Why don't you see for yourself?" said he, still pointing; and as he indicated the door behind her with his left hand, he put his right hand stealthily into the inner pocket of his coat.

Mary felt paralyzed with horror. She guessed that what he had concealed, there was the knife he had taken from the platter, and she seemed to feel already the sting in her head.

Still she would not turn. She knew that to face him steadfastly was her last and only chance. The minutes seemed hours while they stood thus facing each other. Her brain seemed to be bursting and she felt as if something was surging in her head higher and higher, till each moment seemed to be the last in which she could endure the awful tension. She must scream, she must turn round; the strain was getting too great to be borne.

Meanwhile the madman was still pointing with his white fingers to the door behind her, and she was feeling that she would give way, that the fatal fascination of his attitude would be too strong for her, that she must turn and—die.

And then, when her breath was coming in such gasps that they seemed to fill the room with sound, she heard a door open and footsteps which she recognized in the hall.

Summoning all the strength she had left in her, she screamed "Millie!" with all her might.

But to her horror her voice had lost its power, and it was only a hoarse, gurgling whisper that came from her lips. The madman smiled. The smile, blood-curdling and with a sort of hopeful ferocity in it, seemed to give her back a little strength. Urged by pure terror, she cried again—

"Millie! Millie! help! help!"

Then the door opened behind her, and she heard the voice of the cook, crying in amazement—

"My gracious! who's that?"

The next moment the worse had happened. Millie turned to shut the door behind her, and in an instant the madman had darted past Mary, who, turning quickly, was just in time to see him fling his left arm round the girl's throat and plunge his right hand into his pocket.

With all her might, Mary flung herself upon his right arm from behind,



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