POOR DOCUMENT

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"MR. DOOLEY" ON SPAIN'S NEW BABY

BY F. P. DUNNE

"WELL, Sir," said Mr. Dooley, "I see there's a new baby over at th' Spain's."

"So I see," said Mr. Hennessy.

"It's a gr-reat evint to have a kid come to a rile fam'ly," said Mr. Dooley. "With th' likes iv us people come an' go an' no wan pays anny atintion to thim. A birth in this part iv th' wurruld is inthrestin' on'y to about three people. Ye notice that Dock Grogan's buggy stands a little longer in front iv Schwartz's dure thin if 'twas a case iv th' mumps, an' th' next day th' old man is late at th' wuruks. Whin th' foreman is just about to tell him to go get his time he pints his thumb at his chest an' says, 'Pop-ah.' Th' foreman bein' th' father iv nine himself, shakes him be th' hand an' maybe asks him over to th' Dutchman's. An' that's all there is about it. We don't hear th' details. In Ar-chey Road it ain't considered polite to discuss thim.

"But with rilety 'tis diff'rent, d'ye moind. Why, I know as much about this here happy evint in Spain as though I had a room in th' house. Weeks ago th' pa-apers begun discussin' it, an' iver since there's been no let up. I feel kind iv sorry f'r Alfonso. It it's hard to be winked at an' nudged be ye're partickler frinds, it must be th' divvle to have th' whole wurruld winkin' at ye an' nudgin' ye. Up to a few months ago I hadn't heard aanything much about him fr'm th' day he was married, win wan iv his rile subjicks become so enthusyastic over th' nuptials that he thried to dhrop eight pounls iv home-made nithro glycerine in his leige's lap. But ye can't keep a good man out iv th' pa-apers, an' about St. Pathrick's day me old heart was gladdened be th' news that Alfonso was to become a father like you an' Hogan.

"In a little while th' palajeem iv our liberties had got me as well acquainted with th' rile fam'ly as though we come fr'm th' same town in Ioway. I have at laste forty pitchers iv th' good woman. Her name is Victorya. She didn't want to marry him at' first, but th' folks made her, an' he's turned out very well, an' she is beginnin' to like him. She's a fine-lookin' buxom woman, with th' characteristic British picnic. As f'r Alfonso, he has a thurly rile face, not pr'aps so fine a face as th' Czar of th' King iv Servya, but still a face that' if ye saw it wanst ye'd instantly say, 'What a face.' He has th' Hapsburg swingin' undher jaw an' fixed upper jaw, enclosin' thirty-two teeth, stationary nose an' ears, movable eyes, an' a forehead separatin' eyebrows an' hair. If he come into this store at this minyit I'd know him as well as though he was a reg'lar customer.

"Well, Sir, I got so inthrested in th' young couple that I was thinkin' iv goin' over to Spain an' givin' this advice. An' if I was disturbed what dye think was hapepnin' to his rile subjicks? Afther all's said an' done, he's nawthin' ti me. He's a nice young fellow, but that's till. I don't have to pay him his wages. But think iv th' long hours iv waitin' f'r th' Spanish people. Th' popylace didn't suffer as much as th' nobility. Th' popylace sud lave wurrud to be called if annything happened, an' go to sleep. But with th' nobility 'twas diff'rent.

"Whin a rile child is born, all th' nobility, th' Gin'rals iv th' army, th' Admirals iv th' navy, an' th' Ambassadures iv foreign powers have to chase up to th' palace an' be presinted to th' kid befure his eyes are open. An' they've got to go dhressed. It don't do to hurry into a sweater an' a pair iv sneakers, or slip into a wrapper. They've got to appear in full rig'mintals. If a part iv their best suit is a soord, they've got to wear a soord; if it's rubber boots, they've got to wear rubber boots. So there was nawthin' f'r these haughty Castiles to do but sleep with their clothes on, an' manny a brave Gin'ral who has led th' victoryous throops iv Spain through countless retreats bears hon'rble scars that show his devotion to his rile master fr'm sleepin' with his spurs on.

"Well, they waited an' waited, till fin'lly th' wurrud come to haste to th' palace. Th' American Ambassadure thoughtfully borrid a pole fr'm an injune house an' slid down into his gaiters. Elsewhere there was much confusion. Gin'ral Santiago del Popylo had been throubled be bad dhreams, an' was so entangled in his epylits that he had to be extricated be a wreckin' gang. Th' Jook iv Opoorto was obsarved be th' popylace pullin' on his boots in his gilded chariot. Th' Countess iv Alcantara y Sandago was applyin' a powdher puff an' a cup iv tea. Gin'ral th' Jook iv Allycazan was shavin' with a safety razor.

"Up at th' palace all was excitement. Ninety-eight doctors' buggies were dhrawn up in front iv th' dure. Two thousand nurses iv th' noblest Andylusian stock dashed about 'carryin' boxes iv Castile soap, which is on'y used on rile infants, an' dimon studded buckets iv parygoric. Th' King, dhressed f'r th' occasion iv bein 'a father in a combynation iv th' unyforms iv th' four hundred rigmints he is Colonel iv, paced nervously up an' down th' room, now an' thin takin' a pull out iv a goold an' ivory flask.

"Th magnificently attired assimblage stood silent fixin' its necktie, combin' its hair or brushin' th' feathers off its coat, as th' case might be. Th' American Ambassadure, th' Hon'rble James H. Blick, formerly Assistant Commissioner iv Public Wurrupk at What Cheer, Kansas, was conspicuous in th' brilliant an' aven garrish throng, be th' simplicity iv his attire, he bein' clad in th' ordhinary garb iv an American citizen whin he goes to New York, black pants, vest an' coat, an' white shirt. He showed his contimpt f'r th' foolish pomp iv these rile doings be wringin' his hands an' askin' th' man next to him, "Ought I to get down on me hands an' knees or on'y on me knees whin his rile highness is brought in?'

"Suddenly th' massive oaken dures were flung open be a sthrong hand, an' th' exquisite Countess Maria Suzette Annabella Corossa Ann y Toboggo, flushed with her glad tidings, fairly flung hersilf into th' room, an' cried: 'My lards an' ladies, it is a—I f'rgot to ask.' There was a moment iv suspinse, an' thin a sthrange sound reverybrated through th' long an' costly halls. 'Hark!' cried th' British Ambassadure. 'What's that?' 'It is th' palace cat,' exclaimed th' Jook iv Tobasco. 'It is ayether a cat or a King,' said th' bluff an' hearty Gin'ral Escraminto del Bamhillo. Alfonso dashed fr'm th' room exclaimin', 'Here's where I go to th' bat!'

"In a minuyit he reappeared carryin' above his head a plate. An' what d'ye think was on th' plate? Ye'll niver guess. I'll give ye eight guesses an' ye'll not guess. It was th' child. Yes, Sir, I tell ye I have it straight. No I didn't read it wrong. Ye'll know what to do next time. In th' front parlor we'll be gathered—me in a stovepipe hat, with th' medal I got f'r th' hundhred yards dash in sivinty-three; Corp-ral Hannigan iv th' Hibrnyan Rifles in his full unyform, th' policeman on th' beat, th' letter carrier, an' th' dhriver iv injine five. An in yet come carryin' ye'er iliventh (or it is twelfth?)—

"Twelfth," said Mr. Hennessy.

"Carryin' ye'er twelfth on a platter. Ye can see it here in black an' white. 'King Alfonso enthered carryin' th' heir to th' throne on a silver plate. He walked around th' room, sayin', 'Jook, th' Prince iv th' Astooryas.' An' as each person was presinted they cried: 'Long live th' Prince iv th' Astooryas.' An' Hinnissy, sthrange as it may seem, he did live.

"Outside, th' sthreets were thronged with excited taxpayers. Ivrybody wanted it to be a boy, it seemed. They've had enough ladies such as they are in th' Spanish rile fam'ly. It was fixed so that a gun wud be fired to let th' people know whin to cheer or hiss. Ninety-three explosions f'r a girl an' ninety-four f'r a boy. Iv a sudden, a gun boomed out, not in. They counted. Boom! Ninety-wan. Boom! Ninety-two. Boom! Ninety-three. Thin a pause. 'It's a giry.' 'No, wait.' 'What's th' use? Let's go home. Hurrah f'r Susy.' Th' sportin' ilimint that'd been bettin' on th' filly were preparin' to cash whin—Boom! Ninety-four. Ninety-four booms. A boy. Hurrah! Th' popylace wint wild with joy or home, as it happened. An' th' next mornin' th' news was flashed into twinty millyon American fam'lies an' boordin' houses that wan iv th' gr-reat evints iv th' wurruld had happened, an' that th' future King iv Spain was a boy.

"Since thin, th' excitement has died down to some extint, but we're still gettin' news fr'm th' nursery. Th' Queen is raypoorted to have walked down stairs. Th' King is full iv anecdotes iv his heir, who resimbles his grandfather th' King iv England in his caustic wit. Th' rile parent goin' into th' rile nursery th' other day an' obsarvin' th' rile young with his foot in his mouth' exclaimed: 'Wot is th' little doodle, doodledeums doin'; to which th' spirited infant replied, Gah.' On Thursday th' capital was thrown into consternation be th' announcement that a rash had appeared on th' back iv th' Prince's neck. Th' rile surgeon, Don y Dook Grogan, hurrid to th' palace, an' decided afther consultin' with his colleagues that it th' hope iv Spain was to be saved radical measures must be adopted. With gr-reat skill he administered talcum powdher, an' th' Prince is on a fair way to recovery.

"Manny presints have been rayceived, among thim bein' a pacifier fr'm th' King iv Biljum's own rubber farm on th' Congo, and an enamelled bomb fr'm the Czar, with th' inscription: 'Like father used to take.' Th' Prince was christened th' other day. Be th' courtesy iv th' Sultan specyal wather was brought fr'm th' River Jordan, which is owned be th' Turks. I don't know whether th' Prince howled an' kicked his god-father in th' eye. They usually do. I've been black an' blue a hundhred times fr'm standin' up with th' childher in this neighborhood. Annyhow, th' Prince was thurly christened. Th' King his father invested him with th' Ordher iv th' Golden Fleas, an' he was named afther th' crowned heads iv th' wurruld, who are his relations. Henceforth, he will go through life with th' followin' epithet: Alfonso Edward William Nicholas Leepold Garaboolago Wu Ching Fang Rosenfelt Mockahi Rain-in-th'-Face. Whin his mother calls him into th' house f'r supper she'll have to begin befure breakfast.

"All these here deetails I r-read in me favrite journal, which is devoted to th' cause iv labor. If ye want to know what's goin' on in th' highest circles at home an' abrood ye've got to buy a journal that is especially printed f'r wurrukinmen an' wurrukin women. Rilety niver will be abolished as long as there's a pa-aper that makes a point iv gettin' th' news that'll plaze a mimber iv Tinsmiths' Union Number Six. Afther readin' th' raypoorts iv this excellent fam'ly counsellor I find mesilf thinkin' iv th' Prince iv th' Asturyas comin' into th' wurruld wearin' a Ginral's unyform an' a soord. An' I know that ain't so. Me reason tells me that he's about a foot high, with no teeth, little hair, a red face, an' a disposition to prickly heat. No matther what ye call thim, Hinnissy, babies are babies, an' people are people. An' if ye put th' Prince iv th' Astooryas an' P. J. Slavin, Junior, that was born th' same night in Halsted Sthreet in a crib together an' left th' room, ye cudden't tell thim apart if they were both in the crib whin ye come back. If wan iv thim was on th' flure ye'd recognize th' Prince.

"Well, thank Heaven, it's over, an' w can go back to wurruk. Th' la'ad's havin prob'bly th' best time now he's iver goin to have. About twinty years fr'm no he'll be leadin' a life as precarious as a chicken on an autymobile road. It may've been fun wanst to be a King. I wud've liked th' job mesilf. But since th' establishment iv so manny shootin' gall'ries in Patherson, New Jersey, I've given up all me ambition in that line. Whin th' time comes f'r me to die I'd like to pass away all in wan piece. There were about tin thousand babies born in Spain th' same day th' Prince iv th' Astooryas come into th' wurruld. It don't make so much diff'rence how he threats thim. He can't do much f'r thim excipt let thim see him wanst a week dhressed in his best suit iv clothes. It's what they'll do to him, I'm wondhrin' about."

"Well," said Mr. Hennessy, "so long as he's on'y a baby I dhrink his health.

"I'm with ye," said Mr. Dooley. "A glass iv malted milk to th' Prince iv th' Astooryas."

THE GHOST OF LOCHRAIN, OR THE UNDERGROUND SYNDICATE

BY MRS. C. N. WILLIAMSON, AUTHOR OF "THE PRINCESS PASSES," "THE LIGHTNING CONDUCTOR," ETC.

CHAPTER XVI—(Continued.)

Trowbridge laughed again. "I had better try to show the faithful old chap that his master and I are the best of friends," said he. "Now, let us clink our glasses together, and then drink. That act ought to prove to the dog that we're all right together, if he's the intelligent Scotchman I take him for; and then I'll bid you good-night."

He held out his glass and Oxford took up his again, Kenrith also lifting his to his lips once more. But as Trowbridge extended his hand towards Captain Oxford, each holding his glass, with a fierce growl the collie leaped up between the two men, and striking his tawny head against his master's tumbler, dashed it to the ground. It broke with a sharp crash, its contents spattering the floor, and drenching the dog's finely marked face and glossy ruff. Both men mechanically drew back to escape the deluge, and Kenrith was surprised at the expression which for an instant disfigured Trowbridge's features.

It was natural that he should be slightly startled, and perhaps vexed; but a look of such rage and hatred darkened his eyes for a second, that Kenrith feared in his sudden anger he would attempt to kill the Prince. Quickly as it had come, so quickly did the strange expression fade, however, and Kenrith was half-inclined to think it must have been a trick of light and shadow.

There was confusion for a moment, Captain Oxford holding and rebuking the dog. Trowbridge wiping the spilled liquid from his evening shirt and white waistcoat, which were plentifully bespattered; and the night porter (who had been standing inside the door, as if to await further orders) running to pick up the pieces of broken glass.

As he stooped, his back to Trowbridge, he glanced up meaningly at Kenrith, and held out a tiny note, folded in triangular fashion, and crumpled as if it had been held concealed in the man's palm. Kenrith took the folded bit of paper and instantly recognized the handwriting of Elspeth Dean, which he had seen many times since she had begun to act as his secretary.

He guessed that she had asked the night porter to deliver the note secretly, if he were not alone in the room, and that very likely the man had cleverly made the restlessness of Prince Charlie his excuse for so late a call.

Hastily, while the attention of Oxford and Trowbridge was too completely engaged for them to guess that anything was going on behind their backs, he unfolded the note and read, with intense surprise and bewilderment the few words Elspeth had scrawled there.

CHAPTER XVII.

Lady Lambart's Day.

It had been a strange and terrible day for Lady Lambart, one of the most terrible of her life, which, of late years, had not been lived all in sunshine.

In the first place, the morning had been begun by a hideous shock. She had hoped to wring a proposal for herself from Kenrith and to have matters settled between Hilary and Trowbridge before the bursting of the storm which had been threatening so long. If she had dared she would have spoken directly with Kenrith of her financial troubles, but instinctively she had felt that, if she seemed even to hint for help from him, though she would doubtless obtain all the assistance she needed, she would lose forever any hope of him as a husband.

He had been brought up in a different world from hers, and the woman he asked to marry him must be—or seem to be—like Caesar's wife. Though he admired her and was perhaps fascinated by her (or she hoped it), he was not enough in love to forgive her for the follies and almost criminal extravagances, which he would certainly find out if she appealed to him for help in this crisis.

Her one hope had been that she might be already engaged to Kenrith before her troubles reached extreme issues. Then, when she could inform her creditors that she would soon be the wife of the well-known millionaire from the North country, they would be willing, even glad, to wait for their money. If Kenrith made awkward discoveries before their marriage he would be far too honorable, too old-fashioned in his code of morality to break his promise.

To Lady Lambart's bitter disappointment and chagrin, however, Kenrith had said no word of love, and he neither listened nor looked at her in the old interested way which had given her hope. She attributed the change largely to Elspeth, whom she—herself an arch-schemer—regarded as a designing little trickster, a kind of Becky Sharp; and nothing would have given her more delight than to hear that the young stenographer had been killed or disfigured for life in the motor car accident. As fate had not relieved her of the enemy, she had done her best to assist destiny, and was enchanted with the news that through her Elspeth Dean had lost her place at Lochrain Castle Hydro.

For the present, nevertheless, the girl remained, a detested incubus; and it had been a hateful humiliation to Lady Lambart that she and Hilary should have received a warning from Elspeth.

It was a warning for which to be thankful; still it seemed to Lady Lambart that she would rather not have had it at all, than to have received it through the girl.

It was a great relief that the emergency had driven Hilary to capitulate at last; yet Lady Lambart was not easy in her mind that Elspeth Dean should be the bearer of her daughter's message to Trowbridge. Whether Elspeth had or had not acted in the affair of Captain Oxford as she had been accused of acting, was a detail of slight importance to Lady Lambart; she favored his cause and might never deliver the note to Trowbridge.

Matters being desperate at the moment, Lady Lambart had tacitly consented to let Elspeth take the letter, rather than there should be any delay for even if Kenrith failed, if the other millionaire were secured everything might yet be well. She had done her best for him with Hilary, and she intended to have her reward.

When there came no disturbing news from downstairs, Lady Lambart took it for granted that Trowbridge had had the note, and that he had kept his promise to save her and hers whenever the time of need might come.

The two ladies breakfasted in their room insted of going down as usual; but when an hour had passed in peace, Lady Lambart felt thankfully certain that the coast had been cleared for her, and was anxious that Hilary should descend for a talk with Trowbridge.

But Hilary obstinately refused to leave her room. "He must have had my letter long ago," she said. "He might answer it. It is enough excuse that I have a headache. I've done what you asked of me. I've consented to make the sacrifice, and I shall be miserable all the rest of my life; but I know you don't care for that, mother. I've done enough for this morning. I mean to stay where I am, and keep out of Mr. Trowbridge's way."

"He will think it very strange, and he will have a right to be angry," said Lady Lambart.

"He knows I don't love him," the girl answered.

"Still, you have promised to marry the man now. You have no right to avoid him."

"Oh, mother. I must have one more day to myself," Hilary cried, her eyes brimming with tears. "I've promised myself to him, but in the mood I'm in, if—if he should try to kiss me I feel that I could strike him across the face."

Lady Lambart was startled. There was a look in Hilary's eyes which told her that the girl was in no state to be coerced. She dared urge her no further; for Trowbridge was certainly not a patient man, and if Hilary should forget herself and be rude to him he might repent his bargain. The best thing, she thought, would be to go down and see the man, make up some petty message from Hilary, with apologies for the headache, and also to talk of the engagement as of a settled thing to every one whom she might meet. She found Trowbridge in the hall, looking pale and anxious, but he brightened visibly on hearing from her that Lady Hilary had definitely decided to accept him. As it happened, while Lady Lambart was engaged in giving the news, the man with the dreaded "blue paper" arrived. Trowbridge was called upon to keep his promise, and she fled, but not to her own room. She dared not wait in the hall lest there should be some dispute, and she should be called upon to see the "dreadful person" whose expected coming had so shaken her nerves. But hastily scribbling a line to Trowbridge, "I will go to see Countess Radepolskoi. Please come to her sitting room and touch your right cheek if all is well," she handed the sealed envelope to a waiter with instructions to give it to Mr. Trowbridge as soon as he should come back.

Lady Lambart had the best of excuses for paying a visit to Countess Radepolskoi, as by this time she had heard of the robbery, the sole subject of conversation among the guests of the hotel.

When they first made acquaintance, Lady Lambart and the Countess Radepolskoi had seen a good deal of each other. The Countess had been interested in Lady Lambart because she was a friend of John Kenrith, and Lady Lambart had been interested in the Countess because she was a friend of Mr. Trowbridge, the handsome American millionaire of whom everybody in the Hydro was talking. Of late a feeling of constraint had arisen between them, and Lady Lambart guessed that the Countess had become jealous of Hilary with Trowbridge. Knowing nothing of a bond between them which Elspeth had early suspected, she knew no great reason to fear the Countess. Trowbridge was in love with Hilary, and it rather amused Lady Lambart to see the pain of another woman. Now, she determined, after sympathizing duly with Countess Radepolskoi on the loss of her jewels—quite famous throughout the hotel—she would casually mention Hilary's engagement, perhaps asking with all innocence whether the Countess had been told of it already by "her friend Mr. Trowbridge."

Lady Lambart found the door of the Countess's sitting room ajar. She knocked, and when there was no answer, pushed the door farther open. No one was there; but as she hesitated on the threshold, the Countess's French maid looked out hurriedly from an inner room.

"Where is your mistress?" asked Lady Lambart.

The woman was folding up a handsome tea gown, and Lady Lambart noticed that she was very pale, with a curious, strained look in the eyes, as if she were momentarily expecting something alarming to happen. But, perhaps, this was the effect upon her of the robbery last night; servants were rather like that. "Madame la Countesse has been called away very suddenly, miladi," she said. "I am packing her things, and will follow as soon as I can."

"Gone!" exclaimed Lady Lambart. "That is indeed sudden. Is it on account of the robbery?"

The maid's dark face quivered for an instant.

"Yes, miladi; it is on account of the robbery," she replied.

"Surely she will come back?" questioned Lady Lambart. "She said goodby to none of her friends"——

"I know, miladi, it is most unfortunate, and Madame regrets much; but I doubt if she will come back; though, of course, I do not know all her plans."

A flash of enlightenment darted into Lady Lambart's brain. She imagined that Trowbridge must have told the Countess of his intention to marry Hilary, and that in a rage she had left Lochrain.

"The jewelry is only an excuse," was her thought. "The Countess must have felt she couldn't see the two together, and so she has vanished, making some pretence, I dare say, about Scotland Yard. But perhaps Lady Ardcliffe will know something about it. They were always in each others' pockets lately, and now the fact that they have both been robbed will have drawn them even closer together."

In any case, Trowbridge was certain to be aware of the Countess's departure. Lady Lambart told the maid that if Mr. Trowbridge knocked at the sitting-room door he was to be informed that Lady Lambart had gone on to Lady Ardcliffe's room.

A babel of voices greeted her ears as she knocked at Lady Ardcliffe's door, and one broken sentence came to her clearly. "Of course, I can't prove anything now, but all the same I'm morally certain that"——

The voice came nearer; the door was opened by the speaker, Lady Ardcliffe herself; and at sight of Lady Lambart she gave a little start, growing red, and breaking off suddenly.

"How do you do?" said the elder woman, somewhat stiffly, looking so much embarrassed that Lady Lambart was puzzled.

"We—I—that is, we were all talking over the robbery," she went on. "Will you come in?"

"Thanks, yes; I've come to sympathize," replied Lady Lambart, airily.

"You are very kind," returned the other, with a quick but eloquent glance at her friends.

Trowbridge had interviewed her early in the morning, had learned from her own lips the theory she had formed in regard to her stolen jewels (a thing she had absorbed from the Countess Radepolskoi, as she would scarcely have been able to evolve it alone) and had induced her to promise that she would do nothing inimical to Lady Hilary Vane. "It isn't that I care for the girl particularly," he had said. "If I have given people any season to think so, it was only to shield her in her affair with Oxford, and also because you have been unkind to me lately. She knows we are great friends and she and her mother may fancy I have put these ideas about her into your head. I shall think you more angelic than ever if you promise not to accuse Lady Hilary. You admit you haven't any real proofs; that the Countess had them all, and has said that she'll make them known this morning; but mark my words, she'll do nothing of the sort. I've been studying her character, and have discovered that she's as cowardly as she is selfish. She hopes to make a catspaw of you; then, when she has got you to do and say exactly what she wants she will surely throw everything on your shoulders and disclaim any special knowledge or responsibility. Without very strong proofs on which to found an accusation you would be in something of a scrape; and every one would think you had done what you had out of ill nature—a thing really so very foreign from your sweet disposition."

Lary Ardcliffe had finally yielded reluctantly to Trowbridge's arguments, but she had not told him how she and the Countess Radepolskoi had both been talking in the hall of the hotel the evening before against Hilary Vane and Lady Lambart.

Lady Ardcliffe had said, what she had already said to Elspeth Dean, that the two were in dreadful money difficulties, and that unless one or both of them could make a rich marriage (as they were striving to do), she did not see at all what would become of them.

The Countess had added that she would not be in the least surprised if the mother and daughter descended to actual theft to relieve them in their desperation, as already they must have pawned all their own jewelry which was worth pawning. She would not trust Hilary Vane alone in the room alone with hers, she had continued; and thought she had laughed and pretended to be half in jest, naturally everybody who had heard the speech remembered it after the robbery. Lady Lambart and Hilary, congratulating themselves on having escaped a terrible humiliation, little dreamed how their names were being taken in vain in the hotel; and their defenders, Trowbridge and Elspeth Dean, were as ignorant of the talk as the subjects of it; as ignorant as John Kenrith and Captain Oxford, who were known to be friends of the unfortunate pair.

Those who had heard Lady Ardcliffe's words, and especially the Countess Radepolskoi's, the night before the robbery, told all their acquaintances who had not heard; and these persons rapidly passed the story on to others, so that the whole house was buzzing with the hideous gossip which Elspeth Dean, Trowbridge and Mr. McGowan flattered themselves had been killed.

Naturally some of her most intimate friends had lost no time in reminding Lady Ardcliffe of last night's conversation, and all were bitterly disappointed as well as surprised at the Countess Radepolskoi's sudden flitting. A select party had been discussing the situation in Lady Ardcliffe's sitting room when Lady Lambart arrived, and not a woman there but was conscious of a quickening of the pulse when the mother of Hilary Vane appeared at such a dramatic moment.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Lady Ardcliffe's Chance.

"I have been to condole with Countess Radepolskoi too" said Lady Lambart, "but I find that she has gone away. Doesn't that seem very sudden?"

"Oh, it is. Even Mr. McGowan, the manager, didn't know she was going. I asked him, and he told me so," said one of the ladies who had been most bitter against Lady Lambart and her daughter. She was unable to resist the temptation to tell something which perhaps the others did not yet know. "And really, it is very odd; no one saw her leave the house."

"No doubt she had her own reasons for wishing to get away so secretly," said Lady Lambart, with a veiled sneer. Had she but known how these half dozen women were regarding her, even her proud spirit would scarcely have ventured a sneer at the absent enemy.

Lady Ardcliffe, who had lately made common cause with the once despised "foreigner," against Lady Hilary Vane, flushed with anger. "No doubt she had her reasons for not letting some of us know the meaning of her actions," she retorted, in defence of her absent friend. "I shouldn't be surprised, myself, if she hadn't left the hotel after all."

"What do you mean?" asked Lady Lambart.

"I mean that there may be those under this roof who will be watching. Why shouldn't the Countess be her own detective?"

As Lady Ardcliffe spoke these words she fixed her eyes on Lady Lambart's face, expecting to see a change of color come under her look. Other eyes also were fastened eagerly upon the handsome features; and the six self-constituted judges decided that the woman was too hard and shameless even for a blush.

Lady Lambart shrugged her shoulders. "So you and the Countess suspect some one in the hotel, do you? How exciting!"

Dead silence answered, and Lady Lambart began to feel that the silence was electrical, though she did not understand why.

"Really, it never rains but it pours excitements," she went on, when nobody answered. "There was the motor car accident yesterday; and now this dreadful robbery; and my daughter's engagement, which I suppose will cause a little flutter, as Mr. Trowbridge is so popular—"

"Mr. Trowbridge!" exclaimed Lady Ardcliffe. "Surely you mean Captain Oxford—"

"But that is ridiculous," said Lady Lambart. "There has never been the slightest chance for Captain Oxford with my daughter."

"You may not know her heart as well as you think," replied the elder woman. "Girls don't tell their mothers everything."

"I am at least in the confidence of my daughter far enough to know that Mr. Trowbridge has proposed not once, but several times, and this morning has been accepted."

For a moment Lady Ardcliffe felt that she must faint, but, foolish woman as she was, she had enough pride to save her from becoming ridiculous in the eyes of her visitors. With a supreme effort she rallied all her forces, trying to think that her enemy had told an untruth; yet, in spite of her passionate wish not to believe, there was something in Lady Lambart's tone that carried conviction. She guessed that Trowbridge's soft words to her in the early morning had been spoken with an object. He was determined to save Lady Hilary at any price, and he had meant to keep his engagement secret for a day or two. Now his object had been thwarted by the girl's own mother.

All the malice and spite in this middle-aged woman who loved a young man seether within her, seeming to pour venom through her blood. She longed for some inspiration to show her how be to punish Trowbridge for the trick he had played. Her foolish love for him had turned to hate, and she would have liked to strike him a stinging blow.

The easiest way to strike, and the way perhaps to deal the hardest blow, was to ruin Hilary Vane; but it would be difficult to work without her lost ally. The Countess had said this morning, before Trowbridge had come and separated them: "I have absolute proof against the girl by which I can denounce her when she comes downstairs. I won't tell you what it is, for if I did you wouldn't be surprised; and it's better that you should be surprised. I'm not at liberty either to tell you why I am so certain about this proof; but I am certain; and you'll soon see that I was not boasting."

So Lady Ardcliffe had waited, expecting something sensational; and the Countess had vanished; and she herself had been tricked. But if it were not in her power at the moment to have the girl she hated arrested, she would at least so damage her reputation that Trowbridge, no matter how much in love, would hardly dare to face the world with Hilary Vane as his wife.

"Mr. Trowbridge must have been accepted this morning; indeed, I don't wonder that Lady Hilary said 'Yes,' sneered Lady Ardcliffe, with trembling lips. "But I venture to prophesy that the engagement will be dissolved before night—and by him."

Lady Lambart, who had sat down, rose abruptly, looking very stately and handsome. "Are you mad?" she exclaimed.

"Not at all—though I've had enough to make me so. It is you who are mad to come here and talk as you have done—after last night's work."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that it was your daughter—aided and goaded on by you, probably—who stole Countess Radepolskoi's jewels and mine."

Lady Lambart, on hearing Lady Ardcliffe's astonishing accusation of Lady Hilary, though marble pale, burst into laughter. "After all, you are mad?" she cried. And then, turning to the half dozen women sitting in a silent group, she said, "What ought I to do? Send for the manager of the hotel, or—the doctor?"

"Be thankful if I do not send for the police and have your daughter arrested," shrieked Lady Ardcliffe. "There are proofs enough that it was she who took the jewels from us both, and, whatever happens, I intend to get mine back. They shan't be sold to pay your debts."

"Ring the bell, some one, and let us send for the doctor," said Lady Lambart. "This woman has completely lost her senses."

"I think," said one of the others, "that we had better not ring. It is best for everyone concerned that we keep this among ourselves. You may as well know, Lady Lambart, that the Countess also suspected Lady Hilary, though on what grounds, of course, none of us can tell you. She seemed to be certain, however; and so, you see, whether dear Lady Ardcliffe is right or wrong, she isn't in the least mad."

"What a monstrous and horrible accusation!" ejaculated Lady Lambart. "It could only have entered the head of a jealous woman. We all know that 'hell hath no fury like a woman scorned'—especially an elderly woman scorned for a young girl. Both these women have been madly jealous of my poor, innocent child. This is a plot against her. I understand now the mystery of the Countess Radepolskoi's sudden flitting. Mr. McGowan, the manager, has doubtless heard of this disgraceful scheme, and has simply turned her out. I shall see him, and then, Lady Ardcliffe, I warn you that you had better make your preparations to go also."

It was now Lady Ardcliffe's turn to laugh, which she did, shrilly and hatefully. "Miserable fool!" she cried, "don't you know that you and your daughter are walking on the edge of a precipice? Perhaps at this very moment a detective has discovered the proofs which will send your daughter to prison."

"It may be, Lady Lambart, that she is a kleptomaniac," said one of the ladies, who was neither rich nor important, and who had been snubbed on an unforgettable occasion by the proud Countess of Lambart.

The persecuted woman did not deign to answer, but, finding that she was in danger of falling into vulgar recrimination, without another word she swept out of the room. Thence she went straight to her own, where she stood for a moment or two behind the hastily locked door, thinking deeply.

She remembered the Countess's earring, caught in a frill of Hillary's dress, for, though she had not been in her daughter's room at the time of the odd discovery, she had heard the conversation between Elspeth and Hilary. Yes, she thought, it was certain that there was a plot—an incredibly wicked plot—hatched by two jealous, unscrupulous women. But—would it be easy to prove it a plot? Had they not played their game perhaps more cleverly than she yet knew? In spite of her furious indignation against Lady Ardcliffe, the Countess Radepolskoi and all their friends, Lady Lambart began to be very much frightened.

Suppose there were a detective in the house? Indeed, there probably was one, for no doubt the manager would have sent off in hot haste to the nearest large town—and suppose it should be put in his head to suspect Hilary?

It would almost surely be a stupid head, and therefore all the more dangerous. Some other pitfalls might have been laid, of which she and Hilary knew nothing—would know nothing until it was too late. How horrible!; what irrevocable mischief some blundering "detective" might do.

Lady Lambart would fain have talked matters over with Hilary, but feared to tell her the truth in the girl's present strange mood. Instead she rang and ordered the servant who came to have Mr. McGowan informed that she wished him to come to her at once.

He did come, after the shortest of delays, which nevertheless seemed long enough to her; and before he had time even to ask a question Lady Lambart began to pour out her grievances.

She and her daughter had been outrageously insulted in his house. She wished to go at once and consult her London solicitor.

"But, Lady Lambart, in the present circumstances I fear it is impossible—that is, I mean that it will be best for you not to go."

"If you refer to the trifling debt I owe you for our stay here"—began Lady Lambart. But the manager respectfully cut her short.

"No, it is not that, indeed," he replied, "though I must confess I should be obliged if your ladyship could find it convenient to pay. But, you see, a certain suspicion is afloat; nonsense, and cruel suspicion no doubt; and I have done my best to prevent your being annoyed. Still, there it is; and the affair has happened. Really, Lady Lambart, the only thing to do now is for you and Lady Hilary to stay exactly where you are, and as you are, until the matter of the jewels has been cleared up—as it may be, any minute."

"Is it true there is a detective in the house?"

Mr. McGowan raised his eyebrows. "Naturally there is—I may as well admit that, since the fact has been mentioned."

"And my daughter and I are being watched?"

"Everybody in the hotel is more or less under observation."

Lady Lambart bit her lip, and her eyes were full of a dangerous light. "I will not keep you any longer," she said, "since you do not intend to protect me."

"I am unable to do more that I have done, and am at present doing, I deeply regret to say."

"Then, at least, leave me."

He did not require the second bidding. And witn what Lady Lambart suffered in that moment and other moments to come, Elspeth Dean—if she had but known—was fully avenged.

Elspeth pointed to the stairs. "It's up above where the dead woman lies," she whispered. "But they left me lying here. See, there are the bands of stuff that bound me, knotted still. They'll look here when they come"—

"Hush," murmured the detective with a finger on his lips, and turned off the light. They were in black darkness, darkness which in this cold and gloomy place seemed thick, as if it might be felt.

Kenrith laid his hand on the girl's shoulder. She had been trembling a little, but at his touch her nerves grew steady.

There was a slight sound in the distance. A sliding door had been softly pushed back, somewhere out of sight. Then came muffled sound of footsteps on the carpet and voices talking in low tones together. An instant later a yellow light quivered along the dark wall. They were coming round with a lantern, and Elspeth heard the same clinking noise which had frightened her on that first night in the lower room.

In a moment more they would know that they had been tricked; but the light had not found the intruders yet, and the four who lay hid waited, scarcely breathing.

Now they came round the turn of the passage, two tall, black figures, walking one behind the other; but the old-fashioned lantern which, with its clinking chain, hung from the hand of the foremost man, did not send its rays up to their faces. Their features were hidden still, as, if masked by darkness.

"We're late," Trowbridge's voice said, in a hushed tone, yet audible to those intently listening ears. "You oughtn't to have gone so far off when this thing had to be done still, before dawn."

"We've time still," answered another voice, strange to Elspeth, save that she had heard it here before; but she felt the hand on her shoulder start.

"Where was it we left her?" asked Trowbridge. "Here, I think. Why"——and the light touched the woollen bands which Elspeth had thrown off. But his sentence was never finished. The detective leaped out of his hiding place and flashed the lantern in his eyes.

With a cry of rage and amazement Trowbridge staggered away from the light, but the full blaze of the detective's lantern was upon them both now, sparing only the face of the unknown. The girl distinctly saw him pull a revolver from his breast and aim it at some one among their number. She had the impression that the shot was not fired at random, merely to injure a dangerous enemy and terrify the others, but that it was meant to find and kill one among them. So strong was this impression that, with a quick thought for the man she loved, she tried to throw herself in front of Kenrith. But the light thrown up by Trowbridge's swaying lantern was not upon his face. It was upon Captain Oxford's, and quickly she realized that the coming shot was meant for him.

With a shriek she would have warned him of his deadly danger, but he was saved in another way.

(To be continued.)