

OUT OF DARKNESS — INTO THE SUNLIGHT.

The doctor caught up a candlestick and dropped on one knee beside the fresh horror. While the light of the bull's-eye was again brought to bear, and mingled with the wan, yellow rays that struggled in through the panes.

"Good God, gentlemen!" gasped the butler, "it's Charles."

The horribly distorted features were, indeed, those of the footman, and the mystery of the death-chamber began to grow lighter, for it was evident that for some reason he had entered the room in the night—for no good mission, certainly—a short whitebone-handled life-preserver hanging by a twisted thong from his wrist.

The hideous stains upon the koorkee were clearly enough explained by the sight of a terrible gash in the man's throat, and one of his hands was crimsoned and smeared—the one that had left its print upon the quilt, as in his death struggle, he had rolled beneath the bed.

"No one else there, gentlemen," said the constable, looking beneath the bed, and making his lantern play there and about the curtains, while as it shed its keen light across the calm, sleeping face of the colonel, the man involuntarily took off his helmet and stepped back on tiptoe.

"Dead some hours," said the doctor, rising.

"It is clear enough," said Mr. Girtle in the midst of the painful silence. "This poor Hindoo was the faithful old servant of my deceased friend, and he died in defence of his master's property."

"Yes, yes," cried the old butler, excitedly. "Charles used to talk about master's money and diamonds in the servants' hall. I used to reprove him and say that talking about such things was tempting yourself."

"Never asked you to be in it, of course?" said the constable, going close up to him.

"Oh, no; never, sir; but you are quite sure both him and Mr. Ramo are dead?"

"Quite," said the constable. "There, you can say what you like, but it's my duty to tell you that I shall take down anything you say, and it may be used in evidence against you."

"Against me?" cried the butler.

"Yes, against you."

But there was no occasion for the note-book, for Preenham closed his lips and did not speak again.

"I think I will satisfy myself, constable, that all is safe here," said Girtle. "Gentlemen, will you come with me?"

He crossed the room, drew back the curtain over the portal, and taking out his keys unlocked and pushed back the door, descending with the others into the vault-like chamber, and examining the massive iron structure in the middle.

"It is quite safe," he said, as the constable made the light of his lantern play here and there.

"But you have not looked in the safe," said Artis, quickly.

"There is no need, sir. No one could have opened it, even with the keys, but Ramo or myself. Nothing has been touched.

The policeman drew a long breath, and they returned to the death-chamber, Mr. Girtle carefully locking the iron door.

"I don't think we shall want any detectives here, gentlemen," said the constable; "I shall stay on the premises, but perhaps you will let the butler—no, I think one of you, perhaps, will be good enough to send in the first constable you see."

"I am going back," said the doctor. "I can do no more now, policeman. I will send a man to you."

"Of course you will give notice to the coroner, and there will be a post-mortem?"

"You leave that to me, sir; only send me one of your men."

They were stealing out on tiptoe, when Capel went back and drew the heavy curtains right across the bed, to shut from the old warrior the horrors that lay in the middle of the room. The constable, too, stepped softly across to fasten the window. Then, following the others out, he closed and locked the door, turning and involuntarily attempting to draw his truncheon, as he raised his left arm to ward off a blow.

"Bah!" he ejaculated. "Why, it's a statue! Looked just as if it was going to knock me down."

CHAPTER XI.

The Treasure.

A week of horror and anxiety, during which the customary legal processes had been gone through.

A jury had visited the Dark House and been conducted through the two rooms, to go away disappointed at not seeing the inside of the great iron safe. Then, after the evidence had been given by the various witnesses at the inquest, including that of the two doctors who had performed the post-mortem examination, a verdict was returned which charged Charles Pillar with wilful murder, and stated that the Indian had committed justifiable homicide.

The doctors had differed—as is proverbially said that they will—Dr. Heston, the young medical man, who had been called in first, telling the jury that he was not satisfied that the blows given had caused the death, and drawing attention to the peculiar odor he had noticed. But the coroner, an old medical man, sided with the colleagues, who pool-pooled the idea, and the verdict was given.

The coroner was a good deal exercised in his mind whether some proceedings ought not to have been taken in respect to the remains of the late colonel, but he obtained no legal support, and the terrible murder and attempted robbery at No. 9a Albemarle Square, with the history of the embalming and the mysterious inner

chamber, were public property for the usual nine days, when something fresh occurred, and the interest died away.

Then once more there was the old peace in the Dark House where the remains of Colonel Capel lay in state in the mystery-haunted room.

The servants were very reticent, and consequently but little was heard of the proceedings in Albemarle Square. A good many loiterers had stopped to stare at the darkened windows of the great mansion; but as two coffins had been borne from the place, it was forgotten outside that another still remained. What might have been some busybody's business became no one's, and the horrible tragedy tended towards the simplification of the dead man's instructions.

"It is nine days now since the colonel's commands should have been fulfilled," said Mr. Girtle, as they were seated at lunch in the darkened dining-room—the same party, for Katrine had expressed her determined intention to stay in the house through all the trouble, and Lydia had offered to remain with her.

Katrine and Lydia had kept a great deal to their rooms; Mr. Girtle spent most of his time in the library, busy over papers, only appearing at meal times, and consequently Paul Capel was thrown a great deal into the society of Gerard Artis, treating him always in the most friendly way, and declining to notice the barbs of verbal arrows the other was fond of launching.

One of Artis' favorite allusions was to the house his companion inherited. "I felt horribly jealous of you at first," he said. "Seemed such a pot of money; but with special commands to live here with a haunted room and a mausoleum beyond it—no, thank you."

"What shall you do with the chamber of horrors?" said Artis, on another occasion.

"You heard—it is to be built up."

"No, no; I mean the bedroom."

"I shall take that as my own."

"What! A room haunted with the impossible?"

Then came the ninth day, and Mr. Girtle announced that on the next his instructions should be carried out precisely at 12.

"That will give you ample time, Mr. Capel, to visit a banker after-ward; for, after the late experience, I should not lose an hour in depositing your great-uncle's bequest in the hands of your banker."

"You will go with me, I hope?"

The old man looked pleased and nodded.

"But I had reckoned upon seeing the jewels," said Katrine, with a smile at the young heir which made his heart throb and Lydia shrink.

"That pleasure must be deferred, Miss D'Enghien," said the old lawyer, crustily; and no more was said. Bah! spirits of three dead men! Bah!

At twelve o'clock punctually, the next day, Mr. Girtle unlocked the door of the colonel's room, and fulfilling Ramo's duty, held it back while the young men bore in lights; Katrine and Lydia followed, and the old butler, looking shrunken and depressed, came last, to close the door and draw the curtain.

It was midday, but it might have been midnight. Candles were lit again on chimney-piece and dressing-table, and after the old solicitor had seen that the door was fastened within, he took out his key, drew the portal curtain at the end, and then unlocked and slowly pushed open the wide door.

At a given order the butler solemnly carried a couple of candles down into the vault, and stood there to those gloomy stone chambers, where to those who stood waiting his return, they seemed to cast a peculiarly weird light.

Then, in utter silence, the lid was placed over the calm, sleeping features, and the four men, taking each a handle, lifted and bore the coffin down. There was some little difficulty in the sharp turn of the steps, but in a few minutes all was done, and the coffin lay upon the flagstones, while the two girls stood hand clasping hand.

Mr. Girtle walked round to the back of the iron safe and stooped down, when a peculiar clang was heard, as if a spring had been set free, and a large panel at the end where Capel was standing dropped down.

As the old lawyer came back, candle in hand, it was now seen that the panel that had fallen laid bare a keyhole.

Upon the key being inserted in this, and turned, the panel flew back, and glided over the keyhole as soon as the key was drawn out, displaying a second keyhole, crossed by a row of lettered brass slides.

These the old lawyer manipulated till the letters formed in a row a particular word, when the second keyhole was laid bare, the key inserted and turned, and one end of the iron safe revolved on a pair of huge pivots, showing the interior plain, rectangular and dark, with an oblong mass of black metal in the centre.

"The steel chest," said the old lawyer, in a whisper, as he stepped inside the great safe, in which he could nearly stand upright.

Candle in hand he went to the other end, put down the light for a moment to set his hands free to get a second key, a curiously long, thin key, with the end of which he pushed something at the back of the chest. Then, going to one side, he repeated the act, went back round to the other side, and again repeated it, after which he came to the front, and as he held down the light, those who were intently watching his actions saw that there was a small circle of Roman figures, with a hand like that of a small clock, which he pushed round with the end of the key till it was at the letter V.

This done, he bent over the chest, and repeated the action twice upon the top.

Then, as he stepped out, a sharp

sound was heard, and a keyhole was laid bare once more. In this he placed the key, turned it, and the steel chest seemed to split open from end to end, dividing in equal parts, which slowly turned over on massive hinges, leaving the centre—a space large enough to hold the coffin—wide open.

"Mr. Capel," said the old lawyer, stepping aside, "the next duty is yours. There lie the bank-notes and the case of precious stones. I give them over to your care."

Paul Capel hesitated for a moment, glanced at his companions, then back at the opening leading to the colonel's room, where Katrine and Lydia were watching.

The young man's heart beat heavily as he took the candle, and, stooping down, entered the iron chamber to take from its hiding-place his enormous fortune.

It was but a step, and he had only to stretch out his hand to pick up the two cases, but—

The steel chest held nothing.

The treasure was not there.

CHAPTER XII.

The End of the Instructions.

Paul Capel did not realize his position.

"Is there some mistake, Mr. Girtle?"

"Mistake?"

"There is nothing here."

"Nothing there?"

"Nothing there for yourself."

The old man stepped in, searched, and came out with drops of sweat upon his yellow forehead.

"Well?" exclaimed Capel, excitedly, as the old man stared in a dazed way.

"It is gone!" said the old lawyer in a hoarse voice, and his hands trembling violently.

"Well, Mr. Girtle," said Capel at last, in a voice that he vainly strove to make firm, "what have you to say?"

"To say?" said the old lawyer, hastily.

"Oh, it is all a cock-and-bull story," cried Artis. "There never was any treasure."

"Silence, sir!" cried the old lawyer, recovering himself. "How can you speak like that in the presence of the dead?"

"Bah!" cried Artis. "Presence of the dead, indeed! Presence of a mummy. Would you have me pull a long face as I went through the British Museum?"

"You would have you behave—"

"You look here," cried Artis, sharply. "You are executor, and this treasure, if there was one, lay in your charge. It's nothing to me. If it were, I should call in the police."

"Mr. Capel," cried the old lawyer, excitedly, "I swear to you, sir, that the money and jewels were there a fortnight ago. I came down here with Ramo, and there lay the two cases with their contents."

"Well," said Capel, "what then?"

"Be careful," closed up the place."

"That somebody must have been down since and taken the treasure away."

"Only two men could have done this, sir, Ramo and myself."

"That throws it on to you," said Artis.

"And my reputation, sir, will bear me out when I proclaim my innocence."

"I don't know," said Artis. "Sudden temptation—kleptomania, and that sort of thing."

The old lawyer turned his back. Mr. Gerard Artis, this is no time for such remarks as these," said Capel. "Mr. Girtle, what have you to say?"

"At present, nothing, sir. I am astounded. You know we came down on that dreadful morning and found the chamber intact; besides, it could not have been forced."

"There were the keys," said Artis. "But they have never left my person. There were but the two sets of keys—the colonel's and mine. Those were the colonel's set that we found upon Ramo."

"Rather strange that the colonel should have given you a set," said Artis.

"No more strange than that a gentleman should trust a banker," said Capel.

"What, going to side with the lawyer?"

Capel made no reply, only gazed searchingly at the old executor.

"There may have been other keys, Mr. Girtle."

"Oh, no. The place was made some years ago for a sarcophagus, and the makers never imagined that it would be used for a safe."

There was a dead silence.

"Let us search again. The cases may have slipped aside."

"It is impossible," said the old lawyer; and as they two passed into the iron chamber Artis exchanged a glance with Katrine, while the old butler stood looking dazed.

"You see," said Mr. Girtle, holding down the light, "there is nowhere for the cases to have slipped; all is of plain, solid steel, without a corner or crack."

"But underneath," said Capel.

"Underneath? Look for yourself," said Mr. Girtle; "where there is not solid steel there is solid iron, and beneath that massive stone. The treasure seems to have been spirited away."

"That's it," said Artis. "The old man was not satisfied, and he got up out of his coffin and hid it somewhere else."

Capel caught Artis by the collar. "I will not—" he began; but mastering his indignant anger, he let fall his arm.

"There is nothing here," he said, "let us look about the outside."

"That was the work of a minute, for on every hand there was the black stone—wall, floor and roof, and the exterior of the iron safe or tomb was perfectly rectangular and smooth."

"What was the size of the cases?"

"One was about twelve inches by eight, and three or four inches deep; and the other rather smaller," replied the old lawyer; "both too large for me to have juggled them into my pockets when I opened the steel chest, Mr. Artis."

"You held the keys, and if you

meant to take the treasure, you had it before."

"Enough of this," cried Capel. "It is plain that the bequest has been taken away. Mr. Girtle, we will finish at once—fulfill my uncle's commands. Come."

He went to the head of the oaken coffin and took one handle, when, influenced by his example, the others helped to raise it a little from the floor, and it was thrust in and onward, till it rested upon the bottom of the steel chest, nearly filling the space.

Capel stood on the right of the entrance, and for fully five minutes there was perfect silence in the solemn chamber.

"Go on, Mr. Girtle," Capel said, at last; and the old man bent down, thrust the key in the end, gave a half-turn, and the two ponderous sides slowly curved over till they were nearly together, leaving only a few inches of the shining brass breast-plate visible. Then there was a faint click, and the left side fell heavily, setting free the right, which descended with a loud bang and closed tightly over a rebate in the lower side—so closely that it was only by holding a candle near that the junction could be seen.

"Go on!" and the old lawyer again inserted a key.

There was no show of effort on his part as the old lawyer turned the key, when the end of the iron chamber closed in tightly; and after once more examining the blank stone chamber they slowly ascended the steps. Then the iron door was locked, and Mr. Girtle handed Capel the keys.

An hour later a couple of masons were at work with the stones that were below in the locked-up cellar, and the next day they had filled in a wall of six feet thick, cemented over the face, so that only a dark patch showed where the entrance to the colonel's tomb had been.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Young Doctor.

"Look here," said Artis, "you mustn't be offended with me. I speak very plainly; and if I can be of any use to you I will."

They were in the drawing-room, Preenham having announced that the masons had left.

"I am not going to think of your remarks."

"I was thinking of going to-day," continued Artis; "but I feel now that I ought not to go and leave you in a regular hole like this."

"There is no need for you to stay."

"Well, no need, of course; but I suppose you will not kick me out."

"Of course not. You are welcome."

"That's right," said Artis. "You see," he continued, looking round to where Katrine and Lydia sat together, "I feel it due to myself to stop and show that I had no hand in that."

"No one accused you, Mr. Artis."

"Oh, no, of course not; that would be too good a joke. Then I shall stay."

"Our case is different," said Lydia, turning red, and then pale. "Mr. Capel, Miss D'Enghien and I, if we can be of no more use, would like to say good-bye this afternoon."

"But why?" cried Capel, as he glanced at the speaker, and then fixed his eyes on Katrine. "There is no occasion for you to leave."

"I think Miss Lawrence is right," Katrine said.

"But I want help and counsel from both of you. You must not leave me yet."

"Impossible! Why? Etiquette? Is not Mr. Girtle here? Are not things as they have been since we met?"

"I did not know that Mr. Girtle was going to stay," said Katrine, softly. "If I felt that we could be of any service—"

"Then you will stay?" cried Capel, warmly.

Katrine hesitated, looked up, then down, raised her eyes once more, and left her chair to take Lydia's hand.

"Let us go upstairs," she said, softly.

Lydia rose at once.

"You do not speak," said Capel.

Katrine did not answer till they reached the door, and then she raised her eyes to his with a long, timid look.

"If Lydia consents, so will I."

"And will you stay, Miss Lawrence, to help me?" cried Capel, warmly.

"I will," said Lydia, gravely.

"That's right," cried Capel, opening the door for them to pass out, and catching Katrine's eye for a moment as she passed.

"Curse her! She's playing a dangerous game," said Artis to himself, as he watched the ladies leave the room.

Glancing aside, he saw that the old lawyer was watching him narrowly.

"I suppose you are not glad that I am going to stay, Mr. Girtle," he said.

"For some things I am," said the old man, coolly; "for others I am not."

Just then Capel returned.

The two girls separated as they reached their rooms, Katrine kissing Lydia's cheek; and then as soon as she was alone her countenance changed, and she sat gazing with glowing eyes that seemed full of some purpose upon which she was bent.

At the same time Lydia Lawrence sat with her face buried in her hands, weeping silently, and wishing that she were back in her country home.

Very little was said below, for Mr. Girtle had an engagement in the city, and left the young men together.

"You won't have a detective set to work?"

"No."

"Well, do as you like. I'm off for a run, to get rid of this gloom. Back to dinner."

"Thank goodness!" said Artis, breathing more freely; and five minutes after he was slowly crossing the square, wondering who the man was who had just gone up to the door he had left.

"I've seen his face before," he muttered. "Why, of course, the young doctor. What does he want?"

Capel was thinking of the fortune

that had slipped through his fingers. Depressed, and yet at times overjoyed, for Katrine's glance had been full of hope. But he must trace the money that had been taken, and the gems—how lovely they would look on Katrine's neck!

He sighed as he pictured her thus adorned; and he was sinking into a day-dream, when the door opened softly, and Preenham entered with the doctor's card.

"Dr. Heston? Show him up."

Capel motioned his visitor to a chair, when the keen-looking young doctor, who was watching him narrowly, said: "I dare say you are surprised to see me here."

"Oh, no, A. call?"

"I only make professional calls, Mr. Capel. I have come to you on an important matter."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Capel.

"Yes. Respecting the death of one of those two men—the Indian, sir. I'm afraid there was some foul-play there."

"Foul play? Why," he was killed with a life-preserver."

The doctor tapped with his fingers on his hat, as if he were heating a funeral march. Then, quickly, "No, sir; the more I study this case the more I feel convinced that he was not."

CHAPTER XIV.

A Clever Diplomatist.

"Dr. Heston, you surprise me. There was the inquest."

"Yes, where my opinion, sir, was overruled by the coroner and my colleague—both elderly medical men, sir, while I am young and inexperienced. You are disposed to think that this is a case of professional jealousy?"

"I will be frank with you. I did think so."

"Exactly; but pray disabuse your mind. I am not jealous. I am angry with myself for giving way in that case. It seemed all very straightforward, but it was not."

"May I ask you what you mean?"

"I mean, sir, that I am certain that our poor old Indian friend did not die from the blow which he received from that life-preserver."

"How then?" said Capel, huskily.

"It seems to me that he must have been poisoned in some way or another, and I could not rest without coming to you."

"Oh, impossible."

"Perhaps so, sir, but I am telling you what I believe. Do you think he had any enemies here?"

"Oh, no; the servants seemed to have been on friendly terms."

"Well, it hardly seems like it."

"That wretch must have yielded to a terrible temptation," said Capel, "and the other was defending his master's goods."

"What goods?" said the doctor.

Capel was silent.

"I see, sir, there is more mystery about this than you care to explain. Was there some heavy sum of money in the late colonel's room, and were these two men in league?"

"I don't think they were in league."

"Was anyone else interested in the matter?"

"Oh, no, impossible," said Capel, half aloud. "Dr. Heston, I am afraid there is a good deal of imagination in what you say. Let me try and disabuse your mind."

"I should be glad if you could."

Capel paced the room for a few minutes.

"This has taken me quite by surprise, Dr. Heston," he said. "Give me a little time to think it over. Will you keep perfectly private all that you have said to me?"

"I don't like to suspect men unjustly, and yet I'm afraid I've done wrong in giving him time," said the doctor, as he went down. "Well, a week is not an age."

As soon as he had left, Paul Capel let his head go down upon his hands, for his brain seemed to be in a whirl; the death of Ramo, the disappearance of the fortune, the visit of the doctor, it only wanted this latter, with the hints he had thrown out, to fire a train of latent suspicion in the young man's mind.

There was that open window that the policeman had declared had not been used. Was he wrong? Had others been in the conspiracy, and turned afterward on Ramo and Charles? They might have been in the plot. Or, again, they might have been defending their master's wealth against the wretch who had escaped with the treasure by the open window.

Those three Italians! Had they anything to do with the matter?

The old butler! He seemed so quiet and innocent! But often beneath an air of innocency crime found a resting-place.