

# OUR SOCIETY

## CHAPTER II.

Early next morning I left my house and took a cab to Bond street. My mission was to see Morrice Sandaway, and I found him at breakfast; but as I sent up word by his man to say that a gentleman wished to see him on business of vital importance, he consented to the interview.

It was a cosy room, furnished as all bachelors' rooms are. There were photos and nicknacks lying about, books, magazines, papers, and wine-bottles on the sideboard; and I saw with regret that the silly boy was drinking claret even with his breakfast.

When I came in he sat back in his chair with a listless air, and asked me, with a yawn, what I wanted.

"I want two words," I answered, "if it is not a liberty. Do you meet Major Merton at the club on Wednesday?"

He blushed scarlet at the suggestion, and answered:

"What business is that of yours?"

"Every business," I answered, "as one who comes here wishing to be your friend."

"I will hear nothing against Major Merton, sir; understand that."

"Of course; it is not my intention to reflect on one who is doubtless so worthy" (he winced at the satire), "but, as one who has known the Major for a long time, and who, no matter how, has come to have your interests very much at heart, may I advise you to take a simple precaution on that evening?"

He nodded assent, and I went on.

"You are, I believe, to play for large stakes, and much money will change hands in the course of the night? Now, while I sincerely hope that you will win, it occurs to me that, before you play, you should ask Major Merton to put on the table in notes or gold a sum equal to that which you bring with you. You will see that I am advising you to adopt a common and business-like precaution, and I am sure that that will give no offence."

He thought for some minutes, and evidently debated the matter in his mind; then he turned to me, and, shaking my hand, gratefully said:

"It is very kind of you, and I will certainly see that the money is staked as you advise."

I left him, chuckling, and confident.

What was my object in taking this measure, you ask, and again I tell you shortly. I had learned that Merton was much pressed for money; still more, I learnt that he was suspected of being a forger, and I knew that were he asked to produce a large sum of money he would produce forged notes; and so, as we could not imprison him for gambling, he would fall into my hands on one of the most serious charges known to the law.

That is why I chuckled, as returning to Scotland Yard, I ordered twenty men before me, and gave them instructions for the Wednesday on which so much depended.

## CHAPTER III.

Precisely at eight o'clock on the great night I drove to Covent Garden, and gave the password at the door of the club.

The day before I had contrived that a plan of the whole place should be in my hands; and, more than this, I knew their danger signal, which was four bells for "all right," three for alarm.

Need I say that I carried my life in my hands, that I was well armed with a good Colt, that I knew the least hurry or premature action would mean death, and would allow the robbers to escape down their secret staircase, of the existence of which I knew, though I had been unable to discover the locality.

When I entered the room play was going on briskly, on a big table covered with green cloth. Twenty villainous-looking desperadoes sat around, and amongst them was the lamb Morrice. He had just asked that Merton should stake ten thousand pounds, and the proposal was scoffed at and derided. Then they appealed to me, and I answered, "It is only fair."

Angry words succeeded, and, Morrice at length refusing to play, Merton said that the money should be forthcoming, and he

left the room, returning at the end of ten minutes' time, when he produced a great bundle of notes; and my heart bounded, for I knew that they were forgeries.

For awhile after this play went on most briskly. They asked me to join; but I said, "Presently," and so was allowed to sit in a big arm-chair. With suppressed excitement straining every nerve, I watched the minutes go by, and awaited my time.

After an hour's play Morrice began to lose very rapidly, a pallor overspread his features, while grim desire and ferocity were marked in the faces of his foes.

Ah! their time has nearly come.

You see, had I at once made a *coup*, and whistled for constables who were about the building — they had not entered for I had given them orders not to do so until one o'clock — the men could have seized the forged notes, shot me, and let me down the secret staircase, and all would have been lost. It was absolutely necessary that I should wait until I had a chance of fingering the notes, and getting them, on some pretext or other, into my hands for a moment.

At one o'clock play was so keen that the men were silent with excitement, and in the silence a slight noise was heard down the stairs.

"What was that?" said Merton appealing to me, and I answered:

"I heard nothing."

"Sound the alarm," he said, and then with pale faces listened while the bell sounded, once, twice, three, four times. "Safe!" said Merton, as he sighed with relief. Fool! the alarm was rung by my own officers.

Knowing that the great crisis was nearly at hand, I still tended to be uneasy at the sound, and as if wishing to listen more closely, I walked slowly to the door, and put my head round the edge, as is the habit of those who would hear very distinctly.

The hour was truly at hand. An enormous heap of gold notes lay on the table, and the ball began to spin in the basin. Morrice was as pale as a sheet, his teeth were clenched, his hands shook with excitement, his eyes were bloodshot, while he could hear the deep breathing of the others. Slowly the little came to a rest; twenty eager eyes gazed at the number. A shout went up. Morrice had lost, and with a cry of rage and despair he rose from the table and turned on Merton.

"Scoundrel," he cried, "thief, and robber! you have brought me here to ruin, i.e., to turn me away a beggar and a pauper whom I have trusted."

The gamblers laughed at the words, which seemed to comfort them.

"If we have won," said Merton, as a fiendish smile lighted his eyes, "if we have plucked a pigeon, it is our good fortune rather than reproach us, go and do the same: find a pigeon and pluck him, as we have plucked you."

These cruel words enraged Morrice beyond all restraint. A cry as of a wild beast he sprang at Merton's throat, and I saw that my time had come. Stepping up to the table in the confusion, I clutched a handful of the forged notes, and cried:

"Gentlemen, one word. As a disinterested spectator, it seems to me that Mr. Morrice Sandaway has not been fairly met here. On looking at these notes, I see that he could only have won with less and forged paper."

The interruption seemed to act on the heated men as nothing could have done; it had, in fact, hardly escaped my lips ere pistols flew up and were pointed at my head.

"Tear the notes from him!" screamed Merton, but with a sweet smile I stamped once on the floor, and ere the men could move, a posse of officers rushed into the room, while, with a shout, I sprang on Merton, and held him to the earth.

"Thief and forger!" I cried, "twenty years ago I swore that your hour should come, and it is now. Look at me, not at Mr. Woolfield any longer but, Inspector Woolfield of Scotland Yard, who has kept his oath, made by the boy and redeemed by the