



Then he turned his horse's head homeward, choosing the road which would take him past Leicester Court on his way. He was half minded to go and rouse Beryl and find out whether Lola had, after all, gone there or whether she could help him in deciding in what direction to begin his search.

When he reached the Court, however, he found the place in darkness as complete as that at Mrs. Villiers' save only for a light from the windows of the sick man's room, and, feeling that he could do no good by rousing Beryl merely to put a question to her and to receive an answer which he knew only too well would be that Lola had not been near the place, Sir Jeffrey turned his horse's head again and rode straight for the manor.

As he neared home an incident occurred which excited him almost beyond control. He had ridden very hard and fast during the greater part of the distance, finding relief in the violent exercise, and quite unlike his usual habit, without a thought for the horse that carried him, but when he had reached the manor home he noticed that his horse was very much distressed, and he drew rein to ease it, allowing it to walk. Then, as he found it had gone lame, and, dismounting, he felt in the hoofs and found a stone.

Before he remounted he stooped a minute or two on the turf by the side of the road to let the laboring, panting beast get its breath. Then, himself feeling stiff, he walked along a short distance on the turf, glad of the change from the saddle. He reached in this way the outskirts of the Ash Tree wood, the boundary line of his estates in that direction, and there was surprised to hear what sounded like the rustling of light footsteps in the wood. It was late, near midnight or past, and no one had a right to be abroad at such an hour.

Probably some raccol was out poaching, he thought, and at another time he would have welcomed the idea of a taste, but now he was too full of real trouble to be worried by any such trifling incident as the theft of a head or two of game. "He stopped, however, and listened intently, and as the moon was shining brightly at the moment, he saw distinctly under the branches of a dark yew tree whose shade was wide enough to conceal both himself and his horse.

He was on the opposite side of the road from the wood, and he did not like to cross it lest the sound of the horse's hoofs on the hard ground, and the vicinity of the moonlight should reveal his presence. As he listened he distinguished that the footsteps were short and quick, while it seemed to him that the rustling of the leaves as they were walked was continuous, as though caused by a woman's dress, but it was very difficult to detect any little signs of the kind.

It was clear, however, that the person was walking in his direction, and that he remembered that just at the spot there was a very rarely used footpath, leading to the road from an unoccupied cottage which was now falling into decay. A minute later his speculations were set at rest.

The slight gap in the hedge where the path emerged was nearly filled up by the rank luxuriance of an ivy, and Sir Jeffrey saw the figure of a woman and branches thrust cautiously aside and a woman's hooded figure fill all the gap. She paused an instant, as though in doubt. The face was hidden completely in the shade of the hood which covered the head, but the figure was perfectly well known to the man who was now watching with breathless interest.

It was his wife! At that instant his horse, a very high spirited and nervous animal, took fright at the woman's figure and with a snort of fear commenced to plunge and stampede, and the baronet's hands being entangled with the bridle, his efforts to quiet the animal succeeded him completely, and to his infinite annoyance, he could not free himself from the plunging, excited horse for some considerable time.

"Lola! Lola! it is I, Jeffrey! Wait!" he called, fearful lest she should take alarm and rush away in ignorance of who he was. As soon as he could possibly extricate himself from the reins he left the horse go. But Lola had disappeared. He ran across the gap in the hedge, and, standing on the threshold of the wood, called her name loudly and waited till the echo of it came back from 30 different points, seeming to mock him. Then he ran at the utmost speed he could use in such a place along the path into the wood, passing now and then to call to Lola by name and to listen for the sound of a word or a footstep.

But the place might have been the abode of the dead and the figure he had seen a ghost for he said, "and who that is you'll guess readily enough if you know the news." The girl flushed very slightly at the words for did she not know that she was his wife? "What news? You look as though it were ill news." "It is the worst it could be," she saw on looking closer into his face as he spoke that he was haggard and ill. "Tell me, is Lola with you at the Court?" "At the Court?" exclaimed Beryl, starting in surprise. "There is no need to answer," said Sir Jeffrey despondently. "I had a faint, flickering, wild hope that, after all, she might be with you or that you might know something of her. Would to God you did! She has gone from here, run away—been driven away, rather, by some means which it baffles me to understand."

CHAPTER XIX. "HEAVEN HELP ME! I BELIEVE SHE'S DEAD!" Nothing came of Sir Jeffrey's discovery in Ash Tree wood to help in unravelling the puzzle. He had not had the wood searched and had contented himself with searching it alone for some hours. He was unwilling that the discovery of Lola's strange conduct should be made in the presence of a number of the servants, and he resolved, therefore, that as he could not bring them to the place without telling them what they were to look for he would not do anything till he

that Jeffrey might never know the truth should be held in absolute regard by her. Not a word should pass her lips. Lola had solved the difficulty in her own way, and if only she and the Frenchman could disappear altogether it might be the best way out of a snare which had offered to Beryl no key. It seemed to her that Lola, finding herself in the midst of difficulties from which there was no escape, and which were closing fast round her, had accepted of a course which had chosen flight as the only alternative.

"Can you help me with a suggestion, Beryl?" asked Sir Jeffrey after a long silence in which he had seen the long lines of his face. "There is no need to answer," said Sir Jeffrey despondently. "I had a faint, flickering, wild hope that, after all, she might be with you or that you might know something of her. Would to God you did! She has gone from here, run away—been driven away, rather, by some means which it baffles me to understand."

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to the wall of the cottage was found—the body of this Frenchman, Turrian, with a dagger plunged right through his heart. Sir Jeffrey and Beryl interchanged a lightning glance, and Beryl's pulse seemed to stop for a beat and then go bounding on with double force as the news was told.

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