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THE TWO MARYS; OR, THE O'DONNELLS OF INNISMORE.

CHAPTER VIII.—Continued.

Mrs. Montague had but just entered the private box they engaged when she whispered to her daughter—

‘I declare, Millicent, I have left my diamond bracelet on the toilet table; I was going to put it on, and changed my mind; I feel very uneasy.’

‘Oh never mind, don't be alarmed,’ replied Millicent; ‘perhaps you replaced it in the jewel case and forgot it, and even if you did not, Wilson is very careful, and no one else will enter the room.’

Mr. Montague, however, fretted and fumed all the evening, about her bracelet, and immediately on her arrival home, hurried to her room. One glance at the toilet was sufficient; the bracelet was not there.

‘My bracelet, Wilson, I hope you have put it safely away. I forgot and left it on the table.’

‘Dear me, ma'am, I trust not,’ said Wilson, ‘for I have not seen it; but take it easy, ma'am, she added, ‘and just open your jewel case, for it is most likely you'll find there.’

‘Not so, I tell you, Wilson,’ replied her mistress, with excessive agitation, and at the same time opening the case. ‘See, now; oh! what has become of my beautiful bracelet? Who has dared remove it from the table?’

‘Oh! pray, ma'am, do not make yourself so uncomfortable till we have thoroughly searched the place,’ said Wilson, now hastily removing the costly scents and essences, which lay scattered around, till the table itself was finally removed; but, alas! the expensive bauble was nowhere to be found.

In the greatest consternation, Mrs. Montague hurried to her husband, and informed him of her loss. She was for instituting a thorough search, there and then; and calling together all the servants. But Mrs. Montague insisted on perfect quiet till the morning, comforting her by telling her that he would then give information to the police.—The half-distracted woman then yielded assent to his proposal, bid Wilson say nothing to any one, and, in a terrible ill-humor, submitted to let her hair be arranged for the night.

Wilson was scolded oftener than usual, but then, Wilson was such a sweet tempered woman, one who would kiss the hand that struck her; and, of course, to-night she made great allowances for her mistress's harshness, for the loss—it lost the bracelet really was—was indeed no slight one.

After a few moments silence she remarked, ‘A strange idea has just occurred to me, ma'am, Fraulein has been out to-night, and yet she has been very ill all day; couldn't give the young ladies their lessons, that seems odd, doesn't it?’

‘Good heavens, woman, what are you driving at?’ said Mrs. Montague, whose suspicions had as yet been levelled at no one particular person in her household.

‘Well, I really can scarce tell myself, ma'am, only it does seem odd, now doesn't it?’ replied the waiting woman.

‘I think the whole affair is odd, and something much worse than odd,’ replied the mistress;—‘however, there must be a thorough search in the morning.’

A little more than twenty minutes had elapsed after Herr Von Sulzer had quitted Maria Flohrberg; he had forgotten a small parcel he had left at the hotel, and hastened back for it. On his return, he saw standing, a few paces from a pawnbroker's shop, a woman whose dress attracted his attention, for it was somewhat particular, in so far as the shawl and bonnet were neither of them such as were then worn.

‘Is it possible I did not give Fraulein Flohrberg enough,’ he said, for he felt convinced it was her he beheld, and he walked towards her, exclaiming—‘Ah, I did not expect to meet you again.’ But at that moment the female paused, and threw up her veil, as if with the intention of closely examining something in her hand. ‘I do not know you, sir,’ said the woman; he apologized, and walked on.

‘I could swear to that face amidst a thousand,’ he said to himself; ‘it was not Fraulein, but the dress is exactly the same.’

No, the low forehead, with a scar in the centre, and the dark eyebrows almost meeting each other, rendered it a face, when once seen, not soon to be forgotten. The dress was exactly like that of Maria, made of black silk;—the bonnet pink; the shawl—a remarkable one from its showy colors—a white middle, with a green and pink border; such as were worn twenty years since.

The gentleman went on his way wondering, for the parties were, of course, not the same, but ere he left the spot, he paused, and saw that the woman turned down one of those shabby streets

which run from Oxford street in the direction of Golden Square.

On the following morning Mrs. Montague met her husband, at breakfast, with an air of grave importance on her face, which she invariably assumed when she considered she had made a discovery, and she then mentioned what Wilson had told her of the absence of Fraulein on the previous evening.

George Montague looked very anxious and uneasy, but made no reply. He had already sent to the police station, and ere the breakfast cloth was removed two officers were in the house.

By this time the news of the robbery had reached Maria's ears; she heard the servants had been called together, that they were going to be searched; her heart beat violently as if, with the knowledge of some impending evil;—yet, she was innocent; but she wrote a few lines which she gave to Alice, to carry to her father, expressive of a wish, under the unpleasant circumstances which had taken place, herself to pass through the same unpleasant ordeal.

Really distressed, Mr. Montague came to her room, assuring her there was no occasion for her to subject herself to such a mortification; but she was resolute.

The housekeeper, good Mrs. Somers, after having submitted to the same ordeal, came to Fraulein: of course, the missing bracelet was not about her person; the police officer then examined the young lady's drawers, trunks, and closets, subjecting every article in Maria's chamber, as also the study, to a minute examination; then her desk was searched, and therein, was discovered the twelve pounds, the money poor Fraulein had intended to have changed for an order for her father, to be made payable at the Coblenz banking house.

The house and every individual therein had at last been minutely searched, and the officer returned to the library, in which the family were seated.

‘What are the circumstances of the German governess you have in your house?’ he enquired. ‘She has twelve pounds in her desk, I see.’

‘Her family are miserably poor,’ exclaimed Mrs. Montague, before her husband could reply; ‘it is impossible she can honestly have such a sum in her possession, for she asked for an advance of four pounds of her salary a month since.’

Mr. Montague felt very anxious, but said,—‘I am convinced this poor young lady's character is beyond suspicion. I make no doubt she will be able to explain how she came by this money.’

The police officer remained for a few moments buried in reflection; then he said—

‘We shall endeavor to ascertain if the bracelet has been pledged, by making enquiries at the various pawnbrokers' shops; meanwhile, can you ascertain if any of the household left home during the time you were absent last night?’

‘Fraulein was absent, if no one else was,’ said Mrs. Montague. ‘My maid, Wilson, told me this: and what makes it more strange is, that the whole day she had complained of illness, so that she could not give my daughters their lessons as usual.’

The officer's face grew a shade more serious, as the lady spoke; he mused again, and said— ‘She has money in her possession for which you cannot account, and she was away from home at the very time she was complaining of illness. Is it your wish to give her in charge on suspicion of being concerned in the theft; or, of having actually committed the robbery herself?’

‘I do not feel myself justified in taking such a step at the present moment,’ said Mr. Montague, now seriously uncomfortable. ‘I will, at least, wait till some information has been gathered. I fear the jewel may have been pledged;—you will soon ascertain if it be so or not.’

‘You will, however, allow me to go and make enquiries as to how the lady became possessed of the gold she has in her desk,’ said the officer, rising to leave the room.

‘I have a great aversion to your doing so, a very great aversion,’ replied Mrs. Montague, ‘still, if you think it advisable, do it, but with as much delicacy as possible.’

As the officer ascended the noble staircase, of white marble, with its balustrades of bronze, he met the innocent and unsuspecting Maria Flohrberg, who, regretting the lapse of time occasioned by the search of the police officer, was now hastening to change the unfortunate gold which was making her an object of suspicion, so that the letter containing the order for payment might be transmitted to Coblenz without delay.

She was about to pass the man, but an inexpressible something in his countenance, above all, his turning to follow her, attracted her attention, and she enquired if he wished to ask any question of her.

‘Yes, Miss,’ replied the officer. ‘I must go with you again to your room, if you please.’

With a heart beating wildly, and limbs trembling beneath her, innocent though she was, Fraulein followed him to the study. He commenced as follows:—

‘You must pardon me, Miss, for I am only doing my duty, but I am obliged to ask you to tell me how you got the money I saw in your desk this morning.’

‘Mein Gott! is it possible I am suspected of the theft?’ exclaimed Fraulein, her face turning ashy pale. ‘I will tell you then; I met a German gentleman, in the street, last night, and he lent me that money. I am now going to a banker's, who will pay it over to my father.’

‘Well, Miss, I am sorry to appear rude,’ answered the officer, ‘but, as I said just now, Miss, duty must be my excuse; perhaps you'll tell me the name and address of the gentleman as you say gave you the money?’

‘His name is Von Sulper; but I cannot tell you his address,’ replied Fraulein; ‘he was one German friend of mine, I met him by accident at the top of Regent Street, and he was then very quick going to the steamer which was to leave St. Katherine's dock last night.’

‘Humph,’ said the man, shaking his head, as if doubting, as he really did, the truth of poor Fraulein's assertion. ‘Howsoever, it will be necessary to account better than this, Miss, for having that money, or you may get yourself into trouble. Now, take it easy, Miss,’ he added, ‘sit down and take off your things, for you must on no account leave home with that money till this case be made quite clear. Sorry, very sorry, to offend you, Miss, but you know I must do my duty.’

‘Ach men, Gott, mein Gott! what for is all this,’ said the now terrified Maria, sinking into a chair and clasping her hands together; then, too, came the thought of her poor father, perhaps even then dying, and in prison, and she exclaimed—‘Woolen sie mir sagen, I am not to go from das haus, that I'm not to use my own gold, that I'm to stop here one prisoner?’

‘I am sorry to tell you, Miss, that you must stay where you are, till my return; one's duty, Miss, is very unpleasant, very, but still it must be attended to.’

Thus speaking, the officer left the room, and Maria remained a prey to her own agonized reflections; now, sitting with clasped hands and streaming eyes, thinking of those she loved at Coblenz; then, pacing the room, in all the agonies of wildest despair, with tearful eyes and blarney lips, and burning with indignation at the very idea of this most shameful suspicion under which she labored.

But another widely different scene was being enacted in the dining room. The officer communicated his suspicions to the Montagues, and thought it looked a bad case for the young lady.

‘She was going out,’ he said, ‘to make away with the very gold of the possession of which she could give no very clear account.’ He begged Mr. Montague not to allow her to leave the house, and added, that ‘himself and two of his men would, at once, visit all the pawnbrokers' and jewellers' shops in the neighborhood, when he hoped to discover the missing trinket.’

Mr. Montague was much distressed, for tho' it did look queer—poor Maria's story of a German friend meeting her in the street, and giving her money—yet, his own experience told him that strange things did sometimes occur, and that a strange concatenation of circumstances sometimes made the most innocent persons appear guilty; he could not bring himself to believe that the open honest countenance of the Fraulein Flohrberg, was otherwise than the index of an honest mind, and the poor gentleman felt such shame at the idea of meeting her, whilst there was yet the slightest chance that she was innocent, however appearances might seem against her, that he kept himself closely confined to his own room.

As to poor little Alice, she was scolded by her mother, because she was in tears and grief that dear Fraulein should be thought ‘no better than a thief.’ Millicent was indifferent, and Mrs. Montague's cold, stony eyes, seemed to gleam more brightly than ever with a cruel delight, as much as to say: ‘Was not I quite correct? You see the officer is of my opinion.’

Things were in this position when Margaret Mainwaring's well known knock was heard at the hall door; she was accompanied by Bertha, and had called to enquire after Fraulein's health.

For a few moments the young ladies could not understand what was the matter; scorn, when she spoke of her friend, was so visible to Mrs. Montague's face, the tears of Alice, and confusion of Mr. Montague, were all enigmas which she could not solve. The angry woman was the first to disclose the painful truth, for, interrupting her husband, who, with no small pain, was trying to put things in a favorable light for Maria, she burst in with—

‘It is no use for you to tell Margaret the story in that fashion, George; Fraulein, I feel con-

vinced, has stolen the bracelet, and no one else.’

‘Fraulein stolen a bracelet, Madam; for heaven's sake think seriously of the nature of the words you utter, it is morally impossible she should have been guilty of such a crime.’

‘We shall see, we shall see, Miss,’ exclaimed the irritated woman, ‘everything is against her, there is nothing in her favor, and if you have any proper feeling, you'll not see her again till this affair is cleared up.’

‘Mr. Montague,’ said Margaret, turning away, her dark blue eye kindling with indignation, ‘I should wish to see my dear Mary's friend, at once, this is an atrocious calumny, I feel convinced. Bertha, will you go home, or shall we visit dear Maria Flohrberg together?’

‘Oh, I will go with you, certainly,’ exclaimed the warm-hearted Bertha; ‘we may be some little comfort to her at such a time of trial.’

Can there be anything more dreadful than to be wrongfully accused of a very grievous crime? This was the thought of the two young ladies as silently, and with tears in their eyes, their gentle hearts aching with sorrow, they followed the odious Wilson, as she led the way up the elegant staircase, and passed by windows of stained glass, and along spacious galleries, till they arrived at Fraulein's room. There she was, poor thing, all alone in her misery, no tears in her eyes, and looking the very image of despair.

She bounded towards her friends as they entered the room, and joyfully received their warm embrace. ‘You do not think me guilty, then,’ she exclaimed; ‘oder sie warem nicht her gekommen.’

‘Guilty, my own dear Maria,’ exclaimed Margaret, ‘guilty, such a thought could never enter our minds for a moment, but let me implore you as calmly as you can to tell of the particulars of this horrible charge, and then we'll return home and talk the matter over with papa and Herbert, and get you out of this horrid house.’

Broken by many more ejaculations in the German language (Maria always spoke very bad English whenever she was nervous or excited, and sometimes forgot to use it altogether) she narrated to her friends the whole tale of her sorrows; showed them the letter she had received the previous day, and, drawing from her bosom the miniature of the General's wife, told them, with a blushing face, the intention she had, when she left home on the previous evening, of raising money upon her little souvenir, till she could redeem it, then described her strange meeting with Herr Von Sulper, the present he had made her, and her return home, shortly before Mary paid her second visit, and finished by telling them how the officer had stopped her on her journey to the house at which she was about to get the money changed into an order on the Coblenz banker.

‘My father, my poor father, what will he do? This gold is mine, and yet they dare tell me I am not to use it,’ exclaimed Maria. ‘Ach mein Gott, how shall I hear this odious charge, was soll ich thun, was soll ich thun. What shall I do?’

‘Never mind about the money, darling,’ said Margaret, ‘that is the least part of this sad business; they must give it you ultimately, and I'll go home and bring dear papa to see you;—but first of all I'll ask him to lend you the ten pounds, and see that it is sent off all right to Coblenz, and as soon as this matter is settled we will all come and see you.’

Maria then bade her friends farewell, her poor mind easier, as far as her father was concerned; but she relapsed again into her former state of nervous agitation as soon as she found herself alone.

CHAPTER IX.—MISTAKEN IDENTITY. THE COMMITAL OF FRAULEIN. A FRIEND IN NEED.

It may be readily imagined that Maria passed a day miserable enough; a day, a night, too, we might add, for though the kind-hearted Mainwaring's visited her, and attempted to cheer her up, still the very thought of the dark suspicion that rested upon her, made her miserable.

Squire Mainwaring had immediately yielded to his daughter's request, and advanced the money to be sent to Coblenz, so firm was his conviction of the innocence of poor Fraulein; and unable to avoid meeting the Montagues, he had narrowly escaped a quarrel, so indignant did he feel at the evident disposition of Mrs. Montague to regard Maria as the culprit, so that on leaving them to pay a short visit to the former, he said,

‘I have always understood it to be an axiom of English law, that a person is not to be considered guilty till a jury of his countrymen should have declared him to be so; but the case is reversed here, Mr. Montague, Mrs. Montague having already, in my hearing pronounced this poor young lady, neither more nor less than a common thief.’

The worthy gentleman had told Fraulein to come straight to his house, immediately on her character being cleared; how little did he think

where and when he should next meet Maria Flohrberg.

The evening was already far advanced when the officers returned, and Mr. Montague found, from one glance at the countenances of the men, before either of them spoke, that they had important intelligence to communicate.

‘We have found the bracelet, sir,’ exclaimed the detective, ‘it has been pledged for the sum of twenty-five pounds, at Mr. Stevens', one of the pawnbrokers in Oxford street.’

‘Is it possible?’ exclaimed Mr. Montague, and a cold chill crept through his frame, as he enquired in what name the trinket had been pledged.

‘In that of Maria Flohrberg,’ replied the man, placing the duplicate in Mr. Montague's hand, as he spoke. ‘It was pledged at a few minutes before eight, last evening, by a foreigner; Mr. Stevens himself took it in; the person who presented it spoke French. He said her veil was down, but she was of fair complexion, with brown hair; and one of his young men could describe the dress she wore; the shawl and bonnet struck him as looking particular, they being both old-fashioned.’

Alas! poor Fraulein, here was evidence against thee sufficient to shake even George Montague's faith in thy innocence. For a few moments he was perfectly silent, and the officer forbore to speak, for he saw that he was deeply moved, and even his cruel wife held her peace, for once forbearing to give open vent to the triumph she felt at her assertion of her belief in the delinquencies of poor Fraulein proving correct.

‘You, of course, give this person in charge, sir,’ said the officer, after he had for some time maintained a respectful silence.

‘Where will she be conveyed to?’ said Geo. Montague, in a hoarse whisper.

‘To the Marylebone police station,’ replied the officer, ‘she will have to pass the night there.’

‘She will pass the night in my house,’ said Mr. Montague, ‘and if you have any fear of her making her escape, I am perfectly willing that yourself and your man should remain here. My belief in the lady's innocence is shaken, but I cannot yet condemn her as guilty.’

‘Stop here! Mr. Montague,’ exclaimed his wife. ‘You surely are not in earnest when you remember of what a crime this young person is believed to be guilty?’

‘I have expressed my desire, madam, I shall not allow the unfortunate girl to be removed to-night,’ said George Montague, leaving the room to shut himself up in his own study, miserable enough, for black as things appeared against Maria—though the bracelet had been pledged in her name, appeared perfectly conclusive of her guilt, he had still great difficulty in imagining such to be the case, in conjunction with the honest looking face, the simplicity and candour of the young German.

Did Maria rest on this her last night in that elegant mansion? Ah, no; rest when she knew she was there under a species of imprisonment, suspected guilty of a crime, the very thought of which made her shudder. How could she? Every hour was counted by her, poor soul, as it winged its flight; the only alleviation to her deep misery, being the consciousness that good Squire Mainwaring had sent the money to her poor father.

Breakfast was served up in her room by the housekeeper, who sympathized with her like her master, but simply put the small tray, containing chocolate and toast, upon the table, and then left the room without saying a word. She could not eat the food; it seemed as if it would choke her, but she took a small cup of chocolate, and then pushed the tray aside knelt down again, as she had done once before that morning, and prayed, oh how fervently, that the good God would clear away from her character this horrible suspicion. Maria was still upon her knees, he cold hands clasped in prayer, and tears trickling through her fingers, when she thought she heard the sound of a strange footstep in the gallery without. Her hour was come, she felt it intuitively, and as she pressed her hand upon her heart, for it beat wildly, she heard a knock at the door. She felt assured the officer was without, and rising from her knees gave him admittance.

‘Mein Herr,’ the alarmed girl exclaimed, ‘you cannot want me. Why are you here again?’

‘I am sorry to say I do want you, Miss,’ said the officer. ‘We have found the bracelet; it has been pledged in your name, and I am obliged to take you, Miss, before the magistrate.’

‘Mein Gott, Mein Gott; what sorcery is this?’ exclaimed Fraulein, leaping from her seat, pale as a marble statue, and with trembling limbs she tottered across the room. ‘Was wollen sie sagen? Das ist falsch, I say, das ist falsch,’ she repeated in the vehemence of her