JOSEPH'S COAT.

BY DAVID CHRISTIE MURRAY.

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CHAPTER XXIX.

Joe left Borton next morning, but before he did so he had another interview with his on.

"Understand," said Joe, "that I mean to do my best for you. And understand that the best I can do for you seems to me to be to set your nose to the grindstone and keep it there. Mr. Keen will find you employment, and everything you hope from me will depend upon the way in which you conduct yourself. You will have the manliness to tell your mother that you need no further help from her, and that you are resolved to work out by yourself an atonement for your own misdeeds If you accept one penny piece from her, you forfeit all claim on me. Try and be a man," said Joe with a shaky voice. "Try to be honest And so, good bye, sir. When I can shake hands with you wi' out feeling soiled by it, I will."

Having made arrangements with the lawyer for the furtherance of his ideas concerning young George, Joe started back for his hotel, and on his lonely journey he set himself to unravel the tangled strands of the net which held him. He had made up his mind not to reveal himself to Dinah, and, being all along in a mood to do penance, he held hard to his resolve—held the harder for his own strong inclination to go against it. There was an intense longing in his heart to comfort her, and there was a dreadful fear that the proclamation of himself would but bring a new sorrow to her. He put by that trying problem for the time, as he had done before, not yet being able to solve it And then he set to work to think about Uncle George. It was beyond doubt that Uncle George had been a rascal; but then, who was Joe Bushell that he should judge anybody, or be severe beyond necessity even with so bad an old man as his benevolent relative had proved?

"Why should one scoundrel venture to be hard upon another?" Joe asked himself "He's been a bad lot, but so have I."

He would have justice and no more. Even if old George got better, it was impossible that he should fight the case; there were too many dangers in it. And if he died, they would be an end of everything so far as he was concerned, for Dinah could claim the money. Yet there would be a nece-sity for exposure then, and Dinah had kept her secret so long and so closely that even for her child's sake Joe could see that it would be hard to proclaim it to the world. There was one thing which seemed possible for the returned exile to do. If old George should recover the use of his intellect, though only for a day, Joe had power enough over him to compel him in any way he chose. He could compel him to make surrender to Dinah and to keep his secret Such a hold as Joe had upon him no man could afford to disregard or defy. And out of this reflection arose a plan, and out of this plan arose in turn the incidents which closed the romance of Joe's story.

Once arrived in Birmingham, he had a horse saddled and rode over to his old chum Cheston.

"Cheston," he broke out at once on meeting him, "I want to be constantly in the neighborhood of my Uncle George. I want to be the first to know of his getting better; and if he needs any persuasion when the time comes, I want to be on the spot to give it."

"He'll want no persuasion," said Cheston. "The sword hangs by a hair, and he'll be precious hasty in getting from under it."

"He might recover his senses, and then die in a day or two, before anything was done," urged Joe. "Then there would be a disputed will, and no end of publicity to the case."

"The doctor thinks that he'll live to be moderately strong again," said Cheston.

"Leave me to my own plan," said Joe with something of his youthful obstinacy. "I want to watch him, I want to be near him to lend a helping hand to my wife's case if it should be needed. And I want you to give me a berth of some sort."

"Eh?" said the Baronet.

"I don't want a salary," said Joe, misunderstanding the cause of his friend's astonishment; "I want something to do, just to prevent my being in the neighborhood from looking odd. My name is Jones," he went on with a faint unmirthful grin. "It is in the family to take aliases. I am an employe of Sir Sydney Cheston's. I do anything which allows me to live in the parish unnoticed and unobserved. Nobody will know me. Give me my way, Cheston. And I'll tell you what it is besides. I want to see the old place and some of the old faces, if there any left. I'm number sixteen at the hotel. There's no name on my luggage. Not a soul knows me except yourself and young Keen and that wretched boy of mine. Let me have my way."

"Well," said the Baronet, half laughing and half puzzled, "what can you do? Do you know anything about mines? You used to, but things are changed a good deal, and it's a long time ago."

"I worked in a coal mine in the Dominion," said Joe; "but that's twenty years since."

"You could do a little fancy inspecting, perhaps. Or, let me see. Bowker is a reliable man, and young Gavan broke his leg last week. Yes, that'll do. Gavan was managing man at a new pit of mine called The Buzzard. I don't know why they call it so, so don't ask me, Gavan broke his leg, and Bowker, his subordinate, has been carrying on the work. Now you might take Gavan's place. Leave Bowker alone pretty much, you know, and take his advice about things He's a thoroughly practical man, one of the old rough sort, but a very decent fellow"

"All right," said Joe; "I'll undertake to be worth what I draw from you, and no more Can you send my horse back and drive me over?"

"What!" cried Cheston with a merry laugh. "Drive a mere mine manager! Me! Well, I don't mind giving you a lift. I'll order the dog cart."

Every yard they drove had at one time been familiar to young Joe Bushell, and middle aged Joe Bushell remembered the way very well. After a mile or two they passed the very field in which young Joe had first kissed Dinah and told her how fond he was of her. Poor Dinah! The kiss had been a betrayal, though he had not meant it so A mile or two later came George Bushell's house, and a little further on the Saracen, all smeared and bedizened with plate glass and gilt lettering. Then before long the dog cart turned into a lumpy lane and began to jolt and roll in a threatening manner, and in a while, rounding an artificial hill of mine refuse, they came in sight of the tall stack of the Buzzard and the raw red brickwork of the Buzzard's offices.

A miner came forward to hold the Baronet's horse.

"This way, Mr. Jones, if you please," cried Cheston with a broad grin. "Ah! that's you Mr. Bowker! I wish to speak to you. Come into the office."

Joe took a look at Mr. Bowker, and gave a little start on beholding him. Mr. Bowker, in spite of the years which intervened between the present and Joe's knowledge of him, was still recognizable as one who had done odd work for Joe's father in his youth. Mr. Bowker, for his part, looked at Joe, but with no unusual regard.

"Mr. Bowker," said Sir Sydney taking a seat on a rough hewn stool in the office, "this is Mr Jones, who will take Gavan's place for the time being."

"Very well, sir," said Mr. Bowker, regarding the new comer with no particular favor.

"I have given him instructions," said Sir Sydney with preternatural gravity, belied by a twinkle in his eyes as he looked at Joe, "not to disturb any arrangements on which you may have acted up to this time, and I hope you'll get on well together."

"I hope to few," returned Mr. Bowker, with an unfavoring glance at Joe's watch chain and his well cut though unassuming garments of dark tweed.

"You'll want lodgings, Mr. Jones," said Cheston, with his eyes twinkling and his face a mask of gravity.

"Yes, I suppose so," said Joe.

Mr. Bowker turned sheer round and stared at him. Then he turned again and caught the twinkle in the Baronet's eye.

"Your name's no more Jones than mine is," he cried. "Why, it's young master Joseph! Lord love me! I ought to ha' knowed you in a glawnce, like. Why, bless my soul! I bin glad to see thee. But when I heerd thee spake I knowed thee. Shaak honds, ode mon shaak honds!"

Joe shook hands heartily, but he turned a moment later to Cheston, and looked at him with a somewhat rueful smile.

"So much for my plot!" he said. "William," he added, turning to the beaming Mr. Bowker, "I didn't expect you to know me."

"Lord love thee!" said William, "I should ha' knowed thee anywheer!"

"So I said, Bushell," cried the Baronet. "So I said."

"I don't want it to be known that I'm back again," said Joe. Mr. Bowker's eyes opened wide at this, but he said nothing. "My uncle is very ill, as I dare say you know," he continued, "and I don't want him to know that I am here at present."

"I see," said William briskly. "Th' ode fox has had your feather's money, an' now he'll ha' to turn it up, I reckon. Hewray."

"You seem to bear him no good will?" said Joe.

"Not me! Why, he gi'en me the sack at a minute's notice," said William; "an' all for tekin' the part of a woman as was i' trouble, as he was a blackguardin'. You remember her,—Miss Banks. Her brother was took up for forgin' ode Bushell's naam, an' her went to him to beg him off, and he miscalled her all o'er the plaas An' I ups an' spakes to him. Shut up! I says. Y'ode Rip, I says, wheer's your bowels? An' he turns o' me, an' he says, 'Tek a minute's notice," he says, 'an' leave my emplʼy,' he says. Oh, he's a bitter hard un, he is. Well, send I may live! I bin glad to see thee, Master Joseph, real righteous right down glad, an' that's the trewth."

In the new handshaking that ensued Joe threw in a little extra pressure for Dinah's defender.

"I wanted to stop in the neighborhood, William," he said reluctant to abandon his plan. "And I didn't want to be known. Do you think anybody else would know me?"

"Well I doubt they would," said William reflectively. "But theer ain't a lot o' th' ode una left now. Not one on 'em works here. Yo' might live i' my cottage if yo're i' want o' lodgin's, an' welcome. An' yo' could tek to wearin' a pair o' blew glasses. Dr. Hodgetts he's took to t'em, an' I went by with out knowin' him on'y yesterday. They are a real mazin' disguise—blew glasses.

"Well I won't try the blue glasses," said Joe, "but I'll stop and take my chance." There was more in his resolve than he expressed. What if he were known, and the general knowledge brought him back to Dinah? He feared; but might he not make her happy after all? Ah! if once she took him back again, he would so surround her with observances of love and tenderness that he would half alone. No, no! that was impossible. But he would try to make her happy for the future, if they came together again. "Ill have no alias, Cheston," he cried suddenly. "It would look base to be detected under such a disguise. But I'll stay here and take my chance. Bushell is a common name enough. I can trust you, William?"

"I shan't breathe a synnable," said stanch William, "till you gi'en me leave."

"Now, Joe, old man," said Cheston, with a friendly hand on his shoulder; "I call this a step in the right direction"

"I hope it will prove so," answered Joe.

And so at his own proper cost the returned exile lived in Mr. Bowker's cottage. He bought coarser tweeds and a billycock hat, and fiddled about the mine, making journeys into the bowels of the earth at times, and holding grave consultations with Mr. Bowker as to the progress of the work in hand. Long years of business habits had left upon him the necessity for occupation, and he began by and by to take a real interest in the work. The rapidity with which he revived old knowledge and mastered new impressed Mr. Bowker greatly, but Joe kept his eye upon the real business he had in hand, and was keen after news of old George. He found, in the bar parlor of the Dudley Arms of an evening, a generation who knew him not. Two or three oldsters were there whom he had faintly known in his early days and when he heard their names he could call them to remembrance, but none of them made any guess as to his identity. He was extremely silent and reserved amongst them, smoking his pipe and sitting behind his Times as he listened to their talk. Old George's illness was a common topic, and old George's doctor was a nightly guest; so that such news as was to be had he got at without the risk of questioning. A week or two of immunity from recognition seemed to make him safe.

In the meantime John Keen had found employment at Borton for young George, and sent news that the criminal was buckling to with a will, and promised all sorts of amendment. What the heir presumptive to a quarter of a million thought of working as a clerk at five and thirty shillings a week, and living on that sum was not to be got at, but it is certain that for the time being he bore it well; and news reached his father that he had strenuously refused Dinah's proffered aid, in accordance with instructions.

After two or three weeks of waiting, there came news of a decided change in old George's condition, and Joe learned that in the course of a few days it was possible that the old man might be allowed to look at business once again. He sent the news to John Keen, and John came down on the strength of it and saw the doctor, who denied him access to the sick man for the present, but undertook to pave the way for him.

The frustrated schemer had been groping in his mind in a dim and feeble way, and had at length discovered the mental chamber in which, hidden under all manner of rubbish and debris, lay the remembrance of the lawyer's visit, and his own denial of his crime. And when the doctor set before him the fact that Mr. Keen was again in the neighborhood waiting to see him, the old fellow, with a sort of inward earthquake, recognized the folly and madness of resistance. He had sinned in vain, and his sin had found him out. He had given a hundred pounds to Joseph—that was something. It soothed his heart a little to think of that one generous deed, the only one he could recall; though he tried hard to remind himself of his own virtues as a set off to the account an offended God certainly held against him. The pangs of affrighted conscience were terrible to him, but these alone might have been fought down. There was no fighting young Keen and the evidence of the sexton, or if there were, he was broken and no longer had the pluck for it.

These miseries retarded recovery, but body and mind obstinately insisted on getting stronger, and he had to see John Keen at last. The old man's skin was of the color of the film which gathers on stale unbaked bread, and his eyes were fishy and watery His mouth was drawn down purselike at the corners, and the inner ends of his eyebrows were drawn upwards, so that he wore a mask expressive of feeble misery John had expected a change in him, but was yet surprised to see him look so wretched.

"I've been a-thinkin' over the news as you give me, Mr. Keen," he said in quavering tones; "an' if you prove your case, I'm willin' to do justice. But five-an'-twenty thousand pound is a large sum to part with on anythin' but good evidence."

"Mr. Bushell," said John gravely, "I beg you not to try to deceive me, or force me into measures which I should regret."

"Well, forty thousand's a good round sum," said old George.

"Pray understand, Mr. Bushell," said John quietly, "that we cannot content ourselves with anything less than the restoration of the whole of your brother Joseph's fortune. Let me tell you what we know. I shall tell you nothing. I am not in a position to prove. You purposely widened the quarrel between your nephew Joseph and his parents. You withheld from him all knowledge of his father's death, and you wrote to him, when you had held for a year the fortune which belonged to him, saying that his wife had married again, and so prevented his return to England."

Old George's mouth opened and his fishy eyes widened with a look so ghastly that the lawyer paused. The unbaked pie crust complexion changed to a deep crimson, and changed again to a dull leaden color, and for a minute or two John feared that his listener would succumb to the news. He rose and mixed a tumbler of wine and water and held it to the old man's lips. By-and by the patient recovered, and returned to his former aspect.

"Must I go on and distress you with the memory of these misdeeds?" John asked. "We know everything. We have been in communication with the governor of the jail. Your late private secretary is again in England. Why should you bring misery and disgrace upon yourself by resisting us?"

"I bain't a-resistin' anybody," said old George feebly and miserably. "I'm willin' to do justice. A hundred thousand pound's a lot o' money, but I'm willin' to do justice."

"You are not near the amount yet, Mr. Bushell," John returned. "The title deeds of all the landed property of which your brother Joseph died possessed, and the papers relating to his funded properties, are still in existence. When we come to business we shall be able to refresh your memory."

The wretched defeated old schemer groaned.

"The houses was good for nothin', an' was all sold at a loss," he protested, "The money's all mixed up along o' mine. I bain't a goein' to be made a pauper on. Mind that now."

But this feeble spark of resistance died out when John answered him:

"I am sorry to say, Mr. Bushell, that you have not deserved any merciful consideration at our hands. I shall accept no compromise."

"Am I a-goein' to be made a pauper on?" quavered the wretched old George. "Answer me that, Mr. Keen. Am I a-goein' to be made a pauper on?"

"You must be thankful, Mr. Bushell," John responded, "that we do not take criminal measures against you. Be glad that your wickedness is to be punished so lightly."

"My brother Joseph meant to leave a lot of his money to] me," cried George, tremulously. "He allays said so, an' he made a will an' did it. Am I a-goein' to be robbed o' that?"

"Mr. Bushell," said John, "we will take back every penny piece of which you wrongfully possessed yourself. Thank us, when you come to reason again, that we do no more. We have been merciful to you, and we desire to be merciful still; but so far as your brother Joseph's fortune is concerned, we shall insist upon strict justice. May I see your lawyer now?"

"No," cried George feebly: "I'll deal with him myself. You come here at twelve to-morrow, and I'll have him here. I hain't strong enough to do more talkin' to-day. I'm tired."

"Very good, Mr. Bushell," said John. "At twelve to-morrow."

The young lawyer took his way, not without some pity for the broken schemer. He wrote that afternoon two accounts of his interview, dispatching one to Joe and the other to Dinah, and on the morrow at midday he presented himself anew at old George's house. Mr. Packmore, that elderly conveyancer who had once on a time recommended Ethel to John Keen's services had not yet arrived, and George was alone.

"Mr. Keen," he said, in a stronger voice than that of yesterday, "if I'm a goein' to do justice it's fair as I should come off wi' no disgrace"

"That depends upon yourself, Mr. Bushell," John answered. "It is not necessary for Mr. Packmore to know more than the mere fact, that I can prove Dinah Banks' marriage to Joseph Bushell."

But when Mr. Packmore came he turned out to be a very hard conveyancer indeed, and by no means willing to believe that his client was ready to surrender so huge a slice of his great fortune. In his opinion—as up to that time advised—the case ought to be fought, if only for the sake of securing a complete proof. But finding that his client objected most savagely and obstinately to any fight being made, he gave in.

"Very well, Mr. Bushell," he said, at last, with quiet desperation. "I'll go over to Weston church-as-a-mere matter of form, anyway, and look at the original entry."

"Yo' do anythin' of the sort, if you dare!" cried old George in a half-frenzy.

The elderly lawyer looked at him in amazement, and confided to John Keen his opinion that really Mr. Bushell was not in a fit condition to transact business just at present.

"On our side," John answered, "we cannot admit of any delay. Mr. Bushell is fully persuaded of the validity of our claim, and wishes to do justice."

"It's an odd business," said the conveyancer, "and one I have no stomach for." They were outside the house by this time. "You have some hold upon him, Mr. Keen—something I don't know of."

"Mr. Packmore," said John, with infinite dryness, "I am at your service in this matter whenever you choose. In the interest of all parties I think we had better get it over quickly."

The two legal gentleman met again next day, and the elder looked extremely grave.

"Mr. Keen," he said, "I have been to Weston Church, and there is no certificate of a marriage there between Joseph Bushell and Dinah Banks."

"You had better communicate that discovery to you client, Mr. Packmore," said John. "This is a certified copy of the original register." He produced the document from his pocket-book and again placed it in the conveyancer's hands.

"Well, the original is not at Waston," said the lawyer, half angrily.

"I know it isn't," John returned.

"Great Heaven!" cried Mr. Packmore, recoiling as the fancy struck him. "Has Mr. Bushell been tampering—? Under the seal of professional confidence, now!"

"I can only refer you again to Mr. Bushell," John answered. "The reasons which actuate him to an unconditional surrender are cogent enough; no doubt, if you can arrive at them."

"Quite right to be discreet, Mr. Keen," said the elder. "But I won't and can't accept the responsibility of so vast a transfer without knowing more than I know at present."

The business was broken off for an hour or two, whilst old George's lawyer applied the forensic thumbscrew to his client, and after a tough time of it squeezed the truth out of him. Then he came back and relieved himself by a quotation.

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Mr. Keen," said he, "than are dreamt of in our philosophy. I should never have thought it. So respected—and with one foot in the grave!"

"He has explained the absence of the certificate?" asked John.

"To my amazement," the conveyancer answered.

There was no more hinting at delay, and John wrote two other letters, one to Joe and one to Dinah, announcing that the business was practically at an end. Old George, by his lawyer's advice, prepared to sell up everything and to retire from business, as the only way by which the enormous diminution of his capital could be hidden from the public eye.

CHAPTER XXX.

John Keen found busier employment through the unexpected revelation Dinah had made to him than he had ever expected to find in Wrethedale. But howsoever busy he might be, there were intervals in which he found time enough to think upon one inexhaustible theme, and that theme, naturally enough for a lover, was the inexpressible charms of Miss Ethel Donne. Perhaps the young man had been in love before, but if he had been he contrived to forget all about it. There was but one woman in the world, and she less a woman than an angel. Getting at John's thoughts, one would conceive that there never had been any human creature of such perfections, and never again would be. "There is none like her—none! Nor shall there be till our summers have deceased" It is the proper belief of a lover, and comes natural to him.

It is not to be said that the young man had, or, being a lover needed, any very distinct opportunities of close observation on which to base the glorious theorem which he never wearied of propounding. Tis distance lends enchantment to the view. But to worship a good woman is surely worth an honest man's while. To be a-fole in married life to recognize no disillusion, but only a gradual toning down of color, that is inevitable, and, like many inevitable things, a blessing—one must have made a better choice and be a better man than the average. But here is a fine natured, honest hearted, loyal young fellow in love with a good and charming young girl, and if only the girl could be brought to be in love with him I could find it in my heart to join their hands, with the best hope for their future, and to say, "Bless you, my children! Bless you!" Playwrights and novelists are the most inveterate of matchmakers.

John's especial advantage was that Ethel knew his condition. Had he always disguised it, she could have looked upon him with greater favor, but now his very attachment made it difficult for her even to like him. Hardly a year and a half had gone by since the man she loved had proved himself a scoundrel, and she had loved him dearly. John felt his case no more hopeful on account of young George's reappearance, though he knew Ethel's change of feeling toward her late lover well enough. But that reappearance had opened a wound which time had not yet healed, and her truer lover knew it.

Sometimes, in his consultations with Dinah, Ethel was present, and she was aware of all that went on on that side. Her courage, her faithfulness and friendship, her self possession, all seemed more than human in John's eyes, and there are no words for his pity and admiration. If only the young lawyer would or could have hidden the too evident signs of feeling which every look afforded, Ethel, under these new circumstances, might have liked him well enough; but as it was, she fought him off by a chill abruptness of demeanor altogether unnatural in her, and John, full of warmth as he was within, became frozen on approaching her, except for his eyes, which did her continual homage.

But it is a long lane indeed which has no turning, and the relationship of these two young people underwent a sudden change. Joe had been thinking over the young lawyer's scheme for sounding Dinah's feelings concerning him, and as affairs grew day by day more urgent, and less and less within his own control, the plan began, out of his sheer desperation, to commend itself to him. So that one evening, when John called upon him under cover of the darkness at Mr. Bowker's cottage, the bewildered husband and father capitulated.

"Who is the young lady?" he asked, after reminding John of the hint he himself had given.

"She is a Miss Donne," answered the young fellow, blushing. They sat in Joe's bedroom by the light of a single tallow candle, and the blush passed unnoticed.

"The girl," said Joe, "to whom George was engaged to be married?"

"The same," John answered. "I can pledge myself to her discretion and to her self-command. And she is so devoted to your wife, sir, that she would do anything for her sake. I want to ask you again to remember how easy the task will be. It seems to me that a very broad hint would be needed before your wife would suspect the meaning of the inquiries."

"Since I have been living here," said Joe, sitting with both elbows on the table, and staring at the feeble flame of the candle, with his head between his hands, "I have learned a good deal about them both—my wife and my son. He ruled her and even bullied her at times. Now she's going to be wealthy, and she'll want the control of the lad, and I don't see how I can keep a hold upon him. I don't want to neglect my duty any longer. I could take him with me to the West perhaps, but she'd break her heart to lose him without knowing why; and if she knew why, you can see that all the mischief which could come of my declaring myself would be done, and any chance of good to her in it would be missed. Now, if I could go back to her, and acknowledge myself, and then undertake the care of the lad, and, if need be, go away again and let her see him at times, and know of his well doing——"

The speaker's voice, though he tried hard to steady it, became so shaky that he had to pause and leave his sentence unfinished.

"You authorize me, then," said John, "as a first step, to tell Miss Donne the whole story?"

"I am at a deadlock now," Joe answered. "I've seen that it was coming. I must either go away, and let her suffer anew at the hands of that unhappy lad, and suffer she will, unless there is somebody to control him—or I must make myself known to her. But," he added suddenly, with a shrinking of the heart, "don't let Miss Donne go too far. Let me know, to begin with, whether my going back will be the larger of the two evils. I can well believe it might be."

"Rely upon it" said John, "that all discretion shall be used."

Joe was fain to be be content and to wait, while John went back to the little western village, and set his scheme in motion. Of course it was charming for John to have such a chance of approaching [illegible] course it was terrible to him [illegible] He began by writing [illegible]

"Dear Miss Donne [illegible] inclined to set down the [illegible] —"I have a secret which most nearly concerns the happiness of your friend Mrs. Joseph Bushell I believe it's the one thing in the world she most desires to learn. May I presume to ask your assistance and advice?—Yours most respectfully,

"JOHN KEEN.

"P. S. I must beg of you not to drop a hint of this at present to Mrs. Bushell"

In answer to this brief and somewhat misleading epistle came an answer delivered by the hands of Mrs. Donne's little maid servant. Miss Donne would be obliged if Mr. Keen would call at seven o'clock that evening

At seven o'clock that evening Mr. Keen called. Ethel sat in the small front parlor to receive him, and, except for the maid servant, was alone in the house Mrs. Donne having providentially accepted an invitation to tea. When the girl arose and offered her hand, a most unprofessional flutter started in John's heart, but outwardly he was as cool as a cucumber.

"What is your secret, Mr. Keen?" asked Ethel

"The secret is not mine, Miss Donne, though I am master of it," John answered "If it belonged to me I would offer it, if I offered it at all, without reservation and without conditions. But I am compelled to ask you, in the first place, to promise that you will not reveal it to Mrs. Bushell without the sanction of the person who is, with her, most interested in it."

"I promise that," the girl answered.

"Then," said John, "my secret is simply this, her husband is in England."

Ethel rose and frowned him with the hands clenched, her cheeks flushed, and her eyes sparkling with anger and surprise.

"That man is still alive?" she asked.

"Before you judge him," returned John, "let me tell his story. It will not take long. Mr. George Bushell, of whose rascalities you know a little, but not much, was his nephew's only correspondent. He left the runaway in ignorance of his parent's death, and stuck to the money they left behind them. That you knew or partly knew already. But he wrote in answer to his nephew's particular inquiries about Miss Dinah Banks, that Dinah Banks had married. Joseph Bushell believed his wife faithless to him, and stayed away until after all these years he learned by a mere accident that this was false and came over to make inquiries."

"And how does all that concern Dinah's happiness, Mr. Keen?" asked Ethel. "The man has heard that she is going to have the fortune he threw away, and now he comes back to live upon her."

"On the contrary," said John, "he has amassed a fortune of his own. He has been in England for some months, and at any moment might have claimed the fortune for himself, but has given his best influence to securing it for her."

"He has been away from her for six and twenty years now!" cried Ethel with supreme contempt. "Let him go away again!"

"Miss Donne," said the young fellow, warmed on the suffering Joe's behalf, "you misjudge the man. His wife has not suffered alone. He has endured with her, and he has had great sorrows to bear since his return When I first met him I had no sympathy with him, but I have learned to know him since then, and I believe that his wife ought to know that he is here. She is not an old woman, and when she has this fortune she will find suitors in plenty. That is inevitable. Suppose she should marry again"—he inwardly blessed Sir Sydney Cheston for having put that argument into his hands—"and suppose that afterward the discovery should be made. That would be horrible, and none of us who have the secret could permit it to happen, but we should have then to say what we know now; and how could we accept the responsibility of having kept it back from her? She ought to know it."

"Do you wish me to break the news to her?" asked Ethel.

"No," cried John, perceiving suddenly that his argument had altogether overshot the mark. "Personally, I long to see them together, because I believe that she would be happier after his return than she has ever been since I have known her, but he forbids the immediate revelation of the secret."

"If he forbids it——" Ethel began contemptuously.

"There is a reason," said John: "and this is where I beg you to help. His old friend Sir Sydney Cheston has done his best to persuade him to return, and I have exhausted all my arguments in the same behalf."

"It is a pity to have spent so much good persuasion on such an object, Mr. Keen," said Ethel.

"But he will only return," John went on steadfastly, "on one condition."

"And that is——?" inquired Miss Donne with lofty scorn.

"That his declaration of himself will bring no new unhappiness on her." Ethel was silent. "All this time he has been robbed of his fortune, and swindled out of his right to a happy married life."

"He left her voluntarily," said Ethel hotly.

"And was kept from her by a villainous fraud, Miss Donne. But [illegible] has to say through me, [illegible] himself can smooth a[illegible] he has yet to face, he will do[illegible] himself. It it could only add to her unhappiness he will go away again. Have pity for him and your friend, Miss Donne. He asks nothing but the knowledge of his duty. He only waits to know where duty seems to lie."

"How can I help him?" asked Ethel, still scornful. From the first hour of hearing Dinah's story she had hated and despised the runaway husband, and she was not going to change her mind on a sudden. It had been clear all along that he had been a good for nothing fellow. Why should she help to surrender Dinah to him again?

"You could help him by finding out whether his wife still cares for him, and whether she would be glad to have him back," John urged gently, refusing to be beaten down by her contempt for Joe.

"Of course she cares for him! Why else has she kept single all her life, but because she cared for him! That is the way with women!" cried the girl, trembling with anger and her championship for the women she loved. "They love the wretches who use them so shamefully, and pine after them all their life long. Glad to have him back again? Yes, poor weak thing! I know that well enough, Mr. Keen. But I will have no hand in the plot to bring him back, and I have no thanks for you who come here to ask me to take an office so ignoble. I will not trap my friend into a confession which would bring that man back again. I love her well enough to deny her wishes there."

She spoke quietly enough, but with flaming cheeks and sparkling eyes, and an utterance unusually rapid.

"You mistake, Miss Donne," said the young lawyer firmly. It was hard for him to have strengthened the poor opinion she had always held of him, or seemed to hold. "I came to ask you to perform an act of the truest friendship, and I would rather die than ask you to do anything which would not become you as you are. Forgive me! There are troubles before Mrs. Bushell—unless she has her husband's help to fight them—as great, I fear, as any she has encountered yet, terrible as they have been. The man is not what you believe him, but, I pledge myself for him, a true man, with a kindly, honest heart. He has been hideously defrauded. Think of it, Miss Donne. For three-and-twenty years he has lived in the belief that the wife of this youth had been false to him, and for half the time he was struggling with hardship and poverty, whilst that old villain who had deluded him and robbed him fattened on his fortune. He does not claim the fortune now. Does that say nothing in his favor? I believe with all my heart and soul," cried John, in a great heat of friendly championship himself by this time, "that the one thought he has, the one desire he has, is to spend his whole life in atoning to his wife for the sorrows she has borne. And if I believed one little less than that I would never have taken up his cause."

"Mr. Keen," said Ethel, "I do you justice enough to believe that you are in earnest, and that he has imposed upon you."

"If you could but see the man!" said John.

"I do not think my opinion of him at all likely to change," answered Ethel quietly. "And I certainly think that since he has stayed away so long, he can do nothing better or more generous or kindly than to stay away for good. Joseph Bushell has done as much harm as any one man has a right to do. Let him go back to wherever he came from, and take his secret with him, and leave his wife in peace. If he should come here, I should certainly advise Dinah most strongly to give him his fortune and let him go."

"I am sorry to find you against me in this matter," said John, and he went away sorrowful.

But before he was half way down the darkened village street a thought struck him and brought him to a stand still.

"Bravo!" he cried, "the very ticket!" and with that vulgar exclamation he turned and walked briskly back again. This time he rang the bell at Dinah's house, and being admitted, gave the first shove to his new scheme.

"I have called to say," he began, "that everything is now ready for the transfer of your husband's property to your hands. I shall be greatly obliged if you can make it convenient to come down to Birmingham, where Mr. Packmore, who is engaged on the other side, and I can lay the necessary documents before you."

"I don't want to go down there if I can help it, Mr. Keen," said Dinah piteously.

"I'm afraid I must ask you to do it," said John, cruel only to be kind. "You need not go farther than Birmingham"

He knew partly how Dinah dreaded a return to the place she had left in such unearned shame.

"If I must come," said Dinah quietly, "I must come." It was all for the child for whom she had suffered so much. And now that he was beginning to act so nobly, and to struggle for himself, he was ten times more than ever worthy of any suffering she might endure. For, the young man had told her—making the best of a bargain the thought unpleasant—that he meant to be a man in future, and had declined her assistance with an air of martyr-like magnanimity inexpressibly affecting.

"I dare say," said John with much innocence, "you could persuade Miss Donne to accompany you. We shall not want to keep you more than a day or two."

"Make the time as short as you can, Mr. Keen," said Dinah. "When shall you want me to be ready?"

"Consult your own convenience," cried John, "but make it as soon as you like. It will be best to have the business over," he added cheerily.

"Yes," Dinah answered. "I'll speak to her about it, and I'll let you know to-morrow, Mr. Keen."

On that understanding John went away, and the first result of this small ruse of his was that Ethel and Dinah and he all travelled down to the Midland capital together on the following afternoon. Old Daniel was quite beyond the understanding of any part of the story by this time, and Mrs. Donne knew no more of it than that her neighbor had come in suddenly for a great fortune which ought to have been hers long ago. She was not a mercenary woman, but she made no objection to her daughter's friendship with Dinah under these circumstances. John had guessed, and as events proved had guessed rightly, that if Dinah visited the old country at all, it would be in Ethel's company. Half this plan was accomplished, and now he had but to bring Ethel and Joe together to complete his scheme. For, after the manner of impetuous youth, he was persuaded that Ethel could no more fail to recognize the manliness of Joe's character than he had done. If she could but see the man, as he had said to her. If she could but hear his wishes from his own lips, and see how real and how in earnest he was, she would surely consent to help him. And nobody, I am assured will be likely to think any the worse of the young man for his generous efforts in behalf of such a cause. Joe by this time had fairly taken John's affections captive, and John was ready to swear by him as the honestest and most injured man in Great Britain. It is a fine thing to be young and to have these impetuous beliefs in human probity. They are often thrown away, but for once they bade fair to be expended on a good object.

When John had once got Ethel so near, he set to work to get her nearer still, but found unlooked for difficulties in the way. Perhaps she misunderstood the purpose of that persuasion with which he dodged her, and suspected an interest more personal to himself than that which really animated him. But at last, avoid him as she might, he caught her in the corridor of the hotel.

"Miss Donne," he murmured, as she sought to pass him with a mere bow, "I have something of the utmost urgency to say to you." She could do nothing less than pause, without being downright rude to him. "I am most glad you came here, for I think it forwards one of the dearest wishes I have in the world. Joseph Bushell is within five mile of us Will you see him and judge him for yourself? For Dinah's sake!" he pleaded. "Think how much hangs upon your judgment. It commits you to nothing. Will you see him?"

Ethel was a woman, after all, albeit a very charming one. And being a woman, she could scarcely be insensible to the young fellow's disinterested earnestness, or to the flattery which so simply told her that the course of two lives depended on her judgment. I do not desire to lay too much stress upon the last. The appeal, "For Dinah's sake!" might have been enough to shake down any little barrier of unwillingness. Perhaps, too, she was a trifle curious to see the man.

"Dinah must not know of it," she answered, "And I do not see how I can leave her."

"If you will give me an hour after she has gone to bed to-night," urged John, "Mr. Bushell shall be here." "Very well" she answered, "I will see him."

John, elated, and supposing all troubles over, made his swiftest way to Mr. Bowker's cottage, and dispatched a messenger to the Buzzard, who returned with Joe. The young fellow found it a somewhat delicate thing to tell him that he was to go and be examined by a lady he had never seen, with a view to ascertain his fitness to be trusted with his own wife. But he blurted it out at last.

"Miss Donne is very much opposed to you, but I want you to see her yourself."

Joe assented with a readiness which surprised his companion; but the truth of the matter was, that Joe's heart was growing hungrier and hungrier and his scruples were beginning to be nothing in his way. He was almost ready at moments to start off and throw himself upon Dinah's mercy without preliminaries. He had written half a ream of letters to her, and destroyed them as he wrote them, one by one.

So when darkness fell, the two went into town together, and Joe stayed at another hotel while John went on to spy out the land before him. Dinah retired early, and John darted away for her husband, brought him up in a cab within five minutes, and led him to the sitting room where Ethel sat to receive them. It was not a small thing for Joe to enter the house in which his wife was sleeping, even though he were sure of not being discovered by her; to be so near her, and yet to be sundered from her by the barrier of those six and-twenty years of absence. He bore the impress of his emotions in his face, and it was natural that for a moment he should wish that he had not undertaken the venture.

Ethel rose to John's introduction of the new comer, gave him a formal bow and signed him to a seat. The first thing that crossed her mind was that Dinah would never (in the mere worthless, conventional sense of the word) be a lady, though she had the essentials of ladyhood (which are perhaps, after all, included in womanliness), whilst the man before her had at least the aspect of a gentleman. Even that in her prejudiced mind, went against him. He would think Dinah's accent vulgar, and despise her homely ways and thoughts.

"I am obliged to you," said Joe, in the simple and manly way habitual and natural to him, "for having consented to meet me. Mr. Keen tells me that you are very much opposed to me, and I should have expected that. You know the facts of the case up to a certain point, and I need not trouble you by repeating them."

He paused, and Ethel inclined her head. It was not easy to make way against her resolute coldness; but he went on.

"If I say anything which gives you pain, I can only ask you to forgive me. When my son and I encountered each other in New York, I learned that my wife had never married again, and that my uncle's letter to that effect had held a cruel lie—he didn't know how cruel. Perhaps you know Mr. Bushell's handwriting?" he asked, drawing a book of memoranda from his pocket. "There is his letter. I thought it advisable to bring it."

Ethel glanced through the letter, which was yellow with age and much worn at the edges of the folds. "There has been a gais" (propably gayish) "wedding here last week when Dinah Banks was married at the old church. I am sorry to hear as you are not doing well and being busy at this time no more from your affectionate uncle, George Bushell." So it closed.

"Did you keep this letter, Mr. Bushell, with a view to any such contingency as this?" asked Ethel.

"No," said Joe, with a simple sad surprise, "I never thought at that time of coming back to England. It was years after that before I could have paid the passage-money."

He folded up the letter, returned it to his pocket-book, and went on.

"That was the last line I ever had from England. Perhaps that is why I kept it. When my unhappy lad met me in America he was traveling under an assumed name, and I didn't guess who he was. But I resolved on coming back to England in consequence of the news he gave me. When I landed here I scarcely knew what I wanted to do, but I learned from Mr. Keen here everything my wife had suffered in my absence. I learned for the first time that I had a son, and I heard what had become of him. I went with Sir Sydney Cheston to the place where he was confined, and I found that he had been released by the intervention of uncle George."

This was news to Ethel, and it amazed her but she said nothing, and gave no sign.

"Shortly after this my son wrote to Mr. Keen for assistance in discovering Dinah, giving an address at Borton. We went to see him together, and I recognized him as the man who had met me in New York, and had passed himself off as the brother of my old friend Sir Sydney Cheston."

He saw how bitterly all this distressed Ethel, but he was too careful to spare her to apologize, and she bore it bravely. He went on.

"My wife, for her son's sake, has compelled my uncle George to surrender my father's fortune, and she is wealthy. What hold have I upon a son who has already proved himself unworthy of her? Can I leave her knowing him as I do, to bear the burden he will lay upon her? I have feared that my return might seem a greater evil in her eyes than even that. I have been afraid that after such an absence my return might seem the most terrible thing that could happen to her. Perhaps, if the news were broken to her gently, and if she knew that I had no further object than to help her in leading that poor lad to wiser ways, and that I made no demands upon her, and had no wish to fetter her free on or control her sl