

'My good lady, you don't really believe that your husband is dead?'

Mrs. Ferrari put her handkerchief to her eyes. The word 'dead' was ineffectual to express her feelings. 'Murdered!' she said sternly, behind her handkerchief.

'Why? And by whom?' Mr. Troy asked.

Mrs. Ferrari seemed to find some difficulty in answering. 'You have read my husband's letters, sir,' she began. 'I believe he discovered——' She got as far as that, and there she stopped.

'What did he discover?'

There are limits to human patience—even the patience of a bereaved wife. This cool question irritated Mrs. Ferrari into expressing herself plainly at last.

'He discovered Lady Montbarry and the Baron!' she answered, with a burst of hysterical vehemence. 'The Baron is no more that vile woman's brother than I am. The wickedness of those two wretches came to my poor dear husband's knowledge. The lady's maid left her place on account of it. If Ferrari had gone away too, he would have been alive at this moment. They have killed him. I say they have killed him, to prevent it from getting to Lord Montbarry's ears.' So in short, sharp sentences, and in louder and louder accents, Mrs. Ferrari stated *her* opinion of the case.

Still keeping his own view in reserve, Mr. Troy listened with an expression of satirical approval.

'Very strongly stated, Mrs. Ferrari,' he said. 'You build up your sentences well; you clench your conclusions in a workmanlike manner. If you had been a man, you would have made a good lawyer—you would have taken juries by the scruff of their necks. Complete the case, my good lady—complete the case. Tell us next who sent you this letter, enclosing the bank-note. The 'two wretches' who murdered Mr. Ferrari would hardly put their hands in their pockets and send

you a thousand pounds. Who is it—eh? I see the post-mark on the letter is "Venice." Have you any friend in that interesting city, with a large heart, and a purse to correspond, who has been let into the secret and who wishes to console you anonymously?'

It was not easy to reply to this. Mrs. Ferrari began to feel the first inward approaches of something like hatred towards Mr. Troy. 'I don't understand you, sir,' she answered. 'I don't think this is a joking matter.'

Agnes interfered, for the first time. She drew her chair a little nearer to her legal counsellor and friend.

'What is the most probable explanation, in your opinion?' she asked.

'I shall offend Mrs. Ferrari, if I tell you,' Mr. Troy answered.

'No, sir, you won't!' cried Mrs. Ferrari, hating Mr. Troy undisguisedly by this time.

The lawyer leaned back in his chair. 'Very well,' he said, in his most good-humoured manner. 'Let's have it out. Observe, madam, I don't dispute your view of the position of affairs at the palace in Venice. You have your husband's letters to justify you; and you have also the significant fact that Lady Montbarry's maid did really leave the house. We will say, then, that Lord Montbarry has presumably been made the victim of a foul wrong—that Mr. Ferrari was the first to find it out—and that the guilty persons had reasons to fear, not only that he would acquaint Lord Montbarry with his discovery, but that he would be a principal witness against them if the scandal was made public in a court of law. Now mark! Admitting all this, I draw a totally different conclusion from the conclusion at which you have arrived. Here is your husband left in this miserable household of three, under very awkward circumstances for *him*. What does he do? But for the bank-note and the written message sent to you with it, I should say that he had wisely withdrawn himself from association with a dis-