

indignation at his suggestion. The fact was, Master Ronald was in the first stage of that universal disease called love. He approached Mrs. Pellypop as she sat knitting industriously, and took a seat beside her; of course, she commenced on the great subject of the day, and expressed her opinion that it was a "lascar."

"But what motive?" asked Ronald, absently; "couldn't be robbery—nothing was stolen."

"Then it must have been a steward," said Mrs. Pellypop, determinedly. "Mr. Ventin looked like a man with a temper, and very likely struck a steward, who retaliated by killing him—oh, it's as clear as day to me."

"But where did he get his weapon?" asked Ronald.

"Stole it from the plate basket," said Mrs. Pellypop, whose idea of stilettos was vague.

"It was not a table knife," began Ronald, then broke off suddenly as he saw Miss Cotoner move away with a tall, slender, dark man. "I say, Mrs. Pellypop, who's that?"

"Whom?" asked Mrs. Pellypop, putting up her glasses. "Oh, the girl from Malta?"

"No not Miss Cotoner, I know who she is; but the fellow?"

"Oh, her cousin, the Marchese Vassalla," answered Mrs. Pellypop; "not that I care much for foreign titles myself, but he looks a gentleman."

And, as a matter of fact, he was by no means ill-looking, but when Ronald saw him he instantly took a dislike to him. Why, he did not know, unless it was on the Dr. Fell principle; it might have been instinct, perhaps prejudice; but the fact remained nevertheless—he did not like Matteo Vassalla. A handsome face certainly, with swarthy skin, brilliant, black eyes, and a coal black beard carefully trimmed. In his slender, sinewy figure there was something of the lithe grace of a panther; and what with the graceful movements of his hands, and the deferential manner with which he bent towards Miss Cotoner, he decidedly did not impress Monteith favourably.

But the lady—well, she has been described before, and as Ronald looked at her he only found new perfections. She had rather a sad expression on