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ing the gravel. Just as he was about to pass out he turned, his swollen forehead and half-closed eye making him resemble some hideous gargoyle in the flickering lamp light.

"Yes, I'm lucky to get out with my life," he hurled his bomb at the astounded women. "Anyone who falls foul of Captain Lance Pengarvan is lucky to escape with his life, as my poor old Dad found to his cost this afternoon."

"What do you mean to imply?" demanded Lance's mother scornfully, but conscious of a sinking at her heart.

Wilson Polgleaze laughed, a shrill, cackling laugh, that echoed among the age-blackened rafters of the hall. Then he suddenly dropped his voice and answered:

"I mean to imply nothing. I state a fact. The bully who went for me just now murdered my father half an hour before 'The Lodestar' left harbor. Probably because the old man had got wind of the pretty games he's been up to. I can prove it up to the hilt."

And while Mrs. Pengarvan and Hilda sought for comfort and incredulity, each in the face of the other, the accuser mounted his horse and rode off into the darkness.

CHAPTER IX.

The News From Falmouth.

THE morning after Antonio Diaz shipped his guns on "The Lodestar" broke dull and gloomy over St. Ruan's Tower. At sunrise, Hilda, who had slept but fitfully after the excitements of the previous evening, got out of bed and drew up her blind, half expecting to see the black hull of the tramp steamer in the cove. But the sullen water between the twin headlands was destitute of craft larger than Nathan Craze's coble, plodding towards the snaky line of lobster-pot floats, which was plainly discernible from that height on the oily swell. "The Lodestar" with her secrets had vanished under cover of the night as silently as she had come.

"I am glad they have gone," the girl breathed a sigh of relief. "That wretched creature meant mischief, and I was afraid he might have taken steps to stop them. Of course his story about old Mr. Polgleaze was a spiteful lie—the only revenge he could think of off-hand. 'The dear old Dad' is most undoubtedly alive and well, getting ready for another hard day's work at his money-mill."

That was the conclusion to which Mrs. Pengarvan and Hilda had come after closing the door on the ship-owner's son, and ascertaining that Craze and Pascoe, though waiting within hall, had not heard the accusation.

"Of course there was nothing in that nonsense about Jacob Polgleaze so far as Lance was concerned, but I can't help wondering if anything has happened to the old miser," Hilda broke the ice.

Lance's mother uttered one of her blunt laughs. "That was in my mind, too, as I believe you guessed," she replied. "I also confess to a certain amount of curiosity on the subject."

After a pause Hilda remarked with apparent irrelevance: "Pascoe told me last week that he wanted a new spade and potato fork. If he is not busy to-day I think I will send him into Falmouth to buy them. It will do Jenny good to get some exercise."

"An excellent idea," the elder woman assented. "Jenny is far too fat and lazy. She wanted to lie down in the road when I drove her to the Pentreaths' the other day."

So after breakfast Timothy Pascoe was given his instructions, and harnessed the ancient pony, which was the sole occupant of the dilapidated stables, sometimes doing duty in the shafts of the farm cart, and on the rare occasions when the ladies had to return the visits of neighboring gentry, in those of an antiquated chaise. The latter, as the lighter vehicle, was chosen for the present mission.

No direct reference was made by the anxious women to the real object of their faithful retainer's excursion to the town, but as the long day drag-

ged to a close they exchanged many surmises as to the time of his return. Jenny's "records" were quoted, and none of them gave hope of a reappearance before six o'clock. Punctually at that hour Hilda remarked with some petulance:

"That pony must have tumbled down."

"Nothing of the kind," declared Mrs. Pengarvan. "Timothy has been taking his time in the town gathering the news, I expect, and you may as well own, my dear, that is what we want. Thank goodness he is a listener, and can keep his tongue between his cheeks."

It was past eight when the heavy jog-trot of the outraged Jenny was heard in the drive. It branched off towards the stable-yard, and it was some minutes before Pascoe came into the hall where they awaited him. They scanned his stolid countenance anxiously, perceiving at once that something had happened. In fact, Timothy Pascoe in his quiet way was palpably bursting with news.

"I've bought them tools," he announced, like all bearers of momentous tidings taking pleasure in dallying with the tremendous mouthful that he was rolling on his tongue.

"You have been a long time gone," said Mrs. Pengarvan, loth to disclose by hurrying him the fear that she was half ashamed of.

"There's a powerful how-de-do going on in Falmouth, and I bided there to get the hang of it, seeing as how in a manner of speaking the Tower may feel the difference," replied Pascoe. And then, slowly and with great gusto he added: "Mr. Polgleaze—the old 'un, Jacob—is dead. Murdered, seemingly, in that cock-loft over the shop where he does his writing."

"What else did you hear?" demanded Hilda breathlessly.

And the two ladies, with their faces as white as chalk, listened to the details which Pascoe had been able to gather. Having sprung the central item on them, he grew terse and lucid in his narrative, quickly putting them in possession of his scanty stock of information, and assuring them it was all that had been given to the public up to the time of his leaving the town. Knowing the man's pertinacity, they had no doubt about that.

It appeared that late on the previous evening—at half-past ten to be precise—Mr. Polgleaze's housekeeper had become uneasy because he had not returned to his house. Sometimes he stayed late at his office, but never so late as that. She had therefore sent the maidservant to the salesman in the shop, Israel Hart, who lived near by. Hart had lost no time in going down to the Market Strand, and, letting himself in with his duplicate key, had discovered the dead body of the senior partner in his chair at the office table upstairs.

THE shopman had promptly raised the alarm. The police and a doctor were quickly on the spot, and it was soon known to the small crowd which had collected in the street that "old Jacob" had died of several knife wounds inflicted by someone who had stolen on him from behind. Messengers had been despatched to Mr. Wilson Polgleaze's hotel, and subsequently to scour the town for him, but it was nearly one o'clock in the morning when he returned from a long ride in the country, before he was apprised of his father's death. He had seemed very much upset, but had been able to throw no light on the occurrence.

"Which ain't to be wondered at, seeing that Master Lance was punching his head out here at half after ten," grinned Pascoe.

"Never mind that," snapped Mrs. Pengarvan. "This horrible affair has nothing to do with what happened here last night."

"Of course not, ma'am. You can leave that to me."

"Well, is there any more to tell?" Not much, it seemed, except that Israel had left the shop at six o'clock, in the belief that his employer was in his office overhead, finishing correspondence which he would post himself. The salesman had heard no sounds of quarrelling or of any scuffle