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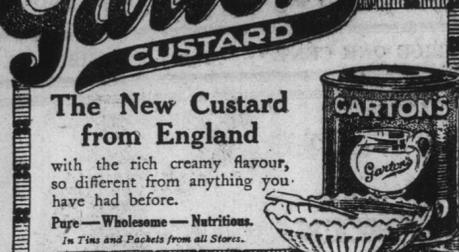
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CHAPTER XXV.
AN UNEXPECTED TRAGEDY.

"I must congratulate you and your associates, Mr. Jarvis," said his lordship, in his smooth, deliberate tones, "on taking a most honorable and dignified course. It is not possible that the prosecution could have anticipated such an extraordinary, and, I may add, such a disgraceful occurrence, as has taken place during this trial. I shall take care that whoever is responsible for it shall be duly punished. The woman Emma Meeson will be considered in custody, pending inquiries. The accused are discharged, and I entirely indorse all that you have said with reference to them."

As the judge ceased speaking, an irresistible burst of applause broke out, and then came a sudden hush, and every eye looked at the dock.

Lilias had drawn herself up to her full, stately height beside the rail. "Kenneth!" she cried; "Kenneth!" He looked around, very pale, and with tightly compressed lips. She put out her arms toward him and cried again:

"Kenneth—thank you, and God bless you; but—I was guilty!"

Then her teeth came together, and she swallowed something. For a moment her lovely face was distorted by agony. Then it became composed again. The quick flush that had risen to her cheeks and brow died away, and, with a little sigh, which sounded quite distinctly through the deep hush that had fallen on the crowded court, she fell back into the arms of two female prison attendants—dead!

CHAPTER XXV.
A NEW HAND IN THE GAME.

Among all the great audience that had witnessed the tragedy which ended the great Eversley will case, there had been no more deeply interested spectators than Mr. Arthur Ashley, Mr. Walter Redman, and Mr. Henry Montagu. During the hush compelled by the presence of death, the crowd filed silently out of the court, and melted away through the open doors of the wide entrance; but in order to avoid the crowd these three gentlemen remained behind.

Mr. Montagu put his hand on Ashley's shoulder, and said, in his softest accents:

"My boy, that was a most fortunate thing for you. I forgive you everything now. The whole estate and fortune goes to the cousins, and you are one of the three. A third of forty thousand a year. I congratulate you, my boy, and I know that you'll be as generous as you'll be rich."

"Don't worry about that, Monty," said Ashley. "I'll see that you are all right. The evil genius of the whole thing is dead, and now we can work with a free hand. What's more, I don't think there'll be any possible obstacle now in the way of my marriage with Miss Vanderleen."

"No," said Redman, "that ought to be all right now."

"All right? Yes, I should think so," said Mr. Montagu. "Come along, I've got a motor car waiting outside. We'll go up to the Savoy and have lunch and crack a bottle of the best over it."

"Right you are," said Ashley. "Come along. The crowd's got out now."

They went down to the entrance, and out into Newgate Street. In front of the door, on the other side of the pavement, there were three of the city police. Mr. Burnett stepped out from the little crowd on the right-hand side and approached the precious trio of conspirators. They gave a start of alarm at sight of him; Montagu's darkly sallow face turned a shade paler, and his thick lips quivered, Redman gasped like a fish out of water, and Ashley alone had the courage to smile—until he felt Burnett's heavy hand laid unceremoniously upon his shoulder.

"Mr. Arthur Ashley, Mr. Walter Redman, Mr. Henry Montagu, I arrest you, in the king's name!" Then the officers closed up, and a crowd gathered around.

"Eh!" exclaimed Mr. Montagu. "What's that for? What do you mean by it, Mr. Burnett? You must be making a very big mistake."

"I am not accustomed to make mistakes, Mr. Montagu," said the detective, with a pleasant smile. "Here is my warrant. You can read it now or later on, as you please, and you can come quietly with me at your convenience, or be taken in charge. It is quite optional with you. The charge is—"

"Thanks, that will do, Mr. Burnett," said Redman. "You will pay for your mistake later on. Meanwhile the law is on your side, and we will go with you."

"Yes," said Mr. Montagu, whose complexion had been turning grayer every moment. "I have my car here. It will hold the four of us. Come along, Mr. Burnett."

The detective saw his prisoners comfortably appointed motor car, and said to the astonished chauffeur:

"Bow Street, please, and hurry up."

"Mr. Montagu's is my master," said the man. "I don't know who you are."

Mr. Montagu put his head out of the window and said:

"Go on, Charles; do as you are told."

Mr. Burnett got in and shut the door, and the big motor car rolled away from the wondering crowd down into Ludgate Hill, on the way to Bow Street.

The motor car pulled up at the entrance to the police station, and Mr. Burnett conducted three very dispirited but still wondering men to the charge room, where they were

rang up before the inspector's desk. Then Mr. Burnett took out his warrant and read the charge against his prisoners, which charge, divested of legal formula, amounted to this:

"That Arthur Ashley, Walter Redman, and Henry Montagu were accused, each and severally, of fraud and conspiracy to defraud the heirs, executors, and assigns, first, of the late Sir Arthur Eversley, baronet, deceased; and, secondly, the heirs, executors, and assigns of the estate of Henry Kenneth Markham, also deceased, by means of forged documents."

"Arthur Ashley was individually charged with forging and uttering three acceptances of the value of two, three, and five hundred each, respectively; and also a policy of underwriting purporting to be signed by the late Henry Kenneth Markham."

"Walter Redman was individually accused of receiving and keeping the said forged documents, for his own personal use and profit."

"Lastly, Harry Montagu was individually charged with aiding and abetting and possessing guilty knowledge of the aforesaid fraudulent transactions."

"The documents, Mr. Inspector," said Detective Burnett, when the charge was concluded, "are in my possession, and the treasury will prosecute."

"Very good, Mr. Burnett," said the inspector. Then, turning to the three men who had intended to lunch at the Savoy, he continued: "Gentlemen, I am afraid you will have to remain here to-day. You will be brought before the magistrate to-morrow."

"But can't we have bail?" exclaimed Mr. Montagu, his face flushing a purple red, and his eyes starting half out of their sockets. "I am a well-known financier in the city, Mr. Arthur Ashley is a gentleman of independent means, and Mr. Redman is also a man of position. We can find five thousand pounds' bail in an hour, if that will do."

"Very sorry sir," replied the inspector, "it is not in my power to grant bail on such a charge as this. You will, of course, communicate with your lawyers, and they will make the application to the magistrate to-morrow."

"This way, please," said a big sergeant, erect and dignified, who had been waiting for his cue.

"Take it quietly," said Detective Burnett, in a quite sympathetic tone of voice. "Go and write your letters to your lawyers, and I will see that they are posted; or, if you like, I'll take them myself. I haven't anything particular to do this afternoon, and I always like to see fair play."

"You're not a bad fellow, Mr. Burnett," said Montagu, who seemed to rise to the occasion much better than the others. "If you don't mind waiting till we've got them ready, there's my motor car at your service, and may it do you a jolly sight more good to-day than it has done me. Good-bye for the present."

"That little Jew is the only sportsman in the crowd," said Detective Burnett to the inspector, when the door had closed behind the procession.

"As I gave promise of beauty, my parents determined to add to it every possible accomplishment that could make me more useful for their purposes, and the earnings of crime were spent without stint to make me what you found me."

"At seventeen I was married to Rayman Sherrill, who was the head of the great gang of swindlers which is still known as the 'Transatlantic Agency.' He is now, under the name of John Hunter, serving a term of ten years' penal servitude at Portland, for the forgery of bonds. So, you see, Kenneth, I lied to you when I said that I was a widow, and so free to accept the only happiness of which only the dim prospect has come into my wicked, miserable life."

"I am sorry and ashamed that I lied to you, but, Kenneth, I was sorely tempted, for I sincerely loved you, and even you know what that means to a woman who has hungered for clean, unselfish love all her life."

"I loved you so much that there was a time when I was mad enough to dream of at least a few years' happiness with you. My husband—can you think what it costs me to write that word in a letter which you will read?—will not be out of prison for more than five years, and my dream was to spend some of those years with you, and kill myself before the man to whom I am bound could claim me."

(To be continued.)

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to the cells.

"Yes," replied the inspector, "and I shouldn't wonder if he turned king's evidence when the trouble comes to a climax."

"Quite possible," said Detective Burnett cheerily. "Well, I've not done a very bad day's work so far. Do you think you could get your assistant to relieve you for half an hour, while these gentlemen are writing their letters, and crack a bottle with me?"

"I'll try," said the inspector. "I think Davidson is due for duty now."

CHAPTER XXVI.
A PITIFUL LETTER.

When Kenneth got back to his chambers, heart-sick and nerve-shaken, Mr. Crudge gave him a letter which, he said, had been left about an hour before. The envelope was black-edged, the address was in Lilias handwriting, and on the black seal was the initial "L."

He took it and went into his room, that room whose dingy, book-lined walls had witnessed the first tragedy of his life, and which Lilias had first made beautiful with her presence.

He opened the letter with trembling fingers, and read, with misty eyes, the last written words of the woman who had at once glorified and poisoned his life.

"KENNETH: By the time you read this you will have witnessed my atonement for the sin which I am going to confess to you. It is too late now to rail at fate, but, perhaps, in what I tell you here, you may find some reason to look mercifully on my memory. I have been a criminal all my life. I am the daughter of Patricio Castellano, whose crimes, as you know, made him infamous throughout Europe, until he died by the garrote nearly ten years ago. My mother was the almost equally infamous Victorine Laroche. My first breath was that of an atmosphere of crime, and in that atmosphere I have lived to this, the day of my death."

"As I gave promise of beauty, my parents determined to add to it every possible accomplishment that could make me more useful for their purposes, and the earnings of crime were spent without stint to make me what you found me."

"At seventeen I was married to Rayman Sherrill, who was the head of the great gang of swindlers which is still known as the 'Transatlantic Agency.' He is now, under the name of John Hunter, serving a term of ten years' penal servitude at Portland, for the forgery of bonds. So, you see, Kenneth, I lied to you when I said that I was a widow, and so free to accept the only happiness of which only the dim prospect has come into my wicked, miserable life."

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