

Dr. Marsden is in the churchyard with his sister, a lady well stricken in years. Their carriage is in the road just outside the gate. Both are staring helplessly at George Stanton, who, no less wildly, is regarding them. Half the congregation, split up into little groups, stand expectantly by—eager but silent. Not a man speaks; and for a moment all appear transfixed. My arrival breaks the spell.

"She retired to her room early last evening on a plea of headache." It is the doctor who speaks, but in a voice so strangely unlike his own that I do not recognise it. "She went to her room, we know, but the bed therein has not been occupied."

"What—what does it all mean?" gasps George.

I think I know—nay, am sure of it. A light breaks in upon me suddenly. I look at the doctor, who, meeting my glance, returns me such a look of mute, agonised entreaty as I would not see again for all the wealth in South Africa. My heart beats wildly, and I tremble like an aspen leaf.

"We have searched high and low, far and near," the distracted father pursues, "but we can find no trace of her. I have scoured the neighbourhood since daybreak in all directions, but not a trace, not a trace."

A woman steps forward and curtsies respectfully. Her gaffer, she says, saw Miss Kitty on the road last night.

Let the man be brought hither. Gaffer, pushed and prodded by his spouse, comes awkwardly forward. He is rather deaf and wants a deal of prompting in his examination.

Yes; quite true. He "see Miss Kitty on the high road, just by the Three Stones, last night, a-runnin' like a hare —"

"In which direction?" asks the eager George.

"This," indicates Gaffer. "She stopped at seeing me, frightened-like, and I made bold to ask her where she were going to. She said, "'To the church.'"

"Here?"

"Ay—here; and what's more, she give me a shilling to get some 'bacca for Christmas, and she said I needn't say as I'd seen her."

"Then," observes George to the doctor, "she must have come to the service last night without you knowing it, in which case she would have been seen and recognised by those present, most of whom were at church last night. Friends, neighbours," he shouts excitedly, "if any of you saw Miss Kitty

Marsden here in church last night, I beg you to tell me so."

No answer. A silence that can be felt.

"Perhaps," pursues George, in desperation, "perhaps she came late, towards the end of the service. No doubt of it. Who would be the last to leave the church?"

"The organist—Philip Lester," say a dozen voices at once; "he would lock up."

"Fetch him here, some of you, in Heaven's name," says George. "He is in the organ-loft now."

Some three or four depart to do his bidding. For a few minutes a busy hum of conversation is heard. Then, as I turn aside to whisper to Amy, the villagers re-emerge from the church and with them, in their midst, I see—

"Merciful God!"

It is I who give utterance to these holy words—I, who, for a moment stand spell-bound, and then dash madly forward and lay violent hands on the organist. My reason leaves me—I hear nothing, see nothing—nothing but the craven face of the man before me. 'Tis I who, in a wild outburst of delirium, denounced the fellow as an assassin and drag him, unresisting, to the very spot where, in the shadow of the old lych-gate, I had seen him a week before strangle a poor innocent girl whom I now knew to be Kitty Marsden!

* * *

They told me afterwards that in my excitement I had nearly killed the organist; and I can quite believe it. At the time I was capable of anything.

Had he committed the murder? Oh, yes; and from his confession of the crime it must have been performed exactly as I saw it—and have described it. He had determined, he said, that Kitty Marsden should never marry another whilst he, her former lover, was living; and on the plea of restoring to the poor girl some foolish love-letters which had once passed between them had lured her to the churchyard the night before our wedding and had there deliberately murdered her. He cheated the gallows, after all, for he took poison in prison the very morning he was to have been hanged. How or where he obtained the poison nobody ever knew; but he was obliging enough, before making his final exit, to write a further confession of a forgery in connection